



# peter gabriel

Some comments from Tony on his friend Peter Gabriel's recent albums and current approach.

"Peter paid quite a price for doing both those third and fourth albums in that he was out of the public eye for a very long time before each of them. I always feel he's struggling a little bit to keep his head above water in his career because it takes a long time to do that kind of thing."

"As you said, I think the third album is more successful than the fourth. The fourth is very good but I think it's over-thought about and gets to the point where it's almost too serious, you get to feeling, for Christ's sake give us some light relief."

"The lyrics particularly on the fourth album are too serious, some of them drive you into the ground, the kind of thing that makes you clasp your wrists - if it does anything to you. How much personal empathy does Tony have with Gabriel's oblique approach to commerciality?"

"I would personally like to be able to do things like that myself but I know that on my own if I attempted something like that I've got no chance, I'd only have one fall awaiting me and that's total obscurity."

"Peter" can only get away with it because he's established a name for doing that kind of thing. For all its imagination that fourth album would have stood no chance from anyone else - there's basically nothing approaching a single on it



build atmosphere." However it might outrage some, Genesis are still capable of picking up new fans at the younger end of the market. Many of the people who bought 'Mama' will also have bought 'Karma Chameleon' and will quite likely never have heard of Peter Gabriel, much less know that he was once Genesis' primary inspiration and leader. Their unique blend of commerciality in the post-Gabriel era combined with a melodic chemistry that can still produce music of lasting merit has ensured their survival for as long as they choose. It will not be the public that finally see Genesis off but the band themselves. But until that day, their continuing presence is justified in Tony Banks' words, as follows - "We're writing what is contemporary pop music, which is music that is supposed to be judged at this point in time. It doesn't matter what people think of it in twenty years, its NOW that matters."

And if enough people like what they're doing NOW to put them in the Top 3 NOW, nothing further needs be said. They know what they like - and so do Genesis.

there's not much being offered at the moment. I often feel that we've got virtually no competition in terms of people looking for slightly more imaginative music. Very few such groups seem to be allowed to get through - the music papers, which used to be one of the ways for such groups to get exposure, don't seem to be trucking down or supporting any such bands any more. Genesis is kind of left on its own as the last of those kind of groups. I mean you do get the odd new group or single with a bit more depth, Ultravox with 'Vienna' for example, but in the main things seem to be very superficial at the moment.

"Even a group like Madness, who I like, if you listen to their albums all the songs are pretty much the same. On a Genesis album you'll probably find that although you bought it because of a fairly simple single there are very different things on there with a bit more depth and interest."

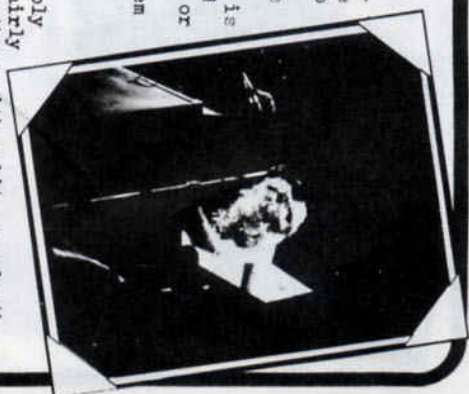
At the same time, Tony is at pains to distance the band from the unhealthy infatuation with musical technique per se which riddled so many bands in the early and mid 70s and led to so much impenetrable cold-blooded music that it became a principle factor in the late 70s re-evaluation. "I never had much time for technique myself, I don't think it's a very important factor. My own technique has never been that good, it's not the point. It's how you use the technique you have and the ideas as to whether the thing has an emotion."

"I did feel that Keith Emerson with ELP put far too much emphasis on technique and I didn't really like ELP as a result, whereas I loved him with The Nice - there was much more spirit then. I never liked us being lumped with ELP because I knew the people who liked us because they liked ELP were liking us because of the technical expertise of various members. I would prefer that the people who liked both us and Culture Club are liking us because there are a couple of good songs there - then that's all right."

Likewise he is wary of too much import being attached to the band's more ostentatious early work, particularly in terms of over-interpretation either of the songs themselves or of the band's aims in writing them.

"I don't think we really were ever aiming for that kind of dignity or whatever. People have always tended to see our music a little bit differently to how we originally intended it. I always saw us as having more to do with melodrama than anything else, and melodrama by its nature is not too serious, it's always got that tongue-in-cheek element. I certainly never felt that anything we did should be taken too seriously."

"Even something like 'Snapper's Ready' - you've got the battle involving





St. Michael and all the angels, 666 and everybody you can lay your hands on from the Brewer's Dictionary of Phrase and Fable to The Bible - I mean, it is way over the top and it should be seen as such."

All the same, he does concede that Genesis have been influenced of late in terms of their approach to writing by the changing values that surround them, although he disagrees that 'Abacab' denotes a marked break with tradition. "We just felt that we couldn't write any more songs about Greek myths, that we had used that big chord sound on the chorus one too many times. We'd felt a couple of times on 'Duke', particularly on something like 'Duke's Travels' that we were searching for another synthesizer solo to carry on the succession of things like 'Cinema Show' etc. So on 'Abacab' we decided to approach it differently, to streamline things and try to avoid some of our cliches.

"The actual composition of the songs isn't actually that different, it's mainly the arrangements - I think that, as a result, it's probably the most effective track: it manages to have some of the emotional impact of the earlier songs, because of the nature of the chord changes and the lyrical content but put on a much simpler footing. I don't think the change between 'Duke' and 'Abacab' is as big as all that though - it can be overstated."

Yet although he acknowledges the stimulus for Genesis' re-tuning, Tony professes himself not overly enamoured with much recent music. Obvious reasons aside, his views may not be unconnected with the recent fate of his second album, which like Mike's 'Acting Very Strange' passed largely unnoticed. "The crazy thing about albums at the moment is that if there's a hit single on it, the album sells regardless and unfortunately the main singles buyers are young teenagers and mums and dads and that's controlling what everyone in between is buying - which is ludicrous. There must be a lot of people making good albums which you never hear because there's no hit on it. It applies to Mike as well as me - I was amazed in fact that his 'Halfway There' didn't do better than it did."

Phil's success on his own outings however has fuelled speculation that he has become the dominant member of the band. Also that Genesis' future is in doubt either because of the prospects of Phil leaving or due to internal stresses as a result of his success. Tony gives the lie to both suggestions with conviction.

Contd on page 11 ...



Contd from page 6 ...

apart from obviously the drum sound and the singing and the odd thing like the brass on 'No Reply' and 'Man On The Corner' (?) which was Phil's own song anyway.

"It's just that Phil's influences are much more widely known than ours because of his own success and so are much more easily recognized than Mike's or mine on Genesis material. If I felt that Phil was dominating the band there's no way I'd be in it because I'm a hopeless person to dominate. Phil obviously, as the singer, gets more attention or recognition than either Mike or me but he still doesn't look an obviously charismatic person. He doesn't have the kind of image that's going to die tomorrow because it isn't positive enough."

What hopes is your own solo output attempting to fill? "Nothing specific - I'd like to establish myself to some extent independent of the group for obvious reasons. I wanted to sing myself and therefore I kept the melodies etc.

fairly simple because I knew I couldn't cope with too much, not first time round anyhow. 'A Curious Feeling' was such a commercial failure that I wanted to try something different, something that I liked but that had more chance of selling, I make no bones about it - although it ended up doing no better but that's neither here nor there. I still think it had a chance and that there's a couple of songs that could have been hits if I'd had slightly more sympathy from the radio producers. "I always had a great love for the Beatles, particularly the 'Rubber Soul' era and I was just trying to go for some of that imaginative simplicity, if you like."

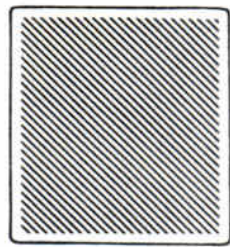
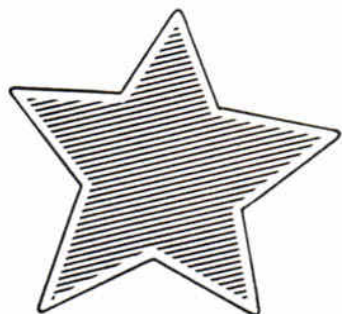
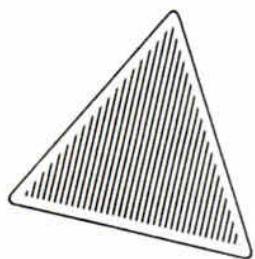
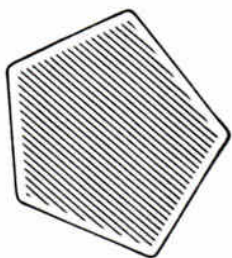
Genesis in general and Gabriel in particular were at one time among the most visually extravagant of groups, onstage at least - Gabriel was notorious for among other things the fox's head and red dress in which he performed 'Supper's Ready'. There's an irony then in their subdued image these days, Phil Collins' theatrical routines and clowning apart, at a time when costumes are both more popular and wilder than ever.

"The way costumes are used today is very different, though. The sort of costumes we used to be involved in were very much part of the stage production", Tony explains. "It was just something that used to happen as part of the show, like the lights and the stage sets and the slides that we used to use at the end of Peter's era. Today costumes seem to be much more related to the image of a group - which is something we in Genesis never really had. We were never particularly interested in the identities of the individuals in the group, we were more concerned to project a group image through the music and the album covers and that side of things rather than through particular personalities.

"It was part and parcel with the whole theatrical approach we had to the show, not in the show-bizzy sense but just being aware of and employing some of the techniques of theatre, to







*Genesis*

