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*Peter Gabriel, From Genesis to Growing Up* is a collection of insightful and engaging essays about Gabriel’s status as a singer, songwriter, producer and humanist. The book documents his early career in the progressive rock band, Genesis, through to his gradual involvement in world music in the 1980s, well before the term had become commonplace. It then moves onto his more recent involvement with musical experimentation and theatrical stagecraft that, albeit on a much larger scale, revisits his earlier performance concepts of the early 1970s.

Co-editors Drewett, Hill and Kärki have created three broad sections in the book that collectively serves to narrate Gabriel’s life and work. **Part One: Identity and Representation** contains chapters that discuss his early career, his musical eccentricities, his love of soul music, and his music’s combination with motion picture. **Part Two: Politics and Power** focuses on Gabriel’s early solo career and his move toward becoming a political voice. Chapters in this section discuss protest songs, his involvement with Amnesty International, and his support for the music of ‘others’, principally in the founding of the WOMAD festivals. **Part Three: Production and Performance** contains chapters that analyse Gabriel’s involvement in groundbreaking sound and vision technologies, changes in his touring methods, his use of surrealism in videos that were broadcast in the early days of MTV, and his more recent collaboration in stage design with Robert Lepage.

While each chapter has been approached from an informed and sometimes passionate stance, there were several that, for me, are worthy of brief mention in this review. Co-editor Sarah Hill (Chapter 2) and Kari Kallioniemi (Chapter 3) both situate Gabriel’s career within the notion of Englishness and, for Kallioniemi, English eccentricity. Hill adds to a limited list of existing works that position progressive rock bands, such as Genesis, within a predominantly southern English, middle-class, student-based construct in which its performers and audiences were well versed in classical music and literature. Kallioniemi posits that Gabriel follows a line of English eccentrics that go back to Dickens and the Victorian freak show,
and contends that Gabriel’s early contemporary peers were performers such as Vivian Stanshall, Syd Barrett and Ian Anderson. Taking a different angle, Kevin Holm Hudson (Chapter 4) describes how Gabriel was influenced by soul music. One could be forgiven for not being aware that Gabriel—a vocalist who is one of a few rock singers who uses an English accent when singing—was always a fan of Otis Redding and Marvin Gaye. Holm-Hudson thus provides a very interesting discussion on the musical and emotional origins of Gabriel’s song, ‘Sledgehammer’ (1986).

Part Two: Politics and Power contains two impressive discussions on Gabriel’s involvement with international politics from the perspective of his protest song, ‘Biko’ (1980), written about the black South African activist Steve Biko. Co-editor Michael Drewitt’s chapter approaches the song from a mainly historical point of view, drawing on his own experiences in South Africa at the time of Biko’s death, as well as describing the South African state censor’s reaction to the song. Ingrid Bianca Byerly’s subsequent chapter offers a musicological analysis of the emotional impact of the song, and she provides intricate diagrammatical and transcribed passages to support her views.

Later in Part Two, Dave Laing investigates Gabriel’s passion for world music and discusses the ethical issues that arise when ‘other’ people’s music is relocated into a successful Western rock musician’s recording and touring repertoire. Gabriel sees this repositioning as a collaborative process (which, for Laing, is supported by Gabriel’s work with a number of African artists, in particular Youssou N’Dour) and Laing states that Gabriel is a typical member of the world music demographic who is both fascinated by the music of other cultures, while being committed to humanitarianism.

In Part Three: Production and Performance, Franco Fabbri examines Gabriel’s interests in sound innovation and provides a convincing discussion from his own background in the recording studio environment. Co-editor Kimi Kärki has the final word in the last chapter, and describes the stage presentation collaboration between Gabriel and Robert Lepage, which was a result of Lepage seeing Genesis in his formative years and Gabriel’s fascination with multimedia possibilities.

While I have discussed selected chapters here, many others were absorbing and often provocative. I can recommend this book to academics and undergraduates who are fans of Gabriel’s work, as well as to anyone who will enjoy in-depth discussions about a musical innovator whose career is in a constant state of development and reinvention.