

## **Warming Up a Rain Soaked Crowd – Peter Gabriel at Hyde Park 23 June 2007**

Peter Gabriel brought the opening day of the 2 day Hyde Park Calling concert to a close with a 90 minute performance made up of largely forgotten gems plucked from the dusty recesses of a solo career which is now 30 years old.

Of course those fans that faithfully devour every scrap of Gabriel data from the internet will know the story already but to recap for those people on the outside – Gabriel is currently in the early stages of a Warm Up tour arranged at fairly short notice as a result of agreeing to do the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary at WOMAD next month in Wiltshire.

To that end he has reassembled the same band (save for the absent keyboard player Rachel Z) that toured the major territories between 2002 to 2004 – what could reasonably be described as the Growing Up band, but playing anything other than Growing Up songs. Gabriel enlisted the help of his devoted fans to suggest songs they'd like to hear live that were not aired last time and the result for tonight's show is the return of songs that have lain dormant for anything up to 27 years!

The keyboard slot has been filled – and I would add to great effect - by Angie Pollock, who also can add a touch of class to the backing vocals department when called upon. Angie has very quickly established herself among the otherwise familiar ranks of Gabriel's supporting players, namely Tony Levin, David Rhodes, Ged Lynch, Richard Evans and Melanie Gabriel and the new renditions of these old songs are all healthily revitalised.

Opening the set was Rhythm of the Heat (which was, like so many of tonight's set, last played in 1983) and aside from the decidedly off key opening wail by Mr Gabriel, was as strong as one could wish for. With a confident stride in his vocal, underpinned by a powerhouse performance from Ged Lynch, Rhythm of the Heat succeeded in evaporating a good portion of the water the crowd had absorbed during an intense 10 minute period of heavy rain toward the end of Crowded House's set that left us all soaked to the skin.

On the Air was next and this was definitely one of the set's highlights. On this track, Rhodes and Levin really gave it their all and it is great to see the guitarist show what he can do when he gets a rare chance to solo. Again Gabriel was in top form and sang this as well as I can ever remember – quite what the signer (there to provide the words to anyone afflicted with profound deafness and located to Gabriel's right) made of the line "I want everybody to Know that Mozo is here!" I'm not sure, but to anyone in the audience that was reliant on this service I trust you got the general gist.

Third in a trilogy of Side 1 Track 1's (and also former set openers of course) was Intruder and suddenly *that* stare (as those old enough to remember those pioneering 1980 dates will no doubt recall) was back in all of its glory. This song had Peter roaming the stage, eyeballing the front row and acting out the song's lyric in a way that has been absent for too long from his stage delivery. The song was again held together largely by the heavy drumming of Ged Lynch and was punctuated in a way

that highlighted his role on the original recording by the scratchy guitar playing of Mr Rhodes.

After the onslaught provided by the opening three songs, it was perhaps forgivable that the next track, DIY, was not quite done to the same high standard. The guitars this time took a back seat to a truly exemplary display on Stick by Mr Levin with the piano runs ever so deftly delivered by Angie Pollock. Added to this Gabriel threw in some lovely ad lib words over the chorus but at times the band seemed a bit lost and although their smiles, together with the audience's singing, helped to disguise a few of the rough edges, there seemed to be just the smallest hint of collective relief that it was over. With a little more work though, this could easily turn into the tour's most relaxed moment so long as they iron out the slight hesitancy on display this evening.

Next up was a song of a different vintage – barely into teenage in fact. Blood of Eden from Gabriel's 1992 introspective Us record was not on my personal choice of set list suggestions submitted to [petergabriel.com](http://petergabriel.com) recently – more because there are other songs from Us I'd rather have heard a few more times live than this stalwart from the Secret World Tour from 1993/94. However it gave Gabriel a chance to flex that falsetto of his which he delivered faithfully enough and also spot-lit the voices of both Angie and Melanie. I guess it offered those on stage a chance to take a breather and recharge their batteries but it's a pity we look like being denied renditions of Love to be Loved or Only Us for this tour.

It was back to that third album again for I Don't Remember – which actually came over a lot stronger than I had imagined it might do and gave the crowd another opportunity to participate in the easy to sing chorus. Ironically of course Peter did remember the words to this song and between him and the band they managed to deliver another winning and thoroughly enjoyable performance.

However, nothing played thus far could compare with what came next. If this tour is to be remembered for anything it should be for the back to basics approach that Peter and his band have brought to the material and no one song exemplifies this more than No Self Control. Those who only know the 1983/86-87 live performances are in for a shock with this one – Gabriel has resorted back to the third album studio arrangement bringing a jaunty vitality to the song that I thought impossible to achieve or re-create. Simply the high point of the set for me and one good reason (if you need one) to bear the cost of purchasing the Encore recording of tonight's show.

The only non album track in tonight's set (and I think that's true of the tour to date) is Lovetown which despite being played often in 1993/94 was not a permanent fixture of the set back then and, to my mind, that's a good reason to bring it back. However within the context of tonight's show I found the song a bit sluggish and - given Mr Rhodes' comments concerning Moribund – a surprising inclusion. It certainly felt somewhat out of place alongside the earlier material to me but I do like the song and didn't mind it being included here tonight and to his credit Gabriel effortlessly managed to pull off even those difficult high notes.

It was back to album three for Family Snapshot, a song that has stayed the course remarkably well in live sets down the years, its last airing being in Los Angeles less than 5 years ago. Interestingly Gabriel announced that this song had gained the

highest number of votes from fans in the recent internet poll – a strange irony given that technically it shouldn't have been a contender. But I for one will never tire of seeing this song performed live and tonight it should have represented for me the best moment of the gig – sadly the rain started just after the song was underway which prompted those people evidently made of sugar (who were already soaked to the skin anyway) to get out their rain sheets and brollies thus rendering any objective view of events a mite moot to say the least.

Shouts of “its stopped f\*\*\*ing raining!” and “I want to see the stage!” from a few level headed observers (including your ever so patient roving reporter of course) were enough to pressurize the sheltering audience into removing the superfluous covers and normal business was quickly resumed.

When I'd read that Steam had made it onto this tour I had mixed feelings really – again it had been such an integral part of the Secret World Tour I wondered if it had been rested long enough to justify its re-selection but this performance certainly put me right about that. Ok, in some respects the song is a poor relation to Sledgehammer but live it certainly comes to life and the back to basics approach does the song no harm at all. Sadly though Gabriel's memory deserted him at crucial moments and even his first jaunt along the cat-walk couldn't fully rescue matters. But the crowd were now carried away by the party atmosphere and I imagine most of them barely noticed the lyrical fudging that was going on around them.

Mother of Violence is another one that got my vote in the recent poll but I never for one moment imagined that Gabriel would bring it back and not play any meaningful part in its performance. With the musicians taking a back seat, up stepped a brave, but certainly confident, Melanie Gabriel to sing this song co-written by her parents and last performed live in 1980. Melanie produced a very steady performance which, a few intonations aside, completely justified her dad's faith in her singing ability. As for the musicians, the lighter tone of the song permitted Pollock's piano to emerge as a true delight, whereas Levin's bass work was typically warm and understated. Guitarists Richard Evans played the steel part and David Rhodes came in towards the end on what sounded like E-bow guitar.

The lightness of Mother of Violence was emphasised by the direct contrast provided by the dense imagery portrayed in Lay Your Hands on Me which successfully engaged the audience into a spot of Messianic chanting of the song's title. Of course there was no stage diving by the 57 year-old singer - a relief to those that might have assumed this could happen, I suspect. But despite that being a firm part of the song's live history, this truncated version was special nonetheless.

After a brief round of introductions – certainly more concise than those on the Growing Up tour – it was a no nonsense version of Solsbury Hill that lead us into the final three songs – all retained from the last tour (and every tour since 1986 for that matter). But such concession to normality was probably only fair to those in the audience (and there were many) who were completely unfamiliar with just about everything in the major part of the set. Sledgehammer continued the safe path towards completion and what can I say about a song that has served him well on occasions where he has played to both the faithful and the uninitiated? The band can play this

song in their sleep and it's difficult to fault given that it causes 99% of the audience to sing along with heartfelt conviction.

The set closed with In Your Eyes – without any support vocal to speak of – which in the absence of Youssou is arguably the right way to play it. Again Gabriel and band mates ventured onto the cat-walk and at times the singer engaged in some play acting with Levin as he sarcastically made eyes at his band mate where Levin mimics the bass vocal line during the song's opening section. If you needed any evidence to support the theory that this band are having a great time touring without new material or a new album to fire them up, then that moment is surely it.

In conclusion, any worries one might have had over Gabriel's ability to do justice to these old songs is made all but redundant by performances such as that witnessed this evening – its as if he has undertaken a *Remasters Tour* 5 years after the event!

The lack of any new songs in the current set, while disappointing, is subsumed to a large degree by the vitality evident in this old material complete with its new coat of paint. There is, of course, speculation of him delving even further back in time and doing a Genesis reunion next year. Well maybe on tonight's performance he actually could do that and pull it off – I don't know, but it wouldn't be my first choice. My personal preference is that he concentrates on his own work and works hard to surpass what he has already achieved as a forward thinking solo artist with a level of integrity that is practically unrivalled among his peers.

For now though let's simply celebrate the fact that Peter Gabriel is back on the road, giving it everything, subtly changing his set each night it seems and breathing new life into some forgotten gems as he does so. Miss it at your peril.

Mic Smith

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### **Set List**

Rhythm of the Heat  
On the Air  
Intruder  
DIY  
Blood of Eden  
I Don't Remember  
No Self Control  
Lovetown  
Family Snapshot  
Steam  
Mother of Violence  
Lay Your Hands on Me  
Solsbury Hill  
Sledgehammer  
In Your Eyes