

Genesis in the land of milk and honey

By John Milward

CHICAGO—SOMETIMES, a single voice can do it. Phil Collins, Genesis' leader/vocalist/drummer, was at Ron of Japan sipping sake with the rest of the group in celebration of their Chicago concert. As he eased into the warmth of the sake, he spoke about the difficulties the band has had disentangling itself from the image of Peter Gabriel, the group's lead vocalist since 1970. "It only takes one voice," he said, "to shout out 'Gabriel,' and I get weird. I can't even tell if they're yelling 'Fuck Gabriel' or 'Bring back Gabriel'; it hurts pretty bad. I guess I want people to like me."

Collins shouldn't worry. There's strong evidence that Genesis is doing just fine: *Wind & Wuthering*, their second album since Collins took over for Gabriel in 1975, is the fastest selling of their nine albums and will be the first to go gold. "The plodding Genesis technique," as guitarist/bassist Mike Rutherford calls it, has begun to pay off.

Part of the Genesis strategy has been to develop a cult audi-

ence through live performances. "People should feel they've discovered the band," explains Genesis manager Tony Smith, "and then the association is more solid and personal." Taking the managerial helm in 1973 when Genesis was already a major band in Europe and Canada, Smith plowed their assets into cracking the crucial American market, gambling on an instant-headlining approach. Aside from three supporting dates—including two bizarre affairs with Lou Reed—Genesis has never opened in the U.S.

Chicago was an early Genesis stronghold; their fifth time in the city, they walked into three sold-out shows at the town's class hall, the Auditorium, avoiding the acoustically horrible Amphitheatre.

"The public is slow to catch on to things," sighed Collins. "But here we are, the band is nine years old and people are just starting to hear of the group."

Genesis was originally formed in 1966 as a songwriting collective—keyboardist Tony Banks and Rutherford are the only remaining charter members, while Collins and guitarist Steve Hackett joined in 1971. Cloistered by their cult status, the band sought

a sound that—by its purposefully anonymous nature—was meant to be created without dependence on any of the individual personalities involved. Considering the potential disaster of Gabriel's 1975 decision to pursue a solo career, the band's amorphous nature was possibly the luckiest break of their career.

With Gabriel, Genesis' stage show was an almost clinically detached theatrical affair, with the musicians in anonymous support of Gabriel's elaborately costumed postures and accompanying slide presentation.

Now, in contrast, Genesis' new show emphasizes the individual players and their songs. With drummer Chester Thompson, formerly with Weather Report and Zappa, added for live shows and a bit of jazz credibility, Collins moves from his drums to the center-stage microphone like a child happily scampering around a playground.

"I don't think anybody consciously laid back when Peter was up front," said Collins, "but you did sometimes feel very insignificant. Like I could play a great concert one night, and it'd be 'Hey Peter, great show.' The next night I'd play shitty, and the same guy would [Cont. on 24]

Gabriel blows his own horn

By Dave Marsh

NEW YORK—Peter Gabriel is so shy that he's never anything but edgy in public situations. The size of this room, with its high ceiling and spacious window overlooking a garden and East 48th Street, probably doesn't help. Fingering a midmorning cup of tea, Gabriel doesn't seem entirely certain what he's doing in a five story townhouse rented from cinema celebrities Garson Kanin and Ruth Gordon, and occupied by his wife, two infant daughters, manager and publicist. But then, he's earned his anxiety. Tomorrow, he'll face an audience for the first time in two years. More importantly, it's his

first time ever as a solo performer after fronting Genesis for a decade.

"I quit primarily on instinct," explained the 27-year-old Gabriel, not for the first time. "I was sick of the road. And the success of Genesis meant everything was so big, there was no risk—except all those livelihoods at stake."

So he retreated to a countryside cottage, growing vegetables,

making babies, writing songs. About a year ago, he began seeking a producer, talking to several before settling on Bob Ezrin, whose previous experience with Kiss, Alice Cooper and Lou Reed made him the least probable choice.

"He wasn't particularly in love with Genesis," Gabriel says, deadpan as [Cont. on 24]





Genesis' new beginning (l to r): Rutherford, Banks, Hackett, Collins, Thompson (inset)

Genesis

[Cont. from 22] say, 'Hey Peter, great show.'

"I think when people looked at Peter they thought, 'Whew, what a weird guy.' They viewed him as a kind of mysterious traveler from who-knows-where. Whereas with me, I prefer a 'Phil, you know, he's a regular guy.'

"The band in some respects has never been stronger," notes Phil, "but then the stronger you get the more pressure you've got to deal with." For Collins, one of those pressures is that his is now the recognizable Genesis voice,

and he is therefore a potential solo commodity. Similarly, he sees Hackett's continuing solo projects (one album, *Voyage of the Acolyte*, is already out on Chrysalis with another in the planning stages) as well as his own work with Brand X (which has produced one album, *Unorthodox Behaviour*) as forcing Banks and Rutherford into solo projects. Collins knows that such a movement could be the beginning of the end.

"Genesis is sort of a prop," said Banks, "that gives you a starting definition as to what you are. And if it suddenly wasn't there, it'd be a shock to lose it because it's something you've learned to rely on." 

Gabriel

[Cont. from 22] always. "And I wasn't particularly in love with his records. But we agreed on certain things: keep it simple, strive for intimacy in the arrangements." The result was *Peter Gabriel*, which neatly balances Genesis-like fantasy, hard rock and blues of the Mose Allison/Randy Newman ilk, sometimes within the same song. "The focus is on my songwriting," he says. "And I suppose you would say it's mere pop."

Gabriel has been known for certain eccentricities: shaving a bald spot from forehead to crown on one tour, and on others appearing in whiteface and assorted odd costumes. His lyric flights of fancy were also notable. He hasn't changed much. The first song on the solo album is called "Moribund the Burgermeister." And for a recent fan magazine photo session, Gabriel posed in a garbage can on Third Avenue, wearing his wife's coat and a fencing mask. But the solo material generally is more personal,

and Gabriel now performs in a silver gray track suit.

Gabriel's current approach has come under the unlikely influence of Bruce Springsteen, whose 1975 show at London's Hammersmith Odeon changed his thinking about visual presentation. "I felt like he was my friend," Gabriel says simply, "and I don't think anyone else left the show that night without the same feeling." Like Springsteen, Gabriel is a performing dynamo—facing down to the front of the stage, swinging the mike stand at the overhead lights, generally playing the part of a very assured hard-rock performer. (The focus drifts only when he sits in a corner, playing piano.)

Gabriel's performance obviously made a big impression in Chicago, where the group was called back for two encores, although it knew only enough material for one. Since that town is a hotbed of Genesis fans, and Gabriel's show includes only one number from his old group's repertoire, the past may be lived down quicker than anyone could have predicted. 

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