

Phish Makes Waves For The 40th Year In A Row

by Bart Llewellyn

Astute readers of my column from last year may remember that I wrote about Phish in the spring, and may be wondering why I am doing so again. Well, this time I actually attended one of their shows in person, and they were astounding, whereas last time I was solely basing my review off of listening remotely.

Phish is a confusing band, because they have a very distinctive sound. The particular nature of their music can make it difficult for a beginner to get into them: the main attraction of the band is their improvisatory live shows, and the endless pile of live recordings that fans insist are essential can be overwhelming. Stylistically, they're all over the map, bringing together influences from classic and progressive rock, funk, bluegrass, ambient music, and more, all in service of a mixture of long and deep jams and very silly antics. The four members of Phish (guitarist Trey Anastasio, keyboardist Page McConnell, bassist Mike Gordon, and drummer Jon Fishman, together since the mid-1980s) are incredibly goofy and nerdy people. In some ways, following Phish is like being a sports fan, except more cult-like, as their most hard-core fans love to track stats and discuss them constantly, while casual fans go to their concerts to have a great time. They are unlike most major pop acts in that they never have an opener; each show is completely different in terms of setlists and improvisa-

tion, and they have no major hits, as their large popularity (they sell out Madison Square Garden for New Year's Eve annually) comes entirely out of the dedicated fans that traded recordings of their shows in the 1990s and continued to spread the word from there. But they are one of my favorite bands, and I finally saw them on the first night of their yearly Labor Day weekend run at Dick's Sporting Goods Park.

Seeing Phish live is a unique experience. As you walk towards the venue, there is a lively scene of unofficial vendors selling a variety of goods in the lot, and plenty of buzz as everyone wonders what the show will bring. Eventually, everyone settles in, and the band comes on to launch into their first hour-plus set of two. For the show I went to, they came out ready to blow minds with a nearly 20-minute version of their hard-rocking classic "Carini" that veered between bliss-filled climaxes and dark, pounding atmospherics. The rest of the set found them comfortably navigating a range of material new and old, even playing the silly "We Are Come To Outlive Our Brains" for the first time in over 100 shows, in addition to more great jamming, especially in their modern classic "Ruby Waves". What stood out most from this set, and the entire show, was actually their light show. Their lighting designer Chris Kuroda set the tone for the whole show by operating a highly complex light rig completely in the moment, synchronized with the

band's improvisational odysseys so well that the viewer is left in awe.

They came back from intermission and played a great second set, highlighted by a long, weird version of their fan favorite "Tweezer" that preceded the calm "Beneath a Sea of Stars" when the lights were turned off and the band jammed by the moonlight. Later, they ended the set with the climactic pairing of a nuanced "Light" and an anthem version of their classic "Slave to the Traffic Light", which built to a great climax. They returned for an encore that sent everyone home happy, with the silly chorus of "Say It To Me SANTOS" rattling around their heads.

Emery Slothower ('25), who attended the Saturday and Sunday shows this year, said that he loved finally seeing Phish after growing up on their music, and that "the energy at a Phish show isn't recreated anywhere else." As he started to share a list of highlights (he caught the longest encore in Phish history, at six songs and 42 minutes, for one thing), he laughed because "every Phish song is classic" and thus every show is amazing even though they don't repeat setlists or play any hits.

If any readers are curious about listening to Phish, audience recordings of the shows can be accessed for free on [Phish.in](https://www.phish.in), and the official soundboards are paid downloads on [Live-Phish.com](https://www.live-phish.com). Otherwise, contact me for listening suggestions while waiting for Phish to come back next year.



Credit: Andrew Giffin

Genesis' Fiftieth Anniversary: Selling England By The Pound

by **Bart Llewellyn**

The album *Selling England by the Pound* by Genesis turned 50 years old this month, and it's a gem worth an anniversary appraisal. Genesis at the time included vocalist (and occasional flute player) Peter Gabriel, who was known at the time for his theatrical lyrics and vocals as well as his elaborate onstage costumes and antics, and later for an extensive and successful solo career, with his popularity peaking in the mid-1980s; keyboardist Tony Banks, largely responsible for many of the band's classic compositions; guitarist Steve Hackett, whose stunning textures and impressive technique were sometimes downplayed in the band's sound; bassist and 12-string guitarist Mike Rutherford, an oft-overlooked asset in the group; and drummer and occasional vocalist Phil Collins, destined later to achieve pop stardom in the 1980s, but also a world-class drummer. This group of master songwriters and musicians came together for their most essential album.

Lyrically, it tackles the perceived issue of modern, foreign commercial influences overrunning old England and also touches on satire of modern English life and ancient mythology. Musically, it mixes 1970s rock with classical music and a lush, pastoral sound, foregrounding instruments like the 12-string guitar and the Mellotron, an orchestra-sampling keyboard.

The album should be listened to front to back, but as it can take a few listens to digest

and features some lengthy songs, modern listeners not accustomed to this kind of music might not want to start that way. The shorter pop songs "I Know What I Like" (a comedic Beatlesque tune) and "More Fool Me" (featuring Collins on vocals) are more accessible as an introduction. With some time, the longer masterpieces of the album like "Dancing With the Moonlit Knight" (a perfect summary of the band's talents), "Firth of Fifth" (an unparalleled composition), and "Cinema Show" (a good song, plus an exquisite extended keyboard jam) will too reveal their delights.

Overall, *Selling England* is, in my opinion (and that of our own Mr. Bleyle, who said that it was "the crux of when they were a true five-piece band") a masterpiece worth seeking out, especially if one is only familiar with the band and their frontmen's more famous 1980s pop material. It may be too heady for a prominent place in the broader canon, but it is essential for the adventurous music lover.

If you like the album, on December 8th at the Paramount Theater, The Musical Box, the world's foremost 1970s Genesis tribute act, will recreate a show from the original *Selling England* tour, which promises to be an amazing and immersive experience.

In 1983, ten years after *Selling England* was released, Genesis, reduced to a trio of Collins (now the band's frontman), Banks, and Rutherford, released an album that turns 40 this month. This album was self-titled (it is sometimes identified by the shapes on its cov-

er), and it helped propel them to popular success in the mid-80s. It is not the same artistic masterwork that *Selling England* is, but it has several great songs, is more accessible to the average listener, and is perhaps better suited mood-wise to the month of October. The sinister, dramatic crescendo of "Mama" makes it a compelling album opener and a good addition to a Halloween playlist, and it features amazing Collins vocals. The ghost story of "Home by the Sea", my favorite track on the album, is equally Halloween-worthy, and the instrumental jam after the song further enhances it. The rest is a mixed bag. I can't decide whether the ubiquitous "That's All" (if you think you don't know it, you do) is good or annoying, and the highly offensive "Illegal Alien" should be avoided at all costs, but "Silver Rainbow" is a truly fantastic deep cut worthy of some attention. The production of the album is also very thin and compressed, lacking in color and character. But still, it has some great material, so check it out and see for yourself.

Separately, over fall break, Peter Gabriel played a concert at Ball Arena to promote his upcoming solo album *i/o*, and while I did not attend, several Kent Denver community members did, and when I asked Mr. Bleyle (who was a Peter Gabriel fan before he was a Genesis fan) about it, he said he loved it, and I have heard several other positive reviews of the show (which did not include any Genesis). *i/o* will be coming out on December 1, and it should be something to look forward to.



Credit: Roberto Ricciuti

Listen To These Off-The-Beaten-Path Recs For Fall

by Bart Llewellyn

Autechre's *Incunabula* at 30

My favorite electronic music group, Autechre, released their debut album *Incunabula* in November 1993, and 30 years later, it still shines as one of their best and most acces-



Credit: Paul Hudson Licensed Under Wikimedia Commons

sible works. While its ambient-techno stylistics and vintage equipment give it a sound sometimes dismissed as dated, it is a vibrant record, whose industrial tonal palette manages to remain warm and comforting, unlike their dense and cold recent output, which is brilliantly creative and influential yet perhaps not as satisfying to the average listener. Tracks like “Bike” and “Eggshell” burst with melody, and the album’s drum programming is simultaneously complex, danceable, and chill. It’s an album that equally rewards close listening and use as background or study music. I will gladly tout their daringly original later work, but *Incunabula* is a stunning artifact of a time, before laptops when cutting-edge electronic music had a human heart.

King Gizzard and the Lizard Wizard Release Electronic-Focused 25th Album

The absurdly named, eclectic Australian band King Gizzard and the Lizard Wizard released *The Silver Cord*, their second album of 2023, on October 27th. In contrast to their usual rock-oriented material (though they have embraced so many different styles in their prolific career that to characterize a certain sound

as “usual” would misrepresent the group), the album was recorded nearly exclusively on analog electronics, including synthesizers and a vintage electronic drum kit. According to the band, the album was intended as half of a “Yin and Yang” pair with the band’s June release *PetroDragonic Apocalypse*, a thrash metal album that I haven’t heard because I am not

a thrash metal fan. *The Silver Cord* was released with both a seamless 28-minute mix of the essential elements of its seven songs and an 89-minute sequence of extended versions. While the former is a good way to get acquainted with the album, I prefer the extended versions, because their length and hypnotic qualities allow me to focus on each song one at a time, whereas the stylistic shifts in the short version are jarring. The KDS Welcome Center’s resident music fan, Mr. Jeff Bleyle, agreed with me, calling the extended mixes “awesome.” While the album is very different from the rest of the band’s career, anyone intrigued by the band should explore their dense discography ahead of their Red Rocks performances next September.

Molly Tuttle & Golden Highway at Cervantes Masterpiece Ballroom

Grammy-winning bluegrass guitarist Molly Tuttle ended her fall tour of the western U.S. with a show at Cervantes, a historic venue in Five Points, on October 21st. Tuttle and her band Golden Highway (consisting of Bronwyn Keith-Hynes on fiddle, Dominick Leslie on mandolin, Kyle Tuttle—no relation—on

banjo, and Shelby Means on bass) played a high-energy set focused largely on their newest album, *City of Gold*, as well as their 2022 effort *Crooked Tree*. The band was incredibly tight and played every tune with precision, energy, and dazzling musicianship, but two highlights of the night came when they stretched out beyond basic song forms into open musical dialogue. The first was a hypnotic cover of Jefferson Airplane’s “White Rabbit”, which built from its foundational bassline to superlatively intense and inspired acoustic improvisation. Later in the show, Tuttle’s original “Castilleja” (from *Crooked Tree*) featured a dazzling instrumental midsection that showcased each musician’s dazzling technique in a tour-de-force jam. Other highlights of the show included powerful renditions of Tuttle’s anthems of feminist empowerment, from a touching solo performance of “The First Time I Fell in Love” (from *City of Gold*) to an energetic rendition of “Crooked Tree”, which Tuttle introduced in a speech in which she revealed her struggles to fit in after losing her hair to alopecia at a young age. The audience’s cheer of affirmation when Tuttle removed her wig was a moving sign that, in a world full of hate and division, music can bring good people together. Elsewhere, covers of the Grateful Dead’s “Dire Wolf” and John Denver’s “Rocky Mountain High” complemented Tuttle’s fantastic repertoire of originals well. Overall, the show was a perfect way to spend an October evening. I’ll also spotlight Tuttle’s recorded music, which manages to be faithful to its bluegrass and folk heritage while subtly reinventing it. Her two albums with Golden Highway are both great, and I’d also recommend her 2020 cover album, ...but I’d rather be with you.



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