

ANATOMY OF A DRUM SOLO written by Neil Peart

My first instructional video, *A Work in Progress* (1996), described how I created drum parts for new songs, then demonstrated the recording process. My directors and collaborators on that project, Paul Siegel and Rob Wallis, had already become friends, first when we worked together on the Buddy Rich Memorial Scholarship concerts, and later when they filmed the making of the tribute project, *Burning for Buddy*.

In the weeks leading up to that '96 shoot, at Bearsville Studios in upstate New York, the three of us exchanged ideas almost daily (by fax — so Last Century!). Together we developed and refined our program into points for discussion and demonstration in the show. For myself, I love that kind of collaboration, working with creative, dedicated partners to create a piece of work that grows into something I could never have imagined, let alone made, on my own.

For thirty years I have worked that way with my bandmates in Rush, Alex and Geddy, and their reactions and suggestions for my lyric writing and drumming not only elevate the result, they also elevate the process — the pleasure of doing business.

In the years since that first instructional video, Paul and Rob and I had discussed doing another project together, but I wasn't sure what to tackle next. *A Work in Progress* covered my approach to composing and recording drum parts, so the next obvious theme seemed to be my approach to live performance — but that was such a big one. I decided to start with something a little more modest (if that's the right word!), by making an instructional video about my thoughts and methods regarding drum soloing.

Anatomy of a Drum Solo is centered around a solo from Rush's thirtieth anniversary tour, "R30," filmed and recorded in Frankfurt, Germany on September 24th, 2004.

Our *Rush in Rio* DVD, recorded on the previous tour, *Vapor Trails*, in 2002, was (perhaps obviously) filmed in Rio de Janeiro, so I had titled that solo "O Baterista!" — Portuguese for "The Drummer." (Can't you just hear those words said so many different ways? A foreign movie with a terrified, goggle-eyed man backing away and screaming, "O Baterista!" Or a woman's soft, sexy whisper in the darkness, "O Baterista!" Yeah... in our dreams...)

Anyway, because the centerpiece of *Anatomy of a Drum Solo* was filmed in Germany, I called it "Der Trommler." You'll guess what that means. There is another "bonus" solo in the program from a few nights later, in Hamburg, Germany, and I gave it the title, "Ich Bin Ein Hamburger," "I Am a Hamburger." This owed something to Popeye's friend Wimpy, and also echoed JFK's famous statement in the early '60s, when he visited the newly-divided city of Berlin and announced to the Berliners, and to the world, "Ich Bin Ein Berliner."

Leading up to putting this show together, Paul and Rob and I first discussed the notion a few times during the R30 Tour. Paul visited me before our show in Saratoga Springs, New York, and the next week both of them ganged up on me backstage at Radio City Music Hall. Nearing the end of a long, hard tour, I wasn't very interested in thinking about another major project yet, but I did agree to let them arrange for some special "drum cams" for the Frankfurt show, which the band was already planning to film for a concert DVD.

Once the tour was behind me, the conversations among Paul, Rob, and me picked up in frequency and intensity. Slowly, gradually, we began to circle around actually doing it. Plans were made, people were chosen for cameras and technical crews, for audio recording, for photography, the studio was booked, and finally, my plane flight was booked, and I was on my way. (Hey — wait a minute! I'm not ready...)

In mid-July, it would have been an enjoyable adventure to motorcycle or drive from my California home to New York, but there was no time. Instead, I sent my car ahead by truck to Rob's house in rural New York. I would be able to drive the Z8 from there to the studio, then after the shoot, drive north through the Adirondacks to my house in Quebec, and to visit family and friends in Ontario. The expense was easy to justify, trading all those airfares, taxis, airport limos — and the sheer nastiness of air travel — for a beautiful drive.

And sure enough, after flying five hours to Newark and sitting in an airport limo for almost two hours from there to Rob's house, I was very pleased to be following Rob and the jovial Alfonse through the dark little roads of the Catskills.

Allaire Studios is located atop a mountain near Bearsville, New York, where Paul and Rob and I had shot the previous video at Bearsville Studios, nine years before. The excellent recording facilities and cozy accommodations were built into a vast estate from the 1920s, once a summer residence for the family who owned Pittsburgh Plate Glass. The studio's website showed spectacular views in every direction, but I never saw them — the weather was foggy and/or rainy all through our three-day shoot. But never mind most of our business was indoors anyway. We tried to get outside between rainshowers for some of my introductory, spoken pieces, and during one of those, I felt a few fat, heavy rains.

I kept talking, Carlos kept filming, and even as the rain's tempo increased into a Buddy Rich single-stroke roll (a metaphor for drummers only), no one wanted to say "cut." Then all at once everybody seemed to realize it was absurdly hopeless, and we made a comical run for cover.

However, mostly I was wet from sweat rather than rain, sitting behind the drums and working through the solo. Each part was dissected (even "vivisected," hence "Anatomy"), and I discussed themes, textures, and techniques, while demonstrating the pieces individually. I have to say, it was the hardest three days of work I've ever done.

Starting in the early morning, each day I stood or sat in front of the cameras for ten or twelve hours, either talking or drumming. There's a joke among comedians, "Dying is easy comedy is hard," but I would amend that to "Drumming is easy talking is hard." I had to exert all my powers of concentration to try to speak articulately, comprehensively, and smoothly — without drooling. That is a challenge for any drummer (you know the jokes), and I found it demanded so much mental energy to remember what I wanted to say, in the order I wanted to say it, and not deliver it like a robot or a zombie.

At the end of each day I felt empty and drained, and at the end of three days, I felt truly exhausted — and yet, exalted, in the afterglow of all that creative and performing energy. The next day I drove from the studio to my house in Quebec, speeding north over the back roads of the Adirondacks in my Z8, and it was one of the great drives of my life. I felt ragged and fatigued, yet strangely elevated, elated.

Neil with Rob and Paul from Hudson Music

A few weeks later, after I had steeled myself to watch the first edit (fearing embarrassment and shame), I was talking on the phone to my wife, Carrie, and grumbled, "I guess it's going to be okay." She knew that meant I was very pleased. Working with Paul and Rob and our excellent crew of artists, technicians, and assistants was so truly collaborative, with everyone contributing his or her bit of expertise and imagination. As each shot was being set up, Paul and Rob and I gathered in the kitchen to exchange ideas for talking points and demonstrations, roughing out a basic "script." Then off I went again — into the lights to try to do all that in front of the cameras.

Though difficult, the process was exciting and rewarding, truly inspiring, and in those brief and fast-moving three days, all of us forged a united team of people who worked toward a common goal — making the best show we could.

That being the case, of course we hope people are going to like it!

Here is the introductory piece I wrote for the DVD booklet. It tells a little more about the background and inspirations for this video.

Drumming in the Shadows of Giants

Four score years ago (give or take), our forefathers brought forth the drum solo. The people watched and listened, danced and cheered, and it was good. Prophets and pioneers like Baby Dodds, Chick Webb, and Big Sid Catlett passed the sticks down to Gene Krupa, and his showmanship and rhythmic grace brought the spotlight to the drum solo

as a popular performance piece. Gene Krupa was the first and only drummer to have a movie based on his life, and more than 40 years ago, before I ever touched a pair of drumsticks or knew what a snare drum was, I saw *The Gene Krupa Story* on late-night TV. To the boy I was then, the notion of being a drummer seemed exciting, glamorous, elegant, and dangerous, and my eyes must have been shining with inspiration and desire. I remember thinking, "I wanna do that!" Buddy Rich's amazing technique and musicality raised the drum solo to an even higher level of artistry and popular appreciation, and other inspired soloists like Papa Jo Jones, Louie Bellson, Max Roach, Joe Morello, Sonny Payne, Roy Haynes, Philly Joe Jones, and Art Blakey took the form in fresh, exciting directions.

In the early '60s, when I finally did get a pair of drumsticks, and learned what a snare drum was, drum solos began to bloom in rock music too, in concerts and recordings. Ginger Baker, Carmine Appice, John Bonham, and Michael Shrieve brought audiences to their feet in theaters, arenas, stadiums, and festivals, and fired me with more inspiration and desire — "I wanna do that!" At the same time, jazz and its various mutations produced brilliant innovators like Billy Cobham, Elvin Jones, and Tony Williams, who built a bridge between jazz and rock — a bridge that would later be crossed in both directions by Steve Gadd, Steve Smith, Bill Bruford, Terry Bozzio, Dave Weckl, and many others, all traveling with their own musical mastery and unbounded imagination. For anyone who appreciates drum solos, whether playing them or just watching and listening, I hope *Anatomy of a Drum Solo* will be entertaining, informative, and maybe even inspiring.

For those who recognize the feeling, "I wanna do that!", I can at least demonstrate and articulate the way this drummer thinks about drum soloing, but my far greater hope is to inspire others to build their own solos, tell their own stories, as an expression of their tastes, their characters, and their lives.

The drum solo is a tradition handed down to us, our heritage, as it were, and it is a heritage worth celebrating. Giants have come before us, and giants will come after, but even while us mere mortals play in their shadows, we can aspire to entertain ourselves, and maybe others too.

Drum solos are not for everyone, of course, whether drummers or music lovers, but even drummers who choose not to perform drum solos can still enjoy and benefit from a private indulgence. Exploring and experimenting freely, and even just that kind of practicing on your own, can only nourish and improve your playing.

At the end of my commentary in this DVD, I offer a blessing, or a wish, that it is not just for drummers, but for everybody:

"Go forth into the musical wilderness, and play well!"

Neil Peart