

Understanding Rush's LIMELIGHT

Living on a lighted stage
Approaches the unreal,
For those who think and feel
In touch with some reality,
Beyond the gilded cage.

Cast in this unlikely role,
Ill-equipped to act,
With insufficient tact,
One must put up barriers
To keep one's self intact.

(Chorus)

Living in the limelight:
The universal dream
For those who wish to seem.
Those who wish to be
Must put aside the alienation,
Get on with the fascination,
The real relation,
The underlying theme.

Living in a fisheye lens,
Caught in the camera eye,
I have no heart to lie.
I can't pretend a stranger
Is a long-awaited friend.

All the world's indeed a stage
And we are merely players,
Performers and portrayers,
Each another's audience,
Outside the gilded cage.

As printed in RUSH Complete.
Music by Alex Lifeson,
Geddy Lee-
Lyrics by Neil Peart.

Life, the one thing we all have in common. "Limelight," by Rush, not only speaks of life but seems to contain life's vital force. Like people, "Limelight," comes alive, lyrically and musically, matures and becomes involved with the life of the listener. As it matures, the listener learns a great deal about the life of a rock star. The listener also is shown how the life of a star is different from theirs and that it isn't all that it's cracked up to be. Although a well thought of 'pop' song, "Limelight," seemingly goes beyond that into a realm of more serious literature and gives us a bit of insight into the hectic life of a successful artist. The lyrics work well with the music and vocals in creating a mood that fits the song as a whole.

The song concerns itself with the lives and dreams of people. The writer, Neil Peart, is now a star, yet remembers when he was just like the rest of us. He remembers when he only had dreams of the stage. He tells us it's okay to dream, but to make those dreams come true a person has to make sacrifices and has to be willing to deal with the consequences of stardom. A star has to remember how they got there or they will not stay on top for long. The song does not condemn the dreams we have, but simply tells us to think about them. The album "Limelight" is on is entitled Moving Pictures. There is a basic theme or concept that holds the album together, the idea of reality against a dream. "Limelight" falls into that mold well.

As a star, Peart's sense of reality is now different from the reality of people who are still just dreaming of the stage. He experiences a very different reality than what most dreamers realize. Peart can identify with both "realities." He has lived the life of a dreamer and made his

dreams become a reality. He sees the pedestal his fans place him on and is still, "in touch with some reality, beyond the gilded cage." He sees the difference and still retains a sense of his own identity.

The opening line catches the listener immediately. "Living on a lighted stage," is a life many dreamers would love to live. The rest of the stanza deals with people who realize dreaming of this life is normal, but for most, it will never come true, that in itself is a reality. The people who aren't stars are the ones, "Beyond the gilded cage." The reference to the gilded cage has an ironic twist to it. This "cage" may be pretty, golden and desirable but for those who live in it, it is still just that, a cage. This reality has to be remembered by the star because it is where he started. He is just as human as the rest of us.

The "unlikely role" Peart speaks of is the role of the star. He never expected to be where he is but dreamt of it like most do. Now that he is here he has to deal with it and watch himself or he may lose all he has strived to create. He expresses the view, stardom is often lived the wrong way because the performer does not know how to deal with the situation and its pressures. In dealing with this predicament, "one must put up barriers to keep one's self intact." This can mean sanity, money or anything else a star can lose very easily. The barriers can be simply things stars can do to keep themselves healthy and productive, such as, exercising, refraining from drugs or an easier schedule. The barriers can go beyond these examples too. For instance, holding true to yourself and your music or not letting other people shatter your integrity. The temptations of being a star can be overwhelming and a person can lose everything they have worked for, quickly, if not careful.

The chorus emphasizes the idea that this world of stardom is a "universal dream," because of the human need for attention. There are the dreamers who, "wish to seem," and the performers who, "wish to be." The difference is the intensity of that dream. For the latter some advice is given. These individuals must give up feeling different. People will always look at them as being strange or unusual. They must rise above this, love their work, and be very dedicated to making it become a reality.

A great deal of work, money and time goes into being a star and this sums up the "underlying theme," showing, again, the differences between those inside and outside the cage. The "theme" has to do with the relation between the star and the fan. It illustrates the irony between the people who dream of this life who never stop to realize all of the hurdles it not only takes to get there but to stay there. It may be a "dream" to be on stage but a lot more goes into being a star than just being in that limelight.

A performer and artist who wishes to stay in the limelight has to realize, the fans are the people who put him there but to stay there he must rely on his own talent. He has to constantly remind himself of his own identity and not the one his fans have given him. If the band has had success at something they still must move on and try new directions. It is too easy to get stuck in a groove until nobody wants to hear it again. A star has to possess integrity to stay on top of the situation and to keep a complexity to their music that will keep it in the limelight as well.

Musically, the next stanza begins as the first did, but this time one is, "living in a fisheye lens." A fisheye lens is used in photography for a panoramic view. It will purposefully distort a photograph, making the center appear further away than the sides, like looking into a bubble. If someone is "living" in such a lens, their main goal or focus, is clear but far away and difficult to

achieve. It would be easier to simply go for the sides which are closer, but not so clear, cheating themselves in the end because they took the easy way out. The perimeter is a copout because it's too easy, and the focus is desirable but further away.

The next four lines deal with the true life of the star. They are almost always in the public eye, to the point where some people see them so much they think they know them. The writer realizes, contrary to popular belief, he is only human and can't pretend he knows the people who believe they know him. He has to be honest with himself and his fans. It is from this honesty that the root of the song's message stems.

In the final stanza or verse, Shakespeare's As You Like It, is directly alluded to: "All the world's indeed a stage." This passage and this song have a lot in common. Everyone, in their own way, plays several roles in life. Everyone is also an audience for everyone else on the outside of the "gilded cage." The acumen of Shakespeare reverberates throughout both works. This last verse sums up the whole song. It speaks of the differences between the dream and the reality. The word "indeed" is emphasized to again show the irony between the performers and the audience, both of which we are all a part.

Musically the song holds together tightly. The guitar, as in most rock songs, is the key instrument. It is always present but not always obvious. The guitar begins the song then each instrument falls into place until all are present. The song does not fade in or out, similar to a live production. A complete cadence is found at the end of each verse. Each verse holds true to form and the chorus is repeated twice, once as written and again at the end. This allows the idea of the "underlying theme" to sink in a bit more. The first line of the last verse crescendos to give it more emphasis than the others. This is probably because the writer figured Shakespeare

said it best. The crescendo does, however, build to a sustained climax just as the advice of the song suggests.

There is an extended guitar solo at the end of the song also similar to a live performance. It is almost as if the solo gives the listener time to think about what has been said before the song comes to an end. The solos are not directly related to the main melody, musically, but only in the feeling they both help to create.

The music is arranged well enough that the different rhyme scheme goes practically unnoticed. The music establishes a mood. This mood is dreamy and almost eerie. It flows from beginning to end, and even though each instrument seems to have its moment to be center-stage, they all work to hold the song together.

The song teaches the listener a lesson in dreaming. It goes beyond the average pop song and says a little more. It contains ideas that will hold true for generations of dreamers to come. There is a lot to be learned from the song. Peart knows the path to stardom and the realities of both sides of the cage. He has come to grips with his situation and seems to speak with authority. There is an irony about the people who dream of the stage, listen to the song but never hear its message of the reality inside the cage. "Limelight" should be played for all the people who dream of the stage and being a star. It would probably make a few dreamers think twice about following their dream.

by

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