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RUSH: All the World's Their Stage

It's been a steep climb and a relentless battle for this Toronto-based band, but now Rush is on top, proudly reigning as North America's premier power trio.

That's what you've been telling us month after month, persuading us to check out the story of guitarist Alex Lifeson, bassist singer Geddy Lee and drummer Neil Peart.

On the afternoon before Rush took off for Wales to record their seventh album, Alex gave us a call. The group's last three albums had all turned gold, their latest tour had been a smash success, and nothing but positive expectations came across the phone wire.

"We have two weeks before the actual recording of the album," Alex began, "but we've already got 90 percent of the lyric-writing done and about 30 or 60 percent of the music. The working title is Hemispheres. It's probably going to be an extension of the studio album we did last summer, A Farewell to Kings. One side is going to be a concept, like 2112 (another previous album). It's a story that deals with good versus evil, the outcome being better. That's just a hint.

Rush is certainly glad that an anxious audience awaits their next album, especially when they think back to the early years when it seemed every musical path led to a dead end.

They grew out of a suburban North Toronto basement and into a seemingly endless circuit of schools, bars, parties and dances. It seemed unlikely they would ever find a way out and into the real music scene.

Finally, in early 1974, the group's manager Ray Danniels and his partner Vic Wilson released the band's debut album, Rush, on their own Moon Records label.

"Unfortunately, we didn't have a lot of choice whether to put it out independently or not," Alex recalled. "No one was really interested in the band. As a matter of fact, our manager went to every record company in Canada and he couldn't get the album away. In fact, if he had been willing to pay a company to take us, they still wouldn't have—we were poison ivy.

Those sounds, turned down everywhere in Canada, had to make their way to America before anyone would take serious notice. One wised up radio station in Cleveland took a fancy to Rush and began playing the album. Soon, import copies started selling in the neighborhood, catching the notice of Mercury Records, who signed the band to a long-term deal.

Everything seemed to be looking up. Just before they were set to leave on their first tour of the United States, drummer John Rutsey decided to leave the band. Fortunately, Neil Peart stepped in, and Rush set out on a long tour of America and Canada to build the band's strength and following.

That first album didn't escalate Rush into superstar status in America or Canada, but the group's second LP, Fly by Night, earned them the Juno Award for most promising new group in Canada. A lot of people were starting to listen, though the press and radio programmers continued to ignore them.

Album No. 3, Caress of Steel, had the band's heart and soul in it, but the record sold poorly.

"Caress of Steel didn't do very well commercially, although it's probably our favorite album because it was such a big steppingstone," Alex explained. "It was really an experimental thing, and we were so disappointed when the record company came down on us and our management was worried. It was a question of, do we go up or do we go back fighting? We decided to fight, which is how 2112, the next album, came about.

"It was a strong statement for us," he continued, "because it deals with freedom of expression and that was the important thing to us at the time. It still is. For our music, for our lives in general, that's what everything is about—the freedom to be an individual."

The power of the message must have come through loud and clear, because 2112 began a new phase in Rush's history. Their fierce, colorful songs were turning heads everywhere, while album sales shot up and the group's concert drawing power exploded.

All the World's Their Stage, their next release, was a double live album that was well worth the wait of their show, capturing the thematic and unrelenting drive to generate as much rock 'n roll energy as they can handle.

Last year's A Farewell to Kings, with its broadened musical scope, let rockin' Rush fans know that the band is here to stay—2112 wasn't just a lucky break.

Archers, their most recent collection, was designed "to make those first three albums available to people who didn't get into Rush originally." Alex informed us. "The plan was to put out the records at the same price they were sold for, and give the bargain to the people."

Now, with their audience brought up to date and their reputation as super rock stars secure, Rush is ready to descend with their latest.

Open your ears and hang on to your seats!