

RUSH - Vapor Trails
Atlantic

Hard Rock

13 songs (67:15)

Release year: 2002

Rush, Atlantic Records

Well Rush fans.....the wait is over..... A year ago this past January, it was announced that the three members of Rush; Geddy Lee, Alex Lifeson and Neil Peart were getting back together after an almost 5 year hiatus to do another album. Drawing on recent personal tragedies, drummer/lyricist Neil Peart, has found refuge writing about life's experiences and all of the triumphs and tribulations that we all face every day. We all need to pick ourselves up after being dealt a bad hand in life and turn it around and do something positive, soaring ahead and leaving Vapor Trails behind you. That pretty much sums up the overall message of this release. This is a very reflective and personal album lyrically, but is also very melodic and has a more harder edge than anything I've heard them do in years. There are no keyboards used on this album, instead, opting for a more guitar driven sound using many different guitar tracks all layered together to produce a big wall of sound. It features a simpler, almost back to basics type of production and there is little to resemble the slick and polished sound that they'd used throughout the 80's and into the 90's.

This is the band's 17th studio album, and the first one since Test For Echo, released in 1996. The future of the band seemed to be uncertain after Neil Peart lost his only daughter in a car accident in the summer of 1997, and his wife, one year later, to breast cancer. He has recently remarried and seems to be on track in piecing his life back together. The fact that this album is finally here is in itself, as the opening track states, One Little Victory both for Neil and for the band. This is the first single from this release and it explodes with an almost tribal drum attack and a guitar riff that gives a passing wave to the current "modern" sound. A hard driving track that features lots of riffing, wild drum beats and background vocal layering. Ceiling Unlimited, is a very spirited and uplifting track and features a U2-like guitar riff. There's also some great layered guitar passages in the chorus section and has the energy of the classic Rush sound that we haven't really heard much of since the early 80's. Geddy sings in a much higher pitch on this track, more of a throw back to the 70's, but his voice is so much more stronger now with a lot of power and emotion. Ghost Rider, draws parallels between Neil's passion for cycling mountain roads and the roads we travel on our journey through life. Cycling was and is therapy for Neil, often cycling to gigs from the hotels. After he lost his first wife, he embarked on a trek through Europe and effectively disappeared for over a year. Peaceable Kingdom was originally supposed to be an instrumental track and features some great backing bass melodies, but after September 11th, 2001, vocals were added and became a very poignant look at condemning not only those who support and promote terrorism, but our overall indifference to many of the more serious issues facing mankind today. There are just as many people who are trying to destroy our freedoms and our ways of life as there are fighting to preserve it. Neil writes, "All this time we're hoping and praying we all might learn, while a billion other teachers are teaching them how to burn". A positive outlook emerges from this track as we "Wave towards the clearing sky". Stars Looked Down, is Neil's passionate plea for answers to the cruel hand of fate that was dealt to him a few years back and repeatedly asks the question "Was it something I said?" How It Is, begins with some cool guitar and bass harmonies and mixes both electric and acoustic guitar together, something that I haven't much of on a Rush album since the 70's. A very uplifting track with a catchy chorus and Geddy sings, "Such a cloudy day.....seemed like we'd never see the sun". There's a metaphoric aspect to much of the lyrics and phrasing on this album as Neil tries to see a brighter future for himself amidst all that he has been through in the last 5 years. Vapor Trail, destined to become a Rush classic, uses guitar sounds that haven't been heard since the Caress Of Steel album and really rocks. It has a classic Rush chorus and Neil writes, "Washed away like footprints in the rain.....washed away like voices in a hurricane". Earthshine is driven by big guitar riffs and has a more sci-fi / fantasy based lyric. The chorus and vocal work by Geddy on this track is a real highlight of the album. The last track, Out Of The Cradle is an awesome track and the perfect closure to this album. A very melodic and energetic song and you get a sense of this being about the rebirth of this band. The overall feel

of this album is just that, a rebirth of ideas and energies and a rekindling of friendships with a positive outlook on the future.

The energy of this release just flows from one track to the next and is something that I haven't heard since the Moving Pictures album. There's a heavy emphasis on rhythms and there are very few actual guitar solos. Instead, opting for chordal riff changes which add splashes of color to each track. Geddy Lee has brought with him some of the melody and vocal stylings of his solo effort, My Favorite Headache, to this release and delivers some of the strongest and passionate vocal work he has ever done. The sense of melody that the band strived for in the mid 80's through the 90's is very much present throughout this release, but so is the more guitar driven sound of the 70's and early 80's. Incorporating elements of the classic Rush sound and using a very modern guitar, bass and drums sound mix, Rush have in a sense, re-invented themselves. This album is somewhat of a surprise for me. Having been a huge fan since the mid 70's (I've seen them 7 times live!!), I was expecting a more laid back and reflective release. The reflection is there, but so is a new found energy and spirit that I feel has been missing from their sound for quite a few years now. I like all their releases, but after Moving Pictures, the whole energy and feel that was something I loved about this band, somehow had changed. Rush fans are going to eat this up and I think many are going to be pleasantly surprised by the quality of this album. After many listens, this album is starting to take the shape of a classic Rush album. It may rank up there some day as being some of their best work ever. Welcome back guys!!! (especially Neil) and I can't wait to see them on tour this year. The tour will be a huge success I'm sure and will feature no opening act and a lot of older classics that either have never been performed live before, or haven't been performed for a very long time. Rush is back!!! and maybe even better than ever!!!

Killing Songs : One Little Victory, Ceiling Unlimited, Peaceable Kingdom, Vapor Trail, Earthshine, Out Of The Cradle Marty 90 / 100