

Counterparts

Reflections in a Wilderness of Mirrors

By Neil Peart

In 1994 Rush will celebrate twenty years together (our rhinestone anniversary, I believe it's called). But really, can you imagine – the same three guys staying together through a score of years, and finding an audience to keep buying all that racket? I'm not sure which is more amazing, but either way it must be some kind of record, and either way, we're happy. That's the secret, if there is one.

"Wilderness of mirrors" is a phrase from T.S. Eliot's "Gerontion," and was also applied by former CIA counterintelligence chief James Jesus Angleton to describe the world of espionage – hence the twist on "Double Agent," reflecting the clandestine workings of dreams and the subconscious. Disinformation or intelligence? Let the mirror decide.

Reflections in a wilderness of mirrors; a kind of theme. Not reflections in the conventional sense of looking back – certainly one can also reflect upon the present and future – but more in holding a mirror up to our hidden selves, to human nature and its doings in the world, and to the tragedies and inspirations of everyday life. Heavy stuff, I suppose, but that doesn't mean we can't have fun with it! That's the secret, if there is one.

We had outlined a few goals before we began working on this record, but only in the most casual way: conversations in the tuning room, the tour bus, or some hotel bar. Generally, we would continue to aim for a balance between spontaneity and refinement (natural complements and not adversaries, as some would have it), and perhaps work on a more organic approach to the songs – guitar, bass, drums. Our true counterparts.

Other than these vague notions, we began with the usual "clean sheet of paper," the mindset that we try to bring to every new project. So now we began to ransack the world for producers and engineers to help shape whatever music might emerge when we began writing. We checked out the field of young talent, new people who were doing interesting work, but it soon became apparent that we had nothing to learn from a producer or engineer who had made fewer records than we had. Youthful enthusiasm is all very well, but we needed enthusiasm with some experience!

Enter – or re-enter – Peter Collins, the diminutive, bearded, cigar-smoking Englishman (and true gentleman) who also worked with us as co-producer on *Power Windows* and *Hold Your Fire*. Once again, Peter was the ideal "objective ear" for us, another counterpart. Dedicated to the song above everything, he weighs a performance or a part only in regard to the feeling it conveys, its contribution to the whole edifice (like an architect, he has an "edifice complex"). Peter holds himself aloof from the technique and technology, the craftwork – "quality control," as he terms it – and rightly considers these things to be the domain of the musicians and the engineer. The rest of us can huddle around the mixing console and fuss over the fine details of musicianship and sound, while his job is to keep the project moving, and to ensure that craft is not allowed to

interfere with art – the song. That's his secret, if he has one.

We did discover some new engineers, and Kevin "Caveman" Shirley was our choice for the actual recording. His previous work seemed to capture the instruments in a raw, direct fashion, powerful and exciting and as faithful as possible to what drums and guitars really sound like. Our Caveman was somewhat of a purist, using few effects and a minimum of processing. For example, if I asked him to alter the sound of my hi-hat, say for more brightness or more body, instead of simply twiddling a knob on the desk he would come out and move the microphone.

As the Caveman's counterpart, we brought in Michael Letho for the final mixing. Michael's previous work displayed a refined, architectural style of layering and building a song (another "edifice complex"), and we hoped this would complement the Caveman's style, and our own, combining rawness and refinement – spit and polish, you might say – gaining both and sacrificing neither. As Peter Collins remarked at the end: "Isn't it nice when a plan actually works!"

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The Concise Oxford defines "counterpart" both as "duplicate" and as "opposite," in the sense of "forming a natural complement to another." That's what I thought was so interesting about the word considered in this way, contraries are reflections of each other, opposite numbers, and not necessarily contradictions, enemies, The Other. Polarities are not to be resisted, but reconciled. Reaching for the alien shore.

Dualities like gender or race are not opposite but true counterparts, the same and yet different, and not to be seen as some existential competition – we could do without that. Better yet: we could get along without that.

In this light, a listener should not mistake the irony of "Stick It Out," with its plea for both fortitude and forbearance. Or "Animate," which is not about two individuals, but about one man addressing his anima – his feminine side, as defined by Carl Jung. Within that duality, what "a man must learn to gently dominate" is himself, his own "submissive trait," while also learning to "gently dominate" the animus – the male-thing – and the other hormone-driven "A-words" like aggression and ambition. We dominate by not submitting, whether to brute instinct, violent rage, or ruthless greed.

For the rest of it, we can all dominate or submit as the occasion warrants, try to reconcile the duplication and opposites, and dream of racing through life at the speed of love (186,000 miles per second, if you believe in love at first sight). Everyone wants the ideal of "forming a natural complement to another." A counterpart. Friendship, love, and partners in life and work are the rewards for bridging that gap between "duplicate" and "opposite."

Counterparts. Words and music. Guitar, bass, drums. Writing, rehearsing, and recording. Flying and driving and working and laughing. Alex's flashes of dazzling spontaneity, Twisted humor, and emotional fire; Geddy's melodic instinct, wry wit, and meticulous passion; my own

obsessive drive and rhythmic bombast. True synergy, I guess: the whole greater than the parts – which are, after all, just humble old us.

The course of true synergy may not always run smooth, like any "real world" relationship, but even occasional friction, if handled with respect and dignity, can be a grindstone and create its own sparks – no pearl grows without a grain of irritation at its heart. (The trick is to grow a pearl and not an ulcer.) And really, who wants to be around people who agree with you all the time? Differing opinions are part of the chemistry – for example, I still get excited at seeing how much my lyrics are improved by input from the other two – but together we also have to face the maddening complexity of the forces around us: the mechanics of running a large organization, the hassles of business, the erosion of privacy, the absence from home, and sometimes the soul-destroying ennui of too long a tour. ("The only thing worse than touring is not touring," that's my motto.)

So we do what must be done, and try to balance it out with the challenges and satisfactions of our private lives. Our job is to pour as much as we can into the melting pot of Rush, tributaries flowing to the larger river, sparks added to the fire, reflections carried to the mirror. That's how we can best pursue happiness.

And that is the secret, when all is said and done. "The pursuit of happiness" may be the finest phrase in history, and some people seem to forget that happiness is what we're supposed to be chasing here. Not short-lived pleasures, not commodities, not good hair or perfect cheekbones, but simply enjoying the mountain while we're climbing it. The upwards paths may be hardest, but they have the best views.

And to our way of thinking, we can continue to move upward – we just have to hold off the rust of laziness, the mold of the marketplace, and the dull patina of cynicism. Pursuing such a complicated and elusive state is easier said than done, of course, but while we're chasing it we sometimes learn one thing – that it is a chase, and we may as well cut to it.

That's the secret, if there is one.