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ADVENTURES IN PARADISE



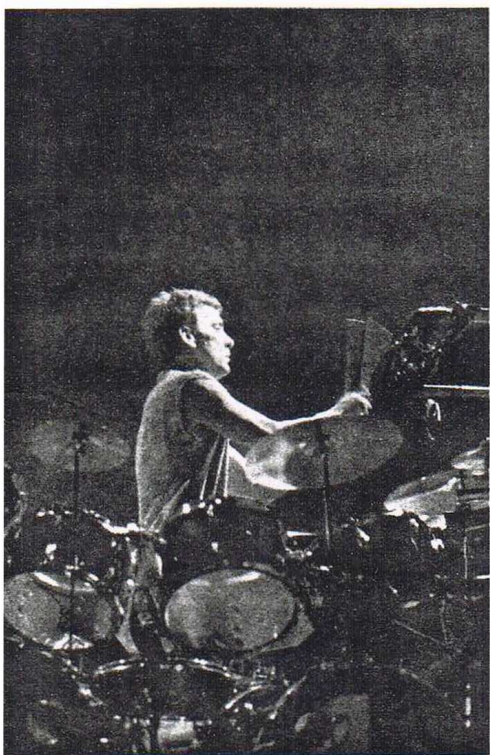
The whole world provides inspiration for Rush drummer and lyricist Neil Peart.

He's no stranger to vaccines but he's hoping it'll be a long time before they find a cure for wanderlust

Travelling Companion:
KEITH SHARP
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DEBORAH SAMUEL *

IT'S NOT NICE TO NEEDLE RUSH DRUMMER Neil Peart about his recent safari to East Africa. Especially after Peart's solid frame was punctured more times than your average dartboard as a precaution against tropical diseases.

"It's not the shots I mind," says Peart ruefully rubbing his wounds, "it's the idea that they may have missed one. I have this recurring nightmare of contracting some exotic virus and an examining doctor looks at me and says, 'Oh, I'm sorry Mr. Peart, we forgot to give you a shot for that one!'"



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Peart's escapade was a prelude to the release of Rush's latest opus, *Hold Your Fire*, and a North American concert tour which began in the Canadian Maritimes and heads south down the eastern seaboard.

During his African trip, the adventurous percussionist tramped across Tanzania and Kenya, and scaled the dizzy heights of Mt. Kilimanjaro (19,340 feet) before meeting up with his family for a more leisurely jaunt through game lodges and safari parks.

"I've always had a fascination for nature and for areas where life is close to the earth. To write lyrics about nature and the environment, I find you have to examine these things first-hand and acquire an insight into the reality of the situation."

Other recent Peart fact-finding missions have included cycling tours through Europe and mainland China.

Not your average skin-basher, Peart is a delightfully intelligent, articulate individual whose probing, provocative lyrics have been a Rush trademark since he debuted on the group's second album, *2112*. Coupled with the equally textured instrumental arrangements of bassist/vocalist Geddy Lee and guitarist Alex Lifeson, Rush has become somewhat of an anomaly.

Call them The Thinking Man's Heavy Metal Group

or simply label them Yuppie Rock, the fact is that even after 15 years, Rush's music still carries a significant impact. Especially the last three albums which contained conceptual themes that addressed concerns readily discernible to the general public. *Grace Under Pressure* dealt with environmental abuse, *Power Windows* probed the use and misuse of power, while *Hold Your Fire* concerns itself with the multifaceted human personality.

"My first idea was to write about time and the first song I wrote was *Time Stand Still*. But the more I thought about it and played around with ideas, the more expanded idea of temperamental barriers took shape. *Time Stand Still* applies to that concept in that it deals with the attitude of enjoying life and not letting it whisk by without appreciating it."

Force Ten opens the album in high spirits and, although it's already earmarked as the first single, Peart states that the track also lays the album's conceptual foundation. "The song expresses ways to face barriers and urges people not be afraid of failure — one of our basic temperamental traits."

Open Secrets stemmed from a conversation between Peart and Lee about people they knew and how they went through life without properly addressing problems that were affecting them.

"Quite a lot of my ideas come from having conversations with other people. I take their observations and viewpoints and personalize them. Unfortunately, a lot of people think these songs are personal statements. I don't want that to happen because it would seem I'm unburdening myself and that would be tiresome."

Second Nature is conciliatory in its message: If we can't reach perfection in this world then let's at least settle for some degree of improvement. "Sometimes we have to accept something less than total victory," notes Peart. "It's like the difference between compromise and balance. The politician who campaigns for clean air but doesn't want to close down the stinking factory in his area because thousands of people will lose their jobs. My viewpoint is that I'll take as much as I can without hurting other people."

Peart's European cycling tour provided graphic evidence of terrorist unrest on the continent. Observations which germinated into *Lock And Key*, a track that deals with man's killer instinct.

"I'd be pedalling through some sleepy little Spanish town on a quiet Sunday morning and I'd see soldiers and town officials standing guard over office buildings and restaurants brandishing some pretty serious weapons."

Even more unusual was Peart's experience at a Paris airport. "I'm sitting in the lounge waiting for my flight and I'm hearing all these explosions. I found out that any luggage left unattended is automatically taken to the parking lot and blown up! That's one heckuva way to solve your lost luggage problem."

While *Prime Mover*, *Mission* and *Turn The Page* deal with various other traits of human nature, Peart employed his own adventurous instincts to pen *Tai Shan*, an ode to a Chinese mountain scaled during last year's cycling expedition. "I was just inspired by the whole spirit of the country and wanted to capture that experience in one song."

Hold Your Fire concludes with *High Water*, a track that addresses man's primal connection with water. "I always feel comfortable when I'm near water, be it the sound of the ocean or even the refreshing feeling of a dip in a swimming pool," explained Peart. "I remember being in the centre of one of Japan's biggest cities and the noise pollution was incredible. But right in the middle was this garden with a small waterfall that ran over a bunch of stones. It was designed in such a way that if you sat by the

waterfall, the sound of water would drown out all the surrounding noises. I think the Japanese understand the therapeutic nature of water better than most."

Co-produced by Peter Collins (who also shared duties on *Power Windows*), the new album was recorded in England, Canada and the Caribbean island of Montserrat, and was mixed in Paris.

"We use the Manor in Oxfordshire because of the great drum room and we recorded the keyboards at Ridge Farm in Surrey. Then we went to Montserrat and sunbanned on the beach while Alex slaved over the guitar sessions before ending up at McClear Place in Toronto to finish off the vocals."

Peart explained that the mixing could have been done anywhere quiet. "But we like to mix a little culture with our work so it's nice to visit art galleries and museums in famous cities when you're not working."

Whereas *Power Windows* was lauded for its experimental nature (The Art Of Noise contributions and the string arrangements), *Hold Your Fire* returns to a more basic, dare we say commercial, stance with *Time Stand Still* shaping up to be the band's biggest single ever.

"We were quite free about trying new things but less free about using them," said Peart in describing the finished product. "We tried all these string arrangement ideas but when we played them back we decided the songs were strong enough without them."

An innovation for Rush was the inclusion of 'Til Tuesday's Aimee Mann in a vocal duet with Lee on *Time Stand Still*. "It was something we'd always wanted to do and that song lent itself perfectly," notes Peart. "It's a little different but it works all the same."

To the point that major trade publications have cited this album as being the most commercially accessible release in the band's impressive history. Peart demurs, "We always like to get our albums played on the radio. After you've worked hard to record songs that you like, you always hope that someone else will like them too."

But after a career spanning 15 years from the band's initial hard rock roots to their current, more sophisticated direction, one has to wonder 'Who is your average Rush fan?'

"That's a good question," laughs Peart. "There probably isn't one. I mean there are fans who have favorite Rush eras and who didn't like us before or after that era. There are fans who love our last few albums but who probably can't stand our early stuff and vice versa. And with every new album, there are people who are just discovering us."

"Because of this, we can't write with the average Rush fan in mind. Our material is based on the initial test of whether it excites us as a band. If it does, then we proceed on the naive assumption that if we like it then our fans will like it too. At that point the craftsmanship comes in and we try to create quality arrangements based on the expertise our experience has afforded us. The end result is a Rush album."

Which leads to the inevitable videos (a process Peart considers a waste of time) and the annual (or semi-annual) tour, a procedure the band has down to a science.

"It's kind of like being a school teacher," smiles Peart. "We spend the summers with our families, release the albums in the fall and then tour through the winter and spring. We avoid those horrible summer stadium concerts like the plague."

"We've done those 3,000-seat Bon Jovi tours in the past when we had to. Now we can afford to be more selective. At this point in our careers, we can make albums when we want to, tour when we want to, and perform where we want to. This way, touring doesn't become a soul-destroying experience." □