

Rush stronger than ever after hiatus

By Joel Engelhardt, Palm Beach Post Staff Writer
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Maybe all the old bands should take five years off.

The three Canadian rockers who make up Rush came out of a five-year hiatus Friday at Coral Sky Amphitheatre with an enthusiastic dose of pile-driving rock. They played for three hours, and their adoring audience never once sat down.

It's as if Rush grew stronger from the tragedy that forced the band's work stoppage. After their last tour, in 1997, the 19-year-old daughter of drummer and lyricist Neil Peart died in a car crash. A year later, his wife died of cancer.

The band, together since 1974, didn't return to the studio until a year ago, to write and record *Vapor Trails*, its first album since 1996's *Test for Echo*.

The fans who packed Coral Sky didn't forget. And in the two dozen songs played Friday, they got a full taste of Rush's classic rock FM staples, including searing versions of the familiar -- *Working Man* and *The Spirit of Radio* -- and the new -- *How It Is* and *Ghost Rider*.

These guys manage to make a lot of noise with only three people: intense drummer Peart, whose eight-minute solo is a show-stopper; bassist and vocalist Geddy Lee, looking cool in his trademark granny sunglasses, black sleeveless T-shirt and shoulder-length hair; and guitarist Alex Lifeson, the short-haired blond who regaled with his odd fantasy of an encounter with a flying shark-snake.

Rush live is a stadium sound -- large, loud and raw, more suited to a cavernous concrete palace than the open air of Coral Sky.

There's nothing subtle about Rush music. Lifeson and Lee took the unusual step of going acoustic for one song, less than five minutes.

But that's Rush's allure.

Their greatness is not so much in intricate playing as in intricate melodies.

Like the three clothes dryers whirring throughout the show, they are about timing. Timing between the musicians, whose songs are built on quick stops and rapid change. Timing between their sound and the brilliantly sharp graphics displayed on a giant video screen behind them. Timing between their music and their state-of-the-art laser and lighting show.

It's all too much for the fans, who worship them -- to steal a line Lee screeched with passion -- like "priests from the temple of Syrinx."

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