

RUSH

open fire

Legendary Drummer Reveals The Secrets Behind **Hold Your Fire**.

by Neil Peart

It really is hard to believe that **Hold Your Fire** is our *twelfth* studio album — in *thirteen years* together. But then it's also hard to believe in Relativity and TV evangelists.

We began the songwriting in Canada in the autumn of 1986, then started recording in England in January of 1987. As we had for **Power Windows**, we tried to move around for each stage of the project to keep our environment fresh and interesting all the time. Having worked with co-producer Peter Collins and engineer Jimbo Barton on that album as well, we had already established a mutual trust and respect that made the work go very smoothly. In fact, we haven't enjoyed making a record so much for a long while — and we even finished on time!

But that's getting ahead of the story...

In early September, summer is already over in the mountains, and everything is quiet and a pleasant kind of lonely. In a cottage beside a still lake I began working on some lyrics. Next month we would be starting to work on new material and I wanted a little time to prepare some ideas. It's hard to walk in with a totally blank slate.

Having enjoyed writing around the central theme of "Power" last time, I decided to try something like that again, this time working with the theme of "Time." I set to work first on *Time Stand Still*. I'd been thinking about this for some time now — how so often the richness of a period of time or an experience seems to lie in looking *back* at it. Or conversely, sometimes you might know that you are enjoying a wonderful time, but just wish you could make it last longer. I'm sure you know how that goes.

But as I set that idea aside after a while, and went on to work on others, it was strange to see that what I had thought was my theme suddenly turned itself into something else — without even asking me! With the development of ideas for *Second Nature* and *High Water*, the theme suddenly changed to "Instinct," or perhaps "Temperament" — the idea of primeval or subconscious drives. Well okay, I thought, if that's what my brain wants to work on, go ahead!

"Hey Brain, I don't care what you get fired up about — as long as you (you guessed it!) **Hold Your Fire**."

Well.

One bright day later in September, I went over to Geddy's house and we spent the afternoon

catching up on things down in his studio. Over blueberry buns and coffee we discussed some of our aspirations for the next album. He played me a few things he'd been working on with his new keyboard setup — entirely controlled by a Macintosh computer! It was an amazing thing. After working out what he wanted to play in the conventional way, he could program it all into the Mac and assign different parts to any number of separate keyboards. This proved very valuable to us, both in the songwriting and

Bob Leafe



Geddy Lee: His vocal skills reach new heights on **Hold Your Fire**.

recording stages of the album. Especially so for Geddy, who considers himself a bass player first, vocalist second and keyboard player a distant third — now we had a keyboard player we could yell at all the time!

I showed him the work I'd started on so far, and we also discussed a few lyrical ideas that he had been thinking about but had never gotten around to putting on paper. These ideas would become incorporated into *Mission*, *Open Secrets* and *Turn The Page*, and fit very well into my overall theme. Of course, for Geddy, being the singer, it's nice to have some involvement in the lyric development, and I'm always glad to have some input from him or Alex to expand on a particular idea.

In the beginning of October, with southern Ontario ablaze in the glory of autumn, Geddy, Alex and I returned once again to the rural setting of Elora Sound. Alex brought along a tape of experimental work he had been doing at home, which would yield some good parts for several songs, and Geddy had been sifting through this year's batch of "sound check jams," which have been a rich source of raw material in recent years. He had them all sorted and labeled as potential verses, bridges, choruses or instrumental bits, and thus they served as a reference library of spontaneous ideas that could be drawn upon at will.

As usual, I was working alone on lyrics in the afternoons while the other two worked together on musical ideas. Here is where Alex comes into his own as Musical Scientist — creating drum programs for my stand-in, the drum machine, and recording his and Geddy's work on the portable "Lerxst Sound" recorder. In my own process of writing and refining, I remember one day throwing out eight pages of rewrites for *High Water* — and that's after *three days* of rewriting it. So it doesn't get any easier!

In the evenings we would go over to the barn, share what we had accomplished during the day, and work together on making ideas into songs. This is a very enjoyable part of the process, working so closely and creating new things. Of course, nothing is ever accomplished without a struggle, and sometimes what you're working on seems like it will never turn out any good. But when it does come together, and you can record it and hear it immediately, there are few things more satisfying.

We were torn about whether or not to play some live shows before the recording. In the past we have found it worthwhile in some ways, even

if just to have a change of scene for a few days. But it's also frustrating to have to stop working on new material, only to spend a week or so rehearsing old stuff. This year we thought we'd try just going away somewhere for a few days, then returning to the writing fresh. That way we would have the advantage of a change of scene, but wouldn't have to spend precious writing time working on old songs.

The first snow of the year fell overnight in early November, and by then we had worked out eight songs. At this point, we were still not satisfied with the overall variety of music we had, so we decided we'd go a bit further. We were aware of the fact that only a small percentage of people actually buy *records* anymore, the vast majority choosing cassettes or CDs. Thus, we figured, why should we worry about the time limitations of the old vinyl disc? We thought we'd like to have *ten* songs, and go for fifty minutes or so of music. So we did.

At the beginning of December, Peter Collins ("Mr. Big") joined us at Elora and contributed his valuable criticisms and suggestions to the songs. Most of the changes were small ones, except for *Mission*, which received new verses, and *Open Secrets*, which underwent some chorus revisions. But even the small changes help to keep our music growing.

Ironically, the opening song, *Force Ten* was almost an afterthought. In the tradition of those last-minute, spontaneous songs like *New World Man*, *Vital Signs* and *Natural Science*, we put together during the last two days we had for writing. As I had on *Tom Sawyer*, I worked with some lyrics given to us by Pye Dubois, and Geddy and Alex went to work on the music, trying to explore some areas that we hadn't covered yet. By the end of one day it was fairly complete — the touch of spontaneity and freshness we were looking for to complete the album.

We began the serious recording at The Manor, in Oxfordshire, England, where we had also recorded the basic tracks for *Power Windows*. The big attraction here is the drum sound in their big stone room. The big attraction is *not* the weather — especially the January snowstorm that brought England to its knees and turned that old stone Manor house into a damp and drafty icehouse! Even with the big coal fires that burned in the main rooms of the house all day, without modern heating or insulation, it did not "hold its fire"!

But hey, we work well when we're shivering! After three weeks, we were able to leave there with the drums, bass, basic keyboards, guide guitars and guide vocals all finished. Once again, Jimbo did a great job for us behind the console, making things sound great and maintaining "quality control."

We had decided before going over there that it would be fun (and funny) to be cowboys in England, and had provided ourselves with the requisite hats, scarves, shirts, music — and most important — *accents*. Thus the studio was full of cowboy-hatted people saying things like: "Ah reckon that sounds mighty good," and "Much obliged for the vittles, ma'am!"

Thankfully, it didn't influence the music — but it *did* give Alex an exciting new theme for his oil paintings.

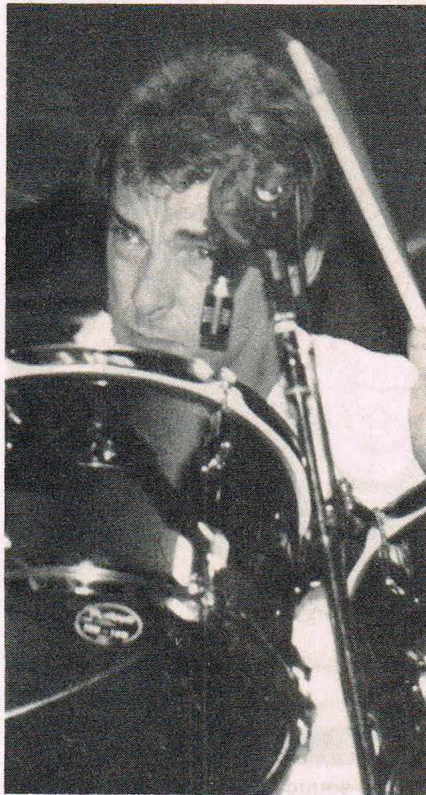
Well.

From there we moved into Ridge Farm Studio, an Elizabethan farm which has been converted

into a modern residential studio. It was our first time working there, in the rustic Surrey countryside, and we enjoyed it very much. (Even though it was still winter in England.)

It has to be said as the man himself might say, Andy Richards did a great job once again, adding dynamic keyboards and exciting "events" to the tracks. For once we were moving along right on schedule, and Alex was even able to finish some guitar overdubs before we left.

Bob Leafe



Neil Peart: Perhaps the most technically proficient of all rock drummers.

On a free day, Geddy and I made an overnight trip up to London, treating ourselves to a stay at the prestigious Savoy hotel. We each had our own plans for the afternoon and evening, but met up in the venerable "American Bar" at the hotel for a drink in the late afternoon. We were both so stimulated by being out on the streets of London (and away from work), that our conversation was rich and various — about ourselves, our families, art, movies, our hopes for the future — and not a *word* about the work in progress! It was really nice how two people who work together everyday, and had for so many years, could find fresh areas of stimulating conversation.

Then it was back to — *aaah!* — Montserrat, a small island in the Caribbean which is notable — apart from its beauty — for turning out doctors in a couple of weeks, and for turning out records in paradise at Air Studios. We had been there for the first time to do the guitar overdubs for *Power Windows*, and enjoyed it so much we had to go back again.

There is a live volcanic crater on the island, where you stand in a cloud of sulfurous mist and all around you are vents of steaming vapors and bubbling volcanic mud. When you think about the fact that this comes up right from the centre of the earth, it reminds you just how fragile *terra*

firma really is, and how quickly a place like that could disappear beneath the beautiful Caribbean Sea.

One hopes *it* will hold its you-know-what too!

We had not worked in Toronto for, oh, about ten years, fearing too many distractions (however enjoyable and well-meant) from family and friends. But it does get harder to be away from home all the time, and for once we thought we'd like to try doing at least a *small* part of this project at home. So we decided we would record the vocals and the last of the guitars in Toronto.

We worked at McClear Place Studios, right in downtown Toronto, which was nice after all the remote places we'd been. I must admit, as much as I like the country, and particularly Montserrat, it was exciting to walk down busy streets and see all those *strangers* every day.

It was here that Aimee Mann came in to do a great job on some additional vocals for us — yet another new sound for Rush. Also, all of us signed up with the Berlitz school to polish up our French for the next stop on our itinerary — Paris!

We arrived in Paris on a bright sunny day in early May, with the chestnut trees still in bloom along the boulevards, and had our first breakfast at a sidewalk cafe on the Boulevard St. Germain. We were staying right on the Champs Elysees, and working at a good place called Studio Guillaume Tell, about five miles away. Our route to and from work every day led right through the Bois de Boulogne, the biggest park in Paris, so it was a great situation.

Normally we work twelve or thirteen hour days while we're recording, but "Mr. Big" likes to stop by nine o'clock during the mixing. It's difficult to remain objective after nine hours of listening to the same song over and over again, and you can't afford to be *wrong* when you're making final decisions like that. But that's okay, we didn't mind having to go out for late dinners at night with the day's work done, and the streets of Paris lit up before us!

But of course there is a dark side to the City of Light. Especially after the events of last summer, it was impossible *not* to think of acts of mindless violence, the kind of thing *Lock And Key* talks about. We even had one or two bombs go off while we were there, though fortunately not on *us*! And you *don't* get used to seeing the soldiers and gendarmes standing around everywhere with automatic weapons and bulletproof vests.

There is no fooling around with situations like that, and I would ride carefully by them on my bicycle, almost as afraid of them as I was of the Parisian traffic — and that's going some! Cruising by these deadly-serious guys with their deadly-serious weapons, I had to hope their fingers wouldn't slip, or they wouldn't mistake me for some vicious bicycle terrorist!

Hold Your Fire indeed.

Okay, okay — no more puns, I promise.

In fact, I'd better start again:

It really is hard to believe that **Hold Your Fire** is our *twelfth* studio album — in *thirteen* years together. But then it's also hard to believe in the expanding universe, superconductors, indoor baseball, 3-D movies, artificial sweetener, offensive weapons, objective reality, rock music...

What?

Well. □

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