

# Peter Gabriel: From progressive rock to world music and beyond

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Peter Gabriel's latest album project, *o/i*, is being released one track at a time in a year-long campaign on a lunar schedule. Each song arrives at a full moon, and the songs are being presented in two forms, a "Dark-Side" and a "Bright-Side" mix.

The concept echoes the rollout of his 2023 album *i/o*, his first new studio release in 21 years, which also offered different mixes and a slow-burn release strategy across the calendar year.

The 2026 album project is being introduced as Gabriel's eleventh studio album, and the release pattern is designed to make the record feel like an event rather than a one-day album drop. The songs are appearing gradually so the record can be experienced as an unfolding sequence, as a series of musical moments, rather than a single fixed project.

The approach fits Gabriel's long-standing interest in presentation and the idea that a recording can have multiple emotional angles. The different mixes also reinforce this conception. The same experiment was used previously with one version tending to emphasize a moodier, more inward texture, while the other offers a brighter, more open character.

"A Hard Lesson," which was released on the blue moon at the end of May, is described by Gabriel in a video as "a quirky, strange and long track" and "a journey." He says it is "about trying to find a place, your place, how you fit in," which frames the song as both personal and social, a meditation on belonging and self-definition.

Gabriel also explained, "This is the oldest track of the project. It probably started in the late 80s or early 90s when I was in Senegal. I was falling in love with the music I heard there. I loved the tension created by the use of polyrhythms, particularly the threes and fours, so that was the start of this song." He added that the song had stayed hidden for 30 or 40 years before "hitting the surface."

Gabriel's comment about his work in the 1980s is significant because he was then also actively collaborating with international musicians and using his platform to amplify non-Western sounds, which made him a pioneer and

visible advocate of what became known as World Music.

He founded World of Music, Arts and Dance (WOMAD) in 1980, and launched Real World Records in 1989 to help artists from around the world reach wider audiences, Gabriel worked on globally influenced projects—such as *Passion*, which was developed as the soundtrack to Martin Scorsese's *The Last Temptation of Christ*—which drew on Middle Eastern and North African musical traditions.

While the concept of World Music would eventually succumb to the commercial interests that dominate the music industry like the Grammys, which replaced it in 2020 with what has become known as "global music," the initiative pioneered by Gabriel reflects something fundamental about the development of culture internationally and the blending of influences into something that had previously not existed.

Gabriel's broader description of the *o/i* project is also important because it is not just a set of singles, but a curated album experience. The project's visual and sonic collaborators are part of that design, including long-time mix engineers Tchad Blake and Mark "Spike" Stent.

Peter Gabriel has been an artist who treats pop and rock as expandable forms. He combines art-rock ambition, social concern, rhythmic curiosity and a strong sense of atmosphere, which is why his work often feels deeper and larger than Top 40 radio songwriting. He is equally associated with theatricality, technological experimentation and a willingness to build songs around mood, imagery and political or emotional tension.

That combination has made him one of the most distinctive figures in British rock. Gabriel is more than a singer with a recognizable voice. He is a conceptual artist who has consistently made songs with innovative musical themes and meaningful lyrics.

Gabriel co-founded Genesis in 1967 at the age of 17 at Charterhouse School, a boarding school in Surrey, England. The band became one of the defining groups of progressive rock through the 1970s. The classic lineup included Gabriel, Tony Banks, Mike Rutherford, Steve Hackett and Phil Collins.

While Banks and Rutherford are generally credited with the long-form musical compositions of the early Genesis albums, Gabriel was almost entirely responsible for the band's well-known theatrical stagecraft and lyrics.

The high-water mark of Gabriel-era Genesis was the double concept album *The Lamb Lies Down on Broadway*, an allegorical and ambitious record that remains one of the era's signature progressive rock works. Its scale, narrative density and sonic imagination helped define what the genre could attempt at its most audacious and successful.

What is particularly unusual is how successful the musicians became after Gabriel's departure from the band in 1975. Genesis itself went on to huge commercial success with Collins as frontman, while the latter became a major solo star; Rutherford found success with Mike + the Mechanics; and Steve Hackett developed a successful solo career that continues to this day.

Gabriel went on to build one of the most popular solo careers in rock. After leaving Genesis, he produced a string of memorable hit singles and iconic songs in the 1980s, including "Solsbury Hill," "Biko," "Shock the Monkey," "Don't Give Up," "In Your Eyes" and "Sledgehammer."

Released during the height of the MTV era, the music videos produced for Gabriel's most successful singles played a significant role in their popularity. The video for "Sledgehammer," for example, took a record-breaking 10 MTV awards, including Video of the Year for 1987, and became the most-played videos of all time.

Of his ten solo albums released since 1977, several of them—such as *Peter Gabriel 3*, *So* and *Us*—sold more than one million units in multiple countries and achieved top ranking in numerous charts internationally. His 1986 album *So*, which included the above-mentioned "Sledgehammer," went to number one in the UK, Canada, Italy, Netherlands, Norway and New Zealand and number two in the US, Germany and Sweden.

Gabriel's extremely popular music is sometimes placed in obscure sub-genres such as art rock, progressive pop or worldbeat-oriented rock. While the difficulty in categorizing his music is a measure of its unique qualities, it is extremely accessible despite its unconventional arrangement, structure and subject matter.

During his rise in popularity as a solo artist, Gabriel also became politically outspoken and active in human rights initiatives. His track "Biko," released as the final track on his 1980 *Peter Gabriel III*, is a eulogy inspired by South African antiapartheid activist Steve Biko, who was murdered while in police custody in 1977. The emotional power of the song, with its bagpipe dirge, hypnotic drumbeat, funeral chant and haunting vocals, still resonates.

Gabriel's recent comments around the 2026 album cycle

continue the tradition of linking art to social awareness rather than music as entertainment alone. His political stance has long been part of his public identity, and it helps explain why his work keeps connecting with audiences. Gabriel continues to sound like an artist responding to the world as it is with urgency, and not resting upon earlier successes.

April's track on the new album, "We Won't Stand Down" continues with this activist thread as an encouraging call to resistance and political engagement. In comments around the song, Gabriel linked that spirit to the generations of the past and expressed optimism about humanity's future, a stance that gives the song a forward-looking moral center. The musician has been outspoken in opposing Israel's "genocidal violence" in Gaza.

Gabriel explains that the song's rhythmic "Cuban element" is inspired by Marvin Gaye's "Sexual Healing." Of the important artists to emerge in the 1960s that were deeply influenced by the social and political movements of that era, Gaye was among the most successful at combining musical expression with meaningful social purpose.

It is remarkable that Gabriel is still creating work at this level six decades into his career. Like many of the progressive rock artists of his generation, he has turned longevity into ongoing artistic achievement. But what stands out most is not just that Gabriel is still releasing new music, but that he is developing a project with ambition, purpose and genuine imagination.

The lunar-cycle releases, the dual mixes and the political messaging point to an artist who still believes recorded popular music matters and is a critical vehicle for inspiring social consciousness and uniting humanity at a time when the forces of reaction are driving in the opposite direction.



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