

## Rush launches its first tour in years at Meadows

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Rush has sold millions of albums since its formation in Toronto in 1969 and has some of the most fervent fans ever seen in rock 'n' roll.

But in 1998, due to twin tragedies in the life of drummer Neil Peart, the group went on a hiatus that had the band members doubting whether the group would ever reunite.

"Oh yeah, for sure," singer-bassist Geddy Lee said in a recent phone interview from Toronto. "None of us knew exactly what would happen. We just basically left the band in suspended animation."

Peart's 19-year-old daughter had died in a car accident and cancer claimed his wife a year later. He spent time coping with the devastating losses by riding his motorcycle all over North America.

Lee was making his first solo record, 2000's My Favorite Headache, when he finally heard from Peart, 49.

"He expressed a desire to talk about work again," Lee, 48, said, "So I knew [a reunion] was coming."

Last year, Lee, Peart and guitarist Alex Lifeson, 49, started work on Vapor Trails, which was released earlier this year. The group's world tour kicks off Friday night at 8 at the Meadows Music Centre in Hartford.

Not surprisingly, since Peart writes the lyrics for the band, Vapor Trails has some of the band's most personal lyrics.

"That's true," Lee said, "He's gone through a lot over the last five years so it was inevitable that it would find its way into what he writes."

"Lyric writing is an interesting form of expression. Certainly, after you go through a lot in your life, there are certain things that are easy to talk about and certain things that are not."

"On this record, I think it was important for him to continue to work through all these events of his life through his lyrics. I guess it was a natural way of exorcising certain thoughts and feelings."

Vapor Trails received glowing reviews after its release and the major reason cited is for Rush's return to its roots as the prototypical power trio. In other words, no synthesizers.

"I think that's something that has been coming for quite a while," Lee said. "I think the last few records have been stripping down, one at a time, bit by bit. I guess this record just seems a little more obvious for some reason."

"It was a decision we made a couple of records back to start stripping back the sound. This time we just kind of said 'OK, let's make sure we don't succumb to the temptation of

filling every hole with a keyboard sound.' "

Rush's 1998 live album, Different Stages

Live, featured a bonus disc of a concert from London in 1978. While mixing the record, Lee was convinced that it was time for Rush to go back to its original game plan.

"When I listened to the material from 1978, the live stuff, it was just a three-piece kind of architecture that I found very appealing," he said. "There was a lot of air around the instruments and it was very easy to see into the band.

"We had created so much density with all the keyboard sounds that it wasn't always possible to do that. So, for me, it was a bit of a wake-up call, a bit of a re-education as to the benefits of a three-piece band."

Lee is very happy with the results exhibited on Vapor Trails, calling it "very focused" and filled with "a lot of passion and a lot of spirit.

"In some ways it reminds me a lot of the work we did on records like 2112 and, more accurately, Permanent Waves," he added

Connecticut's Rush fans get the first chance to see the band Friday night when the group plays its first show together in more than five years. Lee has mixed feelings about life on the road.

"I've kind of finally built myself an actual personal life in the last five years, so it's a little difficult to leave my kids and all that," he said. "[But] playing live is an important part of being a musician, I think. I'll just learn to adapt my actual life to do this for a while."

Lee gets home as much as possible to see his two children, ages 8 and 21, and they visit him on tour occasionally. He tries his best not to disrupt his family's life too much when Rush hits the road.

"I just don't want them to live their lives as satellites to me," he said. "I don't want to send a message to them that what I do is more important than what they're doing."

What he and his bandmates will be doing on this tour is two sets that will run well over an hour each. The nearly three-hour shows still might not be enough to satisfy the Rush zealots in attendance.

"They're gluttons for punishment, what can I tell you," Lee said with a laugh. "They're amazing."

For the die-hard Rush fans, the group will play some songs that they might not have heard performed live before.

"We're trying a bunch of things, but how successful we'll be at that, I don't know," Lee said. "I know there are at least three things that we haven't played in quite some time and at least one song we've never played [live]."

And what song might that be?

"I'll save it for a surprise," Lee said. "It's only a surprise the first day you play it. Now, with the Internet, there are precious few surprises left."