

Untitled

*Rush - The Boys In Brazil!
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RUSH, the legendary Canadian prog-rockers, will release 'Rush In Rio', a triple live album on October 27 through Atlantic. A deluxe double DVD will follow in November. We caught up with guitarist Alex Lifeson to find out about their South American adventure and why they chose to make themselves into 'Bobble Heads'...

Why did you choose to record a live album in Rio?

Alex: "Right from the beginning of the tour, we wanted to record something after having been off the road for a number of years. We wanted to chronicle a portion of the dates. The idea to film one of the shows, and originally intended to film it in the US. Unfortunately, that didn't happen, so we placed all of our bets on the last show in Rio. We'd played Sao Paulo the night before and the rain poured. By the end of the set, my pedal board was shorting out, Neil's electronic kit was shorting! We had a great time despite the rain causing all of these technical difficulties. In Rio De Janeiro, the gear arrived late and didn't know if the equipment would still work. We usually soundcheck at around 4.30pm, but we ended up going on stage at 10pm with no soundcheck or video line check. It was crazy to put it all down to that last day. Fortunately, the Gods were with us that night. There were very few technical glitches."

How much pressure did it put on the band and crew, going on stage without a soundcheck?

Alex: "It doesn't matter so much to us in terms of our playing, because we warm up backstage. For the crew and video crew it was really important. I have to say it was incredible to have an audience who sang along with every word - and had their own words for the instrumentals - in a country that doesn't speak much English. The Maracana Stadium is absolutely huge. I couldn't even see the other side of the stadium!"

Did you get the fans to pick the show's setlist?

Alex: "We were aware of the fans picking the set list for us through the website, so we listened to everything we had done and tried to balance the setlist. You have to reach a compromise where you play a set that is exciting and inspiring to you for the next five or six months and what the audience wants to hear."

Neil Peart's drum solo clocks in at around nine minutes. What do you and bassist Geddy Lee do in that time?

Alex: "I usually put my feet up for ten minutes! Go to the loo. I used to have a smoke then, but I quit."

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During 'By-Tor And The Snow Dog', there is an impressive animated feature that plays on the screens behind the band. How did that come about?

Alex: "I've only seen bits and pieces of it, because the cartoon happens at such an active part of the song I couldn't watch it while I was playing. We have some people who do our website and made the Big Al Tiki Bar animation, so we let them put something together that would make everyone smile."

How important is the internet to a band like Rush?

Alex: "This is the first opportunity for the band to really embrace the internet. There was a five year period where we didn't work, and there was no heart in it. Neil went through an incredible amount and we were just doing our best to support him in whatever way we could. The band didn't seem important then. Then we decided to tour and record, then the web activity and energy began to build."

What are your feelings on downloading music from the internet?

Alex: "I'm glad there's a system that is fair to both the buyer and the record companies. As much as you hate the record companies, they have been a breeding ground for young talent. We wouldn't have got to where we are or made the records we have if we didn't have a label that would take a chance on a band that had five albums, no video potential, a vocalist with a very high, irritating voice. These were the things that the label had to take into consideration. But they saw something in Rush. Our experiences with record labels have always been very positive. We've always been left alone and had a relationship where they left it up to us. After '2112', they knew we were fine to work on our own. Some bands have been ripped off by labels, and that's wrong. But, to start downloading material without the artist receiving anything is wrong. Records cost a lot of money to make. The labels put the money back into developing new bands and artists. In the last five or six years, I haven't seen that development in music. That's not to say there aren't great new bands, but there hasn't been that swell in music."

How did the idea for the Rush 'Bobble Heads' come about?

Alex: "Geddy thought it would be fun to have 'Bobble Heads' from the '2112' era. When we got the prototypes, it was funny. They've turned out to be a very popular piece of merchandise. They were back ordered for months at one time. When you're made into a Bobble Head, you know you've made it! It only took 30 years."

How about a collection of Rush through the years?

"I don't think I could look at them!"

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Next year will mark the 30th Anniversary of the band. How will you commemorate it?

Alex: "That's what we're trying to decide at the moment. We're thinking about going into the studio in late January/early February. Or because of the 30th anniversary, we may go on a world tour. We're leaning towards going on tour. We had a lot of fun on the last tour. It might be a nice way to spend the year. We'll see."

Will touring the UK be part of the band's plans?

Alex: "It's definitely in the plan. We felt so bad by not coming to Europe last time. It slipped through our fingers because the venues we wanted to play weren't available at the right time. Geddy is away on holiday, but if we do the tour, we promise to come over the UK."

Words: Simon Young