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In The Limelight: Neil And Modern Drummer

Neil Peart's ten appearances on the cover of *Modern Drummer* magazine span the years 1980, when he was five albums and several tours into his historic run with the Canadian progressive-rock band Rush, and 2020, the year of his passing. It's an unprecedented feat. No other drummer has come close to appearing so many times on the front of a major drum publication, certainly not the world's most recognized one.

It's no secret that in person Neil was far from an attention hog. It's one of the great ironies of his career, given how absolutely ravenous his following was for every beat, fill, solo, and lyric he contributed to Rush's music. But just because Neil was perhaps the world's least clichéd rock star, it doesn't mean he didn't value the access he had to the eyes and ears of his legions of followers.

Peart's fans have always been highly appreciative of the time and effort he put into choosing the exact right words and constructing the perfect musical accompaniment to the most complex songs commercial radio has ever embraced. During the classic-rock era, when the opening strains of a Rush tune unexpectedly leapt out of a radio speaker, it was a special feeling, an acknowledgement to us music geeks that our teenage dreams of rock stardom *and* sophistication could come true. Hero worship gets a bad rap most of the time, but Neil fans didn't so much pine for groupies, private jets, and endless parties as they daydreamed about making concept albums in the best recording studios, playing intricate drum solos in the world's greatest arenas, or holding court Buddha-like on a mountaintop as a sea of drummers hung on their every word. Neil represented a pinnacle of sorts: a renaissance man who rocked righteously but whose nickname "The Professor" seemed completely apt. The fact that he was one of *us*...well, let's just say it was the perfect shield against anyone who was dumb enough to trot out some hackneyed "drummer joke" in our presence.

When Neil died this past January 7 at the age of sixty-eight,

many of the world's greatest drummers reached out to the *Modern Drummer* office, asking if we could include their thoughts on the great drummer in the tribute issue they knew we'd immediately begin working on. Their words are presented here, as they were in our regular monthly issue this past May, under the headline "Remembering Neil." (We took a slightly different approach here, weaving the quotes throughout the nine other NP/MD cover stories that make up the bulk of this special Legends edition.)

While observing the drum community over my more than thirty years at *Modern Drummer*, something that always impressed me about Neil was how broadly his influence spread. Sure, he was by far the most influential drummer on players in heavy and progressive-rock bands—that made sense, given Rush's music. But his influence permeated so much more of the drumming community, and I had a hunch that if we threw out a fairly wide net and approached players who worked in styles that were different from what Rush was known for, their impressions of Neil might be valuable. And *boy* were they.

In fact, some of the most astute observations and heartfelt remembrances came from the indie, country, world-music, and jazz drummers we contacted. For so many of them, Neil was their entry point into drumming, their first and therefore most important musical role model. And while his performances hooked them when they were at their most impressionable age, as they grew up, even if their musical tastes and experiences went in radically different directions from Neil's, the words of wisdom and encouragement he shared whenever he sat down for a *Modern Drummer* interview continued to be important, and revelatory, and sustaining. It's a legacy that drummers—no, that *music*—won't soon forget.

Adam Budofsky
Editorial Director, *Modern Drummer*



A NOTE FROM THE PUBLISHER

Neil Peart, was and still is a modern-day drum hero. I will always remember the first time I saw Neil perform live with Rush. It was the first of many Rush concerts that I attended, and there was nonstop energy, education, and inspiration from seeing Neil perform every time!

It was such an honor to have Neil collaborate with *Modern Drummer* through the years and become a true inner-circle family member of our magazine. Neil is an inspiration to drummers worldwide, and he was on the cover of *Modern Drummer* more than any other artist in our history. This book celebrates Neil Peart's legacy and his impact on all of drumming through the pages of *Modern Drummer*.

We all wish that Neil was still here with us, but since that is very sadly not the case, let's continue to be inspired by the Professor—a true icon and legend.

David Frangioni
CEO/Publisher of *Modern Drummer Publications, Inc.*



April-May 1980

The First MD Cover Story

“The Neil Peart interview was a story we pursued for many months,” said *Modern Drummer* founder Ron Spagnardi in his editorial accompanying Neil Peart’s first *MD* cover story. “A talented and opinionated artist,” continued Spagnardi about the then-twenty-seven-year-old drummer, “Neil is not impressed by mob fan adulation, and maintains a philosophy indicative of the seriousness with which he views his drumming.” In this fascinating interview, Neil, still early in his career, touches on themes that would crop up throughout the magazine’s subsequent conversations with him, but also betrays a certain guilelessness that would fade in later years as he evolved into the “professor” that his fans came to know and love.

Interview by Cheech Iero







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MD: Do you enjoy the hectic schedule you keep on the road?

Neil: To me, it's just the musician's natural environment. I won't say that it's always wonderful, but it's not always awful either. As with anything else, I think it's a more extreme way of life. The rewards are higher, but the negative sides are that much more negative. I think that rule of polarity follows almost every walk of life. The greater the fulfillment that you're looking for, the greater the agony you'll face.

MD: During your soundcheck, you not only use the opportunity to get the proper sound, but also as a chance to warm up and practice a bit.

Neil: Well, soundcheck is a nice time to practice and try new ideas, because there's no pressure. If you do it wrong, it doesn't matter. And I'm a bit on the adventurous side live, too. I'll try something out. I'll take a chance. Most of the time I'm playing above my ability, so I'm taking a risk. I think every day is really a practice. We play so much, and playing within a framework of music every night, you have enough familiarity to feel comfortable to experiment. If the song starts to grow a bit stale, I find one nice little fill which will refresh the whole song.

MD: Refresh it for the rest of the group as well?

Neil: Sure, for all of us. We all put in a little something, a little spice. The audience would probably never notice, but it just has to be a little something that sparks it for us. And for me the whole song will lead up to that from then on, and the song will never be dull.

MD: How did you become involved with Rush?

Neil: The usual chain of circumstances and accidents. I came from a city that's about sixty or seventy miles from Toronto. A few musicians from my area had migrated to Toronto and were working with bands around there when they recommended me

as someone of suitable style. I guess they tried a few drummers, but we just clicked on both sides. There was a strong musical empathy right away with new ideas they were working on and things I had as musical ideas. Also, outside of music we have a lot of things in common.

MD: Where has this tour taken you?

Neil: Well, this isn't really much of a tour. By our terms, most of our tours last ten months or so. This one is only three or four weeks. This is just a warmup as far as we're concerned. We've been off a couple of months. We took two weeks of holidays and then spent six weeks rehearsing and writing new material. After that kind of break, we just wanted to get ourselves out onstage. That's the only place where you really get yourself into shape. Rehearsals will keep you playing well, and you'll remember all your ideas and learn your songs and stuff. But as far as the physical part of it, the feeling of being on top of your playing, you've got to have the road for that.

MD: This is a warmup for what?

Neil: The studio.

MD: At what studio will you record?

Neil: We will be going to Le Studio, which is in Montreal. We'll record there and mix at Trident in London.

MD: When the members of Rush are composing a piece of music, is the structure determined by the feedback you receive from one another?

Neil: Yes, to a large extent. It depends really on what we're coming at it with. Often times [guitarist] Alex [Lifeson] and [bassist/singer] Geddy [Lee] will have a musical idea, maybe individually. They'll bring it into the studio and we'll bounce it off one another, see what we like about it, see if we find it exciting as an idea, and then we get a verbal idea of what the mood of it is, what the setting would be. If I have a lyrical idea that we're trying to find music for, we discuss the type of mood we are trying to create musically, what sort of compositional

skills we'll bring to bear on that emotionally. The three of us try to establish the same feeling for what the song should be. Then you bring the technical skills in to try to interpret that properly and achieve what you thought it would.

MD: Your role as a lyricist has drawn wide acclaim. How did you develop that particular talent?

Neil: Well, that's really hard to put into focus. I came into it by default, just because the other two guys didn't want to write lyrics. I've always liked words. I've always liked reading, so I had a go at it. I like doing it. When I'm doing it, I try to do the best I can. It's pretty secondary. I don't put that much importance on it. A lot of times you just think of a lyrical idea as a good musical vehicle. I'll think up an image, or I'll hear about a certain metaphor that's really picturesque. A good verbal image is a really good musical stimulus. If I come up with a good picture lyrically, I can take it to the other two guys and automatically express to them a musical approach.

MD: The tune "The Trees" from your *Hemispheres* album comes to my mind.

Neil: Lyrically that's a piece of doggerel. I certainly wouldn't be proud of the writing skill of that. What I *would* be proud of in that is taking a pure idea and creating an image for it. I was very proud of what I achieved in that sense. Although on the skill side of it, it's zero. I wrote "Trees" in about five minutes. It's simple rhyming and phrasing, but it illustrates a point so clearly. I wish I could do that all of the time.

MD: Did that particular song's lyrics cover a deeper social message?

Neil: No, it was just a flash. I was working on an entirely different thing when I saw a cartoon picture of these trees carrying on like fools. I thought, "What if trees acted like people?" So I saw it as a cartoon really, and wrote it that way. I think that's the image that it conjures up to a listener or a reader. A very simple statement.

“There’s a lot of different kinds of drumming that turns me on. It could be a simple thing; I don’t think that my style really reflects my taste.”



Karen Lacrombe

MD: Do all of your lyrics follow that way of thinking, or have you expressed a more philosophical view in other songs that you have written?

Neil: Usually I just want to create a nice picture, or it might have a musical justification that goes beyond the lyrics. I just try to make the lyrics a good part of the music. Many times when there’s something strong that I’m trying to say, I look for a nice way to say it musically. The simplicity of the technique in “Trees” doesn’t really matter to me. It can be the same way in music. We can write a really simple piece of music, and it will feel great. The technical side is just not relevant, especially from a listening point of view. When I’m listening to other people, I’m not listening to how hard their music is to play, I listen to how good the music is to listen to.

MD: When you listen to another

drummer, what do you listen for?

Neil: I listen for what they have. There’s a lot of different kinds of drumming that turns me on. It could be a simple thing; I don’t think that my style really reflects my taste. There are a lot of drummers that I like who play nothing the way I do. There’s a band called the Police, and their drummer plays with simplicity, but with such gusto. It’s great. He just has a new approach.

MD: Who are some of your favorite drummers?

Neil: I have a lot. Bill Bruford is one. I admire him for a whole variety of reasons. I like the stuff he plays, and the way he plays it. I like the music he plays within all the bands he’s been in.

There were a lot of drummers that at different stages of my ability I’ve looked up to, starting way back with Keith Moon. He was one of my favorite mentors. It’s hard to decide what

drummers taught you what things. Certainly Moon gave me a new idea of the freedom and that there was no need to be a fundamentalist. I really liked his approach to putting crash cymbals in the middle of a roll.

Then I got into a more disciplined style later on as I gained a little more understanding on the technical side. People like Carl Palmer, Phil Collins, Michael Giles—the first drummer from King Crimson—and of course Bill were all influences. There’s a guy named Kevin Ellman who played with Todd Rundgren’s Utopia for a while. I don’t know what happened to him. He was the first guy I heard lean into the concert toms. Nicky Mason from Pink Floyd has a different style. Very simplistic yet ultra-tasteful. Always the right thing in the right place. I heard concert toms from Mason first, then I heard Kevin Ellman, who put



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all his arms into it. You learn so many things here and there. There are a lot of drummers we work with... Tommy Aldridge from the Pat Travers Band is a very good drummer. I should keep a list of all the drummers that I admire.

MD: Do you follow any of the jazz drummers?

Neil: I've found it easier to relate to the so-called fusion [drummers], actually. I like it if it has some rock in it. Weather Report's *Heavy Weather* I think was one of the best jazz albums in a long time. Usually technical virtuosity leaves me completely unmoved, though academically it's inspiring. But that band just moved me in every way. They were exciting, and proficient musicians. Their songs were really nice to listen to. They were an important band and had a great influence on my thinking.

MD: What drew you towards drums?

Neil: Just a chain of circumstances. I'd like to make up a nice story about how it all happened. I just used to bang around the house on things and pick up chopsticks and play on my sister's playpen. For my thirteenth birthday my parents paid for drum lessons. I had had piano lessons a few years before that and wasn't really that interested. But with the drums, somehow I was interested. When it got to the point of being bored with lessons, I wasn't bored with playing. It was something I wanted to do every day. So it was no sacrifice. No agony at all. It was pure pleasure. I'd come home every day from school and play along with the radio.

MD: Who was your first drum teacher?

Neil: I took lessons for a short period of time, about a year and a half. His name was Paul, I can't remember his last name. He turned me in a lot of good directions and gave me a lot of encouragement. I'll never forget him telling me that out of all his students, there were only two that he thought would be drummers. I was one of them. That was the first encouragement I had, which was very

important to me. For somebody to say to you, "You can do it." And then he got into showing me what was hard to do. Although I wasn't capable of playing those things at the time, he was showing me difficult rudimental things, and flashy things—double-hand crossovers and such. So he gave me the challenge. And even after I stopped taking lessons, those things stayed in my mind and I worked on them. And finally I learned how to do a double-hand crossover. I remember thinking how proud I would be if my teacher could see it.

MD: Did you study percussion further with other instructors?

Neil: Well, it's relative. I think of myself still as a student. All the time I've been playing I've listened to other drummers and learned an awful lot. I'm still learning. We're all just beginners. I really like that Lol Creme and Kevin Godley album [L]. The [title] stands for "learner's permit" in England. And that album is so far above what everybody else is doing, yet they're still learning. I really admire them.

MD: When you were coming up, did you set your sights on any particular goals?

Neil: My goals were really very modest at the time. I would get in a band and the big dream was to play in a high school. Ultimately, every city has the place that's the "in" spot where all the hip local bands play. I used to dream about playing those places. I never thought bigger than that. For every set of goals achieved, new ones come along to replace them. After I would achieve one goal, it would mean nothing. There's a [theater] in Toronto called Massey Hall, which is a 4,000-seat hall. I used to think to play there would be the ultimate. But then you get there and worry about other things. When we finally got to play there, we were about to make an album, and thought about that.

MD: Your mind was a step ahead of what you were doing at the present.

Neil: Yes. I think it's human nature not to be satisfied with what you were originally dreaming of. Whatever you were dreaming of, if you achieve it, it means nothing anymore. You've got to have something to replace it.

MD: Describe your feelings, walking onstage and looking at an audience of 35,000 screaming fans.

Neil: Any real person will not be moved by 35,000 people applauding [for] him. If I go on in front of 35,000 people and play really well, then I feel satisfied when I come off the stage. I'm happy because those 35,000 people were excited. If we're in front of a huge crowd and I have a bad night, I still can't help being depressed. If I come offstage not having played well, I don't feel good. I don't see why I should change that. Adulation means nothing without self-respect.

MD: You feel you must satisfy yourself first.

Neil: I never met a serious musician who wasn't his own worst critic. I can walk offstage and people will have thought I played well, and it might have even sounded good on tape, but I still know I didn't play it the way it should be. Nothing will change that.

MD: Do you feel there are certain things that contribute to a particularly good or bad night?

Neil: I don't think there is anything mystical about it at all. I just think it's a matter of polarity. I go looking for a lot of parallels. I find it in that, because certain nights it is so magical, and the whole band feels so good about how they played. The audience was so receptive and there's feedback going back and forth and good feelings generated by the show. That has to be the ideal. That particular show might happen five or six times out of the whole 200-show tour. But that is the ideal show. Every other show has to be measured on those standards. Our average is good. We never do a bad show anymore. We have a level where we're always good. Even if we're bad,

the show will be good.

Somerset Maugham, I believe, said, "A mediocre person is always at his best." And that's true. If you play really great one night, you're not going to be great every night. As far as my experiences go anyway, I've never known any musician that was. I'm not. Some nights I'm good and some nights I'm not good. Some nights I think I stink. I think it's just a matter of knowing that you have an honest appraisal of what your ability should be and know how well you've lived up to it. To me, there's no mystery about that at all. You know inside.

MD: What type sticks do you use?

Neil: I use light sticks generally. I've [played] butt end for as long as I can remember. It gives me all the impact I need. When I'm doing anything delicate, I play matched grip with the bead end of the sticks.

MD: So you use both matched and traditional grips depending on the feeling of the music.

Neil: Yes, both. I go back to the

fixed or re-rigged somehow. But if you break a bass drum head, the show stops. We once had to stop in the middle of filming *Don Kirshner's Rock Concert* because I broke a bass drum. So we stopped and fixed it. That's all you can do. It doesn't happen anymore, because of that idea and because [drum tech] Larry [Allen] keeps an eye on the heads and changes them.

MD: Who mikes your drums?

Neil: Our sound man, Ian [Grandy], chooses the mikes and positions them.

MD: You have your own monitor mix during live performances, correct?

Neil: Yes, Larry mixes that. That's really just my drums in a separate mix, because we have front monitors.

MD: Are the monitors on your left and right side just feeding you the drums?

Neil: Yes. All I hear is myself coming from those monitors. The front monitors give me all synthesizers and vocals, and when it comes to guitar and bass, they're right beside me. There are only two other guys; I'm fortunate in that respect, so I don't

MD: Do you use a pitch pipe, get the note from the keyboard, or just hum the note you're after?

Neil: I've been using the same size drums for several years, and I just know what note that drum should produce. When you combine a certain type of head with a certain size drum, I believe there is an optimum note, which will give you the most projection and the greatest amount of sustain. With the concert toms I just go for the note. I have a mental scale in my head. I know what those notes should be. By now it's instinctive. With the closed toms, I start with the bottom heads. I'll tune the bottom heads to the note that drum should produce, and then tune the top head to the bottom.

MD: How often do you change the heads on your drums?

Neil: Concert tom heads sound good when they're brand new, so they get changed a bit differently. They last through a month of serious road work. The Evans Mirror heads are used on the tom-toms and take a while to warm

"I don't understand the people who would look at my drumkit and say, 'All you need is four drums.' That makes me as mad as looking down on someone who has only four drums."

conventional grip when I have to do anything rudimentary, because that's the way I learned it. It's not the best way. For anybody else learning, I wouldn't advise that. I've seen a lot of drummers who could play a beautiful press roll with matched grip.

MD: Why do you tape the top shaft of the bass drum beater so heavily?

Neil: That's an interesting trick that other drummers should know about. I break a lot of beaters off at the head, because the whole weight of my leg goes into my pedals. And I always break them where the felt part of the beater meets the shaft. They break right at the shaft, and then the shaft goes through the head. If you put that roll of tape on there, you'll never break your drumhead. In fact, I can still get through half a song if I have to, until the beater can be changed. The worst thing that could happen in a show would be for your bass drum to break. Anything else could be changed or

need them in my monitors. I have direct instruments to my ears, which to me is the best. I'd rather have that than to fool around with the monitors. And the stuff the other guys need in their monitors I get indirectly, because it's pointing at them, so I also hear it. I know a lot of drummers who prefer to have the whole mix in their monitors, and in some cases need the whole mix in their monitors.

MD: Have you ever worn earphones while playing live?

Neil: No, not really, they fall off. I even had a lot of trouble in the studio keeping them on. I went through all kinds of weird arrangements, getting the cord out of my way. It's just not worth it, I like to hear the natural sound.

MD: What are your thoughts on tuning?

Neil: Concert toms are pretty well self-explanatory. I just know the note I want to achieve and tighten them up.

up. It takes a week to break them in. I don't change those much more than every six weeks or so. They do start to lose their sound after a while. You start to feel they're just not putting out the note they should be. Then you say, "I hate to do it, but let's change the heads."

I like Black Dots when they're brand new. I used to use those on my snare, and the Clear Dots also sound good when they're brand new. But the Evans heads don't. It takes a while. I've gone through agonies with snare drums. I guess most drummers do. I had an awful time, because there was a snare sound in my mind that I wanted to achieve. I went through all kinds of metal snares, and I still wasn't satisfied. It wasn't the sound I was after. Then my drum roadie phoned me about this wooden Slingerland snare. It was second-hand. Sixty dollars. I tried it out and it was the one. Every other snare I've tried chokes somewhere. Either



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very quietly, or if you hit it too hard it chokes. This one never chokes. You can play it very delicately, or you can pound it to death. It always produces a very clean, very crisp sound. It has a lot of power, which I didn't expect from a wooden snare drum. It's a really strong drum. I tried other types of wooden snare drums. I tried the top-of-the-line Slingerland snare drum. [But] there's no other snare drum that will replace it for me.

MD: What kind of finish does your kit have?

Neil: It's a mahogany finish. The Percussion Center in Fort Wayne, Indiana, where I get all my stuff, did the finish for me. I was trying to achieve a rosewood. At home I have some Chinese rosewood furniture, and I wanted to get that deep burgundy richness. They experimented with different kinds of inks, magic marker inks of red, blue, and black, trying to get the color. It was very difficult.

MD: What has been done to the inside of your drum shells?

Neil: All of the drums with the exception of the snare have a thin layer of fiberglass. It doesn't destroy the wood sound. It just seems to even out the overtones a bit, so you don't get crazy rings coming out of certain areas of the drums. You don't get too much sound absorption from the wood. Each drum produces the pure note it was made to produce as far as I'm

concerned. There's no interference with that either in the open toms or the closed toms. The note is very pure and easy to achieve. I can tune the drums, and when I get them to the right note I know the sound will be proper.

MD: Why do you use same-size double bass drums instead of two different-size drums to achieve two different bass voices?

Neil: I'm not looking for different sounds. My double bass drums are basically for use with fills. I don't like them to be used in rhythms. I like them to spice up a fill or create a certain accent. Many drummers say anything you can do with two feet can be achieved with one. That just isn't true. I can anticipate a beat with both bass drums. That is something I learned from Tommy Aldridge of the Pat Travers Band. He has a really neat style with the bass drums. Instead of doing triplets with his tom-toms first and then the bass drums, which is the conventional way, he learned how to do it the other way, so that the bass drums are anticipated.

MD: Giving it a flam effect?

Neil: In a sense. It has an up sort of feel. You could just be playing along in an ordinary four-beats-to-the-bar ride and all of a sudden stick that in. It just sets that apart. When you listen to it on the track, it sounds strange. It really works well and it's handy in the fills. You can be in the middle of a triplet fill and all

of a sudden you can leave your feet out for a beat and bring them back in on the beat. It's really exciting.

I like to interpose two bass drums against the hi-hat too. There are a few different things I do where I throw in a quick triplet or a quadruplet using the bass pedals and then get right over to the hi-hat. I'll complete my triplet and by the time my hand gets over to the hat, my foot is already there. So you'll hear almost consecutive left bass drum and hi-hat notes. If you want a really powerful roll, there's nothing more powerful than triplets with two bass drums. I could certainly get along without two bass drums for 99 percent of my playing. But I would miss them for some important little things.

MD: Did you go to the Zildjian factory to select your cymbals?

Neil: No, I must admit I've cracked so many cymbals, that would be futile. I just know the weights that I want to get, and if I have one that's terribly bad, I'll take it back. I go through an awful lot of crash cymbals. I hit them hard and they crack, especially my 16" crash, which is my mainstay, and my 18" crash.

MD: Where do you buy your cymbals?

Neil: From the Fort Wayne Percussion Center. I actually haven't seen their store in many years. Most of our business is done by them shipping the merchandise out to us, or [owner] Neal Graham comes out from the

REMEMBERING NEIL

To truly have your own voice on an instrument is one of the greatest achievements a musician can have, and Neil Peart had just that. He also had his own voice as an author and lyricist who was a master storyteller, an architect of dreams, a teacher, a sage, an explorer—and I think the outpouring of grief that was experienced at the news of his passing went beyond just the loss of a fellow drummer. We “knew” him through his written words, whether

it be from the music or his nonfiction work. The loss of his person was felt on a profound level. He inspired millions as a wordsmith extraordinaire, and his playing “just sounded cool.” And by that I mean, you can't just decide to be cool. Cool is. Or it isn't. And his playing was cool and spoke to musicians and the layman alike. The Rush records were always mixed with the drums equal in the blend—you never had to listen while squinting from the edge of your seat to decipher what he was

doing through a cacophony of reverb or a wall of other instruments. His playing, like it or not, spoke with the clarity of his written words.

I only met him once. We were working right next to each other at Ocean Way in Los Angeles. He was recording the “Hockey Night in Canada” theme and I was recording with Brian Wilson on his Gershwin record. Sabian's Chris Stankee pulled me next door to meet him, and there was a full big band and a film

crew, along with the actual Stanley Cup trophy. I found him to be kind, engaging, and warm. After a while he was asking me all the questions in our conversation—about what I was doing, what it was like working with Brian Wilson, and whatever else was coming up in my schedule.

One of the definitions of the word “gentleman” is someone who makes you feel at ease, accepted, and in good company. Neil was a gentleman indeed. I wish I would have had the

store. He brought me my new drums a couple of weeks ago. I know he has a lot of imagination; if I want something crazy, he'll come up with it. If I want crotales on top of the tubular bells, or a temple block mounted on top of my percussion, he can do it. When you present him with an idea, he thinks of a way to achieve it. He never let me down in that respect. He built my gong stand. The gong stand mounts on the timpani and is attached to the mallet stand.

MD: With the extensive setup that you use, I'm wondering why you don't use electronic percussive devices.

Neil: It's a matter of temperament

I might have hundreds of toys, but for me most of my patterns and most of my thinking revolves around snare drum, bass drum, hi-hat, and a couple of tom-toms. But there's more to it than that. I can add a lot more. I don't understand the people who are purists or fundamentalists, who would look at my drumkit and say, "All you need is four drums." That makes me as mad as looking down on someone who has only four drums. I'm not afraid to play on only four drums, but there's more that I can contribute to this band as a percussionist.

I'm certainly not a keyboard percussion virtuoso by any means,

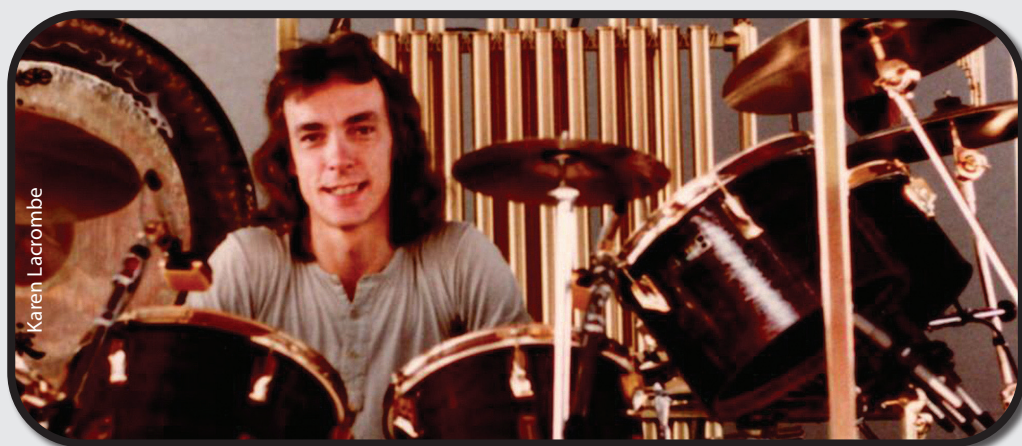
I don't neglect my drumming because of that. When I'm not busy drumming, I have something else to do. And the guys show me the notes to play and I play them. I know Carl Palmer spends a lot of time on keyboard percussion, and I admire him for that. He's getting quite proficient. Bill Bruford's getting amazing on keyboard percussion, because he's devoted the time and the energy that it takes to become a proper keyboard percussionist. I admire that to no end. I spend a lot of time thinking about composition, and drumming has to be the prime musical force. I spend a lot of time working with words. I look at that as a simultaneous education while I'm refining my drumming skills.

MD: Do you use lyrics as a guide to your drumming?

Neil: Not after the fact. Once we have agreed on the musical structure and arrangement, it then becomes a purely musical thing. Obviously, if there's a problem in phrasing I might have to rewrite the structure. But for the most part I forget about the lyrics and listen to the vocals. Getty's interpretation is really when it becomes an instrument, so there's a way I can punctuate the vocals or frame the vocals somehow musically.

MD: What are some of your thoughts on soloing?

Neil: I guess there are mixed feelings. How musical it is depends on the drummer. I find it very satisfying. I guess a lot of drummers do improvise all the way through their solo. I have a framework that I deal with every night, so I have some sort of standard where it will be consistent. And if I don't feel especially creative or strong, I can just play my framework and know it will be good. But certain areas of my



really. I don't feel comfortable with wires and electronic things. It's not a thing for which I have a natural empathy. It's not that I don't think that they're interesting or that there aren't a lot of possibilities. But personally I'm satisfied with traditional percussion. I have distrust for electronic and mechanical things. I've got enough to keep me busy, really.

When I look at my drums, the five-piece setup is the basis of what I have.

nor do I expect to be. I just want to be a good drummer at this point in my life. Having eight tom-toms to me is excellent, because I can do that many more variations of sounds. So you're not hearing the same fill all the time, or the same sort of patterns. There are different notes, different perspectives of percussion. To me it sounds like a natural evolution. I couldn't understand anyone who would look at it with bitterness, or reproach, because

chance for another encounter with him, but I'm grateful for the lovely one that I had. I wish he would have been able to enjoy his retirement, especially after living through such unimaginable tragedy. He was an important figure during my school years in real time '76 to '82, basically *2112* through *Signals*. *Moving Pictures* and *Signals* can catapult me back to junior high school in my mind more powerfully than a photograph. I think many of us feel that way, and his contributions to music and literature will live within us all.

Todd Sucherman (Styx, sessions)

The first big concert I ever attended was Rush during their *Roll the Bones* tour. It was the first time I saw a band in an arena, and it was the first time I ever saw a live drum solo. Needless to say, it blew me away. It sparked a lifelong flame that I've carried through my career to this day. Neil was one of my absolute biggest influences, and his drumming inspired so much of how I've developed as a drummer. He was and will always be a pillar of this fantastic drumming community for countless reasons. But one specific reason in my mind is that he was and will always be at the center of so many

conversations between drummers—and non-drummers—of all ages, all skill levels, and all styles of music. He brought people together because of drumming and helped them fall in love with this incredible instrument. Neil Peart was the "gateway drummer" for me and many others, and he'll continue to be that kind of legend for the rest of time.

Matt Halpern (Periphery)

My first concert was Rush at the Cow Palace in San Francisco, 1980, on the *Permanent Waves* tour. I was twelve. My older brother had

first played me *2112* and *A Farewell to Kings* when I was ten. It was "Xanadu" that got its hooks in me first. Neil's multipercussion sound world and his effortless odd time signatures fascinated me. It was so cinematic. His lyrics were the script. Lying on the floor listening to it in the dark or staring at the gatefold sleeves had a profound impact on my life that I would only come to realize much later, when I transitioned from being a drummer in a band, living in the limelight, to being a film composer. Once-mystical devices like the vibraslap, crotales, temple blocks, orchestra chimes, and

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solo are left open for improvisation. If I feel especially hot, or if I have an idea that comes to me spontaneously, I have plenty of room to experiment. I try to structure the solo like a song, or piece of music. I'll work from the introduction, go through various movements, and bring in some comic relief. Then build up to a crescendo and end naturally. I can't be objective. Subjectively, I enjoy doing it and like listening to it. It's a good solo. Non-drummers have told me it's a nice drum solo to listen to.

MD: Do you have any advice for the young drummers with aspirations of someday playing in a musical situation similar to your own?

Neil: I used to try to give people advice, but the more I learned, the more I realized that my advice could only be based on both my values and my experiences, neither of which are going to be shared by very many people. I would say to them, "Go for what you're after." I can't get much more complicated than that. I don't feel comfortable telling people what to do.

MD: Have you ever taught private students'?

Neil: No, I haven't. I've been asked to do clinics, which I'm interested in but fearful of. But I would like to get into doing that, relating to people on that level. I like to talk about drums. I like to talk about things I'm interested in. For

me to talk about things I'm honestly interested in—and obviously drums is one of them—is foremost.

MD: What are your thoughts on interviews?

Neil: I won't do an interview for a promotional reason. I do them because I like to get my ideas out. Sometimes I can talk about something in an interview and realize that I was totally wrong. And I'll have had the opportunity to air those thoughts out, which most people don't. You don't have conversations with your friends about metaphysics, the fundamentals of music, and the fundamentals of yourself really. When I do an interview, I look for an ideal. I'm looking for an interview that's going to be stimulating, and I'll get right into it. Just sit for hours and relate. That's an ideal, like an ideal show. It doesn't happen that often.

MD: Before setting up your kit, Larry Allen cleaned and polished each cymbal to a high gloss and cleaned all the chrome. Does he take this great care as per your instruction, or is this something Larry does on his own?

Neil: That's a reflection of Larry's care. He takes a lot of pride in having the set sparkle and the cymbals shining. On his side I relate to that, but it doesn't affect me really one way or the other.

MD: Do you hear a difference in the brilliance of the sound when your cymbals are clean instead of tarnished?

"When I do an interview, I'm looking for [one] that's going to be stimulating, and I'll get right into it. Just sit for hours and relate. That's an ideal, like an ideal show. It doesn't happen that often."

Neil: No, not really. It's hard to justify really. To me a good cymbal sounds good, and a bad cymbal doesn't sound good. That's the way I feel about it. My 20" crash has a very warm, rich sound with a lot of good decay. I don't think dirt would improve that.

MD: Some drummers feel that as the cymbal is played, gets dirty, and gets tarnished, it takes on a certain character all its own. Do you think it is really the aging process that is the factor?

Neil: Yes, I think age has something to do with that. But the cymbal is metal—how can dirt make it sound better? If you don't want the decay, stick a piece of tape on it. It'll do the same thing dirt will do. It may be true that dirt is a factor. But it won't give it a warmer sound by definition, because the note of the cymbal is still the note of the cymbal.

MD: The dirt will only affect the sustain.

Neil: Exactly. So if you want a shorter sustain, get it dirty. My cymbals are chosen for the length of decay that I

REMEMBERING NEIL

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tubular bells now play an everyday role in my film music.

As a high school sophomore, I was given an English assignment to write and send a business letter to any business that interested me. Since the only business I cared about was drumming, I wrote to Neil Peart and sent it in care of *Modern Drummer*. I wasn't expecting a reply, but there in my mailbox right around Christmas vacation 1982, roughly nine months later, a postcard from Neil arrived.

I couldn't believe it! I stood by the mailbox in disbelief, reading and rereading Neil's handwritten responses to my questions. I must have read it a hundred times that day. I promptly wrote him back, and again nine months or so later he replied with another handwritten postcard! In both incidences Neil stressed to find and be myself. To "try and do everything, and find out what you do best!" Obviously, based on my questions, I was trying to imitate him. I was fourteen and had no idea who I was. I wanted to sound like him, but it hit me and it stuck, perhaps because he underlined the word

"you." It may have taken me a while to find my own voice (still in progress), and I certainly borrowed from Neil along the way, but that was the best career advice I was ever given. I have never forgotten it. I pass it along to any hungry musician that asks me for advice.

The inspiration, compassion, and personal encouragement that Neil so graciously gave to a fourteen-year-old kid from rural Northern California has helped fuel my passion for music and quest for originality to this day.

Thank you, Neil Peart. You will forever be in my heart, in my hands, in

my feet, and in my ears. Rest in peace. **Brian Reitzell** (film composer, percussionist)

In 1981 I was a brand-new drummer. My ears were searching for inspiration. I had heard "The Spirit of Radio," but it was still a bit of an underground thing here in L.A. Seemingly out of nowhere *Moving Pictures* dropped, and like most drummers I was flabbergasted. Brave, technically challenging, musically beautiful, sonically delightful, this record changed the game. I was already a fan of Phil Collins, so odd