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The story I told you about Marillion the other day is definitely applicable to the Canadian trio [Rush](#). This band, with the same line-up for many years, tries to change its musical direction with each album they release. Time and time again the multitude of fans keeps waiting for yet another "La Villa Strangiato" or *2112 Volume 2*. In 2004 it will be 30 years since the release of the band's debut-album *Rush*, so there's no doubt they altered their musical course drastically more than once. A producer can greatly influence the sound for a significant part, in dialogue with the band's management and their record company. That's one reason why we cannot or may not judge [Vapour Trails](#) too fast and analyse each track separately. The producer on this album is Paul Northfield who mixed formerly the live album [Different Stages <rush.html>](#) and featured as co-producer on albums such as *Moving Pictures*, *Signals* and even on Neil Peart's tribute to Buddy Rich. He even worked together with Ozzy Osbourne, Hole and Marilyn Manson. Currently he's involved in the production of the new Porcupine Tree CD as sound engineer.

For this album *Vapour Trails*, the band equally decided to keep out most, if not all keyboards and lengthy guitar solos. Considering the fact that these two elements were often the main reason to buy a Rush album, it's understandable that many fans find it difficult to get adjusted to this new sound. The band is well informed on the matter and they even invented an advertisement with the slogan "If you hated them before, you'll really hate them now!"

Neil Peart wrote down a quote on the wall of a bar in Montana: "Success is not the result of spontaneous combustion; you must set yourself on fire." It's the red thread throughout this album. Five years after their album *Test For Echo* the trio tried to work out the same chemistry that led them to make 16 albums over the past 27 years. Approaching the album as a whole, in a contemporary way, and framing the mostly well-considered and psychologically founded lyrics, the 13 songs on this new Rush album are "food" for the younger generation. Perhaps they won't even be frightened listening to the odd voice of Geddy Lee which is one way to attract the attention in the music scene. The atmosphere of the album is set right at the very beginning. The opening track "One Little Victory" sounds like a "barmitzvah on speed." Since the modern alternative rock-scene is very guitar-orientated, it's obvious that, having decided to eliminate the elaborated keyboard work, the track gets a more contemporary sound. The elimination of a whole range of instruments means that the remaining one is given a bigger part of which "Ceiling Unlimited" is a good example. Geddy Lee's bass guitar almost takes over. In "Peaceable Kingdom" the bass dominates enormously. The structure of the tracks is well considered and "Ghostrider" could easily be a sturdy Eagles song. This polyphony is found again in "The Stars Look Down" where, for once, Geddy Lee's mostly "enervating" voice doesn't pall.

Throwing the keyboards overboard means also that you need to thrill the audience in another way. Rush tries to do so by integrating acoustic guitar solos in "How It Is," a track that could easily be found on the latest U2 album. This certainly doesn't mean that the musical production isn't any good. Probably my absolute favourite track from this "reformed" Rush is without any doubt the powerful "Secret Touch." I let the other 5 tracks go by, without paying the least of attention, hoping the next album Rush produces will revert to their roots, because it's regrettable that an artist gets lost of his track in order to follow someone other's footsteps. That's why I have to conclude, unfortunately, that the integration of producer Paul Northfield has influenced the musical direction of Rush far too much. The trio Lee/Peart/Lifeson should have worked with Peter Collins, a man who knew how to prepare this recipe in order to make it sound fresh, renewing, contemporary and still recognisable.