

**OUNDING SOUNDS** ◆ **AMAZING MUSIC**





# TURNING IT ON AGAIN?

They're the most successful prog band of all time, with a global impact that goes unrivalled. But with just one album and two tours in the last 20 years and frontman Phil Collins suffering debilitating health issues have **Genesis** truly called it a day? **Rich Wilson** tunes in as **Mike Rutherford** and **Tony Banks** open the debate.



Collins, Banks and Rutherford: ready for take-off or final landing?



# "I THINK WE'RE PROBABLY DONE BUT YOU NEVER KNOW,"

affirms Genesis guitarist Mike Rutherford in an unexpectedly cheery manner given that we're talking about calling time on the career of the band. "But we all stay in touch, and of course Phil's had problems so can't drum at the moment. It will probably all go away in time... but the kind of drumming he did with us, I'm not sure he'd ever be able to do again. So nothing's planned."

Rutherford's reservations are understandable. With Genesis only managing to record one album and tour twice in the last 18 years, they've been far from prolific. And that was before Collins stated in a recent interview that he felt "Genesis are no longer. I don't foresee doing any more Genesis shows and it doesn't fit in with my life." Seemingly the neck problems that have made it excruciating for him to drum coupled with a desire to be around with his young family rather than revisit the write-record-tour cycle have led Collins to write off any future reunions. Yet Tony Banks is less pessimistic.

"Well, I think it may well be the case but I never like to say anything quite so final because I don't see the point really. Why put yourself in a corner? I always just describe Genesis as being mothballed. Phil probably isn't in quite the same position because he has physical problems in terms of playing. Phil feels that there's more pressure when he's with the group, because if you have to cancel a show it's a much bigger thing than a solo show. So I think it's very likely we won't do anything else, but I never say never. I'm sure we could still write well together, so those sorts of things are always a possibility. Whether Mike and I might do something together again, I mean, who knows? That's a different thing, though, and it wouldn't be Genesis if we did. I think if Genesis exists in any form now, it has to have Phil in it."

The relationship between the band members remains genuinely affectionate, and displays that trait of smiling through adversity that has seen them survive for over 40 years. Even the superficially distressing recent footage showing Phil Collins literally having to gaffer tape his drumsticks to his hands in order to play is also playfully dismissed. As Banks wryly and practically notes, "Well, it stops the sticks flying everywhere."

"Oh, I think that's quite funny and Phil laughs about it too," adds Rutherford. "But you know what? I had a bad injury before the last Genesis tour, when I snapped a tendon in my left hand. The body recovers and he'll recover fine. At our age, it just takes three years rather than one year."

It appears then that, unpalatable as it

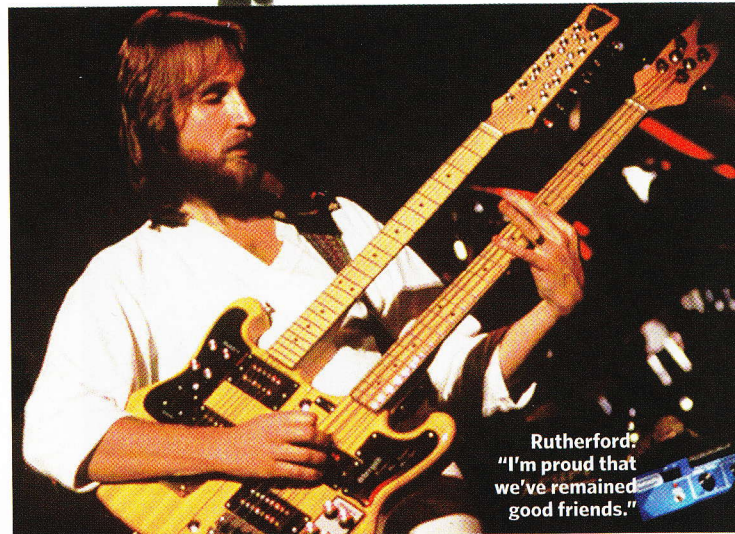
sounds, the 2007 Turn It On Again Tour was the last opportunity to see Genesis. Reminiscing about that summer, Banks reveals that they were genuinely surprised at the level of demand for tickets, something which he attributes to the band's internal ongoing perception that Genesis aren't openly respected in the UK.

"In England in particular, our profile has always been a strange one as we have closet fans," he ruminates. "We don't have many people out there who think we're fantastic but when the shows are put on sale, they sell out pretty quickly. So it was a surprise for us that we were able to do the stadiums. It was like we'd never been gone and that was what was weird about it."

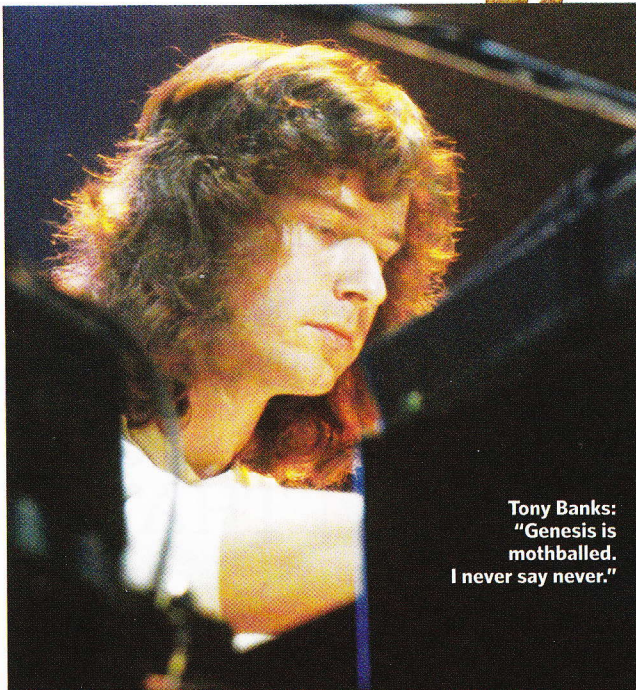
"We kind of fucked up in England," says Rutherford. "We put Twickenham on sale, and I wasn't over-confident because you never know how it'll go. It turned out that we could have done three or four nights, but we couldn't fit the dates in as they weren't available, so I felt bad about only being able to do two shows in the UK."

It had taken a decade for the band to reunite for those dates – and it led many to speculate that it was effectively a farewell tour. Was there a perception within the band at the time that that round of gigs may prove to be their last?

"Well, we did it thinking it was the last time that we were going to visit being Genesis, really," Banks explains. "But then we did it, everyone was happy, and at one point we thought it might go on a bit longer, but we decided against it. Phil for one didn't want to do too much touring, he wants to try and be with his kids more this time around. So there were various other things going on. The Genesis machine is



**Rutherford:**  
"I'm proud that we've remained good friends."



**Tony Banks:**  
"Genesis is mothballed. I never say never."

a very big one. You do an album and a tour, and then two or three years of your life could be mapped out ahead of you. It's whether we really want to do that. The last tour was one of the best we've ever done so maybe it was nice to just end on that."

There's still a glimmering hope though of a full reunion with Peter Gabriel and Steve Hackett to perform *The Lamb Lies Down On Broadway*, something which would of course be dependent on Collins recovering to an extent that he could perform, as well as persuading all the band members to do it. There have been well-documented and apparently protracted discussions over the last decade about such a re-formation, but they've never reached any consensus. The sheer logistics of revisiting the album would also seem to be prohibitive, even for a solitary charity gig.

"We talked about doing *The Lamb*... two years ago but Peter's quite difficult to tie down and he blows a bit hot and cold on it," reveals Banks. "At one point he seemed quite keen and the next minute he wasn't. When we did all those re-releases [in 2008], we talked about perhaps putting *The Lamb*... out first and doing a show. Peter was keen, but then thinking about it, it was all the practicalities of what it meant. How would he do it now? We'd have to change the key of every song, which isn't really a problem, but he can't really play the part of Rael any more as it wouldn't look right. And one charity gig to do *The Lamb*...? To rehearse and get it playable, even for one show, would take a long time. I think the whole thing just became quite a big thing and Peter started thinking 'Do I want to revisit all this?' Personally speaking, I'd be happy enough to. I don't have a problem with it and I'd enjoy having a go at it but the chances of getting Phil and Peter



## ALL THEIR OWN WORK

### What's next for the Gen men's solo endeavours...

WITH THE LACK of Genesis activity, Rutherford has decided to reunite with Mike And The Mechanics with an album due early next year. Rutherford admits that the untimely death of singer Paul Young in 2000 had taken away some of his enthusiasm for the project. "Yeah something changed as we had a great vibe. Paul was always a naughty boy and lived the rock and roll lifestyle but was a great character. After that, we went out on tour with just Paul Carrack singing. Maybe we shouldn't have done that as we'd run our course you know?"

Carrack has decided against any involvement with the re-formed band leaving Rutherford with the tricky proposition of replacing two singers, and he's selected Roachford and Tim Howar to front the new band.

"Roachford's been great to write with and it was really quick and easy," says Rutherford. "In fact the whole thing has been easy, which is always a good sign I think. Tim Howar is the other singer on the album and he's come from more of a theatre background."

Rutherford's last solo album was 1982's *Acting Very Strange*, so with more free time is there the any possibility of a new album?

"I can pre-empt that by saying that I haven't got a very good voice and that's where you start," he laughs. "Being a songwriter, you want to write a song for a great singer. So writing for my dodgy old voice isn't really an option in my mind. The reason I started the Mechanics was because I thought 'Christ, I'm not going to sing again.'"

Tony Banks is currently working on a follow-up to his classical piece, *Seven*, which was released in 2004.

"It's provisionally called *Six*. If I keep going on long enough, I'll get to zero," he jokes. "I think the music is better on this one and hopefully I'm going to realise it closer to what I intended."

A majority of Bank's solo albums have been more in the Genesis mould of straight ahead rock. Is there a possibility that he might revisit this format?

"There's part of me that would love to do it but I've always found that side of my career a little depressing," he reasons. "You put all this work in, do all this stuff, you're very excited by it and you put the thing out and one week later you're back to the drawing board really. I suppose that is a bit of a disincentive. I'm not a very good self promoter. I didn't think there was anything new that I had to offer in that area, whereas the idea of working with an orchestra was something that I hadn't done. In many ways I was getting to the stage where I was craving drums, but then we did the Turn It On Again Tour and with two drummers behind me, that sorted out my lack of drums problem for a little bit. So there's nothing imminent at the moment and I keep doodling around on a few songs but at the moment I'm concentrating on the orchestral stuff." **RW**

into the same spot? I don't think you'd have quite so much trouble with Steve [Hackett], Mike and I. It's just that Peter and Phil are busy chaps."

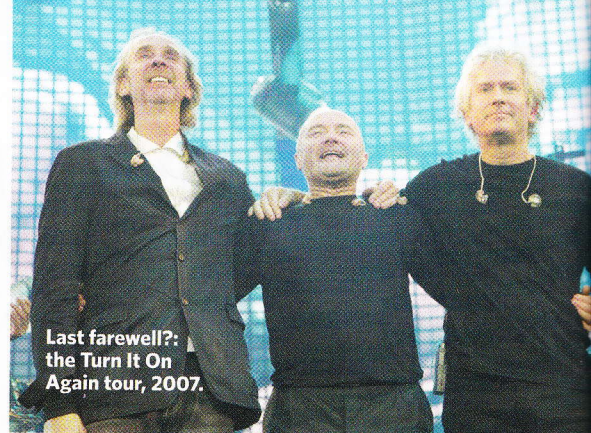
"I think it's pretty unlikely us doing something like that now even if Phil could drum," laments Rutherford. "This is the year we're all 60, and I must say that if you'd said to me on my 50th birthday that in 10 years time, I would be playing in a small club in London with Mike And The Mechanics, I'd never have believed you."

If this is the conclusion of their career, they leave behind a legacy of fine work that ensures their rightful place amongst the progressive greats. Banks puts their success down to the variety within the band's music as well as an identifiable element to their sound, with Rutherford also noting that they were aided by "luck and timing".

There are those who would suggest that such luck was, during the 80s, aided by a decision to commercialise their sound. Whether intentional or not, it gave the impression that Genesis were trying to capitalise on the solo success being enjoyed by Phil Collins, leading to a mass market appeal for the first time in the career. To some, their progressive reputation had been tarnished by pop and left those fans who had immersed themselves in such innovative albums as *The Lamb Lies Down On Broadway* and *Foxtrot* feeling disenfranchised by the likes of 1986's *Invisible Touch*. Does Rutherford understand that feeling of resigned, barely repressed annoyance that a sizeable proportion of their fans still harbour to this day?

"Well, yes, of course. Anyone who gets into a band when they were originally a cult would feel betrayed once they get mass appeal," he reasons. "You were their baby and that's second nature really. But a lot of them carry on listening to us, which is funny. I think that because of MTV, a hit single overshadowed the whole album. On all of our albums right until the end, there were always a couple of 10-minute songs in there and my perception is that the singles were so high profile that they could often dwarf the rest of the songs on the album."

"Obviously it doesn't feel that way when you're inside it – and besides, I never know where that break comes," argues Banks.



"I think we pretty much had a straight line in the way we thought about things right up to and including *Duke*. It wasn't until *Abacab* when we thought of changing our approach. If anything, we just got much better at writing hit songs, which was something we never set out to do, but suddenly, once you got played on the radio we became a radio band. You then had things like *Turn It On Again*, which really wasn't an obvious single as it has a funny time signature, or even *Mama*, which were able to be released as singles. I'm obviously not denying that there were simpler things on some of the later albums, but there were also longer pieces on there too."

There's also a certain irony in the fact that albums like *Invisible Touch* possessed that 80s, all-consuming electronic drum sound which makes them now sound more dated than some of their older albums.

"It's a bit like flared trousers from the 70s, as they didn't last very well," says Rutherford. "In a sense we were always trying to do something that you hadn't heard before and sometimes it didn't work. If you try and be brave... when things didn't work it's really not great."

With the likelihood of a live or studio Genesis reunion being slim, and assuming that we are now discussing Genesis firmly in the past tense, how do Banks and Rutherford want the band to be remembered?

"I'm very proud of our onstage career," says Rutherford. "We did an awful lot of live shows and I always felt that the communications at Genesis concerts was very good. There were no journalists in the way and it was just a natural reaction from the fans. They either liked us or they didn't. I'm also so proud that we, as a band, have remained such good friends."

"Oh, I don't know," counters Banks on the subject, with an air of self-conscious humility. "I guess just to be remembered would be quite good."

**"THE GENESIS MACHINE IS A BIG ONE. WOULD WE WANT THAT AGAIN?"**

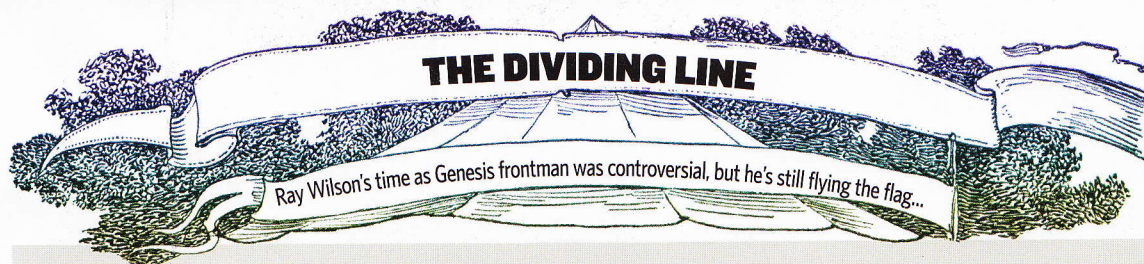
**– TONY BANKS**







New York 1976: Hackett and Bruford join in with sending up a flare or two for fashion help.



Ray Wilson has been, to some extent, the forgotten Genesis singer. Taking over from Phil Collins for 1996's *Calling All Stations*, at the time the band and album were heavily criticised. However, a rehabilitation has occurred in recent times.

"I suppose people are kinder now," admits Wilson, from his home in Poland. "The problem was that I had such a tough act to follow. Who would have been mad enough to step into Phil Collins' shoes? It was rather like the situation facing Paul Rodgers more recently, when he joined Queen."

Wilson was asked to audition for the job, rather than applying.

"The band were on Virgin, and so Mike Rutherford and Tony Banks approached the label and asked if there was anyone suitable on their

roster. I know Virgin suggested Bryan Ferry among others, and I'm not gonna pretend I was first choice. But my band back then, Stiltskin, were signed to the company and were coming to an end. So, I thought, 'Why not audition for Genesis?'"

Not a huge fan of the band at the time, Wilson partly appealed because he was more of a Peter Gabriel man.

"I can't say that I was massively into Genesis at all. I had a couple of albums, and *Selling England By The Pound* was a particular

favourite of mine. Mike and Tony liked the fact that I was more into Gabriel, because it allowed them to be a little different musically, rather than tied to what they'd done with Phil."

While many saw Wilson as no more than a hired hand, that wasn't true. Rutherford and Banks gave Wilson equal status.

"They realised that if there was to be any credibility with the new line-up, and any future at all for Genesis, then I had to be given that billing. Phil was such a powerful frontman that to bring in an employee would have put me at a disadvantage. They were both very easy to work with, and I learnt a lot from them as a writer."

The poor sales

performance for *Calling All Stations*, which led to the band having to cancel a US tour, eventually forced Genesis to split up in 1998. It's a decision Wilson feels was wrong.

"We should have carried on and done another album. We could have turned things around, if only we'd stuck together. I know Tony Banks was also of the same opinion. But Mike Rutherford couldn't be persuaded."

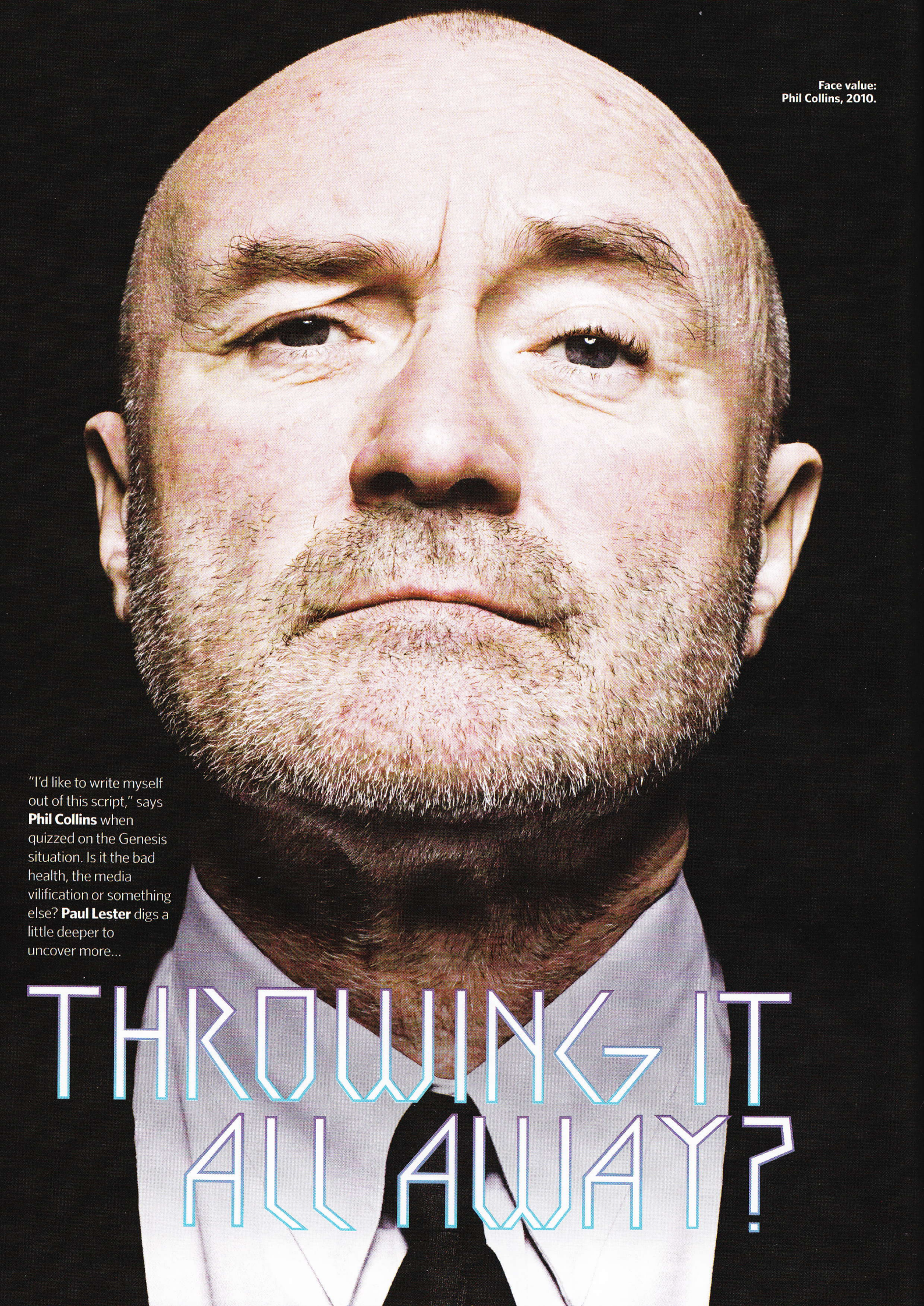
But Wilson hasn't abandoned his Genesis heritage at all.

"I now have a touring project called Genesis Klassik and we do a lot in Europe, where I've always been more popular than in the UK. It's an orchestral version of Genesis, and I do a lot of stuff that I never did when I was in the band. I'd like to think I could bring this over to Britain next year." **MD**

**Wilson:**  
"Mike and Tony liked that I was into Gabriel."







Face value:  
Phil Collins, 2010.

"I'd like to write myself out of this script," says **Phil Collins** when quizzed on the Genesis situation. Is it the bad health, the media vilification or something else? **Paul Lester** digs a little deeper to uncover more...

# THROWING IT ALL AWAY?



The man who greets me in the lobby of the hotel near his home in Geneva may only be five foot six inches tall, but he is as big in the world of prog – indeed, in the world of rock music in general – as any musician on the planet.

This, after all, is Phil Collins, the drummer (and later, of course, frontman) with Genesis during the period of feverish creativity that produced some of the most acclaimed prog albums ever. These include 1973's *Selling England By The Pound*, voted by the readers of this magazine the greatest prog album of all time (issue 2), ahead of *Close To The Edge*, *In The Court Of The Crimson King*, *Dark Side Of The Moon* and *Brain Salad Surgery* (a further clue

as to how highly regarded Genesis are lies in the fact that *The Lamb Lies Down On Broadway* and *Foxtrov* were also in that countdown's Top 10).

But the diminutive chap with the stubble and Andy Capp-style hat on isn't just a critical behemoth – he's a commercial giant as well. Simply put, he's one of only three people in the history of popular music to have sold 100 million records with a band, then gone on to sell another 100 million as a solo artist: Paul McCartney is another, and Michael Jackson is the third. It's pretty stellar company, all told – the Beatle, the soul superstar, and the bloke from Chiswick. You'd think he would be glowing with pride, strutting about with puffed-out chest, an ego on (albeit short) legs.

But he's not. If anything, Collins cuts a somewhat forlorn figure, mooching about the lobby in his shirt and baggy cords, wondering where to park his Range Rover, concerned that he might get a ticket if he leaves it in front of the hotel.

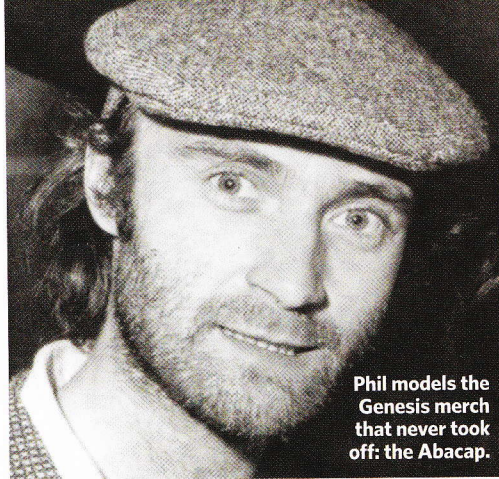
When the interview proper starts in a darkened room on the top floor, sat in his chair by the window, he seems even more slight and unassuming. As an opening gambit, I venture that he dwarfs most people in rock, citing the 250 million total of his combined Genesis and solo sales, which makes him as big as anyone has ever been.

"I was big," he says, laughing.

What might be troubling Collins is that he's also one of the most reviled stars in rock. He's not quite sure why this might be, although it has been gratifying, he says, as a lifelong R&B fan, to have been latterly re-evaluated by urban and hip-hop acts. "That was always there," he says. "That's why I was asked to do the Philip Bailey record [1984's *Easy Lover* and the Collins-produced *Chinese Wall*] and the Lamont Dozier one [1988's *Two Hearts* single]." He reconsiders the point: "I'm not even sure that there has been a rethink," he asserts. "There are still as many people out there who think the same things about me and that ain't gonna change. Every article I read now is along the lines of me being re-evaluated and everyone come out of the closet, and I don't know if that's true. Noel Gallagher probably still hates me. In fact, I didn't even say this – a journalist said it – but it's as though I said it: 'I'm cool now!' So I went on this website and it said: 'Who the fuck does he think he is, saying he's cool?'"

"I don't want to be part of this anymore," he furthers. "I am what I am, and I can't change that. And it ain't that bad. I'm not the antichrist of music."

All the negative press that Collins has endured



Phil models the Genesis merch that never took off: the Abacap.

## “PEOPLE STILL THINK THE SAME THINGS ABOUT ME. THAT WON'T CHANGE.”

over the years, about his solo music (regarded in some quarters as MOR pap), even his supposed treatment of his ex-wives (that marriage-terminating fax, which he actually didn't send), really seems to have finally taken its toll on the chirpy chap of rock. Indeed, in a recent issue of *Rolling Stone*, he talked briefly about his occasional suicidal thoughts, saying: "I sometimes think I'm going to write this Phil Collins character out of the story", adding, "Phil Collins will just disappear or be murdered in some hotel bedroom, and people will say, 'What happened to Phil?' And the answer will be, 'He got murdered, but, yeah, anyway, let's carry on.' That kind of thing." He further explained, chillingly: "I wouldn't blow my head off. I'd overdose or do something that didn't hurt. But I wouldn't do that to the children. A comedian who committed suicide in the 60s left a note saying, 'Too many things went wrong too often.' I often think about that."

He references that same comedian – Tony Hancock – later on in his interview with *Prog*, and makes similar comments about wanting to disappear off the map. "I'd like to write myself out of this script, the script that is my life," he tells me. "I've now had enough. I'd like to, you know... 'he disappears off into the sunset, possibly never to be heard of again'."

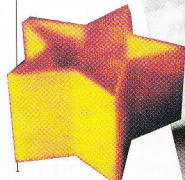
Despite his enormous contribution to rock, there is a sense with Collins that

his glory days are over, and he knows it. His artistic zenith, at least as far as *Prog* readers are concerned, was the 70s, and his commercial peak was the 80s, when he enjoyed greater Top 40 success in the States than anyone, Springsteen, Madonna and Michael Jackson included. The 90s and noughties were less successful: his solo albums didn't sell in their multiple millions. More recently, he has had bouts of ill health (including loss of hearing and dislocated vertebrae in his neck, leaving him unable to hold his drumsticks). Perhaps this is why the once-ubiquitous jet-setting rock star is happy to take a less central role these days, to recede a little from view, despite having a new album of Motown and 60s pop/soul covers, *Going Back*, to promote.

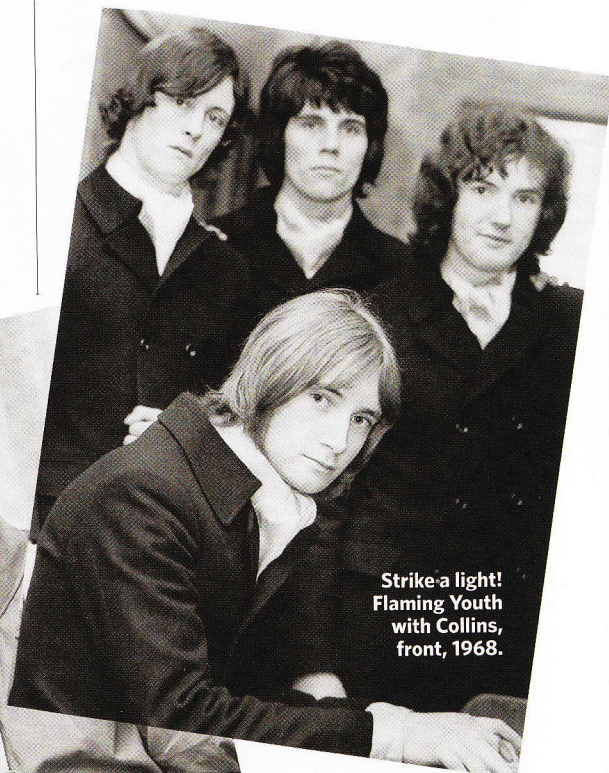
"That period is past," he sighs, unaware that, within a week, he will be at Number One once more, his first album of new material to reach the top since 1993's *Both Sides*. "And it was great and it was good and it was okay sometimes, but from where I am now I feel like you have to write yourself out [of the picture] so you can start again. And I'm not going to start again because I've got too many things I want to do, or not do."

Principal among the things he wants to do is be a good hands-on father to his two young sons now that he's divorced from his wife, Orianne (all three live up the road from him and the kids often come to stay). Second, he wants to focus on the book he is writing on his beloved collection of Alamo paraphernalia. And one of the other things he wants is to be able to enjoy his favourite instant snack foods. Readers, you didn't imagine that sentence. Phil Collins likes being on his own in his "interestingly modest house", where he sits in his kitchen all on his lonesome, eating Pot Noodles, which luckily, he says, he can buy in his local supermarket here in Switzerland. He even customises them. "I put eggs in and stuff," he grins, perhaps imagining the looks on *Prog* readers

Little drummer boy: pre-teen Collins gives it some stick.



Strike a light! Flaming Youth with Collins, front, 1968.







**Mr Tambourine Man:**  
Phil on tour with  
Genesis in 1977.

## AFTER THE ORDEAL

Live Aid: the lead balloon crashes.

"It wasn't much fun," Collins says of the performance on July 13, 1985, at JFK Stadium in Philadelphia. Robert Plant has called it "an atrocity". To Collins, it was simply "ugly", marred as it was by under-rehearsal and one too many drummers (Chic's Tony Thompson was also onstage).

"I read the other day that Jimmy Page said it was a disaster because it was under-rehearsed. What happened was, Robert Plant asked me to do it and I said, 'yeah' because we'd already played together on his first two solo albums. He said, 'Maybe you, me and Jimmy can do something?' I thought, 'This is getting better all the time!'"

"Between that moment and two days before the gig they kept asking me to come to England to rehearse, telling me that it would now be with Jimmy, Robert and John Paul Jones. I was busy - I'd just finished a tour and hadn't seen my kids - and I knew this was the Second Coming and that they wanted to get it right, but I just couldn't. So they rehearsed with Tony Thompson and I was going to just join them onstage. So I listened to the set on Concorde: *Whole Lotta Love*, *Stairway*, all that.

"When I arrived, there was the Zeppelin black cloud appearing over the dressing room and Pagey was a bit - let's just say he was out of it, which wasn't helpful. Straight away he made me feel like a spare part, even though they'd wanted me in from the start. Then Tony Thompson, God rest his soul, had me, this 'famous drummer', suddenly muscling in on his moment of glory - kind of, 'I've spent weeks rehearsing this material and you mince in!'"

From the first quarter of a minute I knew it would be trouble: Robert was over-singing, Jimmy was dribbling... I just thought, 'I can't walk offstage' so I stayed there and tried to keep out of everyone's way." **PL**

faces. Sometimes the absurdity of it all hits him. "I sit there and I'm, like, 'I bet Madonna doesn't do this! I bet she's not sitting there with a Pot Noodle!'"

Not that he considers himself sad and lonely. "If I'm painting a slightly Tony Hancock morose picture, it's actually not like that," he says. He just happens to like his own company. "I call Robert Plant sometimes, or Robert will tell my manager to 'tell Phil to give me a call, I'm worried about him'... But I'm not a gossip person. I'm not chatty. I just like to go home and do... stuff."

Not many musicians manage in their career to straddle the worlds of complex, multipartite song-suites and three-minute Motown ditties. Has Collins' career been about reconciling these disparate aspects of his musical character?

"It's not that contrived," he replies, taking a trip down memory lane for Prog's benefit. "I joined Genesis [in 1970] because they were working and I wanted to play, and it was £10 a week instead of the five I was getting."

Collins had been a stage school pupil and child actor (he was, famously, an extra in The Beatles' *A Hard Day's Night*) before gravitating towards music in the late-60s when he formed the band The Real Thing and then joined The Freehold, for whom he wrote his first song. A gifted drummer since childhood, he then became sticksman for Flaming Youth, his first band to have a record deal. Their album *Ark 2* got good reviews on its release in 1969.

He was a jobbing musician who had spent years on the London music scene, enjoying bands such as The Who and The Action and their amped-up mod R&B down at the Marquee club, his home from home. A fan of jazz and soul from a young age, he argues that he would have made his Motown covers album back then, if he'd had "the wherewithal".

"If I'd been given the same studio, I'd have picked half a dozen of the same songs [as on *Going Back*] at least," he contends. "It's the

sort of music that bands played then."

Genesis, however, were different. They were about as far removed from the Motown-covering R&B unit as it was possible to get. "Genesis never had that period - most bands form, they play,

and then get gigs in pubs or colleges, playing other people's songs as well as putting their own material in slowly. Genesis just played their own material. I bypassed that chapter which is possibly one of the reasons I'm doing it now, because I wanted to sing those songs at some point."

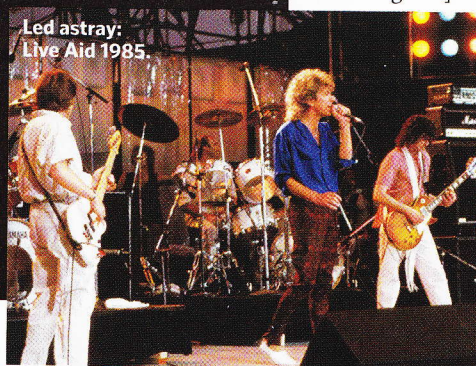
His first drumming heroes were "probably Brian Bennett and Tony Meehan of The Shadows, Bob Henrit of The Roulettes and later Argent, the bloke from The Hollies [Don Rathbone], Ginger Baker, Keith Moon..." His record collection was vast. But it was his jazz and soul records that meant the most, just as working with Lamont Dozier the Motown tunesmith on *Two Hearts* remains an all-time high, while the musician he would have most liked to have worked with is Joe Zawinul, the keyboard virtuoso from Weather Report. "He was always one of my heroes, and he was always asking me to play with him, but I didn't think I was good enough," admits Collins who, in his mind, often envisioned Genesis songs in big band jazz terms. "A song like *Get 'Em Out By Friday* on *Foxtrot* is a song for a Big Band as far as I'm concerned," he contends. "I was listening to Count Basie and Buddy Rich when I recorded that. I bought John Coltrane's *A Love Supreme* in 1964, when I was 13... But that sort of thing didn't appeal to Genesis' sensibility." It wasn't until Collins joined Brand X in the late-70s that he was able to realise his jazzier ambitions. "That was the kind of stuff I wanted to do as a kid," he says, "when I listened to all kinds of music."

Nevertheless, he threw in his lot with the UK underground scene as the music became progressively heavier and, well, more progressive, towards the end of the 60s. This was when bands like The Action "went from being into Sam & Dave to more Byrds and The Association-style trippy stuff. I went with them on that because I loved The Byrds and some of that West Coast stuff... Even in Flaming Youth, before Genesis, we did that sort of thing, like early Yes did - you know, when they were into The Fifth Dimension and doing versions of *America* and *Something's Coming*. That was my favourite version of Yes, actually."

When Collins went for the audition to be Genesis' drummer ("A drummer sensitive to acoustic music", ran the ad at the back of *Melody Maker*) down at Peter Gabriel's parents' house in Chobham, Surrey, complete with swimming pool, the West London lad admits that he had "never met anyone" like the Charterhouse public schoolboys Gabriel, Tony Banks and Mike Rutherford before (although within a year the band would have another Londoner in their ranks: Steve Hackett, a replacement for Anthony Phillips).

"The whole thing was a different experience from the beginning," recalls Collins. I went to the audition in the Surrey countryside - auditions were usually held upstairs in a pub in Kings Cross or wherever. This was a different world."

By this point, Genesis had released *From*



**Led astray:**  
Live Aid 1985.





Collins: "Jon Anderson asked me to get in touch with Yes, but I didn't and I don't know why. I often wonder where my life may have gone..."

Genesis *To Revelation* and *Trespass*. Was he familiar with their music?

"Not their music, but I knew they were a working band who were playing pretty much every night," he says. "I used to see their name in the back of *Melody Maker*. I'd tell the manager of Flaming Youth: 'This band Genesis, they're playing every bloody night and we're not!' I wanted to play."

"Anyway, after the audition, they played me some of their new album *Trespass* and I don't know what I felt about the music, because I didn't go a bundle on the drummer they had [John Mayhew], but some of it was very melodic, with lots of harmonies. I thought they were like Crosby, Stills and Nash."

Collins reveals that rock history could have been quite different because around this time he also got approached to join Yes. "Jon [Anderson] said, 'Yeah, man, give us a call' but I didn't and I don't know why. I think I could have fitted into that band because they were playing things I loved, but it wasn't to be. I do occasionally wonder where my life might have gone..."

The other band he would like to have joined was The Who, and would have seriously considered an offer had it come, following the death of Keith Moon. "They needed a drummer and Kenney Jones wasn't it," he contends. "I know Kenney and he's a nice bloke, but he didn't have the fire that Moon had." Did Collins have the fire? "I think I did, yeah." The Who did, he explains, invite him to perform with them at the Albert Hall but he couldn't fit it into his schedule. "I would love to have done it and I kick myself for not having done so," he says, although he did get to play with "Led Zeppelin" (see sidebar).

Moon, Bonham, Ginger Baker, the prog drummers such as Carl Palmer and Bill Bruford — how did Collins at his peak compare with the other great stickmen?

"Everybody rates me because they like 'der-der der-der der-der dah dahi,'" he says, miming the drum solo from 1981 megahit *In The Air Tonight*. "I'm good — or I was good — but Moon was a one-off. He did things nobody else could, although I would have had a crack. Baker — when I played with Eric Clapton, he'd give me a[n] [admiring] look, because I grew up with his stuff. I lived and breathed *Fresh Cream* and *Disraeli Gears*."

Who usually came top in the NME and *Melody Maker* annual Readers' Poll for Best Drummer?

"Bonham did, or Carl Palmer — depends who was hot at the time. Genesis used to win Best International Live Act. I won *Playboy* magazine's Best Drummer five years running. I was reckoned to be good but Bonham was extraordinary."

How about Genesis themselves? What does he consider to be their signal achievement? I ask this not expecting too positive a response. After all, as far back as 1982, Collins denounced the band's heavy prog past, declaring in *Creem* magazine of the then-recent *Abacab* that, "There is definitely much more immediacy on this record, which I think is us getting better at writing and not clouding it up with shit" and distancing Genesis from "all those bands that have synthesizers and lights", adding, in contrast to his above musings on early Yes: "Though I really like Jon Anderson as a person, I completely hate that Yes kind of music."

Hardly surprising, then, when he decides that he doesn't have "much affection for" the Gabriel-era Genesis albums "other than for the time in which they were made — the gigging days I have tremendous affection for." For Collins, a black music fan, it would have been preferable to have pursued a jazzier, funkier direction ahead of finally fulfilling his dream with Phil Collins Big Band in the 90s. His three finest achievements are, he decides,



Head to head: Rutherford and Collins live in 1992.

"some of the songs on *Both Sides* even though it was my worst-selling album, the Big Band thing, and playing with Eric Clapton."

He does, however, concede, taking into account everything that he's done — the early prog Genesis, the three-piece version of the band, his solo albums, his productions for John Martyn, contributions to Eno records and work with Brand X, among other things — that this is "not the body of work of someone who is safe. I think I've taken more risks than a lot of people. I've tried so many things that I didn't know how to do, and stuck my foot out and hoped I didn't tread on a landmine... That's not being safe. And that's what I'm most proud of."

So *Supper's Ready* and *Firth Of Fifth* don't get much stereo action chez Collins: "Nah," he says, dismissively, and it's probably safe to say you can put that Genesis reunion on hold. "The boys sometimes listen in the car. They put some Genesis on this morning, actually." He pauses for comic effect. "Then they put on *The Ying Tong Song* by The Goons, then Chuck Berry's *My Ding-A-Ling*." He smiles broadly as Prog fans everywhere commit hari-kari. "Go figure." ◀



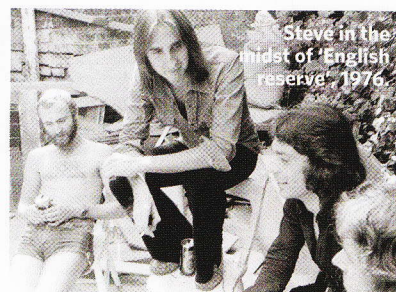


# YOUR OWN SPECIAL WAY

In spite of encouragement, Genesis have failed to re-form the 'classic' line-up. Former guitarist **Steve Hackett** assures **Paul Lester** that he's ready and willing when they are...



No Hackett required: Steve fondly remembers his time onstage with Genesis in the 70s.



Unlike Phil Collins, who appears to want to distance himself from his Genesis past (see previous pages), Steve Hackett is well up for a reunion. Not that he needs to do it—here is, after all, a musician described in a recent issue of this magazine as “the busiest man on Planet Prog right now”, with an acclaimed album, *Out Of The Tunnel's Mouth*, and 150 concerts under his belt to promote it, projects with Steven Wilson, Chris Squire, John Wetton and Gary Husband under way, and a British tour imminent that he calls *Around The World In 80 Trains*.

Nevertheless, Hackett—who admits to including a considerable amount of classic Genesis material in his solo sets these days—is as much a keeper of the flame as any of the former members, and is slightly dismayed that a reunion (whether of the original five or the *Trick Of The Tail/Wind & Wuthering* four-piece) has not happened yet, despite it seeming likely a few years back.

“I’ve had various conversations down the line with them and what I’ve learned is that for something to happen it has to be someone else’s idea,” he says. “Because whenever I suggest an idea to Genesis, there is always a good reason for not doing it. I’ve suggested various permutations, to no avail. They know that I’m up for it, and the very fact that I include so many Genesis tunes in my set suggests I’m carrying the torch. I can’t turn the clock back; I can only present those exhibits to lines around the block queuing for the museum that was once called Genesis. Have I burned any bridges? No, absolutely not. My bridges are open.”

It was 40 years ago that the young South Londoner, then a member of Quiet World, auditioned for Genesis after he placed an advert in *Melody Maker* seeking musicians “determined to strive beyond existing stagnant music forms”. Peter Gabriel and Tony Banks trudged to his parents’ flat in Pimlico “to check me out”. Was he nervous?

“No,” he replies, “because I’d spent five years auditioning and I thought it was just another bunch of guys in overcoats looking like they had the fashion sense of *Doctor Who* with their woolly scarves and overcoats and their dads’ borrowed trousers. It was distinctly non-designer.” Did he like them as people? “I didn’t know what to make of them. Pete was communicative. Tony didn’t say a word so I had no idea what he was like. Six months after I’d been in the band he told me he liked what I’d played in the audition. Talk about English reserve!”

Genesis were, says Hackett, a peculiarly English outfit, with the accent on the



"peculiar". They bore many influences: "Procul Harum, English hymns, a certain amount of Vaughan Williams and Shostakovich, a bit, maybe a lot, of Buddy Rich, pastoral music, and Jimmy Webb circa *MacArthur Park*." He grew up listening to "an awful lot of blues" although "all of that got excluded from my work with Genesis". His audition comprised a blues song, a free jazz work-out, and a pastoral piece with his brother John on flute. They preferred the latter: "Early Genesis were very pastoral," he says. "Mike Rutherford said he really liked the guitar sound of Joni Mitchell – I hadn't even thought an English band could base its idea of guitar music on something from an American lady."

Lyrically, while Yes were investigating cosmic netherworlds and King Crimson were navigating inner space, Genesis were exploring the seamier side of British suburbia and the creepiness of childhood.

"There was something deliberately quaint about Genesis lyrics and characters like Ethel in *I Know What I Like (In Your Wardrobe)* [from *Selling England By The Pound*]. There was as much *Come Into The Garden Maud* with Genesis lyrics as there was 'Bet your mama don't know you scream like that' [from the Stones' *Stray Cat Blues*]. It was just much more veiled, but no less sinister. We approached things from a more obtuse angle. We managed to articulate English repressiveness, with allusions to nasty habits. Other bands were much more overt – like the Stones' idea of underage sex – whereas with Genesis it was all by implication. No one really knew what Peter was singing about. You could take it both ways, so to speak."

On albums such as *Nursery Cryme*, *Foxtrot* and *Selling England...*, Genesis took the musical hall Englishness and fancifulness

of The Beatles circa *Sgt Pepper* to elaborate, bizarre new extremes.

"There was a conscious attempt to embrace the bizarre," he agrees, "in a way that maybe surrealism and Dadaism and expressionist paintings had done." He compares and contrasts the "musical cubism" of King Crimson's *Schizoid Man* and its "angular playing" with Genesis' early-70s innovations with the Mellotron and the sound of "the ghostly orchestra cast out into the void", as he puts it, as evinced on a track like *Watcher Of The Skies*. "That's a song I've still got time for: it's complex, polyrhythmic stuff, and maybe you could criticise it for that, but there's also a lyrical romanticism... We tried to touch on a number of bases. I'm not gifted enough to analyse the appeal of Genesis. It was a hodgepodge of ideas; an early attempt at long-form pop."

Considering how wayward and esoteric their music was, Genesis were staggeringly popular. By 1974's *The Lamb Lies Down On Broadway*, it was becoming evident that Peter Gabriel wanted out.

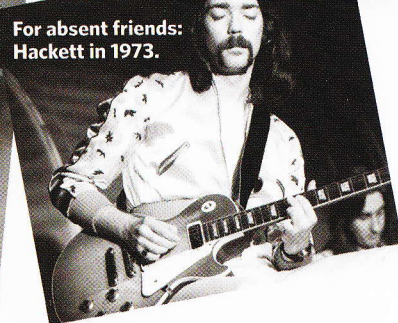
"I totally respect it when a singer wants to write their own music and opts for a solo career," says Hackett. "Sometimes the interests of the music are best served when one person has a vision that mustn't be tarnished by others. Can you imagine what would have happened someone like Tchaikovsky had been interrupted by his first violinist chipping in with, 'Oh, I think I've got a better idea for the second chorus!'"

He admits that "tremendous compromises were made to accommodate each other" and that his own departure from the band in 1977 was prompted by a desire to expand his own horizons.

"We were all musical idealists in a way, and if you get five in a band there is only a certain amount of time that you can indulge the compromise," he



Making tracks: Steve Hackett today.



For absent friends: Hackett in 1973.

## "I CAN'T TURN BACK THE CLOCK BUT I CAN CARRY THE TORCH."



explains. "But there was a lot of talent, and I'm still a fan of the individuals – each has written songs that have fired me up and moved me to tears."

Hackett found it "very emotional" meeting up with Messrs Collins, Rutherford and Banks at the Rock And Roll Hall of Fame ceremony last March, despite being disappointed that the mooted *Lamb Lies Down On Broadway* shows never transpired and the reunion of the four-man Genesis turned into a comeback, in 2006, of the 80s trio. And yet he readily accepts that Genesis' golden age was 1971-74.

"Strangely, the current 'keepers of the keys', Tony and Mike, don't feel that was the band's finest hour whereas I do," he says. "I don't know what Pete feels about it and I suspect that Phil distances himself from it and considers it far too worthy and complicated, and that the stuff he did subsequently was better because it was simpler and more digestible." He pauses, musing that "I could get into hot water with this one", before concluding of the contrast between "classic period" and "commercial behemoth" Genesis: "It's the difference between a gourmet meal for cognoscenti and something more 'bread and butter' that will feed the masses. They got poppier in the 80s, the songs got shorter, more streamlined and stripped down for the video era. But I rather feel that the baby got thrown out with the bath water." 

WHEN THE

SWEET TURNS

TO SOUR

"I feel a bit small!"

Anthony Phillips looks back.

Since leaving Genesis in 1970, Anthony Phillips has gone on to develop a career in writing both library music, TV scores and since 1977, a string of solo albums, the most recent of which is *Pathways & Promenades*. However he's still best remembered as one of the founding members of Genesis. Phillips recalls how in their earliest gigs audiences didn't know what to make of the group. "We were playing at technical colleges, at night clubs and we bemused people. The most trouble we had was with the quiet songs because we just



didn't have the amplification and people just wouldn't listen. One of the sad things about that year on the road was that a lot of material was dropped. We used to kick off sets with *Grandma* and *Little Leaf* [which later appeared as *Old Wives Tales* on *Private Parts & Pieces III*]. These might've have made it onto *Trespass* but were torpedoed off the road as they were too quiet."

After a year of continuous touring, Phillips, suffering from a bout of glandular fever and an extreme form of stage fright, quit the group. Did he ever regret his decision? "Of course, but I wouldn't have wanted to go touring or have the press intrusion. It would've scared the living daylights out of me."

Is it ever irksome being associated with something that you did over 40 years ago? "You do get the "Pete Best" routine from people. It is

difficult in that respect because you can never really get away from people who are much more interested in the fact that you were in Genesis than anything else. You learn very quickly to be polite and quite quickly take your leave in those circumstances. The good side is that nobody can ever take away that I was one of the founding fathers; there was an input, a certain side from Mike Rutherford and I which is in the foundations. That's the good side, and the reflected glory that comes with all of that."

Would Phillips ever be tempted back for a grand reunion gig? "The answer most definitely would be 'No!' I haven't toured since 1970 so I would feel completely out of my depth. If such a gig was for a charity. Then I would have to say 'yes.' I don't know how to say this without sounding too humble but I feel a bit small. These guys have been gigging all over the world. I'm just a studio musician now, really." **SS**

