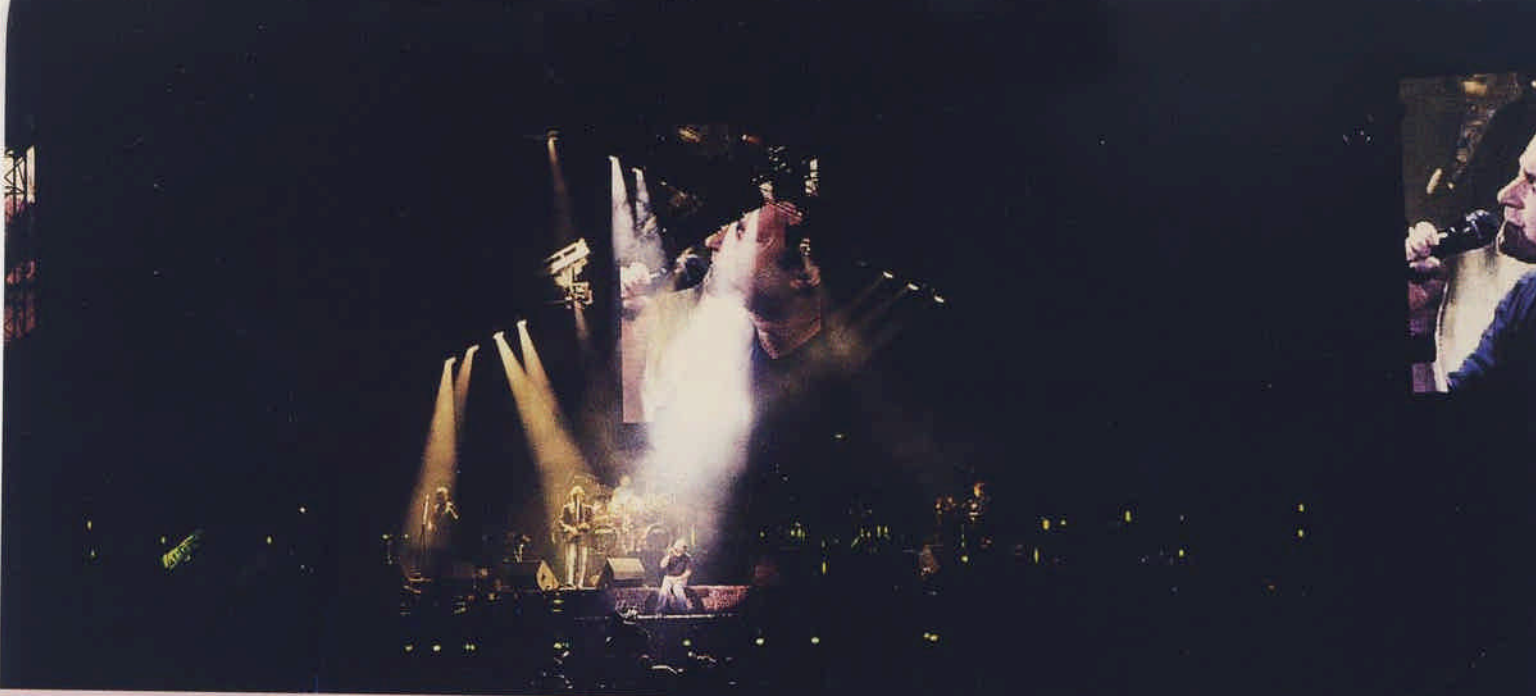


GENESIS

The long and the short of it

GENESIS erupted in a volcano of hit-packed albums, and sold-out super-concerts in '92. Yet some knockers wanted them to commit - Gene-cide! **CHRIS WELCH** probes the way Genesis talk - about critics, music and the price of fame.





GENESIS

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Genesis often get a right pasting from the critics. But they should worry! They've had an incredibly successful year. The statistics alone are impressive. Genesis played some 60 shows in ninety days during their 'We Can't Dance World Tour'. This was followed by massive arena shows, a 'small theatre' tour of the U.K. and six sold-out nights at London's Earls Court. They had a smash hit album and art busting singles. Now they've released a pair of 'live' albums, 'The Way We Walk: Vol.1 The Shorts' and Vol. 2 'The Longs' and both are in the Top Ten! The latter includes the famous 'Old Medley' on which the band play classics like 'The Lamb Lies Down On Broadway.' The band pour all their energy into their generation, from devising spectacular shows to whipping up chart hits, delivering all with deft good humour. You might say - what more could you ask - Phil Collins on tambourine?

But there are those who run down the band and couldn't care less about their music. It shouldn't bother Phil, Mike and Tony, the men who have kept the Genesis flame alive for some 25 years. Nevertheless, it still grates when the band's music is cynically dismissed.

I went backstage before a Genesis show to meet Mike Rutherford and Tony Banks.

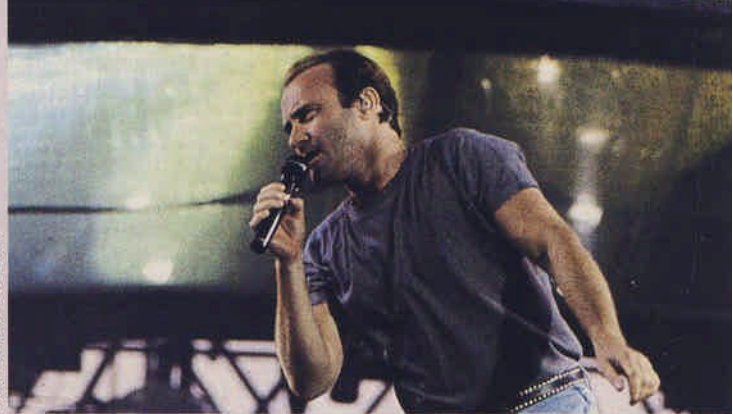
Phil Collins was protecting his throat for the night's performance and was unable to speak. Even as we tried to talk, there was a deafening thunder coming from the stage. Someone was playing Phil's drums at full bore.

"They don't need to do this - it's just Brad our drum roadie having a good time," smiles Tony. "For some reason, the drums always need an incredible amount of testing. Don't ask me why! Being in a group with two drummers, you get to know these things... like one of them always wants to play, all the time."

Genesis finished the major part of their tour last summer and then spent the next month mixing the two volumes of live albums. It was gruelling few months but says Tony: "We kept up our enthusiasm and didn't get too tired. Being on the road doesn't have to be that tiring, as long as you don't do anything stupid. Playing at Earls Court was great fun. The focus was right back on the music again, and we had great acoustics. It was the first theatre tour we'd done since 1980. We did try and do a British tour a few years later, when we played like - converted bus stations in Leeds - absolutely awful venues which have fortunately since been knocked down! We did one which burnt down and another fell down!"

After Knebworth last summer, when Genesis played to 100,000 fans, they decided Earls Court was a more inviting venue. As soon as tickets were put on sale, they sold out.

"It made us feel good!" says Tony. "Many fans had been to Knebworth and they still wanted to come



PICS: DENIS OREGAN



to Earls Court. We had two big hit singles off the current album, which was the first time we'd ever done that, with 'No Son Of Mine' and 'I Can't Dance'. But to be honest, single sales are now so low in Britain that you don't need to sell many to get into the Top Ten. If you sold 15,000 you'd get to Number One quite easily."

When the band started work on the live albums, they had a lot of material to consider. "The old medley duplicated what we had done in the past and we couldn't quite decide whether to put it on the album. But for a certain element of the audience, it was their favourite thing and it really does sound good. We divided up the records into 'short ones' and 'long ones' because that would make quite a satisfying listen - shorts ones in the car, and the heavy ones with headphones! We tried a composite album, but it sounded 'bitty'. The first album features all the singles live, including 'Mama', while volume two includes the old medley with tunes like 'Dance On A Volcano', 'The Lamb Lies Down On Broadway' and 'Musical Box'. The drum duet between Phil and Chester is on the CD but isn't on the vinyl album."

Mike Rutherford revealed that their London

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shows were filmed for a future video.

"It will be a much stronger looking thing, being indoors with all the lights, and we used an extra tracking camera which went right over the heads of the audience."

"On tours I only had a static camera on me, which tended to produce a rather static look," says Tony. "I am very static on stage anyhow. I'm sure people don't need to be reminded of that!"

Did Tony ever fancy doing an Ozzy Osbourne act, leaping about and throwing buckets of water at the screaming Genesis hordes?

"Me? No, that's not in my character, is it? I find if I do anything other than play, then I'm inclined to make a mistake. It takes all my concentration." Among Mike's favourite tunes on tour were 'Domino' and 'I Can't Dance' in particular.

"I love that chunky guitar riff. I wouldn't say it was the funkiest thing we've ever done, it was more like swamp rock - 'Polk Salad Annie' meets a blue jeans commercial. A few reviews said it was a strange song for Genesis to do, but we can do anything, man!"

"What's interesting is the Genesis audience seems to love that song," Tony chips in. "It's no problem for them. We're lucky that our fans can take a wide range of songs. I remember when Led Zeppelin did a semi-acoustic album, and a lot of people couldn't take that. They were a heavy band who weren't expected to do

acoustic stuff. But it's always been our reputation that you can find anything on a Genesis album, and the audience still follow us."

What did they think of the criticism levelled by one critic that their music is 'safe as a building society carpet'?

"Well that's because he doesn't like it - it's not safe at all!" says Tony. "That's the funny thing about Genesis. People say things like that, but the actual truth of the matter is it isn't safe."

We've always been adventurous, especially with chords, and the format of songs. OK, there is the 'I Can't Dance' side of us, which is more straight ahead, but you couldn't say it was safe. It was initially considered most unusual from a band like us."

"We're not unsafe, in the sense of us being three young punks, spitting and kicking,"



PHOTO: DENIS O'NEILL

says Mike. "That's why we don't do many interviews these days. There's one particular magazine that wants to do us, but we know what kind of article we are going to get out of them, and it's not going to be very flattering. So why bother? Our audience think our records are great, so we don't need it. I can take criticism..." Mike splutters to a halt and Tony adds "...not much!"

"Alright then, I can understand criticism of our music, but not a continuously negative slant which writes you off straight away."

"Perhaps we seem to try too hard for some people," says Tony. "But that's the way we are. Some of the press like to hate us, but a lot of it is tongue-in-cheek and a bit of a game. I can't put my finger on it, but there are some people who *always* get good reviews and are generally liked. U2 are 'generally liked' and I can understand that. I like them myself. They have a more earthy sound than us, which seems to make them more acceptable - I dunno why. We've just had a great year, with big hits and a massive tour, but in some eyes we might as well not exist. All you hear about is Madonna and Michael Jackson. That's the only bit of pop music that rears its head into the news."

Did they feel a sense of competition with other groups?

"It's funny, there was a time when it was us, U2, Michael Jackson and Dire Straits, all with big albums coming out within weeks of each

other. All the managers were competing with each other, with big promotion campaigns there is a competitive spirit in that sense." In fact, the last Genesis album, 'We Can't Dance', didn't do quite as well in America they'd hoped. Tony explains: "When we bring an album out, we always to pick a week when it's going to look good on the charts. It worked for us in the U.K. but didn't work for us in America. The sales of our record have been great, but chartwise it wasn't so good. All our recent records have topped

charts in Europe, whereas in America we still haven't had a Number One album. In an age when rock faces fierce competition from other forms of entertainment, a band like Genesis offers support to the music industry. "We are in a unique position. There are no bands that have been going as long as we have, who are still getting new fans," says Mike. "We're not trading on our history. The fans buy our new albums because they like what they hear

from any sense of history. That makes us all quite contemporary."

It's taken twenty years for Genesis to develop their show, and there aren't many bands who can compete with them.

"Our massive production takes months to put together and costs a fortune," says Tony.

"There's no way you could consider doing more than fifty outdoor gigs with that amount of stuff, otherwise you are going to lose a lot of money. New bands have to present themselves in a much simpler and humbler setting. What's hard for bands these days, is that the whole business is designed for instant success. I don't see how new bands can build up their careers that atmosphere."

Tony, the classically trained keyboard player, revealed that he is actually a heavy metal fan. "Heavy metal is one of the few areas left where you've got genuine music. I've always had a spot for heavy metal - much better than technical stuff! Metal features guys who can play their instruments and it sounds good with a lot of excitement. I'd sooner hear Ozzy Osbourne than some repetitive dance track. As a keyboard player, I find it really boring because you know how easy it is to do. You set up a sequence and let it run for hours and doodle around on top and shout 'I got the power!'. It's something anyone can do, which is not a bad thing, but we are losing the mystique of music, which is what Genesis aims to keep - alive!"