

I Know What I Like and I Like What I Know

Genesis 1967 to 1975: The Peter Gabriel Years, Mario Giammetti (252pp, £19.99, Kingmaker)

Seven years after its Italian publication, Mario Giammetti's critical overview of the band Genesis has been translated into English and given a tastefully designed and well-printed UK publication. It's not cheap, it has to be said, and although there are lots of illustrations, they often seem to be in the wrong chapters, and all have a wandering line attached that you have to follow to find the captions.

Anyway, as a Genesis fan who can't bear to listen to anything they released beyond *A Trick of the Tail*, it's a relief to find that this book limits itself to the eight years Peter Gabriel fronted the band and doesn't wander into discussion of solo outings or the dreadful pop they produced later on.

The book is arranged album by album, with each chapter or section offering some band history and biography, a brief contextual listing of other albums produced that year (some with unintentionally hilarious opinions from Giammetti), a discussion of each and every track, some discussion and reporting of the associated tours, and a list of gigs played.

So, yes, we are in geekville, a geekville which – it has to be said – most fans will feel quite at home in. The majority of information and opinion here is well-established and previously reported, and most of the time Giammetti only writes critically to reinforce popular opinion. The most interesting and original parts of the book are from a few interviews Giammetti has done with members and ex-members of the band, getting them to relisten to their old albums and offer their opinions of what it sounds like now.

In the main it's all very gentlemanly (we are talking mostly ex-Charterhouse private school chaps), with arguments and musical differences brushed aside and much opining that 'I'm sure we were all dreadful in those days' and 'what a nice chap he turned out to be' stuff, even when they have just dissed a certain mix or track, or revisited an argument in the past. I guess it's fair enough to have mellowed, although it is seriously disappointing to see how little they seem to think of *The Lamb Lies Down on Broadway* and to certain tracks on *Selling England by the Pound*, albums which most fans would regard as the pinnacle of their career!

But they hardly trash their back catalogue, although Rutherford, Banks and Collins all seem prefer the band they went on to become. (I guess they get more royalties from the later hit albums...) It's clear they were happy to move away from their quirky explorations of mythical and folklore England, even if Gabriel's Puerto Rican New Yorker Rael wasn't what they had in mind, although *The Lamb Lies Down...* also had room for fantastical creatures such as the Lamia.

One of the unexplored areas is that idea of Englishness and how it made Genesis so original. It's intriguing to hear band members saying they wish they could have rocked out more, or how they could never capture their live heaviness in the studio; or that they wished their lyrics (which all contributed too, they don't blame Gabriel all of the time) had been simpler and clearer. If they had they would have simply been another rock band, as indeed – for many of us – they went on to become.

Giammetti isn't, however, writing a thesis or a critical book, not even an exploratory one. He's writing an informed, highly readable and entertaining account of a band and how they made their first six albums, and telling us what he – and to a lesser extent, some of the band – thinks of them now. There's nothing here that will surprise any fans, and no-one who isn't a fan is going to shell out twenty quid for a book like this anyway, so that's that then. As the song ('it' on *The Lamb Lies Down...*) says: 'it's only knock and know all but I like it'. And I do, and you might too.

Rupert Loydell