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The Measure of a Moment

If you told Andrew MacNaughtan that having a handful of photos published in Rush's [Power Windows](#) tourbook would lead to him being their official photographer, touring with the band as their Personal Assistant, direct videos and ultimately film a documentary, it would have been a dream come true. Lucky for MacNaughtan, that dream was realized. 1989's [Presto](#) album introduced his stunning portraits to the Rush community and for the tour he slid into the role of assistant to the band (which would continue through the [Roll the Bones](#) tour). He continues to photograph Rush and has gone on to direct over 50 music videos, and has worked on album art for over 100 releases. His photographic credits include Sarah McLachlan, Dizzy Gillespie, the Barenaked Ladies, Godsmack, Alanis Morissette and more. He has been nominated and won awards for his photography and video direction including a Juno Award (the Canadian equivalent to the Grammy) and the VideoFACT Director of the Year Award at the MuchMusic Video Awards. For more information on his work, visit www.andrewmacnaughtan.com and his *Photographing Rush* series, high-res photos and more at www.andrewmacnaughtan.net.

MacNaughtan is no stranger to Rush fans and his most recent work, an almost hour-long documentary on the band's trip to Rio, has been a ten-year dream for the photographer. I spoke with Andrew by phone on September 26, 2003 as he traveled around Toronto, drove to meetings and dodged crazy drivers. The discussion focused around his work on the highly-anticipated documentary, getting cheeky with the band, his still photography work, a 30th anniversary project, as well as the magical Rio experience.



©Photos by Andrew MacNaughtan

Bp: Whose idea was it to film a documentary for the DVD release? Did the you approach the band or did they approach you?

AM: I've wanted to do a documentary with the band for many years and I think the guys were initially rather resistant to it and not because they couldn't be bothered, but more because they just really believe that there really wasn't much of a story to tell for a documentary. They couldn't understand why...."Well, Andrew, we're not very interesting people," they'd say. For example, I wanted to go in and do a documentary of them making the Vapor Trails album. So it'd be me in there with my camera filming Alex and Geddy working on some songs, Neil working out lyrics - and they said "Well, Andrew, that's not very interesting. The process that we go through to create and write albums is not all that camera friendly to be honest." And to a certain extent I think they have a

point. So I think they just shied away from it because it's not really what Rush is all about. They're not eye candy for pictures. They're regular guys going about what they do in a very sort of business-like manner and it's not like there are hot chicks running around backstage or at the studio or doing lines of blow, y'know, that's not what Rush is about. They just felt that it wasn't the right thing for them to do. Then this whole Brazil trip came up and really all of us at the same time just sort of said "y'know maybe it'd be worth getting Andrew to film this and maybe he can create a little story out of it." It is a pretty unique trip for the band. It's very unusual. They'd never played Brazil and that's an interesting story. So that's how it really came about for the most part.

Bp: Did you come up with a concept of what you wanted to shoot prior to filming and what you wanted the documentary to accomplish? Or did you just let the footage decide the game plan?

AM: There really was no game plan in place. They were really relying on me to try and...as the photographer, as a director of music videos I'm coming in with an eye and perhaps creative ways I can film this piece, but there really was no story line in place at all and it was up to me to do that. I did make notes and I knew that I wanted to get very specific things. For instance I knew I wanted to do soundchecks, I knew I wanted to do pick-up shots of each of the cities we were in. I also wanted to put abstract imagery to music. So I did have some criteria, but basically the goal for me was to just shoot absolutely everything I possibly could - which is what I did. Literally my video camera was going the entire time, about 18-hour days. It was non-stop. In certain cities I hired a B-camera and even a C-camera so I had things to cut with. So basically the goal was to shoot everything possible - try and create a couple of scenarios that would at least keep it interesting and unusual. Another example, I knew that I wanted to film one of the guys in their hotel rooms. I don't know doing what, but something that was natural and real and what they do when they're in this hotel room. Simple. I got a great segment in there with Alex having breakfast and of course he's hysterical. Unfortunately most of it ended up on the cutting room floor because there was just too much stuff. So I had some criteria, but for the most part it really was to shoot absolutely everything and then cut it up and sift through it. And literally I came back with close to 180-hours of footage. I had about 40-45 hours myself just with my camera, plus these two other cameras as well. So we literally had a crazy amount of footage and the hardest part of this whole thing was I had to sit down with my editor and actually try to assemble some kind of a format and that was really, really challenging. And it took a couple of months just to try things and to see what made sense and what kind of story I could build. We tried a variety of different things - we tried to make it all about humor, we tried to make it all about arty moments and let shots linger and be very long and be sort of artful and airy and just put ambient music behind them. We decided in the end after experimenting for a couple of months to just do it chronologically and I think it's turned out very well. It all just clicked and made sense that the best way to go was to just let it unfold as the days actually unfolded over the course of this one week in Brazil.

Bp: Will all of the scenes that hit the cutting room floor ever see the light of day on a future release at all?

AM: Well, you never know. Who knows. Another example is, Alex having breakfast - it's actually hysterical, but again after a point in a documentary you sort of think, "Well, we've seen enough of this let's move on," and I know the die hard fans would love to see all of it, and quite frankly it's all hysterical and it's funny, but with the goal of trying to do something that is within a short, sort of snappy piece, it was necessary to cut some of that. I filmed Neil twice during his warm-up in his drum room - that goes on for a good twenty minutes, him just practicing and warming-up, but after a minute of that or even two minutes of that, I mean not to me, but the average person they go, "Well, we've seen enough of that let's move on." So yes, that footage does exist and it is absolutely incredible and yes, maybe one day it will show up, but for this documentary we needed to sort of pull it back a bit and give it a nice balance throughout.

Bp: I can imagine that would be extremely difficult with so much footage to balance between the 'very interesting to the die-hard fan' and the 'bordering on boring for the casual fan' - it must have been a very difficult balance to achieve throughout the piece.

AM: Yes, it was very difficult. My initial edit was too long. First of all, quite frankly I was expecting to only have a little fifteen minute documentary. Just a really wonderful little fifteen minute clip and I think that's all the band ever expected as well, just a little bonus thing. But we came away with so much great footage and stuff to me that I thought the fans would find really interesting - the stuff that I always thought was interesting and now it's about 55 minutes or so. It really surprised me that I had enough, well, I told you how many hours of tape I had but still a lot of it was pick-up stuff of them walking and stupid things like that - that stuff is not very interesting. But it was very difficult to sift through that footage and try and figure out what was pertinent and what would be interesting to fans and what was just boring and dumb. It was very difficult to get that balance. The first cut that

I had was definitely getting way too long and I had way too much stuff of Neil warming-up for instance. It started to drag on too long and it was starting to make the whole snappy piece slow down too much. It was a tough job trying to weigh out the positives and minuses of various shots. At first I was cutting it as a fan and then I realized, it just makes it too slow and too boring, it needed to be more snappy and interesting.



[\[click images to enlarge\]](#)

Bp: I read that you conducted post-tour interviews for the documentary. Were these free form sessions or more structured Q&A?

AM: I definitely had the questions that I knew I wanted to ask. What was critical about those interviews with the three guys was that in the back of my mind I knew I needed some kind of foundation for the entire documentary. I needed the cement that tied it all together. In other words I'm always cutting back to them speaking in this interview setting so it has some semblance to route the entire clip. So I did have criteria of what I needed them to talk about. For instance, I showed up at Alex's door one morning before the big press day and I filmed him sitting in bed sitting next to his wife who was still in bed as she's cracking jokes about him and I needed to have Alex explain who this person was. So I had him set it up in the interview segment, just talk a little bit about Charlene and that she showed up and was on tour with him in Brazil, so it helps the viewer understand who this person is laying next to him. I think it would be too weird if all of a sudden we hear this voice, we see her for a moment, and the viewer thinks "Who is this woman? Is this Alex's chick that he picked up last night in Sao Paulo or something?" So there were things that I really needed the guys to talk about that would help explain things that occurred within the documentary.

Bp: So we're going to be treated to a very intimate look at the band, something that we really haven't seen before. Off-stage and family interaction is something we've never seen on a proper Rush release.

AM: You're right. And I wouldn't even normally go there. I mean I have footage of Neil with his new wife and stuff with Ged's wife, but I didn't use that stuff because I knew that would be inappropriate - it's not something I'd want to do. However in Alex's situation and in this particular scene in the documentary specifically, it was so funny and he was literally feeding off of his wife who was equally as funny. That just made it a really special moment that I wanted to show the fan that side of Alex. And he was fine with it and so was his wife. We're only talking about a split second that we see her, we hear her but we don't actually see her that much. It's just a really fun moment and it's very funny.

Bp: When I talked to Howard about the show itself he described the atmosphere as "electric and exciting." What was your reaction to the show in Rio? Although I guess we'll see that come through in the documentary as well...

AM: Well, Neil goes extensively into it about how overwhelming it was. For me it was extremely overwhelming, I could not believe how many people were there and how these fans were so appreciative of finally being able to see Rush. It amazed me. Most of the people I would say couldn't speak English but they were singing every single line of every song. They were even humming during "YYZ." They were going [Andrew hums the melody]. They were doing that to the instrumental, "YYZ." It sent shivers. It was unbelievable. They were singing every single song - it was so powerful. It's funny because I was just doing a couple of interviews yesterday for this charity fundraiser I was doing for the Photographing Rush pictures that I sold for charity. A guy asked me what sort of sparked the initial idea for wanting to do the signed prints for charity and it was this trip to Brazil that really opened my eyes and made me realize how fortunate and blessed, for lack of better word, I have been. And a lot of that has been largely due to my affiliation with Rush and the incredible things I've been able to experience because of this band and I just felt so lucky that I was able to witness such a historical event as those three

shows in Brazil and to witness something that was so powerful and it was really a great thing. I was so glad I was there with my camera being able to capture this and I hope that my documentary conveys how the band felt about being in Brazil. I know from a technical point of view it was a nightmare for the band both in Sao Paulo and in Rio. There was a torrential downpour in Sao Paulo, the [largest] show of their career, apart from of course the SARS Benefit, but it rained and not only was it pouring in on the stage and Neil's drum kit, but every time he hit his cymbals water would splash in his face. Then he'd play his mini-marimba with all his samples and he'd be doing his drum solo and every sixth note would finally come out - so basically the whole electronic side of his kit was shorting out. For him it was really, really difficult, but at the same time in hindsight he says it was one of the most exciting nights of his career.



[\[click images to enlarge\]](#)

Bp: The spirit of the crowd helped him rise above the technical problems?

AM: Absolutely and Rio as well was technically for them very difficult. Not only were they filming the show and recording the sound for that show, but the crew was still setting up the gear at 9:30 at night.

Bp: That was due to the long trip and they went on without a soundcheck correct?

AM: Exactly.

Bp: That must have been nerve-wracking on the night they're filming.

AM: Well, I think it was more nerve-wracking for the people who were operating the cameras and recording the sound more so than it was for the band. They just finished doing 60+ shows so they knew they could play well and they knew that their crew would be able to give them good monitors right away in their ears. They were more concerned though for the film crew and the recording crew that didn't have the soundcheck. But it came off without a glitch for the most part and it was really a great thing.

Bp: I know the original plan to record in CT near the end of the tour but I'm thinking that if the filming had been done there that we wouldn't have a finished project that was nearly as special as this set. The fans and the crowd would have, not to sound derogatory, but they would have been 'just another North American crowd.' I think the fact that the Brazilian experience was so special to everyone involved that the fans will be treated to a better DVD as a result.

AM: Absolutely. I knew there were plans to shoot there originally and for me I'm so glad it wasn't because I would never have had the opportunity to film this documentary which I've dreamed about for about 10 years. I'm so glad that the CT shoot fell through and that they decided "Well, it's way more ambitious and probably technically a total nightmare, but let's try to do it in Brazil." And I'm so glad they did because it is a remarkable DVD. I haven't seen the entire show on DVD yet, I've seen some clips and some rough cuts of it and it's pretty incredible. Alex spent weeks mixing the sound, he even had to go back at one point and re-mix various segments of it because he wasn't happy with it - which is one of the reasons for the delay. But he is so excited about it because he really spent literally several months on this so it's absolutely spectacular. He's really proud of it. The documentary alone took me five months to get the cut to where I felt, "Oh my god, I've got a great story here." In fact, Neil and I talked last night and he said that he sat down and watched everything from beginning to end and he's so thrilled, he's so happy with it. He said "Everyone really pulled off such a good job." He's thrilled with the documentary and said "It's a really great story. It's interesting and it holds your attention." He was shocked. As I said at the beginning of the interview, the band thinks they're boring, that there's no story to tell, but he was really shocked and he said, "It's a great documentary, it's a great DVD and the fans are going to love it."

Bp: We're lucky that a fan from way back was in charge of the documentary.

AM: It helps being a fan and loving the band's music. Obviously things are different for me with my relationship with the guys now. In some ways it sort of sucks, I mean, I get excited when I see them on opening night and I'm really excited for them and really proud of them, but it's different now because it's a friendship/working relationship. It's just different, but I know that I had [the fan] advantage going into filming as I knew what the fan would want to see, what would make a good story and I felt that was a really huge benefit.



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Bp: Did you shoot still photos during the Rio show at all or were you focused solely on the documentary?

AM: The documentary was my number one priority. I took pictures from one set-up and I shot the photo that is on the front cover of the DVD - the live picture.

Bp: From "One Little Victory."

AM: Yes. That series of photos I shot with the idea in mind of, 'I better get shots of this. I think this could potentially be a great cover.' So I shot it vertically with the idea in mind of the shape of a DVD. I sent the roll to Hugh Syme and we talked about some ideas and I said, "I shot these photos specifically for your consideration for the front cover." I guess from there he sort of rolled with that and came up the dragon idea and just took it to the next level. I think it's very funny and very brilliant - it's a wonderful cover.

Bp: It certainly is and it helps to bring out the humorous side of the band as well. Did Hugh work with Norm Stangl [of Spin Productions. Norm created the dragon visuals for the Vapor Trails tour] to come up with the dragon for the cover?

AM: I think he got the initial elements from Norm, but Hugh is the one that added all of the fruits and that stuff. He created all of that himself.

Bp: It's a striking image and it also marks the first time that the band has actually appeared on the front cover of an album.

AM: Wow. I've never thought of that - that's a really great observation. I've never thought of that - very cool.

Bp: You've photographed the band a lot, what were you trying to get filming in Rio that was different from your still work with the band?

AM: Because I was there with a very specific goal in mind, to document absolutely everything, I think I was a little cheekier with where I would shove my camera, for instance, in their faces. It was really exciting because it allowed me to film stuff that quite frankly I probably would not have given the time of day to bother shooting because it would make a stupid still picture. But in moving pictures it made sense. In other words filming Geddy opening his dressing room case and breaking his nail on the case and then swearing about how much he hates the cases after all these years - in still photography that would not make a great picture, but in moving pictures it was a wonderful moment. It's funny and it's real.

Bp: Did that make the documentary?

AM: Absolutely. There are a few things in there that I think are pretty damn funny and might surprise a few viewers. There's a moment when Geddy is not very pleased with me and basically telling me to "fuck off." It's a great moment and we left it in because we thought it was funny. And he laughed about it too. In the past Neil would never let me go in and take pictures of him warming up because again I think he felt, at that time, it was an invasion of his privacy. That's his private time when he would be able to rehearse and get into the right headspace before he would go on stage. I think he would find that invasive. However, because I was there for a very specific goal, he knew I needed to make a story and try to get a story and of course he would have full rights of striking something if he was not happy with it and it was just too revealing. I think it allowed me to get things that I would not normally be able to get without pissing the guys off.

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