

the arts

Alan K. Stout
Knight Ridder News ServiceAfter a five-year hiatus, Canadian rock trio
is back with new album and sound

Welcome back, Rush



IF YOU GO

What: An Evening with Rush
When: 8 p.m. Sunday
Where: Riverbend Music Center
Tickets: \$32.25-\$67.75 at Ticketmaster outlets, 562-4949, www.ticketmaster.com
Read the review: Monday at www.enquirer.com and Tuesday in Tempo

You'd be hard pressed to find, anywhere in rock, three guys who can create a smarter and more bombastic sound than the members of Rush. The hard-hitting, highly melodic and always musical dynamic trio has been dishing out top-selling albums for 28 years, and with its latest and 17th studio recording, *Vapor Trails*, it continues to explore musical territory.

The recording of the album, vocalist and bassist Geddy Lee says, was a much more painstaking process than any of its previous efforts.

"We usually take about two months to write and about 10 weeks to record, and this project took 14 months," Mr. Lee, 49, says. "It was far and away the longest amount of time we spent, but it was necessary. We'd been away from each other for a long time, and we really needed some time to shake the rust off — which was very evident when we first started playing together — and we needed to figure out a style, or a collection of songs, that we felt were fresh."

Natural progression

Vapor Trails is Rush's first studio album in five years. Mr. Lee says he, drummer Neil Peart and guitarist Alex Lifeson pushed themselves harder than ever during the sessions and that he himself experimented with new vocal techniques. Mr. Lee says that though he's also played keyboards on many of Rush's past albums, he didn't mind the fact they weren't used at all on the new CD.

The musical progression, he says, was natural.

"We've been evolving in that direction the last couple of records, where we've been stripping the sound down and using keyboards in a less intrusive way," Mr. Lee says. "There were a couple of times where I felt we needed some extra texture and extra melody, and in those cases I would say to Alex, 'Why don't you orchestrate this with your guitar instead of me having to do a keyboard part?' And he loved that because he was completely



Rush is and always has been Alex Lifeson (left), Geddy Lee and Neil Peart (below). Enquirer file photos

against using any kind of keyboards on this record.

"He loved the fact that he could take that role, and create some other point of view using his guitar."

Mr. Lee says the five years since Rush's last album were the most difficult in the band's career. In 1997 Mr. Peart lost his daughter in a car accident, and in 1998, he lost his wife to cancer.

"It was very, very emotional and a very sad time for all of us," Mr. Lee says. "It was clear that the last thing in the world anyone needed to be talking about was being in the band, so through that period of time, we just tried to remain friends and supportive of Neil and tried to help him in any way we could. And that was it. That was our only role."

"There was no point in discussing anything practical," he adds. "It just seemed absurd at that time. And it remained that way for a few years. We felt that Neil would find a point in his life where music was a reasonable thing for him to deal with, and that point came in 2000."

Since releasing its first album in 1974, Rush has sold more than 35 million albums. Each of its 22 releases is either platinum or gold,



and some, such as *2112* and *Moving Pictures*, are considered rock classics. Mr. Lee says he has a difficult time explaining the group's longevity, though he says some of it may come from an inner drive to constantly up its game.

Always a new challenge

"It's very hard to understand from the inside," Mr. Lee says. "I can tell you why I think the three of us have still remained functional, but I can't tell you why our fans have stayed so loyal. They have certainly kept us alive in a lot of ways, but... for the three of us, when we sit down to make music, there is always something we feel we can improve on. There's always some new challenge out there. As much as we're happy with the work we've done, it doesn't take long for us to feel that there's something better that we

can do.

"There's also something about playing in a trio that's really special," he adds.

"There's something about being a three-piece hard-rock band that's a lot of fun, and there's something bonding about the fact that there isn't more than three people. It's a special kind of connection that we have, whether it's when we sit down to just goof around, or whether we're on stage. There's a kind of unity that we feel with each other, and it just works. We don't want to let each other down."

Mr. Lee says Rush, which kicked off its American tour on Friday, is rehearsing its set list, which he says will make for nearly three hours of music. An avid baseball fan, Mr. Lee makes the analogy of feeling like a ballplayer at the end of spring training. He says he and the band are ready to roll and take the show on the road.

"It's quite an interesting visual presentation, but more importantly than anything, we've been working on the music," he says. "It's going to be a long night of Rush music from every period and of course a lot of new material. I'm always hesitant to give away the plot, but I hope Rush fans will be happy."

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