

SONG HITS

MAGAZINE

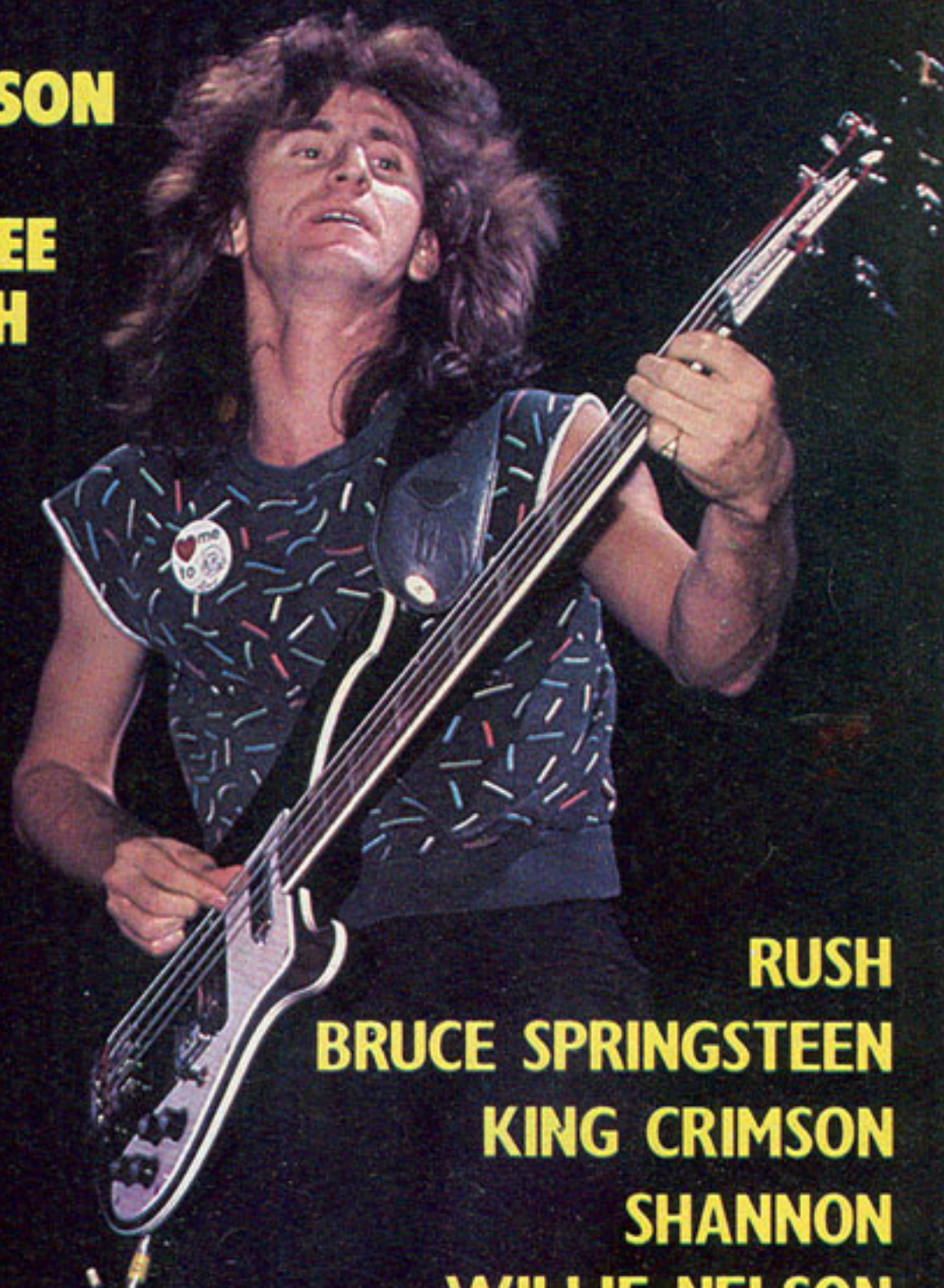
**WORDS TO
OVER 80
HIT SONGS**

NOVEMBER 1984 \$1.75

CANADA \$2.00

CHARLTON
PUBLICATIONS

**ALEX LIFESON
and
GEDDY LEE
of RUSH**



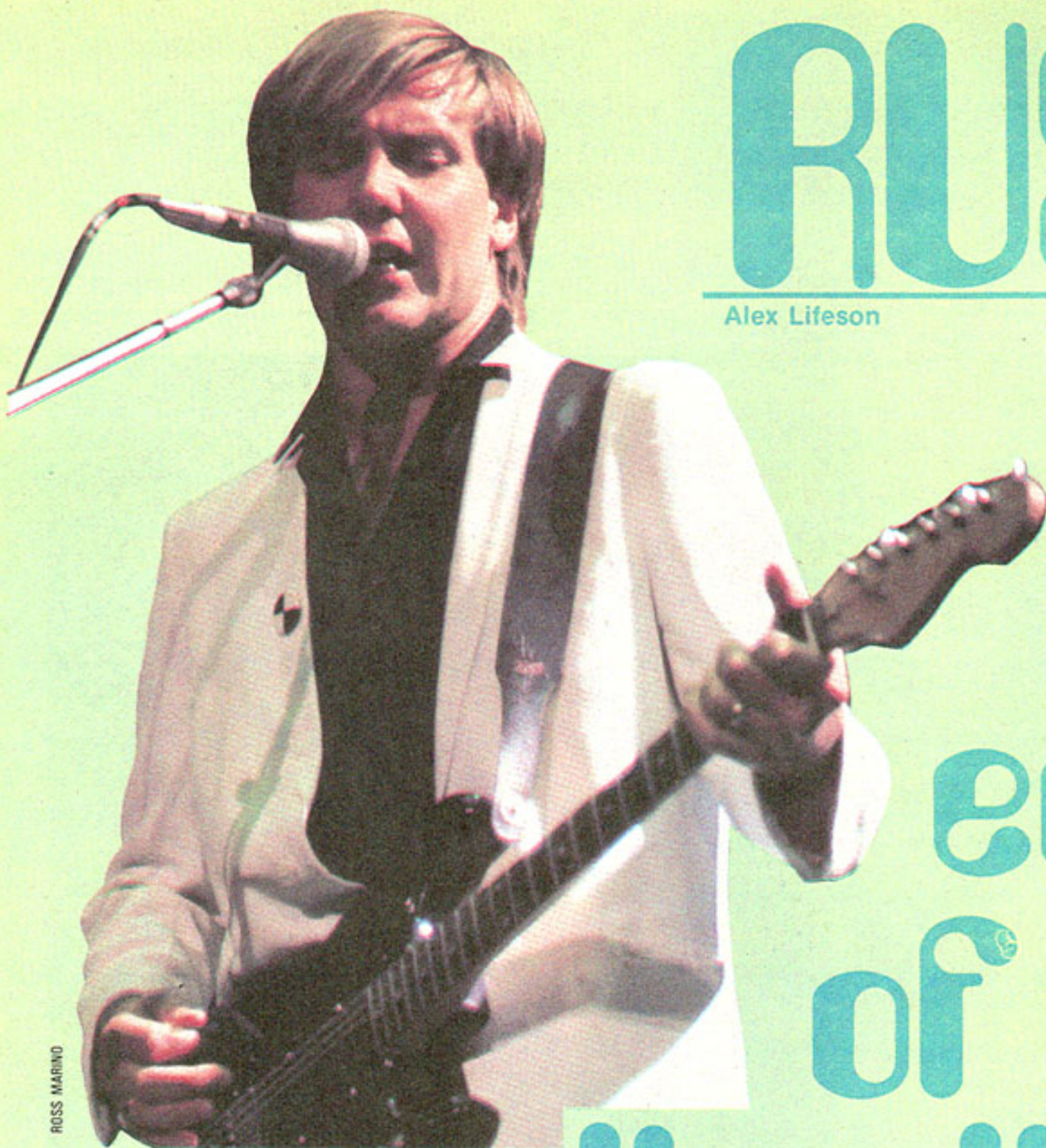
**RUSH
BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN
KING CRIMSON
SHANNON
WILLIE NELSON**

POP: PANAMA • HIGH ON EMOTION • STILL LOVING YOU • ROCK ME TONITE • ROUND AND ROUND • TWO SIDES OF LOVE • SHE'S MINE • LEAVE A TENDER MOMENT ALONE

SOUL: STATE OF SHOCK • MY HEART'S DIVIDED • I SURRENDER • OUTRAGEOUS • SHOOT THE MOON

COUNTRY: EVENING STAR • I DON'T KNOW A THING ABOUT LOVE • TO ME • ATLANTIC BLUE • LOVE OVER OLD TIMES





ROSS MARINO

RUSH

Alex Lifeson

On the edge of the limelight

**Exclusive
Song Hits
interview by
Rich Sutton**

Rush is in a unique situation. They owe their success to no one but themselves and their fans. Now that they're on top, or at least somewhere near the crest, there are no favors that need to be repaid. They can stay out of the popular light and concentrate on making music — the thing they and their fans want the most.

Between 1974 and 1980, Rush watched four of their records go gold in the U.S. The press took notice, although seldom favorably, and radio stations virtually ignored them until the release of *Permanent Waves*. Extensive touring was what gained them their huge initial following. With the release of *Moving Pictures*, *Signals* and now *Grace Under Pressure*, Rush has all the press and radio play they can use. Not only do they choose their appearances carefully, they tend to purposely avoid the spotlight.

When Geddy Lee sang vocals with Bob and Doug McKenzie on "Take Off" that was about as close as any of the trio came to national television and the footlights of rock and roll. Neil Peart remains very private despite his lengthy and absorbing print interview. Even in his songwriting he's a storyteller and an observer, not one who pours out his emotions to the world. There seems to be even less known about guitarist Alex Lifeson. His speedy guitar riffs have been an unmistakable part of the group's mark on music.

Song Hits managed to catch Alex on the road to capture a glimpse of this ten-year-old band through the eyes of the group's quiet partner. We started off talking about the musical changes the band has been going through in the past few years.



Rich Sutton: Is the direction Rush takes something that changes consciously or spontaneously?

Alex Lifeson: I would tend to think spontaneously. I don't know that there is a constant effort to change direction. It's very natural with us. A lot of the material comes from sound checks, little spontaneous sparks, when you're getting warmed up before a sound check, and we put everything on tape and then catalog it, file it, and go through it all and pick any good ideas that we think are there, and start writing from there.

Rich: You changed producers on this album, which might seem to signal that the band was looking for a change in direction.

Alex: It's not a change in direction, just a change in approach, which in working with someone else you obviously relate to them differently. Jerry is a very close friend of ours and still is and the relationship we had as a band and producer was a certain way. We just wondered if perhaps with somebody else it would be different and it was.

Rich: How did the title for *Grace Under Pressure* come about?

Alex: There was an Alex Caulville painting that we were thinking of possibly using for the album cover, but it was a little too powerful I think, and the idea for the title *Grace Under Pressure*, really fit that picture well. Although we decided not to use that picture we decided to stick with that title. We thought it was real appropriate considering we worked as long as we did on this record, there was a great deal of pressure all the way along and it showed a great deal of grace.

Rich: Who was the pressure coming from, yourselves or someone else?

Alex: From all over. The fact that the producer scene was kind of screwed up, and we were pushing the studio time back, we were running overtime and the record company was waiting for the record — it was a tough one.

Rich: Does *Grace Under Pressure* take Rush, excuse the expression, away from the crunch and more toward the crackle?

Alex: I think we always have been. I don't think we ever considered ourselves as a heavy metal band. We always considered ourselves more of a rock band. I think that it's important that you are aware of what's going on around you. We look at these things, and there's a certain crispness to music right now and I think we're definitely moving toward that.

Rich: Was there a reluctance between the three of you to do songs that you can dance to because that wasn't always Rush's forte?

Alex: Not really. We wrote what we wrote and at the time that's what we wanted to do. We went through a long period where we just wanted to be as technical as possible. I think we've become a lot more rhythmic and a lot more in tune with the feel of a song rather than the dexterity of our playing, especially on this last record. You can dance to anything if you really like it. I think it makes for pleasurable listening when there's something that has a real strong rhythm to it. I think I have changed my guitar style a bit, certainly more conscious of playing rhythm. There are a few solos on this record that I really didn't want to play at 100 mph, or really play single notes. I wanted to do a combination of the rhythm which would sit in with the rest of the track with the rhythm section.

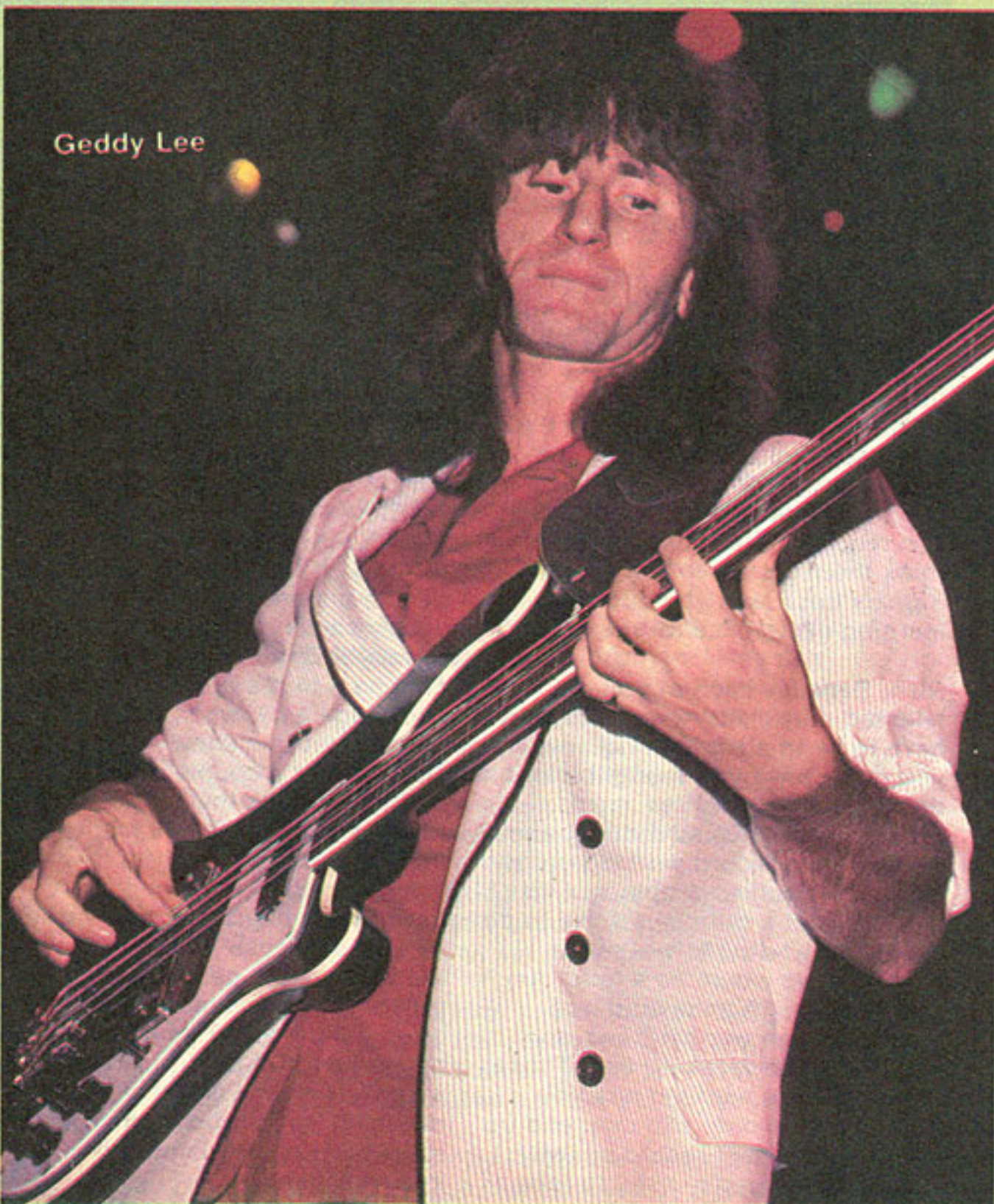
Rich: Another change I notice is

that it seems as though Neil's lyrics are moving away from nature and its effect on man and are moving toward technology's effect on man. Is that a fair observation?

Alex: It's still a bit of both I think. That is a fair observation. As a writing style he's gone from being a storyteller to being an observer. I think he's just looked at things around all of us and put it down on paper. I think it's much more concise and succinct than it used to be.

Rich: Did you ever find yourself pigeonholed because for awhile there was an idiom that Rush had been associated with and now that you've started to move away from that have you found that people tend to say, "well, gee, that's not Rush!"

Alex: I suppose that happens, but it's not really that important to us. Unfortunately with some people, they think of Rush as a real loud heavy metal band with the vocalist screaming. That's been something that's been difficult to shake off at times in the last 10 years. There are



Geddy Lee



still people who hang onto that image of the band. In the last four years we've definitely been making a lot of changes, and the people that are interested are aware of that.

Rich: Do you think Rush has peaked?

Alex: No, I'd say the excitement is still growing for us. I'm not so sure that we've hit the peak yet. The time of *Moving Pictures* was a very big time for us and I think *Signals* was a little more experimental. We had to try some different things. Just like *Caress Of Steel* was a transitional record for us. I think this record is an extension of that. I think there are some faults with *Signals* but it was an important learning experience for us.

Rich: Because each of you are very talented musicians — you basically have to be in a trio that does what you do — have you thought about doing a solo record?

Alex: I think we've all thought about doing a solo record working on our own or with other people, but it's certainly not a priority. I'd like to do it eventually. Just to work with other people would be a lot of fun. I have a small 16-track studio at home so I can wander down and work on some ideas if I like. Those ideas that you work on and you think, I'll hold onto this one, end up going on the next record anyway. I think that you really need to take a

nice chunk of time and take some months off where I don't have to do anything but that. Right now that's a very difficult thing to do.

Rich: It doesn't seem like you're unhappy about that.

Alex: To an extent. Personally, I'd like to spend a little more time at home with my family. But you can't complain.

Rich: Rush has its fans and it has its fanatics. Those people that really go out of their way to become a part of Rush's life, does that bother you?

Alex: Yeah, I think it comes with the territory. It's to be expected. Most people understand that basically you are a very private person and privacy is important to you. If they confine it to the arena and the backstage area, when you're coming out of a show — and they stop you for a couple of quick words — I think that's the best way. I think most people will respect that. There are a few people that just don't really think and don't have the manners and they make it difficult for most. Basically, we all are very private people and probably Neil the most of the three of us. I think as far as he's concerned he's a musician on stage and plays drums and that's it. He's not really caught up in the rock and roll world, or the glamour of being in a rock band.

Rich: The whole band seems to have stayed away from that.

Alex: We try to, which isn't to say that we won't talk to fans after the show or at the hotel or whatever. I don't think you can be rude to people — we were all in that position too, hunting for autographs and wanting to have a couple of words with the musicians that we really respected.

Rich: You and the band have been together for well over 10 years. I have to imagine that after a time money doesn't have all that much to do with it — what is it that keeps you going?

Alex: Money was never the prime motivator. We always wanted to make the music that we wanted to make. Quite honestly we used to have a number of run-ins with the record company when we'd put out a record that wasn't commercially successful. But we believed in what we were doing and we went ahead and showed them that we could become commercially successful as well as artistically successful, which is our primary objective. In these 10 years we've managed to become financially set and all that, but that was never really the goal. The goal was to do the music that we really wanted to do and that we believed was right. We were lucky. We've done that. We proved it to our record company, and we've had the support of management as well.