

Philipp Röttgers

Two eras of *genesis*?

The development of a rock band



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Tectum Verlag

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1. A Call To Arms: Introduction

Take the hits 'Biko' by Peter Gabriel, 'In the Air Tonight' by Phil Collins, 'The Living Years' by Mike and the Mechanics and 'Turn It on Again' by Genesis – what do they have in common apart from being chart hits? Right – they all come out of a group, which, like no other group, had no problem in leading successful band career and successful solo careers parallel for a long time. A group, whose members could have filled the Top 10 Single Charts in a week sometime in the 1980s without any problems!

On June 30, 1990, a concert, introduced as the "biggest British charity event since Live Aid" (Thompson 2005: 239) was played at Knebworth Park in England. It featured many of the greatest musicians of that period, "including Paul McCartney, Eric Clapton, Mark Knopfler, Elton John and Pink Floyd" (Bowler & Dray 1992: 214). But the man of the hour (and of the whole decade that lay behind him) "was Phil Collins, who caught the most admiring eye, as he ran first through a set with his Serious Band and then [...] he augmented that lineup with "my two best friends"', whereupon Tony Banks and Mike Rutherford entered the stage "for a closing 20 minutes of Genesis" (Thompson 2005: 240).

At that point in their history, the members of the band Genesis were "more concerned with solo material than band compositions" (Thompson 2005: 239). Phil Collins was at the peak of his solo career, being more famous for that than for being in Genesis, and releasing hit single after hit single, like 'In The Air Tonight', his "first-ever solo single" with its very own "style, passion, identity – and a pounding rhythm" (Waller 1985: 79) or his cover of "the Motown classic 'You Can't Hurry Love'" (Welch 2005: 109). Guitarist Mike Rutherford was in the charts with his band Mike and the Mechanics, most famous for "'All I Need Is a Miracle', one of the great pop songs of the age" (Welch 2005: 122). Only keyboardist Tony Banks, who collaborated with the likes of "Fish from Marillion", with whom he had released the song 'Shortcut to Somewhere', failed to gain any chart success. Fish's voice was said to resemble the voice of a certain Peter Gabriel (cf. Holm-Hudson 2008: 143), a man who, like Phil Collins, "began to dominate the music industry" by "unleashing a veritable cascade of hit solo albums and singles" (Welch 2005: 4), the most famous probably being "the instantly appealing 'Sledgehammer'" (Welch 2005: 102). Some people in 1990 might have not known that Gabriel had once been in the same band with Collins. Of course, many people knew that they were once together in "what had previously been described as an 'art rock' band" (Welch 2005: 4), especially since Collins & Co. had kept on playing songs like 'I Know What

I Like' or 'The Lamb Lies Down On Broadway' since Gabriel's departure in 1975 (cf. Welch 2005: 92). But more famous were hits and more recent complex tracks like 'Follow You Follow Me', 'Turn It On Again', 'Mama', 'Home By The Sea', 'Invisible Touch', 'Land Of Confusion', 'Tonight Tonight Tonight', 'Throwing It All Away', 'No Son Of Mine', 'Jesus He Knows Me' and 'I Can't Dance', songs that could easily fill a whole *Hits*-compilation. Since Phil Collins had taken over the lead vocals and the band and its members released hit single after hit single, they seemed to have developed from a once great progressive rock band to a simple pop group.

Christopher Curries review of the album *We Can't Dance* from 1991 gives a good overview of the prevailing prejudices that surround the music group Genesis. It was his second review after *The Lamb Lies down on Broadway* from 1975 and in his opinion "both the best and worst Genesis studio albums [were] covered." He calls the album "something of a monstrosity [...], spawning several tedious and idiotic singles that made it almost impossible for fans of progressive music to retain any reasonable level of tolerance for the outfit." And of course, "Phil [Collins] is most deserving of the blame." He finishes his review with the statement that "there really isn't any need for a progressive fan to buy this album."

That is the general view on Genesis, a progressive rock band that had to face the loss of its great singer Peter Gabriel and afterwards changed into a pop band, when drummer Phil Collins took over the microphone. Peter Gabriel was even announced "Prog God" at the progressive rock music awards in 2014 (cf. Masters, n.d.), the band itself had been given a lifetime-award two years earlier, which was accepted by Tony Banks and Mike Rutherford. Genesis' producer Nick Davis (in Banks et al 2007: 331) agrees that "the albums definitely fall into eras." Indeed, the Genesis back catalogue gives a wild range of different songs and styles and seems to part the fan-base into two different camps: The progressive-fan cannot bear listening to Phil Collins' 'One More Night' and the average pop-fan skips over Genesis' epic double album *The Lamb Lies down on Broadway*. He prefers to listen to Phil Collins' 'Another Day in Paradise', while the progressive rock fan would like to hear Peter Gabriel's album *Up*. When he looks into his vinyl collection he might find Genesis' *Wind and Wuthering* but not *Genesis!* But both fans probably have Peter Gabriel's album *Us* in their collection – and both of them can sing along to 'I Know What I Like (In Your Wardrobe)', Genesis' 1973 4-minute single from one of their most progressive albums, *Selling England By The Pound!*

In an article on cracked.com it is said that "the bulk of Genesis' new albums was pop and lots of Phil Collins." Adam Tod Brown admits that

“the prevailing historical opinion is that, after taking over frontman duties, Collins proceeded to completely ruin the Genesis legacy, turning the band into wussy music for boring adults, but it's not like Gabriel left and the band released "Invisible Touch" the next day.”

A new frontman for an established band is always something that makes the fans insecure. People identify with the singer. When Ozzy Osbourne left Black Sabbath and was replaced by Ronnie James Dio, fans were divided into two camps: The band sounded better, Dio had a better singing voice and wrote mystic lyrics, but one could not bear to hear him sing “Paranoid”. Should they have changed their name at that point? Definitely not. Tony Iommi, guitarist of the band from its beginning until today *is* Black Sabbath.

Neo-progressive band Marillion (who were dealt as successors of old Genesis) lost their singer Fish after roughly ten years. They recruited Steve Hogarth and together the band have made music for over 25 years, but the record sells have never reached their early heights again. Should the band have renamed themselves although the musicians were all the same?

And what about the likes of Iron Maiden or Deep Purple, who became famous and successful after their first singers had left? They became famous with singer no. 2 and everyone that followed up could not relive the spirit of the most famous line-up.

An interesting case is Pink Floyd. Their earliest incarnation had Syd Barrett as frontman and songwriter, which made him “Mr. Pink Floyd”. He left after two albums only and the band’s bassist, Roger Waters, slowly moved himself to the front over the years, claiming to be “Mr. Pink Floyd”, even after he had left the band. Next, guitarist David Gilmour took over the role of the front man, seen by many as “Mr. Pink Floyd”. How often would this band have had to change their name?

Genesis faced the same problem after the loss of their second vocalist. When Phil Collins, who had “always been Genesis, at least to the record buying public who can’t really tell his solo career apart from Genesis” (McMahan 1998: 4) left in 1996, they hired a new vocalist, Ray Wilson, but after his predecessors Gabriel and Collins, he unfortunately had no chance to become “Mr. Genesis”. But “Mr. Genesis” was someone else. There are actually two “Mr. Genesis”: Keyboardist Tony Banks and guitarist/bassist Mike Rutherford, who founded the band in 1967 and have seen it through all its successes and changes. Barley anyone realized that these two were the driving forces behind a progressive band that was progressive in the truest sense of the word. The focus is and has always been on the two

singers and the fans might only think of Banks and Rutherford when wondering: “How did they allow the band to become so poppy?”

We will have a look at “how they could have allowed it”. First of all, we will take a look at the musical evolution that surrounded their genesis and then we will go through their history and pick out songs to make up the trademarks that each “era” bears (the Peter Gabriel era runs from 1967-1975, the Phil Collins era runs from 1975-1996). We will see how they changed, *if* they changed, what caused any changes and we will look at how true the accusations against the band are. Another important factor is also the inclusion of the solo careers of the members, which might shed new light on who was responsible for which feature in the band’s music and performance. Is it really true, that after Phil Collins became popular with short simple love songs, he took over this recipe on Genesis or are there any other factors one might have to consider?

For the solo careers, I chose songs by each member to point out certain features of their careers. The songs and performances can be found on Youtube, lyrics and album covers are linked. In the beginning of each chapter that deals with a special song or album I added comments from the videos I deal with in that chapter that show the general atmosphere when it comes to discussions about Genesis.

2. The Journey: Musical development in Britain in the early 1960s

...different generations, diverse backgrounds, be it musically, politically, sociologically. (Ameri & Schmidt 2013: 7)

It was after the Second World War that young people “became significant for the marketing industry, and clothing, cosmetics, magazines, movies and entertainment were designed for and marketed to them.” They had “their own radios and record players, and they listened to and bought recordings of music that reflected their own tastes”, music that “became known as *pop music*.” This music, especially “rock and roll, united most teenagers in the late 1950s and early 1960s and it created “a “generation gap” between them and older generations.” Pop music “split into niche markets, people of all ages found that the music they listened to marked their identity as strongly as the clothes they wore and the ways they behaved” (Burkholder et al 2005: 896).

Britain’s musical export were The Beatles, founded in 1960, who conquered the world with their “British Invasion” and they were followed by “bands such as the Rolling Stones, the Kinks, the Animals, the Who, and Cream.” All these bands

“sought an individual sound, they developed many new styles within the broad tradition of rock: the California style of the Beach Boys; Steppenwolf’s *heavy metal* style; the *hard rock* of Led Zeppelin and Aerosmith; the *acid rock* or *psychedelic rock* of Jefferson Airplane; and the *avant-garde rock* of Frank Zappa” (Burkholder et al 2005: 900).

Out of these new styles different genres emerged and each genre “had its own stars, fans, and radio programs, and the popularity of songs in each category was tracked on *charts*, weekly rankings by sales of 45-rpm singles” (Burkholder et al 2005: 896). One of the new genres was the genre of progressive rock. It “emerged in Britain” (Hegarty & Halliwell 2011: 10) by the end of the 1960s. The roots go, as for many genres, back to the Beatles, because “the birth of progressive rock is frequently traced back to the release of [their] 1967 album, *Sgt. Pepper’s Lonely Hearts Club Band*” (Hegarty & Halliwell 2011: 31). If one thinks of progressive rock, one “will conjure images of long solos, overlong albums, fantasy lyrics, grandiose stage sets and costumes” (Hegarty & Halliwell 2011: 2). The most famous representatives of progressive rock in the 1970s were “Yes, Genesis, Jethro Tull and Emerson, Lake and Palmer (ELP), [...] King Crimson, Soft