

Ashgate Popular and Folk Music Series



Peter Gabriel, From Genesis to Growing Up



An Ashgate Book

Edited by
Michael Drewett, Sarah Hill and Kimi Kärki

PETER GABRIEL, FROM GENESIS TO GROWING UP

This book is dedicated to the work of Witness <http://www.witness.org/>

The editors would like to thank Rob Bozas and Real World for permission to reproduce the album covers featured on the front of this book and Peter Gabriel for inspiring this project.

Peter Gabriel, From Genesis to Growing Up

EDITED BY
MICHAEL DREWETT, SARAH HILL AND KIMI KÄRKI

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General Editor's Preface

The upheaval that occurred in musicology during the last two decades of the twentieth century has created a new urgency for the study of popular music alongside the development of new critical and theoretical models. A relativistic outlook has replaced the universal perspective of modernism (the international ambitions of the 12-note style); the grand narrative of the evolution and dissolution of tonality has been challenged, and emphasis has shifted to cultural context, reception and subject position. Together, these have conspired to eat away at the status of canonical composers and categories of high and low in music. A need has arisen, also, to recognize and address the emergence of crossovers, mixed and new genres, to engage in debates concerning the vexed problem of what constitutes authenticity in music and to offer a critique of musical practice as the product of free, individual expression.

Popular musicology is now a vital and exciting area of scholarship, and the *Ashgate Popular and Folk Music Series* presents some of the best research in the field. Authors are concerned with locating musical practices, values and meanings in cultural context, and may draw upon methodologies and theories developed in cultural studies, semiotics, poststructuralism, psychology and sociology. The series focuses on popular musics of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. It is designed to embrace the world's popular musics from Acid Jazz to Zydeco, whether high tech or low tech, commercial or non-commercial, contemporary or traditional.

Derek B. Scott
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Abbreviations

AIDS	Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome
BCP	Black Community Programmes
bpm	beats per minute
CCR	Creedence Clearwater Revival
CMI	Computerized Musical Instrument
DIY	do it yourself
DL	dynamic level
EST	Erhard Seminar Training
IASPM	International Association for the Study of Popular Music
MUDDA	Magnificent Union of Digitally Downloading Artists
PC	pre-chorus
PI	performance intensity
Prog	progressive (rock)
RWN	Real World Notes
WOMAD	World of Music and Dance
WOMEX	Worldwide Music Expo



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Chapter 1

Peter Gabriel: From Genesis to Growing Up

Michael Drewett, Sarah Hill and Kimi Kärki

Genesis

The idea for this collection stemmed from a casual conversation between Michael Drewett and Sarah Hill outside the Turku Cathedral at the International Association for the Study of Popular Music (IASPM) Conference in 2001. The final session of the conference had just ended, and had featured Serge Lacasse discussing recording techniques in Peter Gabriel's song 'Blood of Eden'. Apart from Umberto Fiori's seminal 'Listening to Peter Gabriel's "I Have the Touch"' (1987), there had been no academic treatments of Gabriel's work in scholarly journals or, to the collective memory, at academic conferences. Michael and Sarah decided to propose a panel session on Peter Gabriel for the IASPM-Montreal conference in 2003, which would allow them to pursue their academic interest in Gabriel's work in tandem with their more personal attachment to it.

Kimi Kärki had been one of the organizers of the Turku conference, and was in the audience for the Gabriel session in Montreal. In a discussion following the session Michael, Sarah and Kimi decided to work towards putting together an edited volume on Peter Gabriel's music. In a curious bit of chronological coincidence, the evening after the Gabriel session was the closing performance of Peter Gabriel's summer tour, at the Bell Arena in Montreal. In a last-minute scramble the editors of this collection were all fortunate enough to secure tickets for the concert. Sarah had seen Peter Gabriel live on a number of occasions in the UK and the USA, but not since the *So* tour; Michael had not previously seen him perform live while Kimi, who was sitting in another part of the stadium, had the opportunity that night of seeing a stripped-down, yet nevertheless affecting, production of the *Growing Up* stage show, with the added attraction of Robert Lepage emerging onstage to be greeted enthusiastically by his hometown crowd. The IASPM conference ended the following day, and, in a further moment of synchronicity, Michael soon found himself at the Montreal airport check-in – and the next morning at the London baggage claim – chatting with Peter Gabriel.

One of the challenges of this project, and one of the joys of its inception, was in the contributors finding the delicate balance between academic interest and their own personal investment. There are recurring themes in the following chapters, about musical production and artistic influence, about political conviction, self-awareness, social activism and cultural investment. Peter Gabriel's career has spanned almost the length of rock music itself, and his continued contributions to

technological advancement, to the promotion of ‘world musics’, and to political awareness have given him a vitality in popular culture that few other musicians can claim.

Growing Up

Peter Gabriel (born 1950) has always been interested in rock music performance as a form of theatre. His stage performances are famous for their theatrical innovations and experiments. As a member of progressive rock band Genesis in the late 1960s and in the first half of 1970s he took unusual personae, stories and costumes to the centre of his performances.

One of the most successful rock acts of the 1970s and 1980s, Genesis has enjoyed an unusual longevity, borne of inauspicious beginnings: the Garden Wall, a band founded in 1965 at Charterhouse School by 15-year-old schoolboys Peter Gabriel, Tony Banks, Johnny Trapman, Chris Stewart and Rivers Job. Fellow student Anthony Phillips was in another group called Anon; Mike Rutherford was in The Climax, alongside Chris Stewart and three others. As members of each group eventually left school, these various groups joined forces; Gabriel, Banks, Rutherford, Phillips and drummer Chris Stewart were soon uniting as the New Anon, and recorded a six-song demo featuring songs primarily written by Rutherford and Phillips. The Charterhouse connection went even deeper: school alumnus Jonathan King, now a recording artist and producer, heard the tape, and began to champion their music, renaming the band Genesis along the way.

In December of 1967 the group had their first formal recording sessions. Their debut single, ‘The Silent Sun’, was released in February 1968 without attracting much notice from the public. When the members of Genesis – with John Silver now replacing Chris Stewart – left Charterhouse in the summer of 1969 they had just released their first album, *From Genesis to Revelation*. They decided to try their luck as a professional band; John Silver was replaced by John Mayhew; they got their first paying gig in September of 1969, and began the long process of working out new material.

Genesis were soon signed to the new label Charisma, and recorded their second album, *Trespass* (1970). This was followed by even more personnel changes: Phillips left in July of 1970, followed by Mayhew, leaving a vacancy for child-actor-turned-drummer Phil Collins, former member of Hickory and Flaming Youth. Guitarist Steve Hackett completed the new line-up: his presence, and that of Collins, toughened up the group’s sound, which became apparent immediately upon the release of their next album, *Nursery Cryme* (1971).

During these formative years Gabriel developed an interest in the theatrical use of masks, make-up and props, and took to telling framing stories for Genesis’ more elaborate works. *Foxtrot* (1972) was a landmark album: seminal in creative terms, successful in commercial ones. Genesis’s reputation as a live band was soaring, and demand for their live performance to be documented on an official

release was satisfied in August 1973 with the Charisma release of *Genesis Live*. 1973 also saw the release of *Selling England by the Pound*, perhaps the group's most sophisticated album to date. *The Lamb Lies Down on Broadway* (1974) was Gabriel's last album with Genesis, though he performed with Genesis one final time, at a 1982 benefit concert for the WOMAD (World of Music and Dance) Festival.

During the late 1970s and first half of 1980s Gabriel released four solo records, each titled *Peter Gabriel*, but known also by the titles *Car* (1977), *Scratch* (1978), *Melt* (1980) and *Security* (1982). In addition he released *Peter Gabriel Plays Live* (1983) and the soundtrack to Alan Parker's film *Birdy* (1985). His fifth solo album, *So*, released in 1986, became a huge mainstream hit, aided by the success of the groundbreaking video for the single 'Sledgehammer'. His interest in non-western music became evident with the 1989 release of *Passion*, the soundtrack to Martin Scorsese's film *The Last Temptation of Christ*.

In the 1990s Gabriel released *Us* (1992), followed by *Secret World Live* (1994), which documented the subsequent ambitious and theatrical tour. At the same time Gabriel became more and more interested in multimedia production, resulting in two CD-Roms, *X-Plora* (1993) and *Eve* (1997). Along with architectural designer Mark Fisher, Gabriel was involved in designing the London Millennium Dome performance, the music and narrative for which was then released as Gabriel's album *OVO* (2000). In 2002 he released *Up*, which was followed by yet another notably theatrical and technologically challenging tour. In 2010 he released *Scratch My Back*, an album of cover versions.

In the twenty-first century Gabriel has been active in promoting digital music delivery, co-founding one of the first online music services, and MUDDA (Magnificent Union of Digitally Downloading Artists), a musicians' union. He has also been continuously active in human rights issues, most notably through the *Witness* programme, and in the production and distribution of artists from around the world with his Real World label.

Identity and Representation

From his school days through his adulthood, a common theme of Peter Gabriel's lyrics has been belonging: the self in society, his self in a rock band, his rock band in England, England in the world, the world itself. Gabriel's innate and ceaseless musical curiosity has provided a rich palette for the exploration of this overriding theme, and his position at the vanguard of music video has constantly supplied compelling, and often uncomfortable, visual representations of it. Yet despite a fluidity of style and myriad influences, Gabriel's own identity is always foregrounded, deconstructed, reassessed, and re-presented to himself and his audience. And this has been the difficulty for audiences and critics alike. In a review for the *New York Times*, Jon Pareles noted that:

since he left the group Genesis in 1975 for a solo career, Mr Gabriel has written about amnesia, about faith healing, about psychosis, about revelations, about torture, about transcendence – all moments when the ‘self’ disappears. And at a moment in rock when marketing wisdom decrees that a successful musician needs to stick to a recognizable image, or identity, Mr Gabriel avoided one, letting listeners conjure him for themselves. His first four solo albums didn’t even have their own titles, just his name. (Pareles 1986)

Of course, Gabriel’s most recognizable identity is his voice. It is an instrument of range and complexity, at times sounding restless, battered, life-wearied; at others nothing less than a startling organ of screeching emotionalism, a soul voice, the voice of the soul. Gabriel’s voice developed on record, from the schoolboy progressive rock of Genesis to the mature ruminations of *Up* (2002), with Gabriel himself leaving tantalizing clues along his journey about that elusive ‘self’ Pareles pondered in 1986. The opening section of this book attempts to address the many facets of Gabriel’s self which he has revealed on record and through his music videos. The first three chapters consider the remnants of the progressive in Gabriel’s musical and theatrical personae; the last two consider the shift from self-directed expressions of self into collaborative explorations of the body and psyche in two landmark videos, ‘Sledgehammer’ and ‘Mercy Street’, with the musical and performative interlinked in compelling ways.

First, Sarah Hill sketches an outline of Gabriel’s solo career, from his first self-titled studio album (1977) to *Us* (1992), by way of ‘Supper’s Ready’, from the Genesis album, *Foxtrot* (1972). She sees Gabriel’s subjectivity as a process mappable across his first six solo albums, from the early, tentative moves toward musical independence through to the multicultural tapestry of his later solo work. The fragility of some of Gabriel’s lyrical expressions of self and other, especially on his first four, self-titled solo albums, hint at a much larger quest, one which was to find near resolution in the latter albums *So* (1986) and *Us* (1992). Hill considers such individual moments of personal and spiritual release, and relates them to Gabriel’s musical development, from progressive to ‘world’.

In his chapter, Kari Kallioniemi explores eccentricity as part of the ‘normal character-building activities of English self-definition’, looking at models from Victorian literature and twentieth-century music, along with Gabriel’s early career in Genesis. By tracing some of the general traits of eccentricity through Gabriel’s 1980s solo output, Kallioniemi sheds light on some of the more difficult strands of Gabriel’s lyrical expression – insanity, nonconformity, primitivism – and connects Gabriel’s earliest work with his latest solo album, *Up* (2002). What this reveals is a man sympathetic to a particular cultural lineage, and sensitive to the changing technological needs of the world beyond his own musical core.

Common to Hill’s and Kallioniemi’s chapters is the mention of fictive identities. Kevin Holm-Hudson continues with this theme, specifically investigating Mozo, the persona Gabriel adopted as a soulful alter ego. Holm-Hudson traces the influence of soul on Gabriel’s musical development, from Gabriel’s ‘pivotal’

experience of listening to Otis Redding on a Dansette player at Charterhouse school, to seeing the man in concert in 1966, right through to the overt sexuality of his mainstream hit singles, 'Sledgehammer' (1986) and 'Steam' (1992). In tracing the latent soul elements of some of Gabriel's earlier work, Holm-Hudson uses those later singles to compare the recording processes of Gabriel with those of the Motown and Stax labels. This is the first of many instances in this collection wherein 'Sledgehammer' is invoked as one of Gabriel's significant moments, musically, stylistically and visually, and serves as a useful introduction to the final two chapters of this section.

Brenda Schmahmann's chapter focuses on Gabriel's groundbreaking video for 'Sledgehammer', an artistic collaboration with Stephen R. Johnson, Aardman Animations and the Brothers Quay. She argues that the video for 'Sledgehammer', along with that for 'Mercy Street', subverts gendered conventions, and she analyses the video from that starting point. Schmahmann suggests that one of the pleasures derived from viewing this particular video is in the understanding of the laborious process behind its creation. We are therefore given to the 'glance', rather than the 'gaze', and can understand the processes by which gendered identities are being 'performed' in a video which even now enthralls with its technology, and captivates with its vision.

To conclude this first section, Carol Vernallis offers a very close reading of the visual and musical codes of the video for 'Mercy Street' (1986), questioning the identity of the narrative voice, and also of the viewer's own position. Gabriel's 'elegy' for Anne Sexton provides a fascinating series of problems: Gabriel's increasingly 'confessional' approach to lyrical writing, married with his mid-1980s fascination with Sexton, the American confessional poet, produced one of the most haunting songs in his output. The video, directed by Matt Mahurin, provides the perfect visual complement to Gabriel's own 'hermetic' musical style. Indeed, as Vernallis argues, the unpredictability of the song's structure and harmonic blueprint is similarly mirrored in the often inscrutable imagery, and series of references, in the video.

In each of these chapters, Gabriel's identity in lyrical codes, musical production and visual imagery is of primary consideration. Read together, they present a rounded portrait of an often perplexing, occasionally bewildering, sometimes worrying, unendingly creative mind at work.

Politics and Power

Peter Gabriel's politics are well known, both in terms of his songwriting and the causes he supports through performance, fundraising and other activities. However, throughout the 1970s, both as a member of Genesis and as a solo artist, Gabriel's political convictions, whatever they were, were not directly reflected in his music. It was only in 1980, with the release of the song 'Biko', that Gabriel began a long political journey which has seen him explore human rights abuses, political

prisoners, the world's poor, victims of apartheid, women's rights and, more recently, AIDS awareness. In addition, he has provided an important performance and recording platform for musicians from around the world through WOMAD and Real World Studios.

Gabriel's entrance into the arena of music and politics came as a personal response to the news of the death of Stephen Biko, an anti-apartheid activist tortured and killed by the South African security police. Moved by Biko's death, Gabriel researched Biko's life and wrote a song about the incident. The writing of the song coincided with Gabriel's discovery of African music, which influenced the musical direction of his third album (1980), upon which 'Biko' appeared. While 'Biko' was not the only political song on the album, it was certainly the only one which was overtly a protest song (see Laing 2003: 345). The effect of 'Biko' on Peter Gabriel's career was enormous. Although Gabriel had written the song as an isolated musician without formal association with political organizations, the song soon attracted the attention of those concerned with human rights, in particular anti-apartheid organizations and Amnesty International.

Gabriel's alignment with political organizations, together with his status as musical spokesperson for the anti-apartheid movement (see chapters by Drewett and Byerly) provided him with an important context within which to promote his political concerns. While such platforms undoubtedly offered Gabriel the opportunity to promote himself as a popular musician, there is no doubt that his convictions were genuine. He specifically released 'Biko' as both a single and 12-inch single in order to raise awareness (providing background to the song on the cover of the 7-inch single), and donated the proceeds to the Black Consciousness Movement in South Africa. In turn, when in 1985 Little Steven coordinated the Artists United Against Apartheid ('Sun City') project, Gabriel actively lent his weight to it. Gabriel's concern with Biko's death led to his wholehearted support of Amnesty International, an organization set up in the early 1960s to document and campaign against human rights abuses. This instigated Gabriel's involvement in *The Secret Policeman's Third Ball* in 1987 as well as in two Amnesty music tours: *The Conspiracy of Hope* tour of the USA in 1986, alongside U2, Sting, Lou Reed, the Neville Brothers, Bryan Adams and Joan Baez; and then in the more international *Human Rights Now!* tour in 1988, with Bruce Springsteen, Sting, Tracy Chapman and Youssou N'Dour. Gabriel participated in these in order to galvanize support for human rights and Amnesty International, as he firmly believed in the power of concerned individuals to bring about change. As he explained (in Henke 1988):

In a world of cynicism and pessimism, Amnesty International is a beacon of hope. It is proof that ordinary people have power. Thousands of men and women have been rescued from unfair imprisonment, torture and execution by the simple act of letter writing. Now, more than ever, it is important for each of us to recognize and use the power we have to bring about change.

This has been most dramatically demonstrated in Gabriel's challenge to his audiences every time he sings 'Biko'. At the end of the song, with the audience singing along to the chorus, Gabriel puts forward the challenge 'I've done what I can, the rest is up to you'.

The importance of 'Biko' to Gabriel's career and as a political song more generally is reflected in the inclusion in this volume of two chapters focused on the song. In his chapter, Drewett documents the story of 'Biko' and how the song has met with different responses, from South African government censorship to Little Steven's 'Sun City' project and numerous cover versions, each of which has led to further coverage of Biko's death. Drewett argues that Gabriel's temporary positioning of himself as an activist-performer played an important role in the effectiveness of 'Biko' as a protest song, one which has affected many lives, galvanized support for the anti-apartheid movement and Amnesty International, and ultimately highlighted broader human rights concerns. In her chapter, Byerly also focuses on the political effectiveness of 'Biko', but does so through the notion of waves of protest that spark further protest, culminating in political transformation. Both of these chapters reveal that, whatever the musical analysis, and despite multiple points of reception, the broader political context is crucial to a thorough understanding of protest songs. It is this context, particularly in regions of contest, which provides the framework of reception for many of those who hear the song.

Gabriel's involvement in Amnesty led to invitations for him to participate in other political and charitable concerns, some of which he agreed to support. These include the free Artists Against Apartheid concert on Clapham Common in June 1986; Nelson Mandela's 70th birthday concert at Wembley Stadium in June 1988, when Mandela was still in prison; the 'International Tribute for a Free South Africa' concert to celebrate Mandela's release held at Wembley Stadium in April 1990; and the 46664 concerts in Cape Town, Oslo, Johannesburg and London between 2003 and 2008. He also released the song 'Shaking the Tree' (1990)¹ with Youssou N'Dour, in support of women's rights. Furthermore, in 1992 Peter Gabriel founded Witness, an organization which trains human rights advocates to use video cameras to document human rights abuses. Witness provides video cameras to activists, houses an archive of video material and works with local organizations to lobby for an end to human rights abuses wherever these occur. This initiative developed out of Gabriel's involvement in the 1988 Amnesty tour. Gabriel noted that:

The experience of meeting people who had been tortured, who had watched their families being killed – suddenly it became real for me and not something I was just reading about. One of the things that was most shocking was that people who had experienced these things then had their stories completely denied,

¹ Originally released on Youssou N'Dour's *The Lion* (1989) album but with a different mix.

buried, and forgotten. Wherever there were good pictures or video material, it was a great deal harder to [deny]. In a way *Witness* grew out of the technical innovation of the video age. Suddenly there was a small [video] camera that was affordable. (Business Week 2006)

For Gabriel, *Witness* is an important reaction to human rights abuse because it tackles the issue in a considered manner. As he explains,

Celebrities shouldn't take on causes in a trivial way. They should find things that mean something to them and do their homework, so that they can speak as articulately as they are able, and then hand over to the people doing the real work. (Business Week 2006)

Gabriel's commitment to *Witness* reflects a consistency between his musical message and his activities beyond his recorded work. A similar link can be found in his involvement with musicians from around the world, performers of 'world music'.

In the late 1970s Gabriel began to discover and become enthused by music from around the world, including (especially) Africa, Bali and Australia (Bright 1988: 140). While excited about the idea of working with these sounds himself, he also wanted to create a platform on which he could promote the music so that others could hear it too. After a period of brainstorming and planning beginning in 1980, Gabriel launched the first WOMAD festival at the Royal Bath and West showground near Shepton Mallet, Somerset in July 1982. Although the first festival was a financial disaster and famously led to a Genesis reunion concert when his former band members offered to help Gabriel out of his financial difficulties, the organization went on to become a highly successful one, holding numerous festivals annually in different parts of the world. In 1983 the WOMAD Foundation was established as an educational charity. Its stated aim was 'to promote, maintain, improve and advance education in world cultures and multi-cultural education' (WOMAD 1996: 34). Thus Gabriel sought a way to combine his own interest in music from other parts of the world with his desire to promote this music and share it with listeners in the western world.

However, Gabriel's interest in and promotion of music from around the world has not been without controversy. The most important criticism levelled at Gabriel involves appropriation. In this volume Timothy D. Taylor argues that in his 'world'-music-influenced music (in particular *Passion* [1989] and *Us* [1992]), Gabriel makes assumptions rooted in metropolitan and colonial ideologies, while at the same time attempting to advocate the preservation of 'world' music and the empowerment of peoples from around the world. However much Gabriel attempts to promote and empower 'world' musicians, Taylor argues that Gabriel's position as a westerner and a male star in the music industry results in music which is always in some way appropriative because in the end the sound is Gabriel's, in terms of both how his voice dominates and ownership of the copyright. For Taylor, the