



## THE PLAIN DEALER

### In a RUSH

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Plain Dealer Pop Music Critic

The first thing you hear are the drums, an explosion of pent-up rhythm. A buzzing guitar roars to life next. Then the bass gets down to business, and a familiar voice sings:

A certain measure of innocence

Willing to appear naive

A certain degree of imagination

A measure of make-believe

So begins "One Little Victory," the opening track on Rush's latest album, "Vapor Trails." From the get-go, one message comes across loud and clear: The Canadian power trio is not only back, but back to cerebral hard-rock basics.

"This was a tough record to make," said bass-playing lead vocalist Geddy Lee. "It was a very emotional time for us. But I'm pleased with the result."

"Vapor Trails" is Rush's 17th studio effort. Six years have passed since the release of the band's last album of all-new material, "Test for Echo."

In the interim, the Toronto-based group took an extended hiatus while drummer and chief lyricist Neil Peart dealt with back-to-back tragedies. His teenage daughter was killed in a 1997 car crash. Less than a year later, his wife died of cancer.

For Peart, the road to emotional recovery included a motorcycle ride across North America. The experience is chronicled in a new song, "Ghost Rider," and in a new book of the same title, penned by Peart.

He got back together with Lee and guitarist Alex Lifeson to start work on "Vapor Trails" in January 2001.

"There wasn't any script," Lee said, checking in by phone this week before a concert in Boston.

"We knew we wanted this record to be related to us as a three-piece again, in terms of the architecture of the sound. And we knew we wanted it to have a positive spirit. . . . But there were so many unknowns.

"We just started jamming, which is how we've always started our songwriting sessions. It's all about spontaneous moments. You kind of play out your emotions through your fingers."

While Rush was on break, Lee recorded a solo album, "My Favorite Headache." It came out in 2000.

During the making of "Vapor Trails," which dragged on for more than a year, Lifeson laid down a ground rule: No

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synthesizers.

"I tried to break the rule a few times," Lee said, laughing. "But we ended up sticking to it.

"It's a direction we've been moving in for quite some time, starting with 'Counterparts' [Rush's 1993 album]. 'Test for Echo' was a little more stripped down. When I was mixing 'Different Stages - Live' [a three-CD, career-spanning set of concert highlights, released in 1998], in particular the parts from 1978, I really liked the way the band sounded as a three-piece.

"When we sat down to do 'Vapor Trails,' Alex felt very strongly we should resist all temptation to use keyboards. It enabled us to get some more melody in there by having me use my voice in different ways and by getting Alex to orchestrate his guitar parts differently."

The new album has "a nice edge to it," said Lee, 49. "I'm pleased with the rock element - and the layers of melody."

Rush performs Monday at Gund Arena, one of the last stops on a 63-date North American tour.

"After all the difficulty of the past couple of years, we've found ourselves again," Lee said. "It's great for Neil, coming back and playing so well. And it's great for all three of us as friends to enjoy each other onstage."

The band has been in marathon mode on the road, with performances clocking in at nearly three hours. In addition to "Tom Sawyer," "New World Man," "The Spirit of Radio" and other signature Rush songs, concertgoers can look forward to a few rarities.

"At the end of the show, we do some material from our first couple of albums," Lee said. "It's maybe my favorite part of the night, a long jam revolving around 'By-Tor and the Snow Dog,' 'Cygnus X-1' and 'Working Man.'"

They'll always have a soft spot in their hearts for Cleveland. The city was "gigantically important" in terms of breaking the band outside its homeland in the 1970s, Lee said.

"It was the first town to give us any American airplay, and it was the first town we played in America," he said.

The group still has a loyal following in these parts, judging from all the write-in votes for Rush in The Plain Dealer's third annual reader's choice Rock and Roll Hall of Fame poll. The band has not been nominated on the rock half's official ballot.

Being inducted would be "a huge compliment," Lee said. "But it's not something you can really think about, because it's out of your hands. I don't think about it much."

Beyond three concerts in Brazil later this month, there are no firm long-range plans for Rush.

"I can't really say where we'll end up," Lee said. "When a band has existed for 20-plus years, it's wiser just to take it one event at a time.

"The next order of business for me is a holiday. I went from making my record to making 'Vapor Trails' to touring 'Vapor Trails.' So I'm taking a long break. Then we'll get back together at some point and talk about making more good music."

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