

This is Movie Man – A review of Peter Gabriel’s Rated PG

Peter Gabriel has a long association with film. A quick glimpse at his biography reveals many close encounters with the art form going back to 1969 when, aged 19, he secured a place at film school. Of course it’s well known that when forced to choose between a career in film and music, Gabriel chose the latter. It turned out to be one of his most astute decisions that he would ever make.

Turning professional with his Charterhouse school friends, with whom he had formed Genesis in 1967, their songs, supported in no small part by his distinctive stage persona, proved to be a winning formula and within 3 years Genesis had established itself as one of the leading *Progressive Rock* bands of the early ‘70s, a position they would comfortably hold onto for the rest of the decade.

Gabriel’s image back then was forged from a combination of his peculiar hair style, sporting elaborate stage costumes, in order to get across the deeper meaning behind Genesis’ complex songs, and delivering imaginative introductions to those same songs that, as often as not, did the opposite job. This confident exhibitionism was in stark contrast to his offstage persona, with those closest to him often describing him as shy, introverted and deep thinking.

Genesis’ considerable success came from their collective efforts although the music press tended to give the greatest slice of attention and, inadvertently, credit for this to their lead singer. Eventually Gabriel began to feel uneasy playing the role of rock star that this success provided him with and after a long period of indecision and uncertainty, fuelled partly by an offer to work with Hollywood film director William Friedkin, he finally left the band in May 1975 to pursue other interests.

One of those interests was to make short form video films – not promo films for singles – but actual short stories for which he hoped to find a backer. Nothing came of this pioneering idea and after twelve months of “growing cabbages and making babies”, Gabriel took a major step back towards the music industry when, in

September 1976, he began recording his first solo album, *Peter Gabriel* issued on 25 February 1977.

Actually his very first solo recording appeared ahead of that album, in November 1976. As a favour to producer Lou Reizner, Gabriel provided a vocal for an orchestral arrangement of The Beatles' 'Strawberry Fields Forever' for – rather topically – the soundtrack of the film *All This and World War II*, which lived up to its name and *bombed* at the box office. Gabriel later admitted he didn't much care for the arrangement and it remains exclusive to that oddball soundtrack.

Although that would be his only contribution to a film soundtrack for seven years, Gabriel and the medium were never that far apart during those years. In 1979 he co-wrote a screenplay with cult film director Alejandro Jodorowsky, based on the story contained within the Genesis album *The Lamb Lies Down on Broadway*. Sadly, the project stalled when it failed to attract sufficient backing; in 1981 he recorded a 15 minute soundtrack to an experimental film created by Graham Dean, called *Undercurrents*, which to this day remains unreleased and largely unheard; and in 1983 Gabriel appeared as a hologram (performing a two minute extract of 'San Jacinto' in full stage costume and make-up) in the low budget Sci-Fi film *Lorca and the Outlaws* (another outstanding box office flop) and provided music for a Japanese film called *Jusaburo* (comprising mainly instrumental mixes from songs taken from his fourth solo album) which briefly appeared on home video (but only in Japan) in 1985.

All of this work, while ultimately receiving little or no attention, helped keep Gabriel's interest in film alive long enough for his work to eventually grace a variety of films throughout the period from 1984 to the present day. Highlights from this aspect of his career are now gathered together to form a compilation album *Rated PG* which was released as part of *Record Store Day 2019*.

The format chosen for this release is a 12" picture disc album which, while not satisfying the audiophiles within Gabriel's fan base, has certainly piqued the interest of collectors of his work. In addition a free download code allows those that require improved sound quality over that provided by the picture disc, a chance to burn high quality digital files to a CDR. Since its appearance for *RSD* it has been confirmed that standard CD and black vinyl editions will appear later in the year.

Rated PG comprises 10 songs that span the years 1984 to 2017, offering fans a chance to acquire in one release a sample of the soundtrack material that Gabriel had to choose from. Sensibly ignoring his film scores for *Birdy* (1985), *The Last Temptation of Christ* (1988) and *Rabbit Proof Fence* (2002), all of which remain in print having been reissued only a couple of years ago, Gabriel has cherry-picked some of his personal favourite tracks that have appeared in a variety of films as 'source material'. Many of these will already be in many fans' collections but there are a few rarities among the album's contents that won't be, as well as many notable omissions from the set that space couldn't be found for. The prospect remains then for Gabriel to release a *widescreen* version of this release at some future date, or maybe a second volume.

Turning for a minute to the true rarities included, the most ardent followers of Gabriel's work won't have some of this material, at least not in the versions/mixes selected, and even those that did buy DVDs of the films *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* and *Les Morsures de l'Aube* in order to hear the songs 'Bol' (now with the revised title of 'Speak (Bol)') and 'Nocturnals' respectively, will, I'm sure, be grateful to have them on a more user friendly format.

Side One of the album begins with one of Gabriel's finest moments to have ever graced a film soundtrack, in the shape of the Oscar nominated '**That'll Do**', written by *Randy Newman* and reportedly the late Sir Terry Wogan's favourite song. Fans of Gabriel's will no doubt recall that the singer delivered an emotional version of this song at Wogan's funeral held at Westminster Abbey on 27 September 2016. Written

in 1998 for a rather forgettable film, *Babe: Pig in the City*, 'That'll Do' benefits from the gorgeously sensual sound of the Black Dyke Mills Brass Band which supports a wonderfully controlled vocal from Gabriel. 'That'll Do' remains one of the high points from Gabriel's sizeable back catalogue of songs that fall outside of his main body of work and it would not have been out of place on the 2003 double compilation *Hit* had its status at the time matched that of today.

'Down to Earth' from the animated environmental awareness film *Wall·E*, raises the tempo somewhat and on its appearance in 2009 was Gabriel's first newly composed song to have been given an official mainstream release for over 6 years. 'Down to Earth' is an uplifting song propelled by a rousing chorus on which Gabriel is supported by The Soweto Gospel Choir, that had provided "heavenly" support on Gabriel's sublime version of 'Biko' performed in front of Nelson Mandela at the *46664 concert* held at the Green Point Stadium Cape Town, South Africa on 29 November 2003.

Film Director Andrew Stanton, when citing reasons for involving Peter Gabriel in his plans for *Wall·E*, recalled the impressions left on him by Gabriel's performances on *The Lamb Lies Down on Broadway* back in 1974 which at least provides a tenuous link between that ancient Genesis concept album, the unfinished screenplay and the world of film. In the ten years that have elapsed since *Wall·E* appeared, Governments and businesses the world over continue to ignore the stark warnings dished out by environmentalists that this planet can sustain only so much damage from the impact of selfish and reckless acts and policies, and while 'Down to Earth' hasn't been adopted as some sort of signature tune by the numerous environmental pressure groups, its central message remains on point. Whether its plastic bags in the sea, Carbon Dioxide in the ozone layer or diesel fumes infiltrating our lungs, the simple truth is there is no place like home and no other home available to us.

On track 3, **'This is Party Man'**, things get even more interesting. Gabriel fans that bought the *Virtuosity* soundtrack issued in 1995 will know this song well, credited on

there to *Peter Gabriel and The World Beaters*. The track as originally presented was a decent enough song albeit one that felt unfinished – it comprising of a single verse and chorus that was repeated a few times rather than developing into anything really substantial. There was also a hint of an imperfect vocal when Gabriel first sings “P-P-P Party Man, P-P-P Party Man” not quite making the highest note, which always sounded jarring and something that should have been corrected.

In contrast the version used over the credits of the film (as heard on the DVD) was much smoother and has the superior vocal, albeit in a much shorter edit at just over 2 minutes. With ‘This is Party Man’ (issued two days ahead of the album as a download) Gabriel has provided an alternate version of the track (hence the slightly altered title) using the superior vocal and incorporating two sections of a demo recording that ultimately developed into ‘Make Tomorrow’ that concludes Gabriel’s *Ovo* record issued in 2000. Students of Gabriel’s lesser known work will recognise those newly inserted sections from a *So*-era demo recording called ‘This is the Road’, issued as a *Moon Club* download on 24 April 2005, although the version used within ‘This is Party Man’ is a completely different take of unconfirmed origin.

This unusual approach of introducing sections of a demo into what is a more polished recording reminds me of the one Gabriel previously took with the *So DNA* material issued within the 25th anniversary box set release of his most popular album. It’s not certain to me whether the demo sections were ever part of the original composition of ‘Party Man’ but the two component parts of that demo which now feature within the body of the song fit well enough as to make such speculation redundant. Therefore, if this was stitched together retrospectively then full marks go to Gabriel and his team for coming up with the idea in the first place.

The fourth song, ‘**The Book of Love**’, stems from the 2004 film *Shall We Dance* and can be viewed as the template for Gabriel’s covers album, *Scratch My Back* issued in 2010. Gabriel would recycle the track for his covers project complete with new vocal recorded over the original backing track. Written by Stephen Merrit, Gabriel’s version offers a delicately delivered, almost spoken, vocal set on top of an orchestral

backing track arranged by Nick Ingman. There's a clue as to how much this song must mean to Gabriel in the fact that he has chosen to include his original version on *Rated PG*. Truth is, that version features a superior vocal to the one later included on *Scratch My Back*, although the majority of listeners might struggle to tell the two apart. Nevertheless 'The Book of Love' is a quality song that, pardon the pun, merits inclusion here as well as being an important sign-post to where Gabriel's career was heading a decade ago.

Closing Side One is 'Taboo' credited to Peter Gabriel and Nusrat Fateh Ali Khan their second (and least well known) of three collaborations in the all too brief time that they worked together. The track was recorded for inclusion on the soundtrack to Oliver Stone's controversial film *Natural Born Killers* based on a heavily revised Quentin Tarantino screenplay. 'Taboo', which on *Rated PG* lasts an extra 90 seconds compared to the standard version on *Natural Born Killers*, features Nusrat on lead vocal with Gabriel providing keyboards and presumably, since no official credits seem to have been made public, the drum pattern.

As a song 'Taboo' is arguably the bravest inclusion on *Rated PG*, it being the only song not to feature Gabriel on lead vocals. Its inclusion on *Natural Born Killers* (voted eighth most controversial film of all time by *Entertainment Weekly* in 2008, incredibly 2 places behind *The Last Temptation of Christ*) will forever link it, indirectly, with mass shootings and as such it's difficult to completely disassociate the song from those horrifically disturbing events. Notably, in Gabriel's only interview to date in support of *Rated PG*, he confessed to not being comfortable with scenes of extreme violence which does beg the question why he agreed to provide source material for *Natural Born Killers* in the first place.

In trying to separate the song from the context of the film, and the horrific violence depicted therein, it's worth mentioning that the lyrics of 'Taboo' comprise nothing more sinister than an opening section of vocal exercises followed by Nusrat repeatedly running through the basic scale on which Hindustani classical music is

based, *Sa, Ra, Ga, Ma, Pa, Dha, Ni* (the equivalent of *Do Re Mi Fa So La Ti* in Western music). Gabriel's decision to include this obscure track on such a high profile release is to be applauded, as this will undoubtedly increase awareness of it among his fan base.

Side two of the album begins with the second previously unreleased track in the form of '**Everybird**' from the animated film *Birds Like Us*, issued in 2017 that has yet to make it to DVD and therefore is appearing for the first time here on *Rated PG*. The film is an allegorical tale concerning refugees looking for a better place in which to settle, an obvious topic for Gabriel to attach himself to. The song's lyric sticks firmly to the film's main theme, which suggests this was written to order, as Gabriel sings:

It's not the place that I grew up in
It's not the body that I was born with
They're not the trees that I once played in
That Surround Us, Us in a prison

Gabriel delivers a delightfully delicate vocal, echoing the feelings of a frightened individual who has to re-connect with the world having been forced to flee from the familiar and their family. Often the music is fittingly fragile featuring a simple piano line, bass and light orchestral touches for the most part that is effective in reinforcing both the sense of loss as well as that of hope in that displacement may open up opportunities rather than necessarily lead to deeper despair.

The newest track is followed by the oldest in the form of '**Walk Through the Fire**'. This familiar song was first issued in 1984 on the soundtrack to the film *Against All Odds* and shortly afterwards in a superior remixed version as a single which barely scraped into the UK singles chart peaking at No. 69 in June of that year. For *Rated*

PG Gabriel has included the original mix, previously available on the film's soundtrack album, rather than the more desired remix which remains exclusive to the 7"/12" vinyl releases from 1984.

The instrumental backing track that eventually became 'Walk Through the Fire' was originally recorded during the third *Peter Gabriel* album sessions in 1979, and it was a pleasant surprise to many fans (especially those that had heard the bootleg *Games Without Words*) when it appeared as a finished track some five years later. It's likely that the lyrics, which deal with single-minded determination, were written in 1983 when Gabriel was approached to provide an unreleased song for the film re-associating him with two of his former Genesis colleagues, Phil Collins and Mike Rutherford, who similarly contributed a song each to the film and its soundtrack. In spite of belonging to a much earlier phase in Gabriel's development as a writer, 'Walk Through the Fire' stands up well alongside the more recent material presented here, and with its heavy dependence on rhythm machines and, of their time, synthesiser tones, it offers a compelling contrast to his more mature and considered material that makes up the bulk of *Rated PG*.

The next track '**Speak (Bol)**' is another welcome rarity that was previously exclusive to the end credits of the DVD release of the 2012 film *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*, a political thriller strongly based around intolerance and xenophobia. The film was not a box office success on release and consequently few Gabriel fans will be aware of it. The version included on *Rated PG* has been edited back to 6' 33" (compared to nearly 8 minutes on the DVD) and is one of the more ambitious pieces included on the compilation.

'Speak (Bol)' is sung mainly by Gabriel but has significant vocal contributions from Atif Aslam (delivered in Urdu) with a backing track that features acoustic guitars, powerful drums and an orchestral accompaniment that combine to form a fascinating soundscape. The central message in the song's lyric takes its lead from the universal anthem for change 'Get Up Stand Up' with Gabriel urging the oppressed to "Speak

out, stand up....Say what you have to say". It's a stance that Gabriel is commonly associated with of course, as evidenced by his cover of the Marley song, his own compositions 'Biko' and 'Wallflower', as well as his work with *Witness*, *Amnesty International* and *The Elders*.

In the post 9/11 world, protest songs (certainly among rock music's higher profile stars) have become surprisingly conspicuous by their absence, as anyone wishing to make a point through music can now simply use social media and post a video of an established artist performing a track to suit, whatever issue they wish to associate themselves with. That trend is reversing to an extent in this era of Trump, Brexit and alleged Russian interference in the running of the free world (if such a thing truly exists) but Rock's role in all of this has certainly waned in the past thirty years. It's therefore refreshing to report that in releasing a song such as 'Speak (Bol)' Gabriel hasn't quite given up the fight, although the number of people receptive to his message, with the passing of time, has understandably fallen or are simply looking elsewhere for their call to arms.

The penultimate track is a personal favourite and another rarity in the shape of '**Nocturnals**' which is another song previously only available on the end credits of a DVD release. Nocturnals appeared in 2001 recorded for an obscure French language film *Les Morsures de l'Aube* (renamed *Love Bites* for English speaking audiences) and directed by Antoine de Caunes. Provided as a favour to the French director Gabriel was repaying de Caunes for having featured him on two TV shows – *Chorus*, a French music show on which Gabriel appeared singing live in December 1978; and *Rapido*, for which Gabriel was filmed promoting the then recently launched *Real World Records* back in 1989.

'Nocturnals' is a lively song with a vibrant Moroccan string motif bolted onto a particularly dominant acoustic guitar riff that provides a memorable hook. Quite how this song was never developed further to become a centrepiece of the *Up* record is

something of a mystery to me but as an album out-take it certainly ranks as one of Gabriel's finest, if rather bleak, moments.

Gabriel's lyrics here take a distinctly dark sinister path, as the protagonist, known as "The Postman" working as part of a gang, confesses to disposing of its drugged up victims and dreaming of "children who grew up to do dangerous things". This is arguably the darkest lyric Gabriel had penned since 'Intruder' graced the opening five minutes of his ground-breaking third album and is fully deserving of a wider audience.

Taking its now customary place at the end of the album is the most well-known track included on *Rated PG*, in the shape of the movie version of '**In Your Eyes**'. The movie in question of course is *Say Anything*, a romantic comedy that was the directorial debut of Cameron Crowe released in 1989 and responsible for giving 'In Your Eyes' its second wind. While the song was an undoubted high point of Gabriel's live shows in 1986/87, 'In Your Eyes' had only been a moderate hit in the US when issued there as the follow up to 'Sledgehammer'. In the UK it wasn't even issued as a single but its appearance in *Say Anything* elevated its status and forever pinned the song to the image of John Cusack holding his boom-box aloft to fire off the musical equivalent of Cupid's arrow towards his ex-girlfriend played by Lone Skye.

The version of 'In Your Eyes' included on the *Say Anything* soundtrack was lifted directly off the *So* album but on *Rated PG* it is listed as the 'movie version'. Anyone familiar with the boom-box scene will recall that the music switches between full on sound to 'computer speaker' quality as the scene cuts between Cusack and Skye to reflect how each character would hear the music. Fortunately Gabriel has not replicated this effect on the version included here, which is simply a slightly altered edit of the familiar album version with minor modifications to the mix. Given its strong association with *Say Anything*, while it's certainly an appropriate song to include on *Rated PG*, I'm sure many fans would have wished for something more from this track or perhaps preferred a different, more unusual, choice of song altogether from the

many Gabriel had at his disposal. But 'In Your Eyes' is understandably very close to the heart of its composer since it continues to feature in just about every live appearance Gabriel makes and one assumes its inclusion here was intended to provide an element of familiarity among the mainly obscure content.

While *Rated PG* is not exactly a *new* Peter Gabriel album (which sounds to me like it will be a further 2-3 years in the making) it will go some way to placating his extremely patient audience who haven't seen a newly composed album of his songs since 2002. As a collection of songs that helps to define precisely what motivates the singer as he transfers his feelings on a wide range of issues into his music, it's actually a very cohesive album. As a stop-gap to that next album of newly created material, whenever that moment arrives, and as a reminder that Peter Gabriel is still very much around, this'll do.

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