Episode 511: Today's Tom Sawyer: Neil Peart, Rush, and Liberty

Guest: Brad Birzer

WOODS: All right, we're sneaking a conversation on music back into the show —

BIRZER: Good.

WOODS: — even though sometimes I can tell people aren't as interested in that, but doggone it —

BIRZER: They should be!

WOODS: — they should be! (laughing) You know, the customer's always right — that is not true. You people are wrong, and I'm just going to come right out and tell you.

BIRZER: (laughing) We obsessive compulsive writers are the correct ones. You must listen to our stuff.

WOODS: That's right. Well, in particular, we can make some connections in this case between some themes that we talk about in this show and the subject matter of your book — but we don't have to do that exclusively. In a way, it's kind of like people who — this just drives me crazy — in my Facebook feed, some new movie comes out, and somebody feels the need to prove it's a libertarian movie. (laughing) Can't you just go to the movies and shut your libertarianism off for two hours? So we don't have to do that entirely.

BIRZER: Understood.

WOODS: You know, my audience is capable of talking about other things.

BIRZER: That's right; that's right.

WOODS: Let's start off with the obvious question: why would you write a book about a rock drummer?

BIRZER: Well, yeah, and of course that's the logical and very good question, Tom. I have spent — all of my professional career, I have written biography. That's all I've done. I'd say I've done a few things outside of that, but even when I do things that

aren't quite biographical, they're still biographical. And I have personally found — and this comes from my own love of Hayek and my own love of methodological individualism. I think it's really important — and, you know, love of personalism. I think it's incredibly important that scholars in the humanities — not necessarily the social sciences — but in the humanities, I think it's really important that we take seriously our belief that the individual matters. So biography has always been a way that I can kind of live that belief that I have out in my own work.

And most of the things that I've done in terms of biography have been on these very highbrow figures. So J.R.R. Tolkien, who of course was the greatest scholar of Middle English and Old English in his day. I've written on one of the Founding Fathers. And so a lot of what I've done — almost all of it — has been highbrow, and I kind of wanted to make the case that because Neal Peart is an extremely popular person, we should not dismiss him as not highbrow, that in fact, with the music of Rush, though it's hard and it's progressive and it's at times extremely highly and throbbing, that in fact, it really does have a lot to it. And in fact, one of the reasons that Neal Peart is so popular is simply because he doesn't dumb down his ideas for his audience.

The music is as complex as his ideas are, and he is — you know, he's a high school dropout, but he is also one of the most intelligent minds I have ever encountered, and he writes nonstop. He's got a number of books, both fiction, and he writes short stories, he writes fiction, and he writes a number of memoirs about his own life, travel logs, which are just filled with natural history as well as history and his own kind of pretty eccentric opinions from time to time. But he's brilliant. He's a brilliant man, and I think he's one of those geniuses in the late 20th, early 21st century that could easily be forgotten simply because so much of what he's known for is in popular culture, and I don't want that to happen. I actually believe that he is a figure that needs to be known in non-popular circles.

WOODS: In that one respect, he reminds me of my own father actually, because my father also dropped out of high school, and he was also extremely well read, I think in part because he had this intimidation factor at work —

BIRZER: Yeah.

WOODS: — that because he dropped out, he must not be as intelligent as other people. Well then he just way, way overcompensated for that. He read so much. And it's interesting to note — we'll get to this a little later — the only album, the only Rush album my father owned — and yes, I had a cool father — he's deceased now, but he had Rush. My father owned *Pyromania* by Def Leppard. Some people in my generation remember that album.

BIRZER: (laughing) I never had that one.

WOODS: Yeah, so he was just tremendous. I mean, I learned about Jethro Tull from his copy of *Aqualung*. Just tremendous. But the only Rush album he had was *Grace under Pressure*, and then I read in your book that's your favorite.

BIRZER: That is my favorite.

WOODS: Okay, because I always thought that was an unusual choice for him, because everybody points to other albums. So anyway, we'll talk about that later.

BIRZER: Good.

WOODS: But if we haven't lost people yet, let's try to draw them in by talking about what people have often tried to — the way they've often tried to describe Rush, which is that they are influenced by Ayn Rand — which is an oversimplification that they've tried to tiptoe away from ever since, but it's not altogether misplaced. Why don't you talk about that for a while, because you spend a lot of time in the book on it?

BIRZER: Yeah, there has always been a characterization, and it's because in 1976 in their breakthrough album, which was *2112*, and they would go on to sell much bigger albums. But up to that point, they had not sold that well. They had sold — respectively. But with that album, that is what really — that's where their reputation just boomed. And I think there are a lot of reasons behind it. It is an album about an anthem. It's about a young man who discovers beauty. In many ways it's a rewrite of *The Fountainhead*, but also there's a lot of *Anthem* in it is well, Ayn Rand's *Anthem*.

But they're young, they're probably 21, 22 when they write that album, and they had been on the verge of losing their record deal because their previous three albums had not sold as well as the company had wanted. And so they decided — and I think this is one of their greatest moments in their history — the three of them decided that they would make the art they wanted to make, and they would not in any cater to the fashions of the time. They would not listen to their record company. They would not listen to what DJs were asking for, which is three-minute songs.

And so what they did, which is just — it's brilliant in hindsight, but it's amazing that it worked — they write, the whole opening side to the album is one song. And it's a very complex science fiction story about a man against the state, about a man who is willing to accept death even at the loss — obviously he loses his life — but if he can't have his liberty, he accepts death. And it's a powerful, powerful story, but the entire thing has the feel of the Overture of 1812, so that really driving anthem.

And I think — and I don't know this for certain, Tom — but it was a moment in history, and I know you're a little bit younger than I am, but 1976 in America was a huge deal because of the bicentennial — not for the elites, not for the Gerry Fords, not for the Jimmy Carters running for the presidency, but for good, average Americans, who basically were so fed up with Vietnam and Watergate but were still conservative or libertarian. And they made that year a special year. There was a moment of intense, conservative, libertarian rebellion that year, and I think that that moment for Rush, even though they're Canadian, I think that spoke to an entire generation of young people who were fed up with the hippies, they were fed up with the counterculture,

which they realized was hypocritical, and this was an album that basically said we will not accept your conformity. And it just resonated.

And still to this day, I put that album on, and it's not totally my kind of music. It's really hard; it's really heavy; it's really throbbing, but man, you can't help but raise your fist and want to just stick it to somebody who's trying to tell you how to live.

WOODS: (laughing)

BIRZER: And you can go back and look at concert videos where every single person in the audience with every beat has their fist exactly in synch, and it's an act, even though you've got 30,000 kids doing that at the same time — that conformity's not lost on anybody — but they're doing it as a way of saying we are going to do our own thing, and we're sick of you people telling us what to do. It's a great moment, and I think it fits into that kind of desire of average Americans just to say we've had enough.

WOODS: I want to say something about Neal Peart's political evolution in a minute, but one thing that I like about him that I've seen in numerous interviews is he gets a little impatient when people want to ask him about old music or they say, "What's your favorite Rush album?" and they're expecting him to say *2112* from 1976. And his answer is, how embarrassing would that be decades alter to say that my favorite album is from when I was half my age. I would hope my favorite thing would be the most recent thing we've done. And that's been one of the really impressive things about Rush. I'm a fan of a lot of bands that have been around an extremely long time and that have produced a lot of great output, but when you look at their most recent work — for example, the most recent Yes album, *Heaven and Earth*, I mean, it has a couple of catchy tunes on it, but it's a total letdown. You wouldn't say anything in the past 20 years I would say of Yes's work ranks with their best.

BIRZER: I agree, Tom.

WOODS: But yet *Clockwork Angels* by Rush I think can stand up against a whole lot of their catalog, and he can genuinely point to it and say I'm really proud of this. That's highly unusual. I mean, nobody's humming any recent Rolling Stones songs, as far as I know.

BIRZER: That's right. Or Who songs, right? Absolutely. And I think one of the great things about Rush is they've never been just a nostalgia act. When they make an album, they pour themselves into it. And it's not that they don't make mistakes, but I do think the last three albums they produced are all of — they're of the caliber of anything that the great bands of the '70s, whether it's Yes or Jethro Tull or themselves — I think they're making albums that are not only the equal of that, but in many ways are better.

And partly these guys love each other. They're comfortable. They know who they are, but they also know that they're not willing to put something out that is second best. They want it to be as high and as good as possible, and that is one thing I think people

have always loved about Rush. They do their own thing, but when they do it it's not half; it's always full, and they give everything they have to what they do, whether it's their live show or something that they produce that has nothing to do with music or the music itself. You can always expect that a Rush thing will have been done to the best of their ability.

WOODS: Now, what happens when you ask band members, hey, you guys are basically just influenced by Ayn Rand, right? What do they say?

BIRZER: Yeah, thanks, Tom, and we should go back to that, because I kind of went on that patriotic moment about 1976. So Neal had read Rand — he actually encountered, if I remember right, it was a copy of *The Fountainhead*. He was living in England in 1971. He didn't join Rush until 1974, and the band had already been together six years by the time he joined. They had had a drummer, John Rutsey, right when they had gotten their first record deal at a North American tour, and John Rutsey had to be kind of taken out. There were some problems with drug and alcohol, and he was a diabetic and wasn't taking care of himself. It was a really sad situation. He's since passed away.

But they needed to hire someone, and they hired Neal in August of 1974. When he came to them he had read everything imaginable, and this is where you can't just say he's a Randian. He had read Hemingway — he loved Hemingway. He had read all the great authors of the 1920s. Fitzgerald; he was very taken with modernist literature, everything from Mark Twain to the present. Philip Roth, everything.

And Rand, he found a copy of *The Fountainhead* on a bench in the London Tube station when he was there in 1971, again, very — he would have been 18, 19 at this point. He picked it up, loved it, but I wouldn't say he really loved it any more than he loved a lot of other things he was reading, but he found in *The Fountainhead* really an inspiration to follow Howard Roark and to say I need to do my own art, and whether I make money from it or whether I get rich from it or whether I'm hated for it, I've got to do this. So that was really the great inspiration for him. And I think it's a powerful inspiration. It's hard even — I don't consider myself a Randian at all, but I still have fond memories of Howard Roark. And okay, should he have blown up his building? That's one thing. But his dedication to art and the highest things above reputation and above profit, you know, for a kid especially, that's a powerful lesson to take away.

And that's what Neal took away, and he had the other two guys in Rush read it. They all decided this was good, so they decided to base *2112*, their moment of rebellion, their moment of really stressing they would never follow the path of another, they would only follow their muse. I think it was a powerful influence for them, and so Neal blatantly recognized this is dedicated to the genius of Ayn Rand. And he never really went back to her; there aren't a lot of other songs he wrote that deal with her, but that always got stuck, because he never dedicated anything to the genius of John Dos Passos, even though he loved Dos Passos. And songs like "The Camera Eye" on 1981's *Moving Picture* are nothing if not a complete rite of John Dos Passos. But very few people know who he is, so nobody sits there and dismisses him as, well, he's just a

John Dos Passos fan, but they do that with Ayn Rand. It's like, oh, he's obviously just a Randian. But he's not. He's read a million books. He read three of Rand's books; they meant something to him, but they probably haven't meant anything more than *East of Eden* or *Grapes of Wrath*. Does that help, Tom? I hope it —

WOODS: Yeah, it does; it does, but I want to make sure we give people the right idea, because I don't want people to think that if they listen to Rush, they're going to be getting a ponderous, philosophical lesson, because he's more subtle than that. And so I want to make sure that I'm not making it seem like the way to analyze him is by looking at philosophers and then trying to understand him. It's much better done than that. It's not so sledgehammer.

BIRZER: It can be. There are moments where it's a little sledgehammer I think, but rarely. In the same way, they can be extremely poetic too, and a lot of it has to do with how Geddy sings it. So imagine — you know, Geddy Lee, the base player and keyboardist, as well as the lead singer. So imagine, Neal writes all these lyrics, but he doesn't sing any of them. So they all have to be sing by Geddy Lee, and Geddy Lee would refuse — I mean, he's a man of equal integrity — he would refuse to sing something that he didn't believe in, and it also means that not only does he accept what Neal writes, but then in the very way he sings it, he puts his own spin on it.

So there are a few clunky lyrics in Rush. I would never say that there aren't. There are a few times when the sledgehammer comes out, but it's very rare. And because the music is usually so good and so complex, they're able to get away with even the kind of sledgehammer elements. But yeah, I think we would definitely miss things if we said these songs don't have Aristotle all over them, and Peart loves Aristotle. And we would also be remiss if we said people like current writers, like John Ford or Cormac McCarthy, they're just as strong an influence.

But as Neal's grown — he's not a 21-year-old anymore. He's 63, and I think as his writing has evolved, so has the power of the lyrics. But he's still just as cutting. In the most recent albums, he's as cutting culturally in terms of his criticism as he ever was. But the sledgehammer's not there anymore, just because Neal's an older guy who knows how to write better as well. I mean, he's always a good writer; don't get me wrong. But there is a difference between the 21-year-old Neal and the 60-year-old writer as they write.

WOODS: You know, on the other hand, there's at least one time I can think of when I wish the sledgehammer had been more present: the song, "Manhattan Project," about the creation of the nuclear bomb. The atomic bomb gets dropped on Japan twice, and the song is about the whole process, but it's a very antiseptic overview of what happens. There's no moral outrage. It's just, well, this happened, and we wrote a song about it.

BIRZER: Yeah, I agree, and yet there's still — with that song, Tom, there's a deep honesty, because I think it is Neal wrestling with that. And here's an example of how intelligent and interesting he is. He read 11 books on the history of the Manhattan

Project, serious academic books, just to write, what, 100 words of those lyrics? To make sure he got it correct. So I think in the end he just did it up saying let's present this as a question, though my guess is, knowing Neal, he would have ended up on the side that this was not the right thing to do. But it's hard to know, because he doesn't — you're right. He doesn't come down on a side with that. Yet it's still a powerful song. It's a beautiful song.

WOODS: What happens when you ask him today — and I want to talk about music again in a minute, but just to keep people with us who maybe don't know about Rush's music — if you ask him today what are your political views, where do you stand now as of 2015, what kind of answer is he going to give?

BIRZER: Well, he still calls himself — he calls himself a bleeding heart libertarian, and he loves the website — as far as I know, he loves the website Bleeding Heart Libertarianism, so people like Steve Horowitz, Sarah Skwire, these are the kinds of people that he really gravitates towards. And they like Rush, too. I mean, Steve Horowitz is as big of a Rush fan as I am, by far. And I'm sure you know Steve, the Austrian economist.

WOODS: Sure, yeah, we've written to each other.

BIRZER: Yeah, and Sarah at Liberty Fund. They're great, great people, and they're huge Rush fans. But that's what Neal calls himself, but in his last book, he has a very interesting idea where he juxtaposes — he says, all right, let's take an example of what I mean by "bleeding heart libertarianism." If we take someone like Edward Abbey, whom Neal admires — Edward Abbey, author of *The Monkey Wrench Gang* and a number of other great kind of modern Westerns and a cranky curmudgeon kind of guy who wrote about the Southwest and was extremely pro-freedom and pretty much an anarchist, but also worried about the environment, mostly because he saw corporations and governments destroying it for their own benefit. You know, Edward Abbey once responded that, well, what's the solution to all of the immigrants coming over from Mexico? How do we really help them? His argument was, well, we should arm them, train them, and send them back home to take care of their own government.

And Neal's response is, well, as a bleeding heart libertarian, I'm much more in favor of making sure they can come to America and assimilate and have jobs. So that's kind of his answer. And he respects Edward Abbey a lot, but he also thinks there are different ways of dealing with this. And Tom, you probably have a better grasp of bleeding heart libertarianism than I do, but it's essentially the argument that real libertarianism is concerned with the poor, and we make sure that when we have government policies, those policies are in place to aid the poor. So not really direct welfare programs, but we ease their transition into society. We make citizenship more accessible; we don't deny them schooling, you know, so in an ideal world, we'd have only private schools, but in the world we live in, maybe we should make sure that in the public schools, they're taken care of.

So he's been criticized a lot recently, because Neal Peart has generally maintained his politics at a very philosophical level. But in an interview recently with *Rolling Stone* this summer — I think it was a terrible interview, frankly, from all sides. I don't think Neal was at his best, and I don't think *Rolling Stone* tried to make him look that good, frankly. But in that interview, he said something about, oh, I hate the modern Republican Party; they're really all just about protecting corporations; they clearly don't care about common people, and therefore the only good person — and he's now an American, by the way; he's an American citizen, Neal is — the only thing they could ever do is kind of hold their nose and vote Democrat.

That's caused a lot of controversy, as you can imagine, because most American fans of Neal Peart grew up on his libertarianism. And one of the points I try to make in the book, Tom — and I have no evidence for this, except anecdotal evidence, evidence of observing what people have said about him, the Rush fans I meet — most Rush fans tend to be either very libertarian or very conservative, and they're always skeptical of government. I've rarely met Rush fans who are hardcore Democrats or socialists or democratic socialists. Now, in England that's just the opposite. But here in America and Canada, it's rare to find a Rush fan who's not, at least on some level, pretty libertarian. So he angered a lot of people with that, but also I think people are willing to say all right, Neal's been great; sorry you said that; we still love you.

WOODS: Yeah, that's sort of what I expected. I want to ask, suppose somebody's getting into Rush for the first time. How do you direct them? There are so many entry points that are possible. What would be the most accessible way to get started that would still give them a good sense of what they're all about?

BIRZER: Well, I think — yeah, Tom, what a great question, and of course, if you had five Rush fans here, we'd have seven opinions, so — (laughing) Rush fans love to argue about this stuff all the time. As you and I talked privately, my favorite album of theirs is *Grace under Pressure*. It's really nothing like anything else they did. As I see it, you can break Rush down into five periods. So they have their period from 1974 up to 1980, where they're writing incredibly complex — to the point where they were worried they were getting so complex they couldn't even play it onstage. Really complex progressive rock that's heavy as well, but they're doing so many time signatures in, say nine minutes, so many changes, so many weird musical things. It's very orchestral, but for a three-piece band they have a hard time with that. If you love old '70s prog rock mixed with — imagine mixing Iron Maiden with Yes — that's where you want to start.

Then they go through a phase starting in 1980 with their album *Permanent Waves*, a phase that really lasts until about 1996 with their album *Test for Echo*, where they're just experimenting with everything, and it's the closest they ever come to being kind of pop-y. But they explore new wave. So one of their albums they kind of sound like The Fix, if you remember The Fix from the early '80s.

WOODS: Oh sure, yeah.

BIRZER: Another album, they sound like The Talking Heads and The Police. So they go through a phase where they're really trying all kinds of things. One of their albums that fans either love or hate, called *Hold Your Fire*, 1987, is basically a jazz-fusion album. It could have been Weather Report making this album, so —

WOODS: I saw them on that tour. It was the only time I ever saw them. It must've been back in the late '80s, yeah.

BIRZER: That's cool. I think it's a great album, but it sounds nothing like anything else they did. So they're constantly experimenting. What they've done in this final phase — and they had a number of tragedies. Kind of infamously or famously, Neal lost his daughter in a car wreck, and then he lost his wife to cancer all within about 10 months. And nobody knew if Rush was going to come back. Everybody assumed they were done. This would have been '97 and '98. And they took five years off, and then they came back with this album, *Vapor Trails*, and then a few years later they came out with an album, *Snakes and Arrows*, and then their final album, *Clockwork Angels*.

So they make these three albums that I actually think are the best albums of their career. And what they've done in those albums, there's just incredible maturity and confidence. No 20-year-old could have made these albums. These are albums that are incredibly complex but just beautiful in every way. And there's anger in them, understandably after Neal lost all of this. There's hope, because these guys made it through the horrors. And so I call this Stage 3. But what they've done in these last three albums is they've made really complex songs, complex lyrics, but they tell them in an almost story-like fashion. This is going to sound a little bizarre, Tom, but it's almost like talking to your coolest, hip grandpa who's telling you what life is like. They've lived it, they know it, and yet, they're rocking. So it's just this wild mix. A lot of blues. They never were a blues band, but there's a lot of blues that shows up in these later albums. And they've just matured.

So it depends, Tom. You started off by asking where to start. If you want to do kind of hard rock that's really prog, go to any of their 1970s albums. If you want to look at kind of their poppier, new waveier jazz stuff, anything from the '80s and '90s. If you're looking for great cultural criticism and really complex storytelling, but accessible, go to the last three albums. I hope that helps, Tom.

WOODS: Wow, I don't know. I don't actually have — I know this is a terrible thing to admit, but I think I only have a few Rush albums, so I only vaguely know the story that you're telling here of their musical evolution. And after looking at your book, I am dying to go out and get more.

BIRZER: Well, I would say — I don't think it's their best album, but I think it's such a good album that it would be the best for anyone to start with — it would be *Snakes and Arrows*. That's their 2007 album. And that's the one where it's still bluesy, but they're doing really interesting things. It's also incredibly libertarian, because basically the whole theme is what have we done, what kind of world did we create, what kind of world are we giving to our children. And there's a great line in the opening song

about how fundamentalisms have now shaped the world as much in the Middle East as they have in the middle West, and what have we done. It's beautiful but gut wrenching, a little bit of bitterness, but there's still a lot of hope in it as well, and just a great album. Some of their most innovative — music that really imitates nature in an Aristotelian way. So a lot of guitar work that sounds like waves. I'm not doing justice to it, Tom, but just incredible, incredible stuff.

WOODS: All right, I'm going to link to it on the show notes page. Okay, so it's going to be TomWoods.com/511 for Episode 511. I'll link to that; I'll link to *Grace under Pressure*; I'll of course link to your book; whatever else we think of, we'll throw up there at TomWoods.com/511.

I do want to ask you a couple more things before we go; is there something you wanted to say?

BIRZER: Oh just that it was that album, *Snakes and Arrows*, Tom, that that's what got them on *The Colbert Report*, and that — I don't know if you like Steven Colbert, but that was — you can still watch it online — but his interview with them was not only so funny, so hilarious — and you realize, these guys, the three guys of Rush are hilarious guys —

WOODS: Oh yeah. Alex Lifeson giving the speech at the — was it the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame?

BIRZER: (laughing) Oh yeah.

WOODS: Unbelievable. That was so good. That was so good, it's going to make your day when you watch it. I'm going to link to that Hall of Fame speech, absolutely. It is so beautifully done. I'll link to that at TomWoods.com/511. All right, sorry to interrupt, but I had to point that out.

BIRZER: No, no, and Tom, too, I think for Rush, they have been hated by the critics and loved —

WOODS: Yeah, I wanted to ask you that; that was one of my questions. Why — the critics hated all the good groups. They hated Yes, they hated Jethro Tull, because they're all supposedly pretentious, but they love groups that are a total bore, that every album sounds like the previous one. What is the matter with these people?

BIRZER: Well, I have a theory, and I think it's a little bit more than a theory, but for me it's a theory at this point, and I'll just put it this way: the Americans hated Rush and Yes and Genesis, because they were not blues-based, and *Rolling Stone*, which of course is the most establishment anti-establishment magazine ever. I mean, they are the establishment, even though they still think they're not, which I think is one of the dangers of the power of that magazine. They hated those bands, because for them rock and roll had to have come out of the black experience, and if it came out of the English experience, it was not legitimate. In England, people hated Rush because Rush

liked Ayn Rand, and therefore they must be right-wing Fascists who obviously don't understand the plight of the common person. And of course every Rush fan, many of them who are very working class and middle class, they know that Rush is speaking to them against these elites who don't realize they're elites, and that is one of the reasons they have been hated by the critics and loved by their fans.

But I do a thing in the book, Tom, and it's right at the beginning, where I just show how *The New York Times* responded to Rush over the years. When they went on *The Colbert Report*, everything changed for them, because suddenly this nerdy, intellectual, bizarre band that all the critics hated, they suddenly realized, wait a minute, these guys have been around; they've stuck together; they're doing interesting things. And then of course the movie came out, *Beyond the Lighted Stage*, and at this point, it would be really hard for a *New York Times* or a *Rolling Stone* not to take them seriously.

But what happened, and a friend of mine, Rob Freedman, who wrote a great book on Rush a few years ago, on the Aristotelianism of Rush, what Rob notes is all of the critics who hated them are either dead or they're out of a job, because they're retired. And now those of us who grew up with Rush, we're in positions of power, and we now know they made us who we are. Rush was that band that when we were in 8th grade, they said, you know what, it's okay to be yourself. It's okay to be the kid who gets picked on in the locker room, because you're the guy who in the end is going to live by your own convictions, and I really think that's why Rush has meant so much to people, not only in 1981, but in 2015, because we now look back, here we are 45, 46, 47, 48, and we thank them, because they allowed us to be who we were in a time period that said we weren't supposed to be.

WOODS: Did you send a copy of this book to Neal himself?

BIRZER: (laughing) I did not, and there are a lot of reasons for that, Tom, and I'm glad you asked that. I got asked to write this book — well, I should say I volunteered to write this book, and then the man I volunteered that to wrote me back and said yes, you need to write this book. And that man is a guy I've come to love and cherish, a very famous science fiction writer by the name of Kevin J. Anderson who lives in Colorado. Incredible writer. He's five years older than I am. We met when I was at the University of Colorado last year and really hit it off. He is one of Neal's closest friends, and he has written now two books with Neal. They've written a couple of short stories together. So *Clockwork Angels* and *Clockwork Lives*, those were co-written by Neal and Kevin.

They've been good friends for over 20 years, best friends really, and Kevin runs his own press called WordFire Press, which has done quite well and was really one of the leaders in e-publishing. So he's the one who published this book, and he's been a great friend to me and a great mentor. But he wrote the note to Neal saying, Neal, we're going to write this book about you; this is Brad Birzer, he introduced me, and Neal's response, being very Neal, was ugh, I hate this kind of stuff; I don't like it when people

write about me; I'm not important, but if you feel you have to do this, go ahead and do it. And of course —

WOODS: (laughing) Oh, come on.

BIRZER: Oh yeah, not exaggerating. Kevin passed this on to me, and I wrote back, and I said, well, Kevin, it doesn't sound like Neal really wants me to do this. And his response was, Brad, that's Neal. Neal hates attention. So it's just a part of who he is. It doesn't bother me at all. As he says, I love being respected; I hate being famous. And yet, there he is. He is famous. There are thousands upon thousands of us who admire us, and if I could give the highest praise to him — I'm sorry he is that way, but it's just the way he is.

But Neal I think, like all good libertarians, like all good people who understand this, he doesn't want you, Tom, to be a mini-Neal Peart. He wants you to be Tom. And he doesn't want me to be a mini-Neal Peart. He wants me to be Brad. And I think that is the greatest strength of his individualism, that he's not looking to create students or conformists; he truly wants to live in the world, and that's what he wants in his art. He wants us to be the best we can be — not to be him, but to be true individuals. And to me — and I know you, Tom. You and I are both eccentric. We both want to do our own thing. That is very Peartian. Peart wants us to be the best.

WOODS: Tell everybody the full title of the book before we wrap up.

BIRZER: Oh sure. It's not my title; I wish it were. One of my three closest friends from college came up with the title, my friend, Kevin McCormick. It's called *Neal Peart: Cultural Repercussions*. And I'm not good at titles, and I wrote a couple of my close Rush friends, and I said what title should this be. And Steve Horowitz wrote me back and said it should be "Neal Peart: A Man of His Words." And I loved that, so I used it as —

WOODS: Yeah, that's not a bad one. I like that.

BIRZER: Yeah, I love that. But it was my friend Kevin McCormick who said, well, look, you're writing about a drummer, but you're not writing about his drumming. So why not make it "Cultural Repercussions," and I thought that was great, so that's what we went with. So I have to give that to Kevin. But the title is meant to say, here's a drummer who actually his words matter as much if not more than his drumming, so these are cultural repercussions. And my point in the book is essentially that Neal created, through not necessarily what he wanted to, but he created an entire generation, maybe two, of men and women — mostly men, because his audience has been mostly men — who basically were taught that our elders, especially those who grew up as hippies, were fools, and even though they talked about peace and love, they really just wanted us to conform to what they thought was true, and that real life is about being an individual and doing what's right, regardless of what the crowd says. So I think there's a whole Neal Peart generation out there, and I'm hoping that in the book, that I'm speaking for a lot of people and not just me.

WOODS: Well, I certainly want people to check out TomWoods.com/511, because there you'll find Brad's book; I'll link to several of the albums that we made reference to in this discussion. We'll make sure that you get a good grounding in music that everybody assumes you listen to anyway, so this time when people bring up Rush you'll know what to say. It's like you don't follow sports, but everybody assumes you do, and they're asking you about this third baseman. You know, I haven't followed the Red Sox since the 1980s; I don't even know what these people are talking about. So this'll be like a nice briefing for you for the next time you're at a libertarian conference, but also it's a neat project. It's very well executed; it's fun and interesting to read.

I'm also going to post as related episodes to this one of course previous episodes with Brad, but also my interview with Ian Anderson from Episode 3. The show had a very raw sound in those days, so think of that as being analogous to early Rush albums, okay? So you've got that, if that helps you Rush fans understand what I'm trying to say. And then also, my episode where I talk to Steve Hogarth of Marillion, which is another great band you folks should know about. So I'll put all that there — it is a musical smorgasbord — at TomWoods.com/511. I kept you longer than I expected to. I have many other things I wanted to ask, but —

BIRZER: Tom, always love talking to you. You know that.

WOODS: It's great. We have such a great time, and I can't wiat to be able to tell people that your new course for Liberty Classroom, *Trails West: How Freedom Settled the West*, we're going to be giving away to everybody in the world for free. I'll make an announcement here on the show.

BIRZER: Oh, that's so —

WOODS: Yeah, it's going to be great. I just bought the domain — it's not up as of October 14th, 2015; it's not up yet, but I just bought FreeHistoryCourse.com. Why was that available? I don't know, but I grabbed it.

BIRZER: Thank the good Lord it was.

WOODS: Yeah, it's wonderful, FreeHistoryCourse.com. Anyway, thanks so much for your time, Brad.

BIRZER: Tom, it is always great talking to you.