

THE APPLIANCE OF SCIENCE

Rush grapple with hi-tech again on their new live double album, 'A Show Of Hands'. Roy Wilkinson hears of their love-hate relationship with computers

CANADIAN ROCK behemoth power triumvirate in double live album self-fossilisation blow out! For the third time!

Alert, alert, excess all areas – surely this isn't a healthy activity for man or dinosaur?

Following on from 'All The World's A Stage' and 'Exit... Stage Left', the current Rush 24-inch tour testament, 'A Show Of Hands', is the band's third shot at gatefold-sleeve-double-live-albumdom.

And, of course, these artefacts are habitually scathingly dismissed as evidence of the stadium-bound senility of the megabuck rock combo. But, if you alter your perspective, it's possible to see the hi-tech stadium performance and its attendant vinyl



RUSH: "TECHNOLOGY does have a darker side."

things, we need to tame and preserve it.

"But it does have its dangerous side and a song like 'The Manhattan Project' (the name given to Oppenheimer's development of the first atomic bomb) was an attempt to be objective about the dark side and

REM's Michael Stipe.

"Certainly, we've made enormous use of technology. Especially being a three piece, it's been an invaluable tool to us – it's constantly expanded what we can do.

"I don't have a fear of computers because I use them every day. But I

state of loss, and that's a nice thing to step out of – to step out of that continuity and concentration and that level of intensity and just be able to enjoy it, to appreciate it as a finished thing. That's the leisure you don't have at the time."

Could 'A Show Of Hands' inclusions like 'Big Money' and 'Marathon' be seen as subtitles for the performance process? After all, arena shows are virtually synonymous with the generation of big bucks and marathon duration.

"Marathon' certainly has a metaphor to playing a two-hour show. There is a kind of mental focus in the Zen state that goes with long distance running and that definitely is comparable to getting yourself into a groove for playing a long live show."

And long term tour grind?

"Touring has become a science for us: of how to do it and what system of work works best for us – how many days in a row put us at our peak and how many push us over the top. We like to be away for three weeks, then home for a week. It's on that kind of rotation."

AT times like this, Neil sounds like a time and motion consultant from some industry. Which is just what a Rush tour is – so does it feel strange

offshoots as logical, even natural terrain for Rush.

The three members of Rush are obviously consummate musical technicians. When this is combined with the way the band have embraced technology, both in the performance and the subject matter of their songs, you could argue that the stadium show, with its emphasis on state-of-the-art visual and sonic technology and precision organisation, is something with which the band have a natural affinity.

Neil Peart, the band's drummer and lyricist, a man who employs the potential of technology to the extent of using a revolving two-drum-kit turntable set-up onstage, is in two minds about this hypothesis.

"I see the connection you're making," he says in his precise, articulate variation on the North American tongue. "Technology is still always a difficult thing for me to grapple with in songs. I've certainly dealt with it a lot, going back to 'Natural Science' where I put forward the argument that science is a natural thing, and that like other natural

to demythologise the whole idea of nuclear power.

"But, I'm much more an organic person by nature. I love the energy of the city, but I am a private, introspective, even introverted, individual. So I would say I'm more content sitting under a tree than in an arena full of technology. But at the same time, my ambition and my creative side demands that I use technology as a tool.

"My organic interest in music is rhythmic which is pretty fundamental, and writing lyrics means putting things down on paper, so that's a very fundamental method. But when I see a computer that'll help me, or I see digital sampling which'll conceivably give me every sound in the world onstage, then I can hardly resist.

"But as I say, technology does have a darker side and in music it can be used as a mask rather than a tool."

EVEN IF Neil doesn't see himself as totally at one with technology, it's difficult to connect Rush with the kind of technofear that plagues someone like

do have a lot of trouble with machines – I might understand how they work intellectually, but if I try to fix them there's definitely no empathy there. If some people are at one with machines then I'm definitely at two with them."

One of the pieces featured on 'A Show Of Hands' is 'Time Stand Still', a song that deals with appreciating the moment to the maximum before it's lost to the past forever. Is there a connection here with the live albums and the way they record Rush performances forever?

"Oh yes, there really is, because you so rarely get to see yourself play. We have a concert video coming out, and being able to see a show does really bring a massive shift of vantage point.

"When I listen to a performance I'd forgotten, certainly the train of thought that was in my mind at the time I played is brought back. My mind jumps all over the place, from what I'm doing to what I'll be doing in a few seconds to what somebody in the audience is doing.

"That's the confusion, the mental

to be at the centre of a mobile industry on this scale?

"Yes, it does – and obviously it has its difficulties. But there is a sense of power in it, a sense of achievement. That's satisfying, and there's a responsibility that comes naturally from working on that scale.

"It's a big responsibility for the 40 people who work for you. Then there's the scale of economics involved and the record company politics involved. It can become a headache, certainly. I'm very much into immediate gratification, having things happen, dreaming ideas up and making them come true. So when stupid things get in the way of that, I get very impatient."

Realising fantastic notions? The man sounds like Steven Spielberg, and rightly so, because Rush's hi-tech entertainment machine is not that far removed from the Hollywood dream factory. Both work on awesome schedules and both are oiled by big money. In which case it's happy coincidence that a rush is movie industry jargon for the first print of a film. Moving pictures indeed.