



Genesis: A tight web of slides, costumes, props, masks, and shattering explosions

Gabriel & Genesis

Short on Hair, Long on Gimmicks

By RICHARD CROMELIN

LOS ANGELES—Peter Gabriel's five o'clock shadow tints not only cheeks and chin but the shaved patch of flesh which cuts up from the top of his forehead into the center of his hair, as if a tiny lawnmower had gone to work. Will the style catch on? "There are one or two people in England who waddle about with it," he admits. "Very good for my ego. But I think it's too violent a step. I mean I'm not sure how many people would consider it an asset to their sex appeal. I think if I can link it up in the public mind with virility, success or even some occult mystical significance, then perhaps it will spring forth in abundance. But probably not.

"The gimmickry is remarkably good at getting pictures in the paper," says Gabriel, lead singer of the onrushing theatrical-rock group, Genesis. "I'm only too happy to play that game, because I enjoy playing it. It does make a difference. It's a means to an end."

To Genesis, even their elaborate stage show is decidedly secondary to the music and falls at least partially into the attention-getting category. "I think there's enough going on on the visual side to be attractive to first-timers," Gabriel explains. "A lot of people don't get interested in the music until a desire to listen to it has been set in after they've seen some of the visual things."

Genesis' show, which has developed into a tight web of slides, costumes, props, masks, shattering explosions and highly sophisticated lighting, had its origin when the band set out on the British club circuit about five years ago and Gabriel found that the sound systems weren't conveying his words too well. "So I used to try to do some sort of mime—mime is a very grand word for waving the arms in a fashion. I would wave my hands to try to give some idea of what I was trying to sing about. The fox mask was the first time I actually took on a costume and tried to act out a character.

It sort of went on from there."

Genesis' strikingly coherent parade of visual images (both amusing and unsettling) is a far cry from the chaotic melange that too often passes for rock theater. The band's music—which ranges from melodic science-fiction space rock with mythic undercurrents to macabre twistings of Victorian fairy tales—provides ideal fodder for visual presentation. "About '68 or '69 . . . we stopped writing songs that we thought could be done by other people," says Gabriel. "At that time our idea was to get a film running concurrently, rather than what we've evolved, which I suppose is more of a theatrical ripoff. We do have big visual things in mind at the time of writing, and the more we can get across what was floating around when the thing was written, the happier we are."

Genesis began as a four-man songwriting team—Tony Banks, Michael Rutherford, Anthony Phillips and Gabriel, all students at Charterhouse School, "a repressive, middle-class institution" in Britain's Home Counties. "At that time," according to Gabriel, "we thought these masterpieces were ready to be recorded by thousands of Number-One recording stars, and so we made a tape which was duly sent 'round most of Tin Pan Alley, and duly returned. We had one song covered by Rita Pavone's brother in Italy, which was a cause of great excitement."

The four writers eventually hooked up with pop mastermind Jonathan King (a Charterhouse alumnus), who sold them on the idea of doing their own material and dubbed them Genesis. King produced the first album, *From Genesis to Revelation* (on British Decca), but the teaming ended soon thereafter when the band broke out of the standard pop-song format.

There followed the traditional English-group country-cottage period, the traditional personnel changes (the lineup now is Banks, Rutherford, Gabriel, Phil Collins and Steve Hackett), and the

traditional discouraging treks to the record companies. They were finally signed to Charisma and gained considerable popularity in Belgium, France and Italy. Then they built a following at home, first in the clubs and then on the concert trail. With the word spread in America by rimshot and mellotron enthusiasts, Genesis recently completed its first headlining tour of the States.

Among the comments overheard after its three-day stand at LA's Roxy Night Club were: "I haven't cried at a show since I saw Nureyev dance, until now;" and a calmer, though no less enthusiastic, "This reminds me of the response Jethro Tull was getting when it was starting out." An enlightening exchange had been observed two weeks earlier, in the lobby of the Santa Monica Civic after a Hawkwind concert, where an intense-looking young man took the Genesis T-shirt off a stranger's back for \$20.

Gabriel, greatly encouraged by the reaction of the audiences here and by the fact that Charisma has switched from Buddha to Atlantic as its American distributor, expects sales and fame to start picking up. It's been a long haul (six years and five fairly obscure albums) but things finally appear to have turned around. "We want, obviously," says Gabriel, "a lot more success than we have now, say in terms of record sales or whatever it is. We're alright as long as things keep advancing. The speed at which it happens isn't so important to us, provided we don't lose too much money. We used to be in a hurry to do things, but now we're not, because it seems the longer it takes things to happen, the better relationship you have with the people that are listening to the music. I think it's a less personal thing when they're hyped, so really we've been quite happy with the pace of the thing. We've been able to play to the people as the interest has grown."

And you know, that haircut might not look too bad. If only you didn't have to shave every day . . .

'Red Necks': A Honky-Tonk Hymn for Okies

By CHET FLIPPO

AUSTIN, TEX.—A jean-clad ex-rocker from Texas is the last person you'd bet on to write a new anthem for country folks. But when it became obvious that "Okie From Muskogee" was fading from mid-America's consciousness and no longer met the Seventies' demand for blue-collar ethnic awareness, Texan Bob McDill filled that gap with "Red Necks, White Socks & Blue Ribbon Beer." This song, as recorded by Johnny Russell, has become the honky-tonk hymn from Atlanta to Winona and points beyond:

No we don't fit in with that
white collar crowd
We're a little too rowdy and a
little too proud
But there's no place I'd rather
be than right here
With my red neck, white socks
and Blue Ribbon beer.*

If you find yourself in a country working man's bar around closing time and the customers start singing this song, well, neighbor, you just better smile and sing along and buy a round if you want to take all your teeth home with you. "Red Necks" has that same built-in fuse for the barroom crowd which "Okie" did. When Russell recently toured with Charlie Pride, the Pride organization advised Russell that "that song" was not, under any circumstances, to be performed. Too much explosive potential.

"Red Necks" has even inspired a sociological study, which describes the appeal as "prideful identification with a group which is often denigrated."

Twenty-nine-year-old Bob McDill sat in his office at Jack Clement's headquarters in Nashville and said: "I just wrote a song; I didn't write any *prideful identification*." He's a staff songwriter in Clement's stable and he had his eye on the clock; at 5 PM his wife was coming to pick him up and they were going out to get "roaring drunk."

When McDill was growing up in Beaumont, Texas, and hanging out with the likes of Dickey Lee and Johnny Winter, it never occurred to him that he would one day crystallize the silent majority's vague yearnings for class identity. He was too busy being a rock 'n' roller.

In Nashville McDill started attracting attention with compositions like "Amanda" and "Catfish John." A writer named Chuck Neese came up with the "red necks, white socks and blue ribbon beer" line and McDill and fellow writer Wayland Holyfield turned the song out in one afternoon.

"I was so high on the idea," McDill said, "I wrote the words in a rush. I was writing about the Country Corner Bar and the Bamboo. To get more imagery, I ran to the Bamboo and got an Arkansas Lunch—a bowl of white beans, cornbread, and a Pabst Blue Ribbon. It's funny, after Johnny recorded it, Pabst threatened to sue; they didn't want their beer associated with rednecks. It surprised a lot of people that RCA put it out. It didn't surprise Waylon and me, because in spite of our hair, we really are rednecks."

The song quickly became a country skyrocket and its impact astonished McDill: "We were careful to polish it so it wouldn't be a putdown but now I realize what the song actually *is* in relation to the mood of country people and it's scary to think of yourself doing that."

*Jack/BMI & Jando/ASCAP