

# 21

## How Is Rush Canadian?

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Given Canada's relatively small population (twenty-one million in 1969, thirty-four million in 2009), many—but certainly not all—of the nation's more ambitious musicians have pursued at least some of their career activities in the US and other foreign parts. Rush mainly demonstrates "Canadianness" by combining such British and American influences as progressive rock, hard rock, and individualism. However, the band has also included more specifically Canadian references across its long career.

### CanCon

The Canadian government implemented specific content—or "CanCon"—regulations in 1971, and broadcasters were then required to include certain percentages of Canadian material. For music, at least two of a song recording's four main categories of Music, Artist, Production, and Lyrics ("M-A-P-L") must be "Canadian" according to citizenship or location. The interpretation of this changed after 1991, due to a "scandal" involving Bryan Adams failing to qualify as Canadian because of co-writing certain songs, such as "(Everything I Do) I Do it For You" (*Waking up the Neighbours* and *Robin Hood: Prince of Thieves*, both 1991), with such non-Canadians as Mutt Lange and Michael Kamen. (Spelling the word "neighbours" in the Canadian way apparently didn't help.) The outcome is that even though Shania Twain similarly co-wrote the songs on *Come on Over* (1997) with her then-husband Mutt Lange and did not record any of this music in Canada, her album and its songs by that point qualified as Canadian.

To explore the implementation of CanCon on commercial radio, in early 2007 I surveyed a five-hour play-list from Toronto, Ontario's classic rock station Q107. The station played exactly the required daytime hours of 35 percent Canadian songs, and the artists were 33 percent Canadian, 32 percent American, 24 percent British, and 11 percent "other." By comparison, the top artists on Modesto, California's classic rock station The Hawk were 60 percent American, 30 percent British, 5 percent Canadian, and also only 5 percent "other." However, despite this evidence of CanCon as a successful survival tactic against American hegemony, the regulations also ghettoized many Canadians. For example, of the fourteen Canadian artists played during the period of my Q107 survey, probably only the Band, Neil Young, the Guess Who, Rush, and Bryan Adams (36 percent) would be played at all on commercial U.S. radio stations.

### Anglo-Americanisms

Based on total album sales, until the ascendancy of Nickelback in 2001 ("How You Remind Me," US #1), Rush was Canada's most internationally successful band. Individual Canadians—especially women—have tended to be more successful than Canadian groups, but only a few of them (including Anne Murray, Celine Dion, and Shania Twain) have sold more albums internationally than Rush. In addition, a certain number of other Canadian bands have been much more successful on the US pop charts than Rush, but most of those groups, including the Guess Who (1970's "American Woman," US #1) and the Barenaked Ladies (1998's "One Week," also US #1, for one week!), have sold far fewer copies of their various albums than Rush has, and even Neil Young has sold fewer albums in the US than Rush.

By 2009, Rush had sold about 45 million albums worldwide: 33 million in the US (including 43 album certifications for 24 different albums), 6 million in Canada, and much of the remaining 6 million split between the UK, Germany, Japan, and Brazil. Rush's success thus cannot be explained primarily as a Canadian phenomenon, and it differs considerably from those artists who became highly successful in Canada while remaining virtually unknown in the US, such as Stompin' Tom Connors, the Tragically Hip, and Jann Arden.

Rush straddled its Canadian-international fusion in a number of ways, including occasional (and usually fairly subtle) lyrics, images,

and music-industry activities involving Canada. The band mainly inscribed Canadianness through its combination of tendencies from British progressive rock (such as complex metrical constructions and “philosophical” lyrics) and Anglo-American hard rock and heavy metal (such as distorted guitars, powerful drumming, countertenor vocals, arena venues, and tendencies towards modality and riffs). Such a combination also recalls Canada’s own hybrid of things British (such as the Queen as “Head of State” and universal health coverage) and things American (such as individualism, rights and freedoms, and libertarianism). Despite its extensive album sales and tours, other than occasional humorous acknowledgments (such as the *Harvard Lampoon’s* 1993 induction of Rush as “Musicians of the Millennium” and references on TV’s *Mystery Science Theater 3000*, 1988–99) and frequent feature articles in US musicians’ magazines, for nearly its entire career Rush enjoyed very little mainstream visibility in the United States.

The parents of Rush’s bassist-singer-keyboardist Geddy Lee (born 1953) and of its guitarist Alex Lifeson (born 1953) immigrated to Canada from Europe in the 1940s, and by the time the members of Rush dedicated themselves in 1971 to becoming professional musicians, Canada had officially established a policy of multiculturalism, which contrasts the tendency in the US towards a cultural “melting pot.” The band’s own comments about the greater “flexibility” of Canadians<sup>1</sup> recall Marshall McLuhan’s comments about the country’s “flexible” and “philosophic or cool” identity.<sup>2</sup> Rush’s continuing interest in a wide variety of secondary stylistic elements (such as blues-rock, jazz-rock, new wave, technology, funk, and alternative rock) certainly falls under the rubric “flexible,” but the band’s particular application of these things is arguably also often “cool and philosophic.”

In 1980, Rush performed with fellow progressive-influenced Canadian rock band Max Webster on its song “Battle Scar.” Max Webster sometimes opened concerts for Rush but never had a successful career in the US and folded in 1982, with front-man Kim

<sup>1</sup> Dan Hedges, article-interview with Lifeson, “Rush Relives 18 Years of Wide-Screen Rock,” *Circus*, 30th April 1992. See <<http://yyz.com/NMS/HTML/artindex.html>>.

<sup>2</sup> Marshall McLuhan, “Canada: The Borderline Case,” in *The Canadian Imagination: Dimensions of a Literary Culture*, edited by David Staines (Harvard University Press, 1977), p. 247.

Mitchell then enjoying a successful solo career in Canada. Geddy Lee also provided the vocals for Bob and Doug McKenzie's (SCTV) "Canadian-themed" 1981 comedy song "Take Off (to the Great White North)." That song charted higher in the US (#16) than Rush's highest-charting US hit, 1982's "New World Man" (#21).<sup>3</sup> Lee also sang the line "Oh, you know that we'll be there" in his high, countertenor vocal style (a minor seventh higher than Neil Young's contribution) on Northern Lights' 1985 charity-rock song "Tears are not Enough." In 2003, Rush played a selection of its 1977–1991 album-oriented rock songs in front of 490,000 music fans at a post-SARS mega-concert in its hometown: "Molson Canadian Rocks for Toronto." The ten-hour event also featured the Rolling Stones and AC/DC (who played last and second-last, respectively, just after Rush) and about a dozen other Canadian and American artists. Tens of thousands of Rush fans probably attended the event, but in such an extremely large context (and even in Canada's largest city, which is also the band's hometown), such fans would have comprised only a very small minority.

In addition to having had only one US Top 40 hit, Rush has never won a Grammy (despite five nominations for Best Rock Instrumental between 1982 and 2009) and has never been inducted into the Rock'n'Roll Hall of Fame (despite having been eligible since 1999). Also, until Rush's appearance on the US late-night "talk show" *The Colbert Report* on 16th July 2008, the band had not appeared "live" on US television since the last of its very early appearances in 1974–75.

In Canada, however, a large number of cultural institutions have compensated for Rush's lack of mainstream exposure in the US. The band had several Top 10 Canadian hits (including "New World Man" reaching #1), and it won eight Juno awards between 1975 and the 1990s, including a special 1990 award (shared with Bryan Adams and k.d. lang) as Artists of the Decade for the 1980s. In 1979, the Government of Canada named Rush its "Ambassadors of Music," and the band later won the Toronto Music Awards Mayor's Award (1990), the Harold Moon songwriting award of the Society of Composers, Authors and Music Publishers of Canada's (SOCAN, 1992), a Toronto's Arts Award (1993), a place in the

<sup>3</sup> "Take Off" appears on Rhino Records' seven-CD compilation: *Like Omigod! The '80s Popular Culture Box (Totally)*. It was also used for an episode of *The Simpsons* in which the family visits Toronto (which was also the "home" of SCTV).

Canadian Music Juno Hall of Fame (1994), memberships in the Order of Canada (1997), recognition on Canada's Walk of Fame (1999), the designation "Most Important Canadian Musicians of All Time" (JAM! online poll, 2000), and a place in Canada's Music Industry Hall of Fame (2003).

Similar to Geddy Lee's 1982 participation on "Take Off (to the Great White North)," Alex Lifeson memorably guest-starred in a 2003 episode of the popular Canadian cable TV comedy series, *Trailer Park Boys*. In the episode, the guitarist is kidnapped by the show's title-characters (who are Rush fans), and he also ends up teaching the show's character Bubbles how to play the guitar for the 1977 Rush song "Closer to the Heart." The episode also emphasizes the historical truth that Rush had not played in eastern Canada (such as Halifax, Nova Scotia, near where *Trailer Park Boys* was produced) for many years. In 2005, Bubbles then performed along with Rush (and Barenaked Ladies' member Ed Robertson) for that song during a CBC-TV tsunami fundraising concert called Canada for Asia. In 2006, quotations from Rush's 1980 song "The Spirit of Radio" were used in promotional spots for *Trailer Park Boys—The Movie*, the song is heard within the movie itself, and Lifeson appears in a cameo (along with the Tragically Hip's Gordon Downie) as a police officer. Also in 2006, the band's drummer-lyricist Neil Peart (born 1952, pronounced "Peert," not "Pert") appeared on the Canadian current-affairs satirical comedy show *The Rick Mercer Report*, on which he talked about his cycling and motorcycling adventures (which were the basis for several of his published books) then "jammed" with Mercer on adjacent drum kits.

Rush also helped to raise hundreds of thousands of dollars for the United Way, UNICEF, AIDS charities, Artists against Racism, and others, and in 2003 it donated a collection of vintage instruments, stage props, equipment, awards, and memorabilia to the Canadian Museum of Civilization in western Quebec (near Ottawa, Ontario). Rush's success (both internationally and in Canada) enabled it to base its activities in Canada and, in a decidedly libertarian move, to run its own business. Although the group recorded its two 1977–78 studio albums and its pair of 1985–87 studio albums mainly in the UK, from 1973 to 2004 the band otherwise recorded its fourteen additional studio albums mainly at Quebec's Le Studio (north-west of Montreal) or in the GTA (Greater Toronto Area).

### Parks and Trees (1975–78)

To apply some terms from Will Straw, Rush explored a “range of musical practices,” “varying trajectories of change,” and “cross-fertilization.”<sup>4</sup> To apply some terms from Keith Negus, Rush functioned as a “synthesist,” drawing on emerging cultural elements— thus influencing lyrics and music—and blending them in such a way so as to “create a new distinct musical identity.”<sup>5</sup> Rush continued to synthesize its identity over several decades, which reinforced its pedagogical status among its hardcore musician-fans. The band retained certain tendencies, such as individualism, literary lyrics, and instrumental virtuosity. On the other hand, it also engaged with other musical styles (such as post-punk and synth-pop) and other lyrical themes (such as relationships and the environment). Rush’s lyrics provide important meanings in most of its songs, and Peart has been influenced by numerous books and authors, with a particular interest in twentieth-century American, British, and Canadian fiction, such as by Saul Bellow, Truman Capote, Samuel R. Delaney, Ernest Hemingway, Jack Kerouac, Jack London, Ayn Rand, and J.R.R. Tolkien. However, Rush’s music, which is almost always credited to Lee and Lifeson, reveals at least as much as its lyrics.

In 1974–75, Rush’s musical style usually still inscribed blues-influenced, riff-oriented hard rock (“proto heavy metal”) or else “pop-rock” of a relatively heavy or psychedelic character, along the lines of such British bands as Cream, Led Zeppelin, and Bad Company. For example, the band’s early song “Lakeside Park” (*Caress of Steel*, 1975) uses a relatively straightforward riff and pop-hook inflected style for lyrics about hometown nostalgia and the lost innocence of one’s teenaged years, and Peart specifically referenced a park in his childhood hometown of St. Catharines, Ontario. The song also refers to the “24th of May,” a Canadian statutory holiday otherwise known as Victoria Day (now generally held on the Monday preceding the 24th and thus creating the summer season’s first long weekend). By 1976–77, however, Rush’s music more consistently inscribed a sort of “bastardization” that merged elements of heavy metal and progressive rock, such as on *2112* (1976) and *A Farewell to Kings* (1977). Rush thus provided a

<sup>4</sup> Will Straw, “Systems of Articulation, Logics of Change: Communities and Scenes in Popular Music,” in *Cultural Studies* 5:3 (1991), quoted in Negus, *Popular Music in Theory: An Introduction* (Polity, 1996), p. 22.

<sup>5</sup> Negus, *Popular Music in Theory*, pp. 146–47.

highly-influential exemplar for the international, late-1980s', 1990s', and 2000s' rock sub-genre called "progressive metal." Another "Canadian" element from Rush's early era is inscribed by the fact that the band recorded its first live album (*All the World's a Stage*, 1976) at Toronto's Massey Hall.

Joseph Kerman defines ideology as: "a fairly coherent set of ideas brought together not for strictly intellectual purposes but in the service of some strongly held communal belief."<sup>6</sup> Rush's ideology involves individualism, forging a professional identity, and not allowing outside forces to control one's activities or path. "The Trees," the third song on *Hemispheres* (1978), inscribes a pointed criticism of legislated equality (artificial "balance"). Its lyrics present an allegory depicting one group of trees, the Maples, as being oppressed by another group of trees, the more lofty Oaks. The maple leaf functions as Canada's most important national symbol; thus, one might interpret the Maples in this song as Canada and the Oaks as the United States. Rush does not seem to argue for the Oaks as monologic. Mikhail Bakhtin defines a monologic world view as one that "denies the existence outside itself of another consciousness with equal rights and equal responsibilities . . . finalized and deaf to the other's response."<sup>7</sup>

"The Trees" arguably criticizes the main Canadian initiative intended to correct US media hegemony: the Canadian Content regulations that were introduced in 1971. Rush's aggressive touring and stylistically varied album catalogue ensured its continuing success in the US, the UK, and Canada, despite any such regulations. In the song, the Maples form a union, and at the end of the song an outside force cuts the Oaks down to the height of the Maples. The irony of the song's closing lyrics—"and the trees are all kept equal by hatchet, axe, and saw"—make it quite clear that Rush considers the solution inappropriate. Such lyrics may reflect the band's cynicism about Canadian content regulations (or similar contexts of "affirmative action"), but ironic inscriptions of artificial balance also appear quite extensively within the song's various musical elements.

<sup>6</sup> Joseph Kerman, "How We Got into Analysis, and How to Get Out" in *Write All These Down* (University of California Press, 1994), p. 15.

<sup>7</sup> Mikhail Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*, edited and translated by Caryl Emerson (University of Minnesota Press, 1984), pp. 32, 292–93; quoted in Brackett, *Interpreting Popular Music* (Cambridge University Press, 1995), p. 7.

“The Trees” begins with Lifeson’s 6/8 classical guitar introduction (0:00–0:10), after which Lee joins on bass and vocals as the same music underlies Verse 1 (0:10–0:22).<sup>8</sup> Lee sings in his natural baritone register and provides a comparatively simple bass part. The music moves between B minor and its relative major, D, but the G#s within C# and E chords also suggest D Lydian. As Lee sings about the “unrest” of the Maples’ discontent, he balances the vocal line by stressing the first and second then fourth and sixth beats of the 6/8 unit (see Example 21.1).

**Example 21.1.** Verse 1 of Rush, “The Trees” (*Hemispheres*, 1978)

♩ = 78

Bmin D F#(no3rd)

There is un - rest in the for - est; there is

C#min A(no3rd) E

trou - ble with the trees, for the Ma - ples want more

G Bmin

sun - light and the Oaks ig - nore their pleas.

Similar to the use of water sounds in the “Discovery” section of Rush’s extended composition “2112” (1976) and the nature sounds found in its mini-epics “Xanadu” (1977) and “Natural Science” (1980),<sup>9</sup> the bird sounds that follow the vocal opening of “The Trees” reinforce the imagery of a “state of nature” in which the Oaks ignore the Maples’ pleas. As Lee sings “Oaks ignore their pleas” in the last phrase, he shifts the emphasis to the first and

<sup>8</sup> On the band’s 1981 live album, *Exit...Stage Left*, Lifeson precedes this song with a brief, classical guitar etude, “Broon’s Bane,” named after the band’s co-producer Terry “Broon” Brown. The piece seems modelled after Cuban composer Leo Brouwer’s etude, “Afro-Cuban Lullaby,” which Steve Hackett performed as “Horizon’s” on *Foxtrot* (1972) by the UK band Genesis. Thanks to Jay Hodgson for this information.

<sup>9</sup> See my article “Let Them All Make Their Own Music—Individualism, Rush, and the Progressive/Hard Rock Alloy, 1976–77,” Chapter 9 in *Progressive Rock Reconsidered*, edited by Kevin Holm-Hudson (Routledge, 2002), p. 202.



third beats, which depicts the Oaks taunting, or laughing at, the childish Maples, along the lines of “nya nya nya nya nya nya.” Verse 1 tonally and rhythmically inscribes a precarious balance, and Lifeson and Lee reinforce this by repeating this music instrumentally and with Lee compensating for the lack of vocals by contributing a rather more active bass guitar part (0:22–0:34). A brief guitar/bass interlude (0:34–0:40) then summarizes the balance between D and B, but shifting the time signature to 3/4 instead of 6/8 and thereby increasing the rate of the basic pulse by one-third and providing what might have functioned as a subtle bridge into the next section.

Jarringly, though, the following section presents a number of extreme tonal and metrical shifts. For example, the band retains the tempo of the previous 3/4 interlude, but now shifting the time signature to 4/4, introducing a pair of unresolved “secondary dominants” (V/B and V/D), Lifeson shifting to heavy, strummed, rhythmically regular power chords, and Peart entering vigorously on drums (0:40–0:47). As Lee begins singing Verse 2 (about the Oaks being too lofty, 0:47–1:15, see Example 21.2), he switches to his piercing countertenor voice—an octave and a half above the range in which he has just been singing. Agitated, highly syncopated note entries remove all traces of the much more pastoral tone presented in the opening section, thus providing urgency that is not dissipated until the very end of the song.

**Example 21.2.** Opening of Verse 2 of Rush, “The Trees” (*Hemispheres*, 1978)

♩ = 156

F# (even 8ths) G (even 8ths)

The troub-le with the Ma - ples (and they're  
quite con-vinced they're right): they say the Oaks are just too loft-  
y and they grab up all the light.

Although the song's homophonic texture continues into the new, hard rock instrumentation, this section also sets up contrasting tonal areas. This music outlines A major, but it also contains a series of adjacent major chords, paralleling the ongoing differentiation between the neighbouring Maples and Oaks, but in a heightened, argumentative sense that temporarily displaces their original identities (D major and B minor). After a brief interlude (1:15–1:21), the subsequent Verse 3 (1:21–1:45, D/B, 6/8) continues with the heavy instrumentation and high vocals of Verse 2, but now in 6/8. Thus, it stylistically bridges the two previous vocal sections, and by now the “creatures all have fled,” perhaps frightened away by the Maples' screams of “oppression.”<sup>10</sup>

The shift to 4/4 after Verse 3, however, establishes an extended instrumental section that initially features a plaintive, woodwind-like synthesizer solo (1:45–2:17) beginning in A major (quite diatonically) and ending at A's dominant, E major. Lifeson and Peart respectively play quiet, angular, electric guitar figurations and rhythmic, wood block drum sounds. These evoke hammering woodpeckers, which prove insufficient for the task of equalizing the two groups of trees. A passage in 5/4 shifts the harmony back to B (2:17–2:53) and soon becomes louder and quite rhythmic (2:53–3:10). Lee plays bass rhythms highly reminiscent of the rhythms he sang in Verse 1 (the A section), and this section further merges the A and B sections by focusing on B minor, D major, and A major, and it also includes Lifeson's guitar solo (3:10–3:29) over the continuing 5/4 material. A section in 6/8 then further recalls the formerly sung rhythms (3:29–3:49), with the band also musically expanding the song's precarious balancing act by interrupting with brief, ascending (A-based) versus descending (D-based) scalar passages in the bass versus guitar, both in rhythmic unison with Peart's woodpecker wood block sounds.<sup>11</sup> These passages produce something like “stop-time” effects (by briefly highlighting certain instruments), and they also parallel the tonal areas of the B and A sections in very close proximity, thus inscribing a heated, contra-

<sup>10</sup> In addition, Lifeson voices the F# chords as barred, major power chords, thus extending the secondary dominant of B into the new, hard rock version of the A section (Verse 3).

<sup>11</sup> The band bases this distinctive and virtuosic section on G major and F# minor chords, with very prominent thirds. G major normally functions as “flat-7” in the pivot to A major in the B section.

puntal volley of arguments. The section then returns to the earlier 5/4 riff (3:49–3:58) but now with F# major chords in order to contrast the 3/4 pivot to the B section that this elaborate instrumental section already expanded and enriched.

After the instrumental section, Verse 4 outlines the Maples forming a union and “demanding equal rights” (3:58–4:28). At the end of this verse, Lee sings equal quarters on the words “trees are all kept equal” (4:20–4:23, on F#s). As this rhythm had not been sung at any point earlier in the song, it underscores the fact that an external, artificial agent had provided the “equality.” The vocal melody, bass, and guitar then follow this with an ascent from F# through A, but instead of cycling back to 6/8, D major, and the A section the song ends abruptly—though ambiguously—on A major, with quiet bird calls recalling the song’s opening sections. Peart strikes his wind chimes (4:28–4:42), but the fading pitches (G#, C#, and B, which are all very important elements in establishing A major) present an ominous effect, encouraging us to mock the song’s socio-political “accomplishment.”

The alternate time signatures, tonal juxtapositions, and contrary motions of the song’s instrumental section suggest a kind of “Royal Commission.” In Canada, such a publicly funded inquiry (or deliberation) normally concerns such thorny issues as language laws, the misappropriation of public funds, and the sale of publicly owned companies. In the middle section of “The Trees,” Rush similarly presents material in ways not adequately argued elsewhere. One could thus interpret the eventual narrative solution of this song—legislated equality—as critical of Canadian Content regulations as a variant of affirmative action. In any case, the entire song achieves a kind of “critical mass” in its obsession with balance and equality. It provides aural and intellectual meaning because it “works through” its contradictory rhythms, tonalities, and textures instead of merely presenting them. Neil Peart later downplayed the song’s meaning:

It was just a flash. I was working on an entirely different thing when I saw a cartoon picture of these trees carrying on like fools. I thought, “What if trees acted like people?” So I saw it as a cartoon really, and wrote it that way. I think that’s the image that it conjures up to a listener or a reader. A very simple statement.<sup>12</sup>

<sup>12</sup> Cheech Iero, “Neil Peart,” *Modern Drummer*, April/May 1980; <<http://yyz.com/NMS/HTML/artindex.html>>.

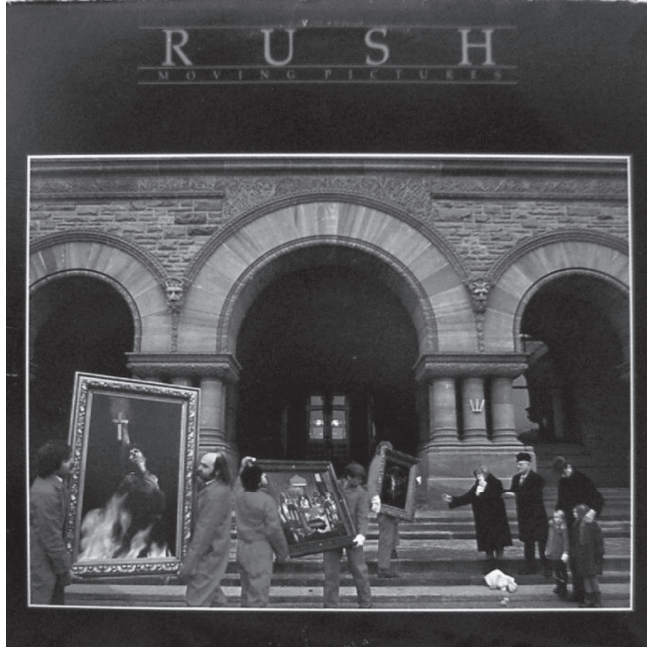
Despite Peart's insistence on the simple statement of his lyrics, the resultant song is anything but simple, and I hope to have provided a reasonable interpretation of its meaning.

In a less extensive engagement with Canadianness also found on *Hemispheres* (1978), the hard-rock anthem "Circumstances" uses French (Canada's second official language) for the recurring phrase "Plus ça change, plus c'est la même chose" ("The more that things change, the more they stay the same"). The three members of Rush all studied French during the late-1970s, the band began recording at Quebec's Le Studio in 1979, and Peart bought a house in the area. In a comparable multicultural way, a section of the same album's "La Villa Strangiato" is named after Toronto's Greek neighbourhood: Pape and Danforth.

### ***Moving Pictures, "YYZ," and Grace under Pressure (1981–84)***

*Moving Pictures* (1981) stands as Rush's best-selling—and arguably best—album.<sup>13</sup> The album gained its favorable reputation largely based on the four songs on its first half: "Tom Sawyer," "Red Barchetta," the instrumental "YYZ," and "Limelight." These continue the succinct individualism embodied in the band's 1980 songs "The Spirit of Radio" and "Freewill," but they also pursue a more picturesque (or personal) idiom in keeping with the album title's filmic reference. Hugh Syme's album cover for *Moving Pictures* (see below) combines a title pun on the band's early 1980s' cinematic/picturesque approach to songwriting with a multiple visual play on words: people moved emotionally by pictures being moved physically. The picture at the front of the cover depicts Joan of Arc (portrayed by one of Syme's associates), the middle picture reproduces C.M. Coolidge's "A Friend in Need" (a.k.a. "Dogs Playing Poker"), and the picture at the rear comprises the "man against star," anti-collectivist logo from the cover of Rush's album *2112* (1976). These pictures are displayed in front of the distinctive three-arch entrance of the Ontario Provincial Legislature in Toronto's Queen's Park (see Figure 21.1).

<sup>13</sup> As with *Permanent Waves* (1980), the band recorded *Moving Pictures* at Le Studio in Morin Heights, Quebec, co-producing it with Terry Brown and recording it with engineer Paul Northfield. In 1995, the Recording Industry Association of America certified the album as quadruple platinum: four million copies sold in the United States.

**Figure 21.1.** *Moving Pictures* (1981), cover art by H. Syme

The three pictures, the three arches, and so on also visually play on the fact that Rush comprises three members, which is a recurring motif on a number of the band's album covers in the 1980s and 1990s. As for the album cover invoking Toronto, in addition to being home to the business offices of Rush's Anthem Records, all three members of Rush had houses either in upscale Toronto areas (Geddy Lee in Rosedale and Neil Peart in Forest Hill) or on an estate just north of the city (Alex Lifeson near Markham).<sup>14</sup>

The third track of *Moving Pictures*, "YYZ" (pronounced Y-Y-"Zed"), comprises Rush's best-known instrumental work. The band has often used unusual time signatures and complex rhythms in order to make a point or sometimes just to "mix things up," and it

<sup>14</sup> Peart also had a house in rural Quebec for several decades. Lifeson also had a smaller, second house in Florida, near where he was arrested on 31st December 2003 for participating in a disturbance at a New Year's Eve party. (The charges were later dropped for lack of sufficient evidence.) Peart's daughter and spouse died in 1997 and 1998, in a car crash and from cancer, respectively. Around 2000, he sold both of his houses and moved to Santa Monica, California with his second wife, who is an American photographer.

bases the opening of “YYZ” on Morse code for the radio call letters of Toronto’s Pearson International Airport:<sup>15</sup>

$$\begin{aligned} \text{YYZ} &= \text{.- .-. .-. .-.} \\ &= 7/8 + 7/8 + 3/4 \text{ (or } 5/4 + 5/4 \text{ or } 10/8 + 10/8) \\ &= \text{q(quarter-note) e(ighth-note) q q e q q q e e} \end{aligned}$$

At the quarter-note level, one could also interpret this as two measures of  $5/4$ , which is how it is usually transcribed by third-party engravers. Building a metrical structure around an airport code fits with Richard Middleton’s expansion of Gino Stefani’s 1973 work on musical semiotics: “There is a range of codes operating in any musical event, some of them not even strictly musical but emanating from general schemes governing movement, gesture, rhetoric, affect, and so on.”<sup>16</sup> “YYZ” presents a coded meaning because the band “transliterated” these non-musical elements musically. Rush played “YYZ” about one thousand times between 1981 and 2011. Thus, this particular piece of music inscribed one of the band’s perpetual, affective “home connections,” which is then emotionally highlighted in the work’s bridge section.

After a series of textually-contrasting sections (such as unison, melody and accompaniment, contrapuntal, and “antiphonal”), its guitar solo ends with an unaccompanied descending sequence, similar to those found in Vivaldi’s violin music. The solo leads into a slower, cut-time section with bass pedal and brassy synthesizer chords (2:51-3:20), providing what Neil Peart calls the “big sappy . . . bridge in the middle that is really orchestrated, really emotional, really rich [to] half symbol[ise] the tremendous emotional impact of coming home.”<sup>17</sup> This section of the composition (and, arguably, the entire work) demonstrates that David Brackett’s idea of the importance of “media image, biographical details, mood, and historical and social associations” can even hold for an entirely instrumental work.<sup>18</sup>

<sup>15</sup> Many Rush fans collect “YYZ” baggage tags. Canadian airports typically use identifiers based on earlier weather transmitter codes, instead of on city names.

<sup>16</sup> Richard Middleton, *Studying Popular Music* (Open University Press, 1990), p. 173.

<sup>17</sup> Quoted in Bill Banasiewicz, *Rush: Visions—The Official Biography* (Omnibus, 1988), p. 54.

<sup>18</sup> See David Brackett, *Interpreting Popular Music* (Cambridge University Press, 1995), p. 9.

After the bridge, the band reprises the pre-solo sections and ends with a Morse Code-like gesture that recalls the song's opening. On the whole, the work evokes mechanical signals followed by: complicated hesitations, the excitement of traveling somewhere new, and a new set of signals at the end. This affirms Peart's comments that "The song is loosely based on airport-associated images. Exotic destinations, painful partings, happy landings, that sort of thing."<sup>19</sup> Peart elsewhere explains that this provided a "shorter, more concise instrumental that was actually a song with verses and a chorus...à la [jazz-rock band] Weather Report."<sup>20</sup>

In 1983, Rush moved on from its 1973–1982 co-producer, British-born Canadian Terry ("Broon") Brown, and engaged former Supertramp producer Peter Henderson (British) to co-produce the album *Grace under Pressure* (1984). However, as if to compensate for this change, the band arranged for the internationally renowned Canadian portrait photographer Yousuf Karsh to take the band's inner-sleeve album photo. Karsh was best-known for his World War II photograph of a grumpy Winston Churchill and had never before photographed a rock band.

Stylistically, from 1981 to 1987 Rush often engaged with such music technology as synthesizers, samplers, and electronic percussion, but the band then backed away from this starting around 1988, preferring to use technology within its computer-based songwriting process instead of with the sounds of its new music. After 1980, Geddy Lee also often sang in his natural, high-baritone voice, as opposed to the intense, very high, countertenor style in which he had frequently sung in the 1970s. Lee's modified and moderated vocal style (and his related vocal melodies) also suited Peart's more picturesque and less "preachy" lyrics. Rush's new music from 1996 to 2007 achieved a balance of a relatively traditional rock-trio aesthetic (guitar, bass, and drums) with complex structural and lyrical elements still inspired by 1970s' progressive rock. This resulted in songs and albums that were at least somewhat consistent with alternative rock and progressive metal, and throughout this period the band continued to perform for a large, international "cult" following, but with very little mainstream attention.

<sup>19</sup> Neil Peart, "The Drummer Sounds Off," *Rush Backstage Club newsletter*, March 1990; <<http://yyz.com/NMS/HTML/artindex.html>>.

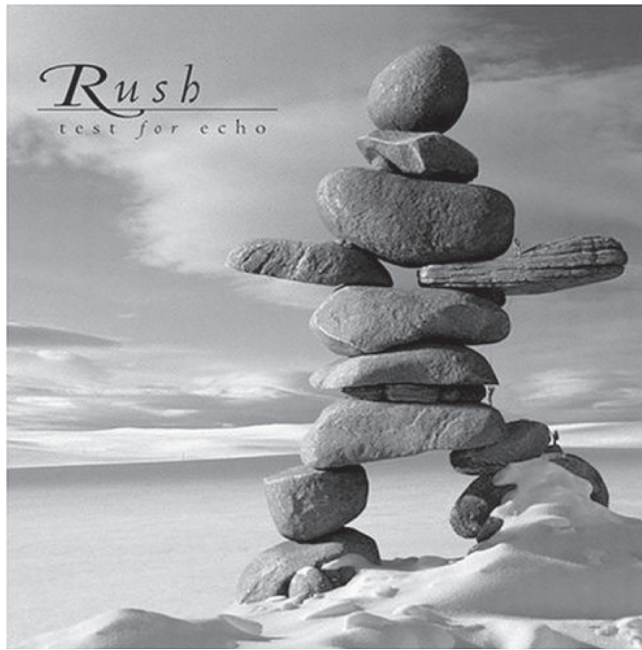
<sup>20</sup> Quoted in Banasiewicz, *Rush Visions*, p. 54.



### Later Rush (1996-2004)

Hugh Syme's cover for Rush's *Test for Echo* (1996, see Figure 21.2), shows three tiny figures, presumably representing the members of the band, climbing a massive, human-shaped rock structure (an inukshuk) in a barren, arctic tundra.

**Figure 21.2:** Test for Echo (1996), cover art by H. Syme



The North American arctic Inuit people traditionally used the inukshuk (meaning “in the image of man”) in hunting practices and to mark trails and geographical directions. Such rock totems are usually no more than a meter or two high (the size of a child or adult), but in Rush’s context an absurdly oversized version represents the band’s long, complicated engagement with rock music. Although Syme’s appropriation of the inukshuk as an image for this album does seem to stretch the boundaries of multicultural sensitivity, this issue is certainly not confined to Rush, for the 2010 Winter Olympics (based in Vancouver, British Columbia) appropriated the inukshuk as its primary symbol (see Figure 21.3)—and arguably with even less of a justification than the visual pun on the cover of *Test for Echo*.



**Figure 21.3.** Vancouver 2010 “Pac-Man” Inukshuk

Although some native groups have responded favorably to the circumstances of the Olympics, the organization’s version of an inukshuk has also been compared by one Chief as resembling an image from the 1980s’ video game Pac-Man. On the front cover of Rush’s *Test for Echo*, Syme’s version looks considerably more like the “real thing,” and, moreover, the album includes additional northern or arctic images. The back cover technologically updates the front cover’s symbol with three large satellite dishes within the same setting. The first page of the CD booklet features a digitally altered ancient map of the northern hemisphere (in Latin, but modified to refer to Rush). Each song lyric also receives a visual treatment, a few of which also reference inukshuks and/or other arctic imagery (a dog sled, the northern lights, and an image of Inuit stone carvers), and the credit page of the CD booklet also includes a snowman family of three. The album’s acknowledgements of Inuit culture are thus presented in earnest (even self-effacingly), and at least some of the band’s followers may have become at least slightly more informed about such aspects of Canada’s multicultural identity. The same can probably not be said of the Olympics’ “Pac-Man.”

Regarding the album’s song “Driven” (and a 1993 Rush song called “Stick It Out”) and the band’s partial interest in underlying funk- and groove-oriented playing, Geddy Lee self-effacingly described the band’s success in this as being “about as funky as

white Canadians get.”<sup>21</sup> In the same album’s “Time and Motion,” the bridge uses the word “loon” to refer to the northern lake bird so common in Canada (such as near Peart’s Quebec country house), but it also suggests “loony” (derived from “lunatic”) or the nickname of Canada’s one-dollar coin: the “loonie,” which was introduced in 1987 and initially featured a loon (bird) on one of its faces.

Musically, by 1996 Geddy Lee was quite comfortable with overdubbing his voice in contrasting ranges (in this case, baritone combined with countertenor), which is something that he had earlier avoided. On the other hand, this particular bridge retains Rush’s established tendency to use an asymmetrical time signature (in this case a lurching 5/4) within a contrasting song section.

### Outro

In 2004, Rush celebrated its thirtieth anniversary as a professional band with an eight-track CD of British and North American psychedelic and blues-rock songs that the band’s members had played in cover versions during the half-dozen years leading up to 1974. The album, *Feedback*, includes a new version of Cream’s version of Robert Johnson’s “Crossroads” and a new version of Blue Cheer’s version of Eddie Cochran’s “Summertime Blues,” each of which thus resulted in a “cover of a cover.” Rush’s rarely-heard first single, “Not Fade Away” (1973, backed with the original song “Don’t Fight It”), is also a “cover of a cover,” because Buddy Holly’s 1957 song had already been covered by the Rolling Stones in 1964. Rush’s version of “Summertime Blues” was used in 2004 as the theme for a pay-TV, pro-wrestling event held at Toronto’s Air Canada Centre.

*Feedback* also includes songs by the Who (“The Seeker”) and Love (“Seven and Seven Is”), two songs by the Yardbirds (“Heart Full of Soul” and “Shapes of Things”), and two songs by Buffalo Springfield: “For What It’s Worth” and “Mr. Soul”—the last of these having been written by Rush’s fellow Canadian, Neil Young. Many critics were pleasantly surprised that for its thirtieth anniversary as a professional entity, Rush chose to acknowledge its distant past (1968–74) of genres and styles not usually associated with the band instead of producing something along the lines of a ponderous,

<sup>21</sup> Philip Dawdy, article-interview with Geddy Lee, “You Can’t Hurry Change,” *Bassics* 6:2 (1996); <<http://yyz.com/NMS/HTML/artindex.html>>.

multi-CD boxed set of its own professional accomplishments of the sequent three decades. On the other hand, the band may also have wished to make the point that there was not much Canadian hard rock—and not really even much of a music industry—before Rush made its self-titled debut (1974) in Toronto in 1973.

The Canadian Music Awards Association was founded in 1974–75 and renamed the Canadian Academy of Recording Arts and Sciences (CARAS) in 1977. The Juno awards were first presented in 1971 (taking over from RPM music magazine's Gold Leaf awards, 1964–70), and they continued to be selected by RPM readers until 1974. The US National Academy of Recording Arts and Sciences (NARAS) began in 1957 and administered the first Grammy awards in 1958. Canadians have often created “new” institutions based on variations of existing U.S. institutions, such as the Canadian Recording Industry Association (CRIA, 1964– versus RIAA, 1952– ) and CARAS. On the other hand, the Canadian music industry evolved fairly quickly from its humble origins in the early 1960s, when numerous musicians still had little choice but to leave. For its part, Rush effected a quite Canadian compromise in this matter by maintaining its own companies in Toronto (Moon, then Anthem) and by often recording in Canada (such as at Quebec's Le Studio), while also co-signing deals with major, international music labels (Mercury, then Atlantic).