

Traveling Music: Playing Back the Soundtrack to My Life and Times. By Neil Peart. Toronto: ECW Press, 2004. 440 p. \$28.95. ISBN 1550226649

Rush drummer Neil Peart's third foray into the literary world is, like his two earlier efforts, a travelogue cum memoir. Its genesis is a six-day solitary road trip from his home near Los Angeles to Big Bend National Park in southwest Texas, a round trip of some 2500 miles. This journey forms the book's framework—the music that Peart chooses to accompany his trip, the passing landscape, and people he encounters act as a springboard to memory and nostalgia. "I think of 'traveling music' as the essence of the music itself," he writes, "where it takes me, in memory, imagination, and the realm of pure abstract sensation, washing over me in waves of emotion. Since childhood, music has had the power to carry me away, and this is a song about some of the places it has carried me." ([ix])

Peart has structured the book along the lines of a pop song, alternating "verses" and "choruses," with an intro, "middle eight" and "rideout." Each chapter is headed by a quote from a song lyric. The verses provide an account of the trip while the choruses are autobiographical. For the most part, this format works well, as Peart shifts easily backwards and forwards in time within this structure.

Anyone for looking an account of Rush will be disappointed. Rush does get the occasional mention, but it is not the focus (an autobiography of the Rush years may be in the works). Instead, Peart mixes personal philosophy with his passion for music. Early on, he muses: "Sometimes I have to face the reality that music can be part of people's lives,

like wallpaper, without being the white-hot *center* of their lives, as it always seemed to be for me."

The vignettes are primarily focused around Peart's development and continual growth as a musician. His memories of growing up in Port Dalhousie, his optimistic dreams of becoming a rock star, and the later cynical touches are a familiar trope, but the warmth and humour of the writing and Peart's obvious dedication keep the book from being self-indulgent.

This is not an authoritative criticism, simply the music Peart likes to listen to. The artists and groups include Sinatra, Coldplay, Miles Davis, and Dido. Some, such as The Who, played a large role in his musical formation while others are mentioned in passing. It would have been helpful to include a list of the albums.

One surprising element of the book is the wide swath of different writings that Peart references throughout, an impressive array of literature, music, philosophy, history, and nature writers. Indeed the sheer variety of texts he quotes and the obvious admiration he has for these writers not only adds interest to the book, but gives the reader greater insight into Peart's personality.

But my biggest criticism is the book is overly long. There are times when the writing feels disjointed. Particularly disconcerting is a long section about a bicycle trip in Africa, which made me feel like I had accidentally wandered into another book. While the style of the

work as a whole is meant to be rather loose and free, a little tightening up of the writing would have improved the overall feel.

Traveling Music is an interesting account of one musician's relationship with music and life. Peart himself remarks the "...insights I gained from books on art criticism by E.H. Gombrich have served me well in deciding how I feel about artists of any kind. Professor Gombrich suggested judging a piece of art by two basic criteria: "What are they

trying to do?" and "How well did they do it?" Simple, yet so profound, and the starting point for a reasonable assessment of any artist's work." Did Peart succeed in what he was trying to do and did he do it well? I think so. I only wish that I could ride along and engage in the conversation along the way.

Stacy Allison-Cassin
Scott Library
York University