

Lifeson on the making of Rush's 'Vapor Trails'

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TORONTO -- Rush's ordeal creating their new record "Vapor Trails" extended right through the music-making process to the album's final mastering.

Guitarist Alex Lifeson told JAM! Music that even after 14 months of touch-and-go writing and recording the 13 songs that make up "Vapor Trails" (the group's first album since 1996's "Test For Echo"), there were serious technical problems late in the process.

The protracted writing process got off to a rough start, but after an early break, guitarist Lifeson, bassist Geddy Lee, and drummer Neil Peart hit their stride. The new album's more streamlined, harder-edged sound came together quickly.

"Once we got over the three-month hump, this record took on a life of its own, and we were along for the ride," Lifeson explains in a basement meeting room at his manager's downtown Toronto office.

But in rock 'n' roll, it ain't over till it's over. And even after the trio went their separate ways at the conclusion of the album, there were more challenges.

"Geddy went away to do the mastering. I went away on a golfing trip as soon as we finished (last February)," Lifeson says.

"It had been 14 months (making the record), and in the past, we spent four to six months making a record ... I just had to go. I felt badly, because everything was dumped on Geddy, to do the mastering and make all those decisions."

Even as he was hitting the links, Lifeson was on the phone four or five times a day with Lee, who was forced to deal with unexpected glitches that didn't emerge until late in the recording process.

"We found problems that we didn't hear in mixing that were apparent in mastering. To get the kind of levels (we wanted), we had digital distortion. We remixed a couple of songs half-way through the mastering, through the remix, back to mastering," says Lifeson.

"The poor guy (Lee) was doing this on his own. It really shook him up."

Still, Lifeson took a final, mixed-and-mastered version of "Vapor Trails" with him to Hawaii for a holiday with his wife. And even then, he couldn't bring himself to listen to the finished product until late in the two-week vacation, when he settled onto the beach, slid the finished disc into his Discman, and pressed play.

"I was really thrilled by the fact that I heard the songs and I really liked the songs a lot. I was really proud of the work we did. It all unfolded for me," he says with obvious satisfaction.

"When I got back, I called him and said, 'Ged! The album is great! We did a great job! We got through it, we stuck to everything we believed in and we did it!'

"He said: 'I don't know what to think. I think it's awful.' I said, please do me a favour. Just don't put it on for a couple of weeks. Be relaxed and open'."

Lifeson said he's still not sure Lee is at a point where he has separated himself from the trauma of finishing the album, to where he can listen to it as a whole. But given how intense an experience creating "Vapor Trails" was, that's not surprising.

"Honestly, we had no life for 14 months. That was our life," the guitarist says.

"It is one thing to go into the studio and have easy hours and take weekends off and a week off every four weeks. But you never stop thinking about it. When you get down to the crunch of mixing, it becomes an unruly beast."

Fans will be able to assess the "unruly beast" for themselves on Tuesday (May 14), when "Vapor Trails" arrives in stores. After Lee and Lifeson complete press duties, they'll hook back up with drummer-lyricist Peart to complete preparations for their first live dates since 1997.

The tour will likely take Rush through Christmas, and then Lifeson anticipates a lengthy vacation. But he won't rule out the possibility of more new music coming from Rush.

"I think one of the lessons we learned in the last five years is it is not prudent to make plans. Things can change in a flash," he says.

"We should all take a break. We had a great time making this record. Geddy and I love working together on music. I wouldn't be surprised if we started working together on another record some time next year."

During a wide-ranging conversation, Lifeson spoke to JAM! Music about the making of "Vapor Trails," the impact of Sept. 11 on their new record, the absence of synthesizers on the album, the group's burgeoning status as a hip influence on contemporary bands, plans for the upcoming tour, and the second-annual Rush fan convention in Toronto. Here's how it went. [GO TO NEXT PAGE--> </JamMusicRush/may7_rush2-can.html>](http://JamMusicRush/may7_rush2-can.html)