



Genesis and The Lamb Lies Down on Broadway (Ashgate Popular and Folk Music Series)

Kevin Holm-Hudson

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In 1974, the British progressive rock group Genesis released their double concept album "The Lamb Lies Down on Broadway", now widely regarded as a classic album of 1970s progressive rock. The story was described by Genesis' then front-man Peter Gabriel as a 'moral fable' about a half-Puerto-Rican street tough from New York City named Rael, who is engulfed by a solid cloud into a series of strange adventures in a metaphysical realm. This album has inspired nearly fanatical devotion among progressive rock fans, some of whom have constructed elaborate web sites purporting to 'explain' "The Lamb". The album is a surreal allegory drawing its material from religious, literary and psychological themes. More than thirty years after its release, "The Lamb Lies Down on Broadway" still enthralles listeners, earning the distinction of being Genesis' most consistently selling back-catalogue release. As the book's title implies, this study will analyse "The Lamb" both within the context of progressive rock, examining its special place in Genesis' recorded output and in the progressive rock genre as a whole, and within the context of social and political changes of the mid 1970s. It is important to consider that "The Lamb" marked a shift in Genesis' subject matter; in 1974 the group was on the verge of 'breaking into' the American music market, then the largest market for recorded music in the world, but they were still regarded as that most British of British progressive rock bands, with songs about Victorian giant hogweeds and albums like "Selling England By The Pound". "The Lamb" marked a conscious shift in their story setting to America, and for the first time the songs were oriented to the present rather than the past or future. Significantly, while 1974 marked the peak of music industry growth and consolidation through corporate mergers, it was also the year in which America was confronted with its limits, through the first of the OPEC energy crises, the crisis of confidence in government following the resignation of Richard Nixon, the withdrawal from Vietnam, and the effects of runaway inflation. Genesis' native Britain was also to feel the effects of the energy crisis, intensified by coal miner and railway worker strikes and a period of economic slowdown that ultimately led to the rise of Thatcherism. "The Lamb" is set in New York City during this time of uncertainty, and it ironically also marks the last concept album of progressive rock's 'golden age'. Within a few years the economic constraints would affect the industry as a whole and progressive rock would suffer a precipitous drop in industry support, owing to the unusual expenses involved in its promotion and marketing. "The Lamb Lies Down on Broadway" thus makes a particularly rich subject for detailed study; seldom does one find such compelling intersections between the musical, textual and socioeconomic aspects of an album.

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Anne Braden:

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