

Guitarist Steve Hackett brings *Genesis Revisited–Foxtrot at 50* tour to Kalamazoo, Michigan

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The legendary English guitar virtuoso Steve Hackett and his band performed at the Kalamazoo (Michigan) State Theater on Saturday night before an enthusiastic audience.

The concert showed that Hackett is going strong as one of the finest guitarists from the 1970s progressive rock era, continuing as both a recording artist and live performer. It also showed that the audience for the early music of Genesis also remains strong, with the 1,500-seat venue nearly sold out.

The show was part of the North American leg of Hackett's *Genesis Revisited–Foxtrot at 50 + Hackett Highlights Tour* and featured a selection of the guitarist's solo compositions followed by a complete performance of the acclaimed 1972 Genesis album *Foxtrot*.

The atmosphere in the theater grew more heated as the audience responded appreciatively to each number. The 74-year-old Hackett, who continues to play impeccably across an extraordinary range of musical styles, exhibits no sign of slowing down.

This is the third year of the *Foxtrot at 50* shows. The world tour, which started in Italy in 2022 and is currently scheduled to end in Mexico City at the end of April, will include a total of 135 dates. Attesting to his worldwide popularity, Hackett has already performed or will be performing in the UK, France, Spain, Switzerland, Germany, Poland, the Netherlands, Finland, Sweden, Norway, Denmark, Peru, Chile, Brazil and Argentina.

The show opened with three songs from Hackett's latest and 30th solo studio recording, *The Circus and the Nightwhale*. The record is a semi-autobiographical coming-of-age concept album recorded between the

2022 and 2023 legs of the tour, and then released in February.

The first number, "People of the Smoke," a dark song about working class life in postwar London (where the musician was born), featured Hackett on a couple of blistering electric guitar solos. The band members also showed off their talents with a five-part a cappella vocal segment—the only uplifting moment in the number—about the arrival of the big top circus at The Smoke, i.e., London: "Flash of light when the sun shines through / Fairground dreamland where we flew / Ooh, Ooh, Ooh."

The tour band includes Roger King on keyboards, programming and orchestral arrangements, Rob Townsend on saxophones and flute, Jonas Reingold on bass, Nad Sylvan on vocals and Craig Blundell on drums.

The remaining numbers performed in the first half of the show included tracks from several other Hackett solo projects. A standout was "The Devil's Cathedral," a somber story about ambition that involves a murder, which began with a cathedral organ intro and a disturbing overlay of soprano saxophone. This was followed by a memorable angular guitar riff by Hackett and wickedly sounding vocals by Sylvan.

After a break, the band launched into a performance of *Foxtrot*, the 52-year-old album that helped bring mass popularity to Genesis as a group in the early 1970s. It was the second Genesis album on which Hackett was lead guitarist and his influence throughout the album stands out. To this audience member's ear, the performance on Saturday night was an exceptional recreation of the album.

Sylvan does an excellent job of emulating the vocals

of Genesis co-founder Peter Gabriel, while also preserving something of his own qualities as a singer. His reenactment of Gabriel's on-stage theatrics brought back memories of the original live performance of *Foxtrot*—without having to wear the fox head and red evening dress that Gabriel had worn—during the Genesis tour of 1972 and 1973.

Foxtrot, a favorite among early Genesis fans, has all the attributes of the progressive rock music genre. The songs are thematically and compositionally complex with an eclectic mix of lyrical ideas and musical influences. Although the *Foxtrot* record does not possess the concept album form, the songs are longer than what would typically have qualified for radio play in the 1970s.

The performance of *Foxtrot*'s "Watcher of the Skies," a song written by Gabriel and influenced by Arthur C. Clarke's 1953 science-fiction novel *Childhood's End* about a peaceful alien invasion, was memorable. Sylvan stood on a platform holding up a small telescope surveying the skies, while the band built the pulsating rhythmic theme into a theater-shaking crescendo.

The other memorable song was Hackett's solo acoustic guitar performance of "Horizon," which forms something of an intro to the 23-minute allegoric finale "Supper's Ready." Written in a baroque style by Hackett, the instrumental number highlighted his gifts as a versatile artist and much more than a rock music electric guitarist.

Steve Hackett was born into a working class family in 1950. He has commented about the house in Pimlico that he grew up in being across the river from the Battersea Power Station. This is the former coal-powered electricity generating complex on the south bank of the River Thames that was immortalized by Pink Floyd on their 1977 album *Animals* with an image of an inflated pig flying between its giant chimneys.

Hackett began playing guitar at age 14 and was influenced somewhat paradoxically by both the Rolling Stones and Andrés Segovia. Developing skills on both electric and nylon acoustic instruments, the young artist excelled in multiple genres such as rock and roll, the blues and classical music.

Between 1968 and 1970 he played in several bands in London that all veered in the direction of the progressive rock that was becoming increasingly

popular at that time. In his autobiography *A Genesis in My Bed*, Hackett describes how he came to appreciate the music of King Crimson and, during a live performance of their song "Epitaph," he became transfixed by their pan-genre approach.

Hackett writes, "In one momentary flash, I could feel how humanity was capable of the most extraordinary things, from achieving the heights of sublime achievements, to plummeting into the depths of potential cataclysm."

There is perhaps no better summary of the polarity of themes that pervaded the progressive rock music that became enormously popular internationally from the late-1960s to the mid-1970s before it exhausted itself in bombastic stadium extravaganzas. The hopes and dreams of that generation of artists for a better future of peace and universal brotherhood were mixed in with expressions of despair and fear that mankind faced an inevitable ending in some sort of dystopian self-destruction.

Hackett joined Genesis in 1971 after he received a call from Peter Gabriel, who had responded to an ad in *Melody Maker* that said, "Guitarist writer seeks receptive musicians determined to strive beyond existing stagnant musical forms."

Hackett's contribution to the group extended through six Genesis studio albums before he left in 1977 to pursue his solo career and collaborate with a wide range of other artists. The other four members of Genesis—Gabriel, Phil Collins, Mike Rutherford and Tony Banks—also pursued solo careers, some of them going on to become major figures.

While he is not as well-known as Gabriel or Collins, for example, Hackett has remained true to his aim of working with all sounds and styles and entertaining audiences with music that is accessible, intriguing and less predictable. This was certainly on display in Kalamazoo on Saturday night.



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