

Genesis: To Them, It's Only Rock & Role

BY BARBARA CHARONE

LONDON — Having recently sold England by the pound, Genesis and Atlantic Records now turn their attention to the United States, where the esteemed buck reigns. A Genesis tour is in progress, scheduled to run through February 1st. An accompanying album, *The Lamb Lies Down on Broadway*, is just now in release.

Tony Banks, the keyboard player, describes the double album as "not really a *concept* album. It's probably closer to the lyrical content of [the Who's] *Tommy*, rather than [Yes's] *Tales from Topographic Oceans*."

"Well, it certainly isn't Peter Gabriel's life work," the lead singer deadpans, adding: "It's more a *plot* album than a *concept* album."

"Basically," says a man from Hipgnosis, which designed the cover, "it's a hippie tale about a counter-culture hero's journey inside his own head. But," he adds with authority, "the story is really just a vehicle for the music."

"I don't know what it's about," Phil Collins shakes his head, "I'm just the drummer. Ask Peter..."

If the participants seem a touch vague on the album contents, consider the stage show: Five years ago, Genesis first began to flirt with multimedia. Back then lead singer Gabriel performed in pantomime to the group's fairy-tale lyrics. Later embellishments included explosions and dramatic aging routines a la *The Werewolf of London*, using masks and elaborate makeup. Backstage in sleazy dressing rooms the group innocently sipped tea and nibbled crumpets.

They have since matured. Pantomime has given way to sophisticated animation, backdrop projections and fuzz boxes.

Optimistically, the group plans to use a hefty chunk of *The Lamb Lies Down on Broadway* as the nucleus of their stage act while touring the States, though other groups have exposed their epic presentations to the indignity of yawns and shouts of "start boogieing!" Fewer costume changes are expected this time around. They are expected to rely more on projections, lighting and Peter Gabriel's stage antics.

"We still want to take the listener out of the concert hall and into the fan-

tasy," Gabriel announces, citing last year's Red Buddha Theater multimedia show as a step forward. "Rock visuals have to go beyond serving the extended whims of superstars.

"The concerts should work more like a film. A film would make the story

World, Peter Townshend says the idea for *Tommy* sprang from a single, "Rael," later included on *The Who Sell Out*. Execs at Atlantic Records describe this as an "incredible coincidence.") Peter Gabriel continues: "It was necessary that he have certain blemishes on

a double album, especially a *concept* album," says Tony Banks, suddenly stumbling on the word. "The songs are related, but they stand up separately as well. You could listen to a few tracks on the radio and get a fair idea what the record's about. You couldn't do that with *Selling England by the Pound*."

Genesis has its audience, but also its critics, who point mockingly at surreal moods and pretentious lyrics. The new album, Gabriel says, will combat that. "It covers a much wider spectrum than our past albums," he says with a half-cocked smile. "On the right wing there are more conventional straight pop songs, and on the left, more sound pictures. It's got the best the band has to offer, a comprehensive selection.

"People think we're more airy-fairy than Yes or ELP," Banks says, "you know, more fey because we don't sweat as much. I think this album will end all those comparisons entirely."

Operating on the principle that they play better in rehearsal than in the studio, Genesis wrote and recorded the album at a rented country cottage in Wales. They used mobile recording equipment.

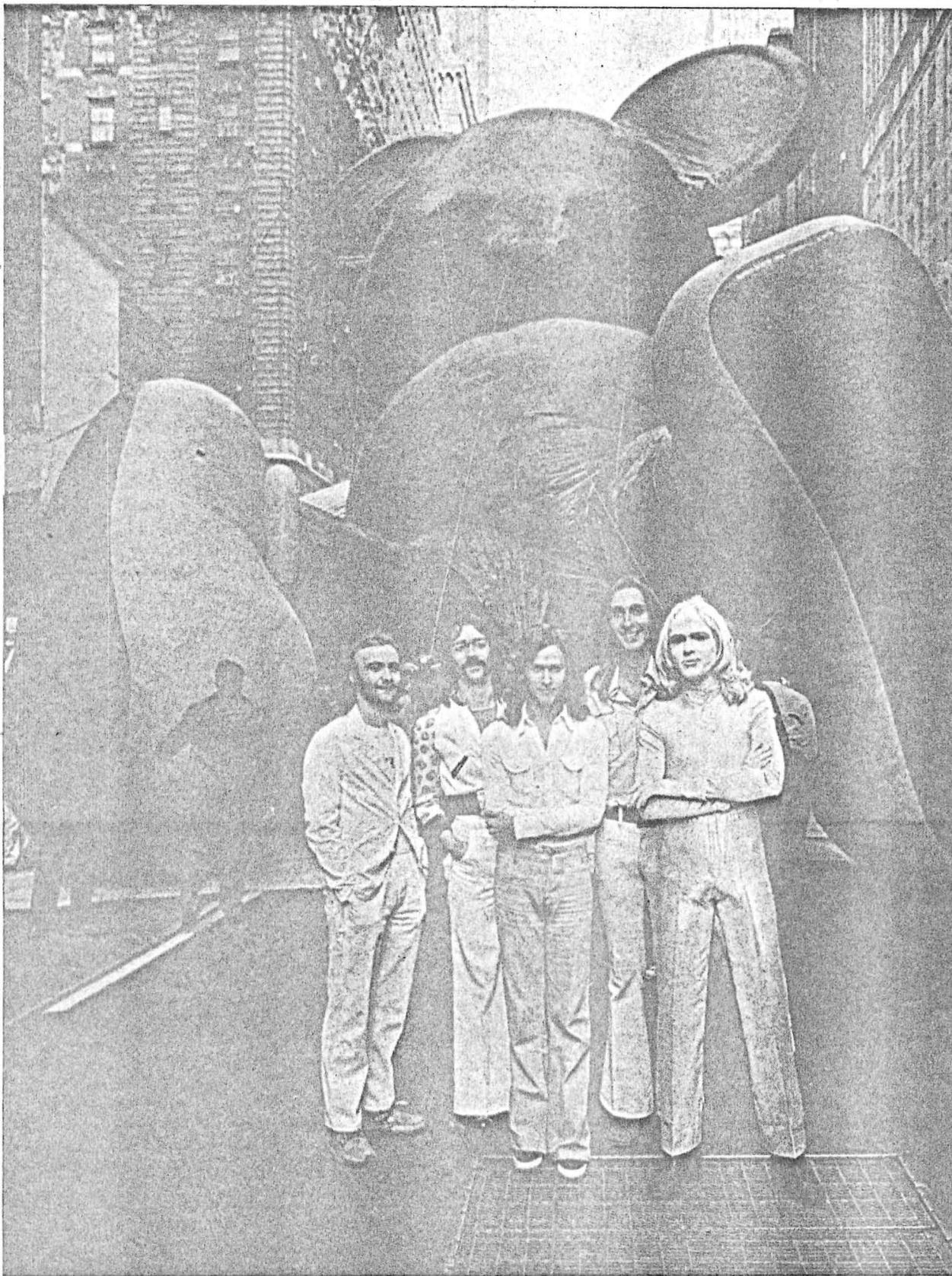
If the British group has thrown away its crumpets and bowler hats and adopted the raunchy, speedy ethos of New York City, the proof of the pudding will be found in their U.S. tour reception.

They're ready and already hip deep in defense of what the critics might have to say.

"There are people who believe that the costumes, props and slides we use are crutches to hold up the crippled music," Gabriel says casually but cynically. "But you're cheating your audience if you don't allow them to hear the music

with the full strength with which it was created. Visuals are rubbish unless they are integrated with the continuity of the music. You can't put layers of makeup on a beautiful face unless the features are there in the first place."

The music is "there" for a sizable cult audience that has followed Genesis through seven albums since 1969. *Selling England by the Pound* attracted the esteemed buck to the tune of 150,000 sales before the current tour, and, Atlantic says, is again a hot item.



Genesis, synthesizing Broadway in London: The lamb lies down on them.

more comprehensible but we're working toward that with the three screens. Most people get onstage and act like they presume themselves to be. But if you're going to occupy a role, you have to discard previous roles and not simply adopt the standard rock pose, a bit like an actor really."

Genesis has set its "plot" album in wild and woolly New York City: "It was a conscious setting," says Gabriel, "because it was important that the main character, Rael, be earthy." (The character's name has come up before: In a recent interview conducted by *Record*

his character which were whole and identifiable when taken into a fantasy situation. What fascinated me about New York was the speed and aggression of the city.

"You see things close to you with tainted spectacles," Gabriel adds, "You don't see things under your nose. But the setting is basically a device for making the character real, more extroverted and violent. Adolescents adjust by finding a slot. But Rael is slotless. He feels he's a waste of material—all he can do is give up or escape."

"We were hesitant about putting out