

Gabriel lets Us down

by Jennifer Beck

Peter Gabriel's new album represents a quantum leap sideways for his musical philosophy. The release, entitled *Us*, sounds like it was created by uniting his 1986 hit album *So* with his 1989 release *Passion*, the soundtrack to the movie *The Last Temptation of Christ*. Unfortunately, after waiting six years for Gabriel's latest mainstream release, *Us* doesn't cover any new ground.

The album assembles the usual impressive array of music industry glitterati: Daniel Lanois produces and Brian Eno is credited as providing "extra brainstorming." Featured as background vocals on two tracks is

Sinead O'Connor, who continues the fine tradition of providing a haunting female counterpoint to Gabriel's weary moan (in the past, this position was occupied jointly by Kate Bush and Laurie Anderson).

The first song on the album is "Come Talk to Me", a powerfully discomfiting personal account that shares the vocal duty with both Sinead O'Connor and Daniel Lanois. In the liner notes, Gabriel says: "Much of this record is about relationships. I am dedicating it to all those who have taught me about loving and being loved." He then goes on to mention his parents, his children, and (I believe) his ex-wife.

Us is almost entirely written in the first person. This, of course, is not a fledgling style for Peter Gabriel, but the use of "I" has a different tone this

time around. "Big Time" and "Sledgehammer", two songs off *So*, were tinged with personal parody and wry self-awareness. "Solsbury Hill" and "Biko" were striking anthems for everyman. "Love to be Loved", the second song on "Us", seems flatly self-referential in comparison.

"Blood of Eden" is the third track on the album, and as suggested by the title, it is sensually, innocently intimate. The pace of *Us* is completely unhurried, with each song clocking in at around five minutes. "Blood of Eden" is a sweet, sweeping glide, like *Passion* put to lyric, full of mumbling, grumbling bass to rattle your mirrors. This aural buzz is highlighted by the high, soaring keening of Sinead O'Connor and Daniel Lanois.

The final song on the album, "Kiss that Frog", is the last truly notable tune: because it's desperately strange. It's either downright clever and charming or utterly cheesy and corny. In an album laced with bitterness,

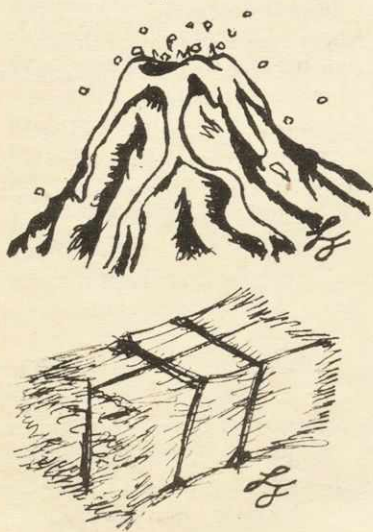


Peter Gabriel stride jumps into mediocrity

this "light" piece stands out as being uncomfortably near "filler" status.

Peter Gabriel has become so ensemble he almost disappears. This album is so slick and over-produced, with credits that fill pages and cross continents, that the only recogniz-

ably human element left is that voice...Peter Gabriel's voice. I was disappointed with *Us*; it took so long and was already so familiar when it came out that I was let down. But it sounds good, it can't help it: it's Peter Gabriel.



by Michael Graham

About a month and a half ago I went down to Sam's to see Lava Hay. I had really liked the stuff I had seen on *Much Music*, but had never bothered to buy any of their CDs. Well after their incredible half hour set at Sam's I knew that I would be buying everything they had out.

I ended up buying both of their CDs (*Lava Hay* and *With a Picture in Mind*). Their mixture of folk, rock, and even country sounds terrific, but what really makes Lava Hay stand out for me is the vocals. Michele Gould and Suzanne Little have beautiful voices and the harmonic arrangements that they come up with are fresh and unique—a joy to listen to (really).

Looking back, I don't understand why I didn't go to see them at the Flamingo when they played three dates in early August and up until a week or so ago I was kicking myself because I had missed a rare chance to see this great band live. I was happily surprised, however, to see that they

Lava Hay brings folk rock (and Abba) to the Flamingo

were coming back to Halifax after such a short time.

So on Monday night we ventured down to the Flamingo and watched the place fill up. Lava Hay hit the stage at around 10:30 or so and played for about one hour before taking a break (it was very hot). The band went over very well with the audience and finally got people on their feet near the end of the first set.

They came back and played some more (I couldn't be bothered with keeping track of time). I think that they ended up playing just about every song on their two CDs. They seemed to be a bit more relaxed and "into it" during the second set, not that the first set wasn't great—it was. The second was just better! Everyone in the crowd was clearly enjoying the music and Lava Hay certainly seemed to enjoy making it.

Suzanne and Michele talked a fair bit in between songs which was nice. I hate it when bands play song after song with little or no break in between. Suzanne introduced the band members, but I haven't the foggiest idea of their names now. The liner notes on the new CD aren't much help either as it appears that they used a lot of session musicians. Suffice it to say that everybody in the band was solid and essential. The bassist played some intricate stuff on both electric and acoustic bass, the drumming was tight, the guitarist

was understated, but proficient in his playing and the keyboard player added nice flourishes to the overall sound. On top of that, both Michele and Suzanne played acoustic guitar and really gave their all on the vocals.

Lava Hay finished their second set, but there was no way that the band was going to get out of playing

an encore and everyone made enough noise to bring them back on stage for two more tunes. The first of these was none other than "S.O.S." by ABBA! Yes, an ABBA cover...and it was great! I love covers of those old tunes. If there was a high point in the show, this may have been it. The second song was also a cover—"Ring of Fire" by Johnny Cash (actually written by

his wife as Michele explained). Michele and Suzanne's harmonizing prowess was clearly evident in the reworking of this tune. Incredible vocals!

Overall the concert was great fun—everything I had expected and more. Only \$5, a great band playing great, upbeat music, an ABBA cover...what more could you want?



"Damn! Where'd I lose my contacts?": Lava Hay plays Sam's this summer

PHOTO: MIKE GRAHAM