Security, Peter Gabriel on Geffen Records.

It seems that all art-rockers follow the same course. Now that David Bowie and Byrne, Brian Eno and even Robert Fripp have succumbed to the lure of the muted tribal drums, it was just a matter of time before Peter Gabriel added his contribution to the ever-growing body of cross-cultural rock. Of course Gabriel was sidetracked from his own album by his master-minding of the immense Music and Rhythm project, yet it can only serve as a token of his sincerity. With his new release, however, he asserts his claim as the most serious and studious member of the Afro/New Wave axis.

Security (the first Gabriel solo to have an actual title) is almost too studied and serious. Each song is a carefully constructed exercise in long builds, yet the releases do not always justify the tension. The opener, "The Rhythm and the Heat," points out a major deficiency of Gabriel’s approach — when the song finally erupts into a state of frenzied tribal drumming (courtesy of genuine Ghanian drummers), it seems out of place with the preceding synthesized textures. When he sings, "the rhythm’s in my soul," we can’t help but believe it, but at the same time we must ask why more of the rhythm isn’t in the recording.

Only once does Gabriel come close to uniting his synthesizers and his Afro-rhythms. When he sings, "Shoot the Monkey," his particular brand of funk works particularly well in this tune, almost reaching the point of no control only to be moored back to earth by the synthesizer instructor. Gabriel’s command of keyboard textures is astounding (not a real string or horn in sight), yet at times it serves only to point out the distinct lack of guitar work. When a guitar does make an appearance, it is only to deliver a series of choppy, ringing chords — an excellent contrast to the synth ostinatos, but also a reminder of what we could be hearing.

A Peter Gabriel album is more than just music, however, it is also a vehicle for his cryptic lyrical insights. Security is chock full of impressionistic wardrobe: only a few of the songs make their meaning clear. "San Jacinto" seems to deal with an Indian tribe’s refusal to leave their land, "Lay Your Hands on Me" is a bulleted expressing sympathy for the insane — in Gabriel’s universe the only difference between sane and insane is which group is behind the walls. As for the rest of the songs, your guess is as good as mine — it will be a long time before anyonedeciphers "The Family and the Fishing Net.”

Security is an album worth the the two year wait. Repeated listenings reveal Gabriel’s substantial compositional and lyrical talents, despite the minor failures. It’s good to know that the rhythm has finally claimed his soul, now all he must do is proclaim it freely.

Mimi Yenari

Off the Beaten Groove

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The Director of Admissions from the University of California, Los Angeles, will discuss one of the country’s finest MBA programs.

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