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String'em up

ALEX LIFESON

Doublenecks, tribute bands, mid-gig chundering and his least-favourite Rush song – Alex Lifeson wraps his head around your questions

AS Canada's most famous band are cooped up chiselling riffs and hammering out arrangements for the forthcoming mammoth global *Clockwork Angels* tour, which is due to hit these shores in May 2013, we challenge Rush's celebrated riffmeister Alex Lifeson with a TG readers' inquest.

Alex is famed for the driving guitar motifs, effects-laden signature licks and prog-infused solos that have powered the trio through 19 studio albums and countless mind-blowing arena tours since their inception in 1968. Forget about Bryan Adams and Chad Kroeger: Lerxst (as he's affectionately known) is one of the most influential Canadians to have ever strapped on an axe.

2012's *Clockwork Angels*, Rush's first album in half a decade, is yet another lauded triumph for the Toronto rockers and Lifeson's playing, as ever, is characteristically top notch.

But has anything prepared him for what he is about to receive? Good luck, Alex...

Are you going to bring out the doubleneck for this tour?

Jim McPherson, via Facebook

"We're just formulating the setlist right now, and it looks like I will be. I wish I wasn't – it's so cumbersome to play, but I might need it actually!"

Has there ever been a song or a guitar solo you've written where you've later thought, 'Oh my God, I wish I had never done it like that!'

Henk Vinkes, via Facebook

"I suppose so but, you know, I really try to step away from that. It is in a place in time and whatever you did, you did it for some reason. I work

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pretty hard on my solos but would I do some over again? Yeah, I probably would. But on the flip side of that coin, I've done a lot of solos that were just throwaway solos that weren't meant to be anything other than a temporary plug in a space on a song. But they've stayed with us and they've become some of my favourite solos. The solo in *Bravado*, for example, was a throwaway solo, and I have a couple of solos on this new record on [the songs] *Clockwork Angels* and *The Garden* that were throwaway solos. They were just filling the demos, but they're among my favourites now."

What do you feel is your most inspired guitar work on the *Clockwork Angels* album?

Mitch Kaehler, via Facebook

"Well, certainly *Clockwork Angels*... *The Garden* definitely just for the feel. Even though it's a simple guitar part, the way it all works together and its dynamics stand out to me. *Carnies* is a lot of fun, very riffy and heavy duty

and *Seven Cities Of Gold* is the same sort of thing – heavy and very 'classic' in that rock-guitar persona!"

I've seen an interview with Angus Young where he says he thinks AC/DC tribute bands are ridiculous. Being in a Rush tribute band myself, I've always wondered what the guys from Rush thought...

Jon, via email

"Well, I've never seen a Rush tribute band but I think it's quite flattering really that other players would do that and pay homage to our music. I think it's really quite a sweet thing and there's some fantastic players, from what I gather, in some of these tribute bands that actually sound better than we do! That's quite a compliment."

Alex, will there be a second *Victor* album?

Benjamin Adler, via Facebook

"I had a lot of fun making that record but it was a lot of hard work. I have probably a couple of albums worth of material that I've written and had fun with and catalogued over the years, so I could actually put something together, at least in a very basic sense. I would enjoy doing something like that but I have so many other interests in my life right now. The fact that Rush continues to tour and record and work as much as it does doesn't really afford me the time. When I did *Victor*, we were taking a year and a half off and I can't imagine that now."



"Whenever we're running a track in the studio, I'm thinking, 'What will I do for the live version?'"



Alex is synonymous with his trusty white Gibson ES-355

How did you get acquainted with the guys from *Trailer Park Boys*, and who's idea was it for you to do that funny cameo appearance in their movie *Countdown To Liquor Day*?

Sharon Young, via Facebook

"Yeah, it was funny! A friend of a friend mentioned the show to my wife and she told me about it and said, 'You should check it out!' So I watched one of the early episodes and halfway through, it was like, 'Nooo, this is really not for me,' but by the end of the episode, I was a complete convert."

"I got a request that perhaps I could have a cameo and that developed into a whole episode based around my kidnapping! We had so much fun doing the episode that they invited me back to play some cameo roles in a couple of the films. We've maintained a close friendship ever since."

A song such as *Headlong Flight* is extremely complex. While you're in the studio, do you ever consider the difficulty of playing a song that intense live, or is it something you worry about when the time comes?

Matt Bond, via email

"Yeah, we worry about it when the time comes... but actually I have to say that whenever we're running a track down in the studio, I'm always thinking, 'What will I do for the live version? What do I need to keep in mind?' The fact this record is a little more stripped down and direct – for example, there are no rhythm guitars under guitar solos – is because it affords me a little more freedom and I just have to play the song."

"With a song like *Headlong Flight*, as long as you remember all the parts, it won't be much of a problem. But when we work on arrangements, we always inject something that will make it more difficult for us. It keeps us on our toes."

I started playing guitar at age 11 after hearing *A Farewell To Kings*. What's the record that started you out playing guitar?

Jez Sullivan, via email

"I think it was *Big Hits (High Tide And Green Grass)* by The Rolling Stones. I remember that was one of the first

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String'em up

ALEX LIFESON

albums that I bought and I remember learning so many songs off that record: ... *Satisfaction*, *Time Is On My Side*, *The Last Time*. Those songs were really what I started out learning."

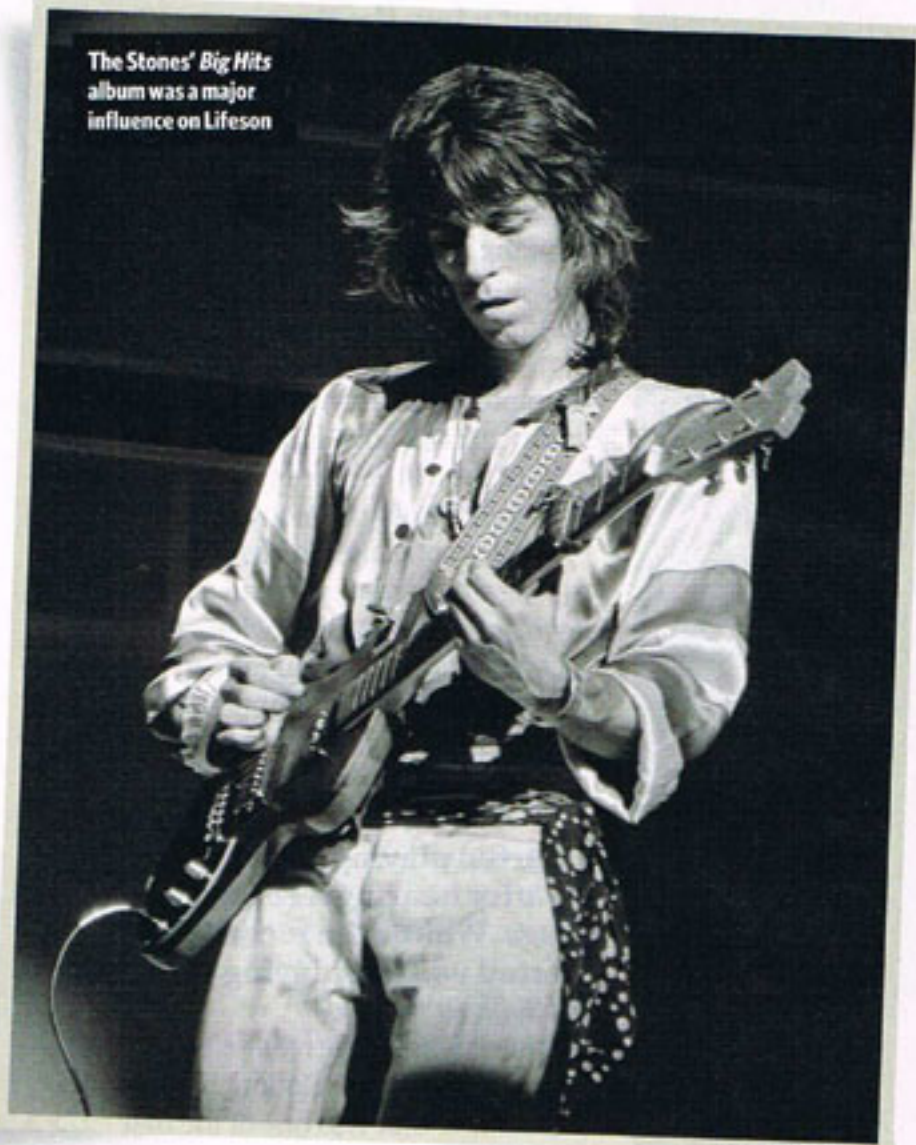
What has been your favourite song to play live since you started touring?

Billy Page, via email

"Well, that's a tough one. There are so many songs that come and go. I have to say I've always really enjoyed playing *Limelight* and a lot of that has to do with the solo. It's one of my favourite solos and I never tire of playing that. It's one of those things where the execution is very important and it's such a fluid, elastic kind of solo. Some nights I feel like I really nail it and other nights I don't feel like I quite get there, so that keeps me on my toes. There's also a nice dynamic between the choruses and the verses."

"I do recall running offstage and throwing up into a bucket"

The Stones' *Big Hits* album was a major influence on Lifeson



Alex Lifeson: the man, the guitarist, the thinker



What was the make of your first electric guitar and amp?

Jeff Harper, via Facebook

"It [the guitar] was a Canora, a Japanese make. It cost \$59 and I received it for Christmas in 1967. I still have it! My mum had it for years and years and years in her closet, and then she finally gave it back to me. I'm thinking about trying to resurrect it but it's missing a lot of parts."

"My first amp was a secondhand custom box that I bought for \$150 from a friend who used it for his keyboards. My first real amp was a Traynor Mark II with a 4x10 cabinet."

What's the worst moment you've experienced onstage?

Blair Bondy, via Facebook

"We were playing a gig in, I think, the winter of 1975 in Hamilton, Ontario, which is just down the road from Toronto. I had flu and Neil did as well, and I do recall running offstage at one point and throwing up into a bucket! That was pretty awful, actually... but the show must go on, right?"

What's your least favourite Rush song?

David Andrews, via Facebook

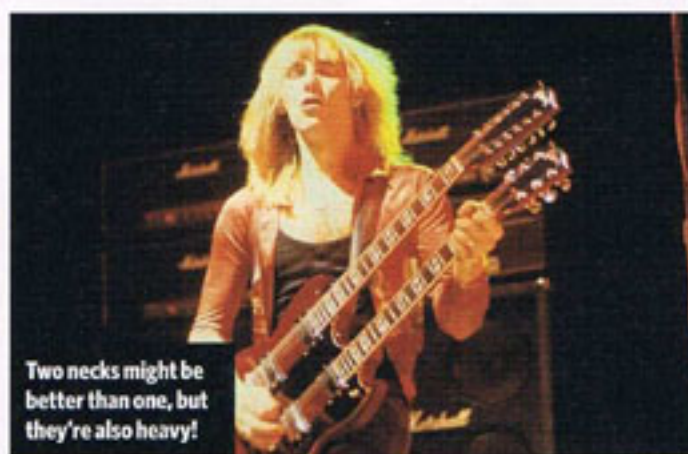
"My least favourite Rush song would have to be *Tai Shan* [from 1987's *Hold Your Fire*]. I just think that it didn't quite work as an idea; it's a little corny and I think we were trying to be a little too cinematic with it and a little cute. I don't think it was a strong enough musical or lyrical idea. But I would be critical of a number of songs from any of our records and I'd say those things are always important stepping stones to becoming a better songwriter."

Lerxst (can I call you Lerxst?), would you, Geddy and Neil show up at the Rock And Roll Hall Of Fame induction if they ever get their act together and induct you?

Mark Stench II, via Facebook

"I guess we'll see if they ever do, but it's not a big deal for us. There are much more important things – the Rock And Roll Hall Of Fame is just someone's idea of a rock 'n' roll hall of

fame, and they can have whomever they wish in there. I'd argue perhaps some of the people that are inducted the Hall Of Fame aren't actually very rock 'n' roll, but they have every right to do whatever they want. There is certainly a long list of great bands that deserve to be in there before we do." ●



Two necks might be better than one, but they're also heavy!