

Peter Gabriel – Up (2002)

Written by bluesever

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1. "Darkness" – 6:51 2. "Growing Up" – 7:33 3. "Sky Blue" – 6:37 4. "No Way Out" – 7:53
5. "I Grieve" – 7:25 6. "The Barry Williams Show" – 7:16 7. "My Head Sounds Like That" –
6:29 8. "More Than This" – 6:02 9. "Signal to Noise" – 7:36 10. "The Drop" – 3:04

Arranged By [String] – Peter Gabriel, Will Gregory Bass – Tony Levin Cello [The London
Session Orchestra] – Anthony Pleeth, Ben Chappell, David Daniels, Martin Loveday Double
Bass [The London Session Orchestra] – Chris Lawrence, Mary Scully Drums – Dave Power,
Manu Katche, Ged Lynch, Dominic Greensmith, Steve Gadd Guitar – David Rhodes, Daniel
Lanois, Peter Green Orchestrated By – Nick Ingham Percussion – Mahut Dominique, Ged
Lynch, Richard Chappell Piano [Bosendorfer], Electronics [Mutator], Keyboards, Sampler,
Organ – Peter Gabriel Strings – The London Session Orchestra Viola [The London Session
Orchestra] – Robert Smissen, Donald McVay, Peter Lale, Roger Chase Violin – Antonia Fuchs,
Boguslaw Kosteck, Cathy Thompson, Chris Tombling, Gavin Wright, Jackie Shave, Jon
Evans-Jones, Julian Leaper, Mark Berrow, Patrick Kiernan, Peter Hanson, Rebecca Hirsh
Violin [Double, Improvised] – Shankar Backing Vocals – AD Chivers, David Rhodes Vocals
[Additional] – The Blind Boys Of Alabama Organ [Hammond] – David Sancious Tabla –
Hossam Ramzy Trumpet – Christian Le Chevretel Percussion – Assane Thiam, Mahut
Dominique, Ged Lynch, Hossam Ramzy Mandolin, Keyboards [Chamberlain] – John Brion

There's a scene in Grosse Pointe Blank where John Cusack as Martin Blank meets an old school friend in his home town following a lengthy period of disappearance (spent working as an assassin) and all his buddy can say is, "Ten years! TEN YEARS MAN!?! Where have you been?" Even the most patient of Gabriel's followers will be muttering something similar, especially as what is contained on the long-awaited follow-up to Us is, on first spec, pretty much a direct continuation of what he was doing a decade ago. Or is it?

Firstly any sonic similarity to previous work is easily explained by the fact that many of the songs on offer here were actually started during the sessions for Us. In the intervening period Gabriel has produced music for the Millennium Dome (OVO) and film The Rabbit-Proof Fence,

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written stuff with apes (no Monkees or Gorillaz jokes, please), kept his Real World label going, worked with Greenpeace, WOMAD and the Witness programme for human rights and married and become a father again, so get off his case -he's no idle wheel-spinner. Likewise this album is no coasting exercise. Like every great work it takes a little living with to tease out the depth and intricacies that lie at its heart but eventually reveals itself as both mature and full of wonders.

Initial listens will leave one with a sense of aching sadness yet (PG says), like its title, this is an album of positive life-affirmation. By this he refers to the central themes of death and renewal. No shirking the big issues then, eh? The title track deals with the process of grieving, as (unsurprisingly) does "I Grieve", whereas "Growing Up" is a description of just that a soul's journey on this mortal coil. "Don't Leave" is a description of someone critically wounded, yet focuses on the pull of loved ones, urging the victim back to the land of the living.

If this all sounds ponderously deep, it's not. Gabriel's correct that what's on offer here is an ability to face up to and deal with our mortality and frailty without seeing it as a bleak Beckettian journey into a void. "More Than This actually" goes as far as to say, again and again, that there is something beyond mere existence and "Darkness", while discordant and brooding on the nature of fear, has a chorus of "I cry until I laugh" seems to hint at therapy that heals. There is humour here too, albeit of a scathingly black kind on the Jerry Springer-baiting funkathon, "The Barry Williams Show".

Musically the textures are unbelievably rich with subtle beats and washes of sound provided by the usual team of David Rhodes (guitars) and Richard Chappell (programming), mixed to perfection; all underpinned by Tony Levin's fabulous bass and aided by luminaries as diverse as Daniel Lanois, Danny Thompson, The Blind Boys Of Alabama, Nusrat Fateh Ali Khan and the Black Dyke brass band. True, the structures haven't moved far away from So and Us but as Mike Love once said to Brian Wilson, "why f**k with the formula?" Gabriel remains a songsmith who speaks from the heart and never fails to move. Ten years suddenly seems like minutes and all is forgiven... ---Chris Jones, BBC Review

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