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Andrew MacNaughtan interview - part II

Bp: When you're shooting photos in a live setting, what is your process before a show as far as pre-visualization and planning? Do you go in with a fairly structured plan?

AM: Absolutely. Every night before the guys go on I make a list of things that I know I want and where I need to be and what songs I want to get. What I do is get the set list and I just watch the show the first night and then I make notes about, "Oh, that's a great moment there," "That's where Neil throws his drumstick in the air, I want to make sure I'm ready for that shot," or "Alex tends to do something goofy that would make a good shot." I make notes throughout the entire show and then I leave them sitting on the stage in front of me next to my lenses and I then I know, "Oh. 'Limelight' is coming up, I've got to get over to the left side of the stage to get that great moment when Alex does his solo" and that sort of thing. You kind of need to prepare yourself ahead of time and know where you need to be at what point in the set.



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Bp: Did you shoot anything in Hartford for opening night [of the Vapor Trails tour]?

AM: I think I just shot video footage on opening night for the video clip.

Bp: Where is your favorite area of a venue to photograph a Rush show?

AM: I think probably some of my favorite shots ever are the ones beside Neil's drum kit. Because I feel that's very cheeky. The audience can sort of see me, it feels a bit risky and maybe not necessarily appropriate, but I find that it gives me those really unusual camera angles that people can't generally get access to. So I like those kinds of situations like that. I also like behind Alex's amps. And I really do love shooting from the rafters way back at the furthest possible seat in the arena to capture the energy of the whole building. I did a shot like that recently in Quebec City that I'm quite excited about. It's a bit of a time exposure thing and all you can see is thousands of hands in the air. It's a really great moment - I'm sure we'll try to use it in the next tourbook.

Bp: One of my favorite shots is from the Test for Echo tour book of Alex's Marshall stacks and his shadow silhouetted in a spotlight. Alex isn't even in the photo, only his shadow.

AM: Those unexpected things are what make it exciting...anything is possible and everything is unexpected. I don't do a lot of concert photography, I used to do a lot of it when I was first starting out in my career just to get the experience and stuff. That's basically how I started to get to know the guys. The first concert I shot for them would have been on the Grace Under Pressure tour and there were some pictures used in the Power Windows tourbook. Now, I don't really shoot a lot of that stuff and Rush is the exception because I find it way too stressful. I'm so passionate about my work and I really want to get the very best possible shot I can get in everything I do and I feel that if I'm shooting and I miss a moment I get really bummed out about it. I find that concert photography requires you to be really, really sharp. You have to be able to anticipate and foreshadow what's about to occur and what might possibly occur and be ready for that and if you don't shoot concert stuff all the time and a lot you sometimes miss those moments. So it's tricky and that type of shooting is very difficult I think.

Bp: Especially when you're using a fully manual system. Other concert photographers that I've spoken with who have gone digital or fully automatic deliver nice shots but the challenge is removed to some extent.

AM: It's funny that you say that because I literally picked up a new digital system yesterday. A lot of my album cover work that I've been shooting lately is digital. A lot of the labels are desperately trying to figure out ways to save money and instead of spending \$2500 on film and processing because I'm shooting 60 rolls of film for an album cover or whatever, publicity and everything, they'd rather I shoot digitally and save that money and maybe put it towards renting a cool location or something. So I had to make that jump - I was resisting that move because I love my Leica. And I love my Hasselblad stuff and the quality and sharpness of that is very important to me. But now I'm kind of excited about digital. I've shot digitally a lot, probably the last 12 or 14 shoots have been all digital and it's been very successful and even last night I was thinking, "This would be really fun to try this live." So I'm ready to explore that route.



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

Bp: Have you ever shot a live performance with the Hasselblad?

AM: Yes, once, but it wasn't very successful. I think I shot some lighting shots - full stage shots, from back at the lighting board. It's difficult because...the Hasselblad, it's hard to explain, but it just isn't right for that. It does give you a bigger format and better quality with the grain, but it just wasn't as successful as I was hoping it would be. Another time I used the Hasselblad I did some shots of Neil over-top of his drum kit. Do you know the ones from the Presto Tour where he's wearing his purple and black striped shirt? I shot a bunch of those with the Hasselblad and that was the closest I came to shooting live stuff and that was only with stage lights. And it also really was not conducive because it was a pain in the ass. I was dangling from a ladder with wires hanging off my back holding me there in case I fell off and I was hand holding the Hasselblad. It was a pain in the ass - it just didn't work. The better shots turned out to be the ones I shot with my 35mm.

Bp: What is your normal gear set-up when shooting Rush live.

AM: The gear I use now is all Leica and I still shoot transparencies. I have a 28, 50, 80 - a beautiful 80 f1.4 which I absolutely love, it's my favorite lens in the whole world, and I have my 135 and a 180mm. That's my standard set-up for concert stuff. But now with this whole digital thing I guess I'm going to have Canon Digital now. I'm not really sure how that's going to work for concerts, I have no idea. Will it be something I like or something I hate and curse at - so we'll see.

Bp: Are there any plans on releasing a photographic Rush book?

AM: There's been talk of it because there's a whole bunch of stuff I have that people have never seen before. I've just gone through all of the pictures for a project that I have coming up which I can't really talk about, but it's really cool. I think the fans are really going to be excited about it. I've been going through all the photos from day one of Rush and it's their 30th anniversary coming up so it's been a great opportunity to go through all the historical pictures. I'm just in awe of some of the great moments that Fin Costello caught - man o'man - he's a real talent. I have thought about a book and I did investigate it at one point, but to do it the way that I would want it to be done the reproduction and the quality of it would not be cost efficient. A publisher probably couldn't recoup the money for that, not the way I would want it to be presented. I'm not interested in doing just a soft cover flippy-floppy thing that you can buy at a record shop - it just doesn't interest me. We have the tour books and those are really beautiful and that's a really good representation of my work with the band through the years. I love the tour books. I think last year's tour book is one of my favorites, I'm not really sure why, maybe because there's a lot of interesting variety in there that I'm really excited about. It just looks really good and Hugh did a beautiful job with the design of it. I know the band considers it one of their favorites, so that was really nice. I love Alex's portrait and I love Neil's portrait in the desert - I'm really proud of that. There are some other moments in there that are really special. I love the whole sofa series, that's pretty funny and I love that whole Alex shot of him molesting poor Neil inside the front cover - it's pretty hilarious, jumping all over him.

Bp: I think that set of photos for the album was very important; it showed that the band was back with a new album and that they were excited and full of life and energy. It was an important message to convey after such a long and difficult time away.

AM: Well that was really our goal. Neil's not crazy about having his picture taken, I think that's pretty much common knowledge, but obviously there's a comfort level with me being there because we're pals and all. I think the way Geddy said it best about that series of photos, "Neil's been through a lot and we wanted some pictures that show Neil with his two best friends there on either side of him supporting him."



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

Bp: Speaking of that comfort level, it wasn't until your shots for Roll the Bones when we really saw their humorous side showing though with the shot of them goofing around with their fists up.

AM: Well, I don't know, I came across a picture of Fin's from the Moving Pictures photo shoot when Geddy's hair was really, really long. From that series of photos there's a number of good ones of them goofing around and having a good time. I don't know, I think because we have such a great friendship it really does let their guard down and part of those photos are them basically playing around with me because they love to make me the butt of their jokes. It's just the way it is. That's just part of my job I guess and I think that was because being their Personal Assistant on the Presto and Roll the Bones tours we got to know each other pretty well and I think they sort of feel, "Ok, he's making us stand here and take these stupid pictures of us that we really don't want to do, let's make the best of it." So we've captured some pretty fun moments. They've allowed me to experiment and do some unusual things. I'm really proud of those three portraits from the Roll the Bones tourbook - I think it was really great that they allowed me to be a little experimental and I tried something different that they'd never done before and I think it worked very well.

Bp: The one of Neil in particular is a striking contrast of images.

AM: It's the two of Neil's personality: the intellectual reading Aristotle, but yet him dancing in the background which is really the other side of Neil. He's a very fun, very funny, great guy who likes to have a good time. I really like that shot and that was his idea. All of those shots were the guys' ideas and I just executed them as best I could.

Bp: Do they usually come up with the ideas for the portraits?

AM: Yes, for the most part. Well, the Neil in the desert shot that was my idea. I really wanted to try something that felt really special instead of just shooting the drum kit against a backdrop which is something we've done for the last five tours. I really wanted to do something a little more artful and challenging. The shot of Alex, I think I said to him "I want to do something weird and sort of stupid. What about a shot of you on a beach with chicks and bikinis." And then he said, "Oh no, how about this: how about you shoot a huge muscle guy, like Charles Atlas was the term he used, and then take a picture of my head and stick it on his body." Perfect and that's what we did and that's how quickly it came about. And just so you know we didn't really squish Alex's head that much, this guy was absolutely huge. When I showed Alex the picture of the guy, he was laughing so hard he was actually crying. He could not believe how hilarious that photo turned out.

Bp: In the Vapor Trails tourbook the candid rehearsal tour shots were a nice treat and I read that there might be some video footage from the tour rehearsals that might make it to the documentary?

AM: Yes, I did put in some. I shot some video footage from that day, but it's actually quite sparse because I only shot for about a half-hour or something. I really didn't shoot that much. Remember, this is pre-documentary or even knowing that there'd be a documentary, so certain people weren't all that open to being videotaped if you know what I mean. It wasn't anything official either, it was just Geddy saying "Hey, maybe you should bring the camera up and just grab a little footage and you never know what we could use it for." So it does appear in the documentary, I think I put a little bit of them practicing "Natural Science" and a bit of "The Trees" in there. I also really love those photos I did of them rehearsing, that was a really cool thing that they finally said "Yes, sure Andrew you can come up and shoot some pictures while we're rehearsing, no problem." And again they've never really let me do that because it was just again their private time. It's them working and they need to be focused. They don't want to be thinking about Andrew running around with his camera. But again there's now more of a comfort level and they know that I can be discreet and not be intrusive in anyway.



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

Bp: You also put together a video segment for the SARS Benefit show from Toronto where they played to their largest crowd ever, almost 500,000.

AM: Yea, that was pretty incredible too I must say. It was a pretty amazing day. It was really important to them. It was Neil's idea to do it and what's funny is that generally it's the most difficult for Neil to come out of hiatus to be able to gear up for something like that because it takes him a week of solid rehearsals and a lot of pain to get back to the condition he needs to be in to play a show like that. If you had seen his hands the day of that show, they were cracked and bleeding because he had been practicing so hard that week. And it's very painful for him, it's hard. It's one thing for him to ease into doing a tour when you slowly ease into getting up to practicing several hours a day but he literally had to go in and do five hours a day in order to get his chops up to his standards of being able to be 100% ready for that concert. It was hard on him. The guys were really so glad and really felt the need to do it. It was a great day all around for everyone.

Bp: Has there been any discussion as to whether or not that footage may be released in the future?

AM: I don't know. The Rolling Stones own all that stuff. They own all the rights to it and I think there was maybe talk of a DVD coming out eventually, but who knows. I don't know really anything about that and I don't think the band knows anything about that either. It's out of their hands.

Bp: Did you take any still photos that day?

AM: Yea, I got a couple of shots. I got some shots of them right before they went onstage, it was a great moment. They were onstage about 10 minutes before they actually went on just waiting for the cue to head over to their instruments. So they're just nice casual moments of the guys waiting and anticipating the show. I think you'll see some of those photos showing up in the next tourbook.

Bp: What one Rush track would you like to see them bring back for the next tour?

AM: "The Camera Eye" without a doubt. I've requested that song every single tour from the guys and they still won't play it.

Bp: It ranked pretty highly among fans on the rushpetition.com poll prior to the Vapor Trails tour as well.

AM: I know. I just think they feel there are other songs to play, "Ok, is it going to be 'Camera Eye' or is it going to be 'By-Tor & the Snow Dog.'" I think everyone felt that a song like "By-Tor" was a song that was much more interesting and a lot more fun to play. I've asked for "The Camera Eye" every single time they start practicing for a tour because I love that song. It's probably one of my favorite songs they've ever recorded.

Bp: Approximately how many shows do you shoot still photos for during a Rush tour and do you shoot the entire show or specific songs on specific nights?

AM: I shoot the whole show. Back when I was touring with them and I was also their tour photographer I was able to get a lot more stuff and a lot more unusual moments both backstage and onstage. It bums me out because I can't really capture those moments as often as I like now because I don't go out on the whole tour with them anymore. The last three tours I would probably shoot about seven shows, so there's a lot of pressure to get as much interesting stuff as I can within seven shows. Roll the Bones and Counterparts those are pretty strong tourbooks because I was able to shoot five songs, or two songs every single night. I could go out and just grab a moment or two. Or I could go out and shoot a moment in "Show Don't Tell" and I always had tomorrow night to go and grab it again. So I had the luxury of that, but now I'll fly out and do three shows and leave, and then two shows and leave and then do two shows someplace else. You don't get on a roll, you kind of have to remember and pick up where you left off last time and continue on from there. It makes it more challenging.

Bp: Thanks for your time Andrew and congratulations on the documentary!

AM: I really hope everyone enjoys the DVD and I hope they really like my documentary because I really worked very, very hard on it and I'm really proud of it.

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