

A black and white photograph of Alex Lifeson, the guitarist for the band Rush. He is shown from the waist up, wearing a light-colored short-sleeved button-down shirt with a patterned tie and dark jeans. He is holding a black Fender Stratocaster guitar with a white pickguard. The guitar's headstock is visible, showing the 'Gibson' logo and the model number 'ES-335'. He has a serious expression and is looking slightly to the right of the camera.

## Alex Lifeson: Why I swopped this Gibson for a Fender

WITNESSING one of Rush's performances on their current tour, it was interesting to note that guitarist Alex Lifeson now plays Fender Stratocasters almost exclusively throughout the set.

For many years he was rarely seen without a Gibson in his hands but now the

blond axeman only uses one during the medley of old standards at the end of the show. On the new 'Signals' LP he also used Fenders most of the time and I asked him what had precipitated the change from Gibson.

"When I first got my Fender it was just a replacement for my original Gibson 335 which I'd had since 1968. We were doing a show with Blue Oyster Cult and the rigger who set up the baskets for the PA system didn't tie down the horns sitting on top of the bass cabinets. What then happened was that they vibrated themselves off the top of the cabinets and fell down onto one of my double-neck guitars, shearing the pickups off and gouging the body. Then the speaker fell on my 335.

"I couldn't care less about the double-neck, that was easily replaced, but the 335 was very special to me. So I took it off the road and I got a Fender to replace it — but I couldn't play it. I just didn't feel comfortable with it. The neck, the body and the balance were totally alien to me.

"But then over the last couple of years I've started to use it a lot more. I put humbucking pickups in the back position and managed to get a sound that was closer to the body of a Gibson, but yet still had the bright character and clarity that the Fenders are renowned for. I'd also kept the two front pickups as they were, in order to retain that special Fender sound.

"And so gradually I got used to it. I put on a couple of different necks and now find it very comfortable to play.

"The ironic thing is though, that I now find that the Gibsons feel a little strange at times. They seem a little stiffer, although I still enjoy playing them very much. I was brought up to them but I think my change to Fenders was basically a technical progression."

STEVE GETT

# ALEX LIFESON

Rush

**WHEN DID YOU BEGIN PLAYING GUITAR?** When I was 12 or 13.

**WHY DID YOU START?** My father bought me a guitar in a department store for Christmas one year.

**FIRST TYPE OF GUITAR:** It was a fifteen dollar Kent classical guitar! I played that for a year and then got a 59 dollar Japanese copy.

**MUSICAL TRAINING:** A friend I went to school with taught classical guitar — he was a very good teacher — and I studied with him for about a year and a half. That started in around 1971, but one day he was in a motorcycle accident and had to go into hospital, so the lessons kinda fell off. Also we'd started to play a lot more in clubs so I wouldn't really have had the time to keep them up. That was the only training I ever had though.

**EARLY INFLUENCES:** Eric Clapton, Jeff Beck, Jimi Hendrix and Jimmy Page.

**FIRST PUBLIC PERFORMANCE:** That was in 1966 in a church basement.

**FIRST APPEARANCE ON RECORD:** The first Rush album.

**RECORDING BANDS:** Rush.

**EQUIPMENT (live):** I generally use my Fenders these days although I do have a couple of Gibsons and two acoustics with me. I go through four Marshall combos and have a wide range of effects including two Yamaha E1010 analog delays, a Delta Lab DL5 harmoniser, a Roland Boss chorus, a Mutron octave divider, an MXR distortion plus, a Cry Baby wah-wah, a Ranger — the list goes on.

**STUDIO EQUIPMENT:** My set up is almost identical — the only difference is that I might not use the pedal board and go direct into the amp. Or I might set the amps at different positions in the studio to try for different sounds.

**MOST MEMORABLE SOLO ON RECORD:** There are a few I like which I feel are very emotive and that's what I aim for in my soloing. A couple that I'm particularly keen on are 'Chemistry' and 'Limelight'.

**OTHER GUITARISTS YOU ADMIRE:** Paco De Lucia, Allan Holdsworth, Eddie Van Halen, Andy Summers and Rory Gallaher.