ECLECTIC THOUGHTS

FALL EDITION
Hello ESA

ESA’s an odd place. It’s fun to talk about the oaks and individuality and prideful counterculture, but rarely is the school comprehensively analyzed. It’s almost taboo to talk about the pressure—how many can feel like drops of blood in a shark tank—because kids can’t be kids anymore. That’s not enough. Good luck getting to college without curing cancer at 15; and unless you learned relativity alongside the alphabet, you won’t get far. Gone are the days of playing outside in the summer; gone the days of growing. We brand chiropractors as schools and graduate with scoliosis.

It feels that way, at least. Right? We live in a small pond out here that cultivates academic success, but if we’re not doubled up or on the AP track, we feel insecure. We get self-conscious and square up against friends, keeping quiet about the work we do in secret. It’s called the Duck Syndrome: just as ducks glide across water but paddle furiously beneath the surface, we smile until 3:25 but thrash and flail all the while. And this extends beyond homework and school; many feel isolated and question their worth in general. I don’t mean to frighten. You’ll get to college; that’s a promise.

But what are the options for those who sympathize? For those wondering about themselves and their significance, and those wanting to change the world from which they feel estranged? How do we matter when the next guy over is everything we are and more? The first step is to step back. We rush through our days not knowing ourselves, prioritizing tasks and people. But look around. There’s a world behind your back that only you properly notice. Your mind reasons in ways no one can fathom or explain. Shakespeare, Einstein, Hawking—they are grossly, utterly pathetic by comparison. The Greats envy the angle you have—the puzzle piece they missed. Square one is to understand that genius isn’t cultivated. It’s not multiple choice; it’s not handed down in red ink. It’s democratic, and we’re all standing on level ground. No one has changed the world by doing what’s been done. And too often we translate that as somehow seeing into a new dimension, when, in reality, it means exploring the dimension to which you alone have access. Find a voice in there.

ESA, though admittedly small, overemphasizes science and math. We have AP Physics, AP Biology, but specialized humanities? It’s easier to teach what can only be answered one way. Know especially in this climate that intelligence isn’t wisdom and challenge yourself to discern the two. If you’re an artist, be brilliant. This school graduates too many scientists. It’s overflowing the path of least resistance. Not that STEM is without merit; it’s incredible—only misrepresented. Chisel at your mind and sculpt what flows. Hollywood paints genius as a moment rather than process, but there was a time when Apple was just a word in a calligrapher’s head. The future brewing in an unexceptional mind. Trust that the dots are connecting and hammer an idea slowly. You might just make the world brilliant.

-STORY
1. Your happiness comes first. You can’t let other people’s wants come before your needs. It’s good and noble to want to take care of people, but make sure you care for yourself too. You can’t save a drowning man with a sinking ship.

2. Hating things doesn’t make you cool. It just makes you bitter and unwelcoming. It’s okay to get excited! Negativity is draining, and ugly thoughts lead to ugly souls. Be someone who radiates love and kindness. Love everything with all that you have. The world needs more people like that.

3. Looks are fading. Don’t surround yourself with beautiful people just for the sake of being surrounded by beautiful people. Eye-candy can only go so far and life is too short to waste time on a hot guy that you have no connection with.

4. Life may not have any real meaning, but don’t let that stop you from seeing all that it has to offer.

5. Some things are better kept a secret. You are under no obligation to share parts of yourself in order to deepen a relationship. There will be people who will try to take advantage of you. Learn who you can trust and be cautious about who you open up to.

6. It’s okay to say or do the wrong thing. Don’t let it keep you from trying again. Mistakes only become a problem if you don’t learn anything from them. So mess up, learn, and move on.

7. You won’t be the best at everything. There will be things you just don’t understand, no matter how hard you try. Don’t be so afraid or so arrogant that you don’t ask for help. I know you think you can get through life on your own, and maybe you can, but communication with others makes the journey worthwhile.

8. There’s no such thing as a “bad” or “wrong” reason to leave a relationship. If you aren’t happy, that’s good enough. Don’t wait around for a “justifiable reason” to get out of an uncomfortable relationship.

9. Not everything you do or say or write has to be poetic. Some things are messy and awkward and miserable. Don’t let that stop you. Always create. Always be thinking. With all of the distractions in the world, it’s easy to lose touch with your mind and soul. Keep creating new things, even when it’s hard. It doesn’t have to be perfect, it just has to be.

10. Most people don’t actually listen, they just wait for their turn to talk. And most people are selfish and try to suck up your existence, just because they can. It’s rare to find a soul who wholeheartedly cares about you and wants to hear what you have to say. If you find someone whose heart never strays, don’t take them for granted.

11. You should never, ever have to beg for love.

12. Heartbreak doesn’t last forever. Cry, scream, hurt, but don’t stop living. Wounds heal, but not all by themselves. You’ve got to get up and keep moving.

13. Sometimes your parents won’t understand you. It’s not their fault. They’re human too, and raising a child is a confusing and difficult experience. Don’t be too hard on them when they make mistakes. (on another note, if you’re in an abusive home, do not let anyone convince you that you’re the bad guy for not loving your parents. And it’s okay to get help. You’re not betraying them, you’re saving yourself.)

14. There are more than one type of soulmate.

15. The universe has a funny way of putting people in your life when you need them most. You may not realize it now, but people come and go in your life for reasons. Their purpose isn’t always visible to you, and some may never be revealed, but every new person you meet is an opportunity, a learning experience, or a friend. Find the people you want to love and hold onto them.

16. The world can get overwhelming at times. Don’t hate yourself for crying for no reason. Crying doesn’t mean you’re weak, it just means you’re feeling. So feel, deeply, fully, openly. Feel the way the universe is changing, and how everyone living in it is changing as well. You’re changing, always, but it’s going to be okay. You’re going to be okay.

-KATIE
The Focus is Sharp in the City

As I plop down the needle on my new pressing of the Exit Stage Left live album, I think to myself “Gee whiz, I wish everyone knew how good this stuff is. If only more people had joined the Rush club, then they’d know.” As Story approached me about writing in The Eclectic, however, I saw my chance. “I’m gonna write a rush album review if you leave me unchained” I responded to his request. At this point, I could have asked to review the Twilight saga in excruciating detail and he’d’ve said yes so I don’t really feel bad. Anyway, I feel like I need to explain what I think makes this band so great (since people don’t seem to already know, just look at the Rush club numbers...) and I’ll start by reviewing their most popular album. Don’t worry, Dire Straits is next month.

In 1981, the Holy Triumvirate—bassist and singer Geddy Lee, guitarist Alex Lifeson, and drummer Neil Peart (pronounced peer-t)—released their eighth studio album. By the time Moving Pictures was released, their other seven albums had firmly established them as wizards in the world of rock n roll. This album really elevated them from the norm, though. They reached a new realm of popularity as the shorter songs and more-accessible instrumentation made their music radio-friendly. The album is only forty minutes long with seven songs, but each one is a masterpiece in its own right, each a masterclass in how to make music. Let’s jump in.

The first thing you hear when you listen to this album is the huge-sounding drone on E at the beginning of the band’s most popular song Tom Sawyer. Peart’s drumming stays rock-solid throughout the song, a staple of all Rush’s music. What’s more impressive is that the band changes through time signatures during the song like they don’t even exist, slipping between 4/4 and 7/4 like changing shirts. I’ll be honest. Tom Sawyer is just catchy. From the iconic MiniMoog riff to the huge suspended chords Lifeson uses throughout the song, the tones stick with you throughout the whole song. The band is tight and learned, never making a mistake. Sit down with Tom Sawyer and listen to what each band member is playing individually. We barely did it at Duo Day last year and at ISAS in Oklahoma City. It’s that hard. I have to admit, I don’t like the solo on Tom Sawyer that much. It’s frantic and shriek-y. Not the best combo. Besides that, Tom Sawyer is a true work of art. Everything falls right in its place, even the solo; just because it’s not my favorite doesn’t mean I don’t see its spot in the song. No wonder why it’s the band’s most renowned song.

Light harmonics from Lifeson start off the next one. As Lee says at the beginning of many live performances of this song “This is a song about a car!”And that it is. Red Barchetta takes place in a future where cars are banned due to the motor law and the narrator has to sneak around with his uncle’s car in order not to get popped by the law enforcement. Crazy right? Peart writes all the lyrics, so take it up with him. This song is all about passion. Some people say that Rush is too technical with little capacity for emotion. When they say that (it hasn’t happened yet), I show them this song. When I was coming to school Wednesday it came on in the car and I had goosebumps and the sudden urge to run the deadly race. You feel the curiosity and excitement coming through the words as the music ramps up in volume and intensity. Lifeson is the one setting the mood here. His gentle arpeggios and overdriven power chords really create an air of wonder when he wants and speed when he needs. This might be one of the best Rush songs out there. Again, listen to the band together and then the members individually. You’ll catch something new each time.

Next comes good ol’ YYZ. YYZ is actually the official abbreviation for the Toronto airport. Since the band comes from Canada, Lifeson himself would often fly the group into YYZ. In morse code, which is what the airport uses to identify itself to planes, YYZ is “-.-.-.-..” This series of dots and dashes (dots being quick notes and dashes being longer) is the rhythm for the iconic tritone 5/4 opening riff to the song. The band says that it still puts them in a good mood any time they fly into YYZ. Anyway, after the demonic intro, the rest of the song is less jarring. It continues in common time and is entirely instrumental. It’s the spiritual successor to the band’s last instrumental masterpiece La Villa Strangiato. Compared to this song, YYZ is shorter, catchier and tighter, if not less technically impressive. Nonetheless, YYZ shows off the band’s instrumental mastery, with Lee’s bass line striking me as one of the most difficult bass lines to play that I’ve ever heard; few (if any) students could play YYZ on bass. The song only uses two chords but the melody gracefully flows through the entire scale, using every note in a creative way. Lifeson’s solo pokes through the base chords at times but falls down into the harmonic bed at others. I’d reckon you can call a band “good” only when it can play YYZ.
Limelight follows as the lyrics return to the songs. Limelight is the second single from the album, and usually a fan favorite. Personally, Limelight doesn’t stand out to me as much as it does for others. It’s still good, don’t get me wrong; if it’s in my playlist, I definitely like it. Compared to the rest of the album, however, it falls short. Like all Rush songs, the lyrics (for those that have them) are impactful and the musicianship is top-notch. For some reason, though, the song doesn’t sound like it matches the words though. It lacks the passion of Red Barchetta and the lyrics aren’t detached enough for a groove like Tom Sawyer. It just seems kinda “there.” Give it a listen, though. It’s still catchy and well-made, just not as interesting as the rest.

The Camera Eye comes next. A later Rush epic, it spans ten minutes and a couple of different feels. This is one of the last epics after 2112, Cygnus X-1, The Fountain of Lammeth, and La Villa Strangiato. At ten minutes, it’s shorter than most of these other ones but I think it stacks up with the rest. Sure, it’s long and isn’t as easily-digestible as the other six tracks, but it says a lot. This song is packed with mood, from the instruments, to the lyrics, and to the length. The song features Lifeson’s guitar riff for what feels like most of the length. I’ll admit, I got tired of it quick the first couple of times I listened to the song. One day, though, it clicked. The repetitive drone of the riff locks you into the cyclical hustle-and-bustle of the city. The song drives without going anywhere and doesn’t stop because it never leaves. Seriously, put it on while you’re in the car and tell me you’re not in the zone. The words break free of the monotony and add the sense of wonder you get when you see so many people and places in a big city. The melody is hoppy and bright while the lick is forceful and consistent. The contrast in this song just works. When you have the time, give this song a chance and you won’t regret it.

Witch Hunt is one of those songs that stuck out to me upon first cursory listen of the album. This songs captures the feeling of the reaction to fear and the abnormal. The quarter note bass drum drives the entire song to feel like an actual witch hunt: a mob of scared people so scared that they’ll do what it takes to get rid of the source of fear. The huge chords and bluesy riff create a feeling of openness. The simple rhythms relieve the song of the business of YYZ and Red Barchetta and let it focus on being foreboding. By the end of the song, it’s so spacey that you just get lost. It’s a sea of sound. “Quick to judge, quick to anger, slow to understand.” Peart’s lyrics describe perfectly the sentiments of many angry mobs. Witch Hunt is a prime example of Rush’s ability to create a mood. People often look past it to focus on the band’s supreme technical ability but they forget that they’re also masters of feeling. Truly one of the best songs on the record.

Finally, we arrive at Vital Signs. This was another song that took a while to grow on me. Once it did, though, I was glad I stuck with it. It’s a simple song in C minor with some interesting lyrics. With the coolest chorus on the album, it leaves the listener at a high point; I’m not saying that they saved the best for last, but it’s far from the worst. “A tired mind become a shapeshifter, everybody need a soft filter, everybody need reverse polarity. Everybody got mixed feelings, about the function and the form. Everybody got to deviate from the norm.” Tell me what that means. Gotcha. It’s tough. Good luck. What I do know is that it’s at the perfect spot right after Witch Hunt. Witch Hunt opposes diversity and strangeness whereas Vital Signs embraces and celebrates it. The songs together act like two sides of the same coin tackling the idea of the extraordinary. Rush really knows how to put together an album.

There it is. One of my favorite albums of all time. If I had to rank the songs in order from my favorite to least favorite, the list would look something like


Take that for what you will. I hope, at least, you’ve gained a bit of insight as to why Rush is so good. It’s out there, I know, but pull up the album and give it a listen or two. You won’t regret it.

-BEN
...AND THE POETS...

RED

Maybe I’ll wear Red today across my arms
brush my face in it
cover my mouth with it
and breathe it in

Contradicting what people want
the blind recognize
violent feelings
but soon they feel
a paradoxical soft touch

Contrasting with a background
that we all
inherently want
so easily noticed
so brazenly existing
so it must be
always intentionally
Red

So Maybe I’ll wear Red today across my arms
brush my face in it
cover my mouth with it
and breathe it in

-IZZIE
Killing blue flowers

Today I killed some blue flowers
I stood over them with my weedeater
Leaned forward
Wavered back and retreated

They were lovely blueberry colored
With broad little leaves on each side
They stood tall out of the weeds
And I killed them

It wasn’t without remorse
Don’t think me a cruel machine
I had to kill them, it was my job
How else would the front yard get mowed?

Sure, I could’ve weedeaten last week
So that the flowers never would’ve grown at all
And I never would’ve had to kill them
But is it that any better?
To live and die than to never have lived at all?

So, anyway
I let them live, then I made them die
But it wasn’t without remorse
I tottered, I wondered, “Is this who I am?”
“Somebody who kills blue flowers?”

And you can’t say that’s true, that I’m a bad person
Do you blame the farmer for reaping his wheat?
Really, this isn’t about conscience or moralizing
The blue flowers simply had to go

Life’s Pleasures

It can make you joyous,
It can make your spirits high,
It can cause a great fuss,
Or arouse a convivial “aye!”

It can be pretty,
It can be plain,
It can make you say a ditty,
Or can make you gain.

It can make you wonder “why?”
Or it can cause you to cry.
It will be battered to fry.
’Tis the story of a fried chicken thigh.

-Jacob

-Hayden
THANK YOU FOR READING!

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The Eclectic exists as a vessel for self-expression and creativity in the ESA community; all high school students are welcome to participate and showcase their individuality!

To submit to the Eclectic, please email electic@esacadiana.com, or find any of the staff listed above.

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