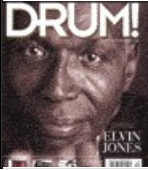


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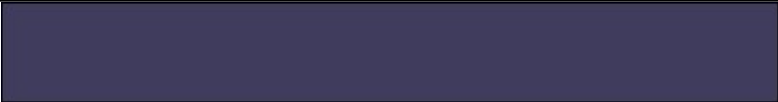
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Artist Features: Neil Peart, Part II

After Class With The Professor
Words and Photo by Don Zulaica



If you're reading this, you're probably aware of our cover story with one of progressive rock's progenitors, Neil "The Professor" Peart. Well, when you get two facing chairs in a room (a la James Lipton) with a rolling tape recorder, a couple of hours, and an eloquent interview subject like Mr. Peart, you also get a *lot* of material.

Rush's Peart, guitarist Alex Lifeson, and bassist Geddy Lee are currently traversing the globe on their 30th Anniversary Tour. At interview time they were also in the process of putting together an EP of covers entitled "Feedback," which is slated to include the Canadian power trio's versions of The Who's "The Seeker," Buffalo Springfield's "For What It's Worth," and Cream's "Crossroads."

In the midst of discussing progressive rock's history through the last three decades, and the band's place in it, a couple of other subjects were covered, namely the cymbal switch to Sabian, the Drum Workshop kit that features logos from every Rush album, and how Neil keeps in touch with his inner 16-year-old.

DRUM!: Talk a little about the new Paragon cymbals and how you hooked up with Sabian. Quite a jarring change, considering you've been playing Zildjian for so many years.

Neil Peart: It was one of those purely organic things that just came along. I'm always curious about everything and always wanting to try different things. There was a tie-in going back to my very first ride cymbal when I joined the band in 1974. The three of us got our record company advance, and we went to the big music store in Toronto and bought new equipment. I got my chrome Slingerland drums and a new set of Zildjian cymbals, and one of them was a 22" ride made in Canada at Medutic, New Brunswick.

So there was that tie-in, and over the course of last year I started hearing people playing Sabians and kind of got interested. And last summer when I was up rehearsing for the big Concert for Toronto with the Stones and all that, I just thought about trying out some Sabians. So I used them for the first three days of rehearsal or so, and then I said, 'Okay, take them down and put the Zildjians back up.' Frankly they blew them away. Even just their stock ones. So, hmmm [*holds chin*].

I got to talking with the company and they invited me to come to the factory. In late September, I rode my motorcycle from Quebec out there. It was an amazing experience. I had never toured a cymbal factory before, and to see how much of it was done by hand-an old guy with his leather apron was sitting there hand-hammering the cymbals. It really was that way, [like] the old guilds of craftsmen. I saw that firsthand and was very impressed.

DRUM: You worked a lot with Mark Love in the early stages, right?

NP: Their product specialist Mark Love just seemed to get in tune right away with what I liked. They had a little kit in their vault, and he kept putting cymbals up. And I'd say, 'Leave that one, take that one off,' and he immediately grasped what was working for me. Then he had plain gray bronze discs, and he really had a row of 'pies' like that. We started with the ride cymbal as the foundation of everything, and he would lathe the bow of it, but not the bell. The bell was still raw bronze. And I would describe, 'I like its attack but it's not very musical, it's very clangy.' So he would say, 'Okay,' and then they would hand-hammer the bell. 'Okay that's a nice musicality, but still it's a little too pointed and too metallic sounding.' So he'd go off and combine another kind of lathing and hand hammering, and eventually all of the cymbals were arrived at by that trial and error. And when I went back, Mark kept sending samples down to L.A. for me to try, and there was constant communication. He suggested the pinpoint lathing on the top, they call it their AAX lathing. It was the final touch that was necessary to make it the absolute instrument. Because the pinpoint lathing gives it such quick response, but at the same time, the bottom gives it the depth of tonality and musicality. The hand-hammered bell works on all of them, even the crashes. I find myself playing the bells now because there's such a musicality to them.

DRUM!: Did you use them on "Feedback?"

NP: The ultimate test was going into the studio three or four weeks ago to record ["Feedback"], which is kind of a tribute album to our youth. We recorded songs by The Who, The Yardbirds, Buffalo Springfield, Cream, and that sort of thing, to put out as an anniversary celebration of our own. I used the new drums and the new cymbals and just couldn't believe how well they worked in the studio. Both [drum tech] Lorne [Wheaton] and I were so pleased. I got to do things like play the downbeat on the bell of a ride cymbal, stuff that I'd never do. I'm able to pull out more uses of the tools, I guess is one way to put it. I was able to find new ways to use the cymbals because of their potential, and noticing right away the character of the crash cymbals as a punctuation mark; this suddenly had a whole new presence to it.

DRUM!: What kind of balance was there between producing something for you and your signature, the music you're putting out, versus. . .this is going to be a product and it's going to sell, and wanting it to be something practical for drummers to buy.

NP: You know better than that! Absolutely, 100% to please myself. [*laughs*] But it happens that my taste in cymbals happens to be of a classic nature, classic Turkish cymbals. That's what I grew up with and what I played for 30 years, obviously. So that's going to be what I like. And we were able to take that and develop it to remarkable extremes, but that was still the basis of it. So I knew we still had a really fine musical instrument. It was definitely designed to please me, and that was Mark Love's goal at Sabian. It was about me playing them and seeing how they were to play, initially. And then as more refinements came into it, as I said, right up until the ultimate acid test of the studio, it was so gratifying to hear that.

DRUM!: You started using DW a while back, but when did the idea come about to do the logo kit?

NP: It was actually out of Sabian that things got started on this, because they wanted to display the new [Paragon] line at [Winter] NAMM on my drums. I said, 'Well we can't use my old drums for that.' They were pretty road hardened after two tours and two albums. . .and Brazil! I started talking with [DW's] John Good back in October [2003], and we had lots of time before NAMM. I said, 'I really want to build something special for the 30th anniversary.' John is one of those enthusiastic craftsman, and that enthusiasm moved me.

And fortunately I live just an hour from the factory now, so I was able to go there every week or so and look at ideas. John had his ideas sonically, so I left that to him since he's the King of Wood. I said I wanted something really special [for the exterior], and we looked at custom paints and different finishes. They would do up one to look at, and then we tried all different colors initially before I realized, I'd never had black drums in all my life. I'd had black chrome Slingerlands, but not the actual classic 'piano black.' Black and red is my favorite color combination, so I said, 'We have to have that. It's the 30th anniversary, why not have the band logos?'

And also, Keith Moon's "Pictures Of Lily" kit, the famous one that was painted in the panels around it on a piano black background, it was a tribute to that because these are my dream drums. I always try to keep in touch with my inner 16-year-old. That's the first concert I ever went to, he was playing those. So [the DW kit] became partly a homage to Keith Moon, to myself at 16. All of that became part of the thinking that evolved into the finish.

Neil Peart, Part II | [Login/Create an account](#) | 0 Comments

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