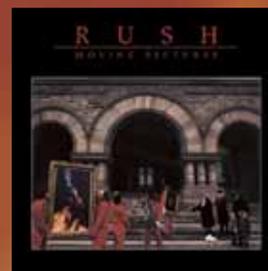


BEHIND THE CLASSICS



Geddy Lee, Alex Lifeson, Neil Peart

WRITTEN BY: PYE DUBOIS, GEDDY LEE, ALEX LIFESON, NEIL PEART
RECORDED: FALL 1980 AT LE STUDIO, QUEBEC, CANADA
PRODUCED BY: RUSH AND TERRY BROWN
VOCALS: GEDDY LEE
GUITARS: ALEX LIFESON
DRUMS: NEIL PEART
SYNTHESIZERS: GEDDY LEE
FROM THE ALBUM: *MOVING PICTURES* (1981)



“Tom Sawyer”

RUSH

On July 28, 1980, the members of Rush entered Toronto's Phase One studios to lay down “Battlescar,” a collaboration with their friends in fellow Canadian band Max Webster. While there Max Webster lyricist Pye Dubois shared one of his poems with Rush's own resident wordsmith, drummer Neil Peart. “Louis the Lawyer” was a stream-of-consciousness ode to an imagined character that emblemized individuality and rebelliousness—qualities Peart had been examining in his own lyrics for several years. Intrigued, he took the piece with him and began shaping the words into song form. “I added the themes of reconciling the boy and the man in myself,” said Peart, “and the difference between what people are and what others perceive them to be.”

Rush reconvened that August at a cottage on Stoney Lake, Ontario, to write songs for its next album. The Dubois/Peart lyric was melded to a funky 4/4 groove, as well as a tricky 7/8-time synthesizer part that Lee had been fiddling with during soundchecks. Lee experimented with his vocal technique, deploying for the song's various interlocking sections the high-pitched wail for which he was best known, a lower-pitched croon and what he calls a “faux-rap” spoken-word approach.

He also devised a foreboding introduction based around a low-end bass-pedal sound played on an Oberheim OB-X synthesizer. Lifeson made his mark on the song, now dubbed “Tom Sawyer,” with an aggressive arpeggiated riff linking the disparate parts (beneath the lyric that begins “And what you say about his company . . .”).

Rush cut demos at Phase One in August and early September, followed by a 13-date U.S. tour where “Tom Sawyer” made its stage debut. In October the band and producer Terry Brown headed for Le Studio in snowy Quebec to make what would become their *Moving Pictures* album.

Among the most difficult songs to capture was “Tom Sawyer,” beginning with Peart's almost impossibly complex drum pattern. “I'm playing full strength for the whole track, and it took about a day and a half to record,” Peart said shortly afterward. “I remember collapsing afterward with raw, red, aching hands and feet. I had been playing the bass drum so hard that my toes were all mashed together and very sore.” The remaining tracks went down relatively smoothly. “I winged it,” Lifeson said of his guitar solo, played on a Howard Roberts Fusion model Gibson. “Honest! I

came in, did five takes, then went off and had a cigarette.” (His final solo was a composite of several takes.) Lee's Fender Jazz bass, synth parts—including the distinctive middle section, featuring a Minimoog—and vocals went down with relatively little fuss.

When the group listened back to the results, however, they were crestfallen. “I remember being disappointed with it in the studio when we were recording it, thinking that it didn't capture the essence of the song,” Lee said. “We thought it was one of the worst songs on the record at that time.” Not until the final mix in November did “Tom Sawyer” announce itself to all involved as a winner. “It was a dark horse,” Lee said. “Then in the mixing, it all came together. When we finished it, we were so pleased with what happened.” The track went on to become a radio hit that Lee calls “the quintessential Rush song,” helping to propel *Moving Pictures* to quadruple-platinum sales. All the members insist that, 30 years after its release, they have yet to tire of playing “Tom Sawyer.” “We still think it's a wonderful thing that such a bizarre song could be so popular,” Peart said. “That alone is a miracle to us.”

—Chris Neal