

= So ( album ) =

So is the fifth studio album by English rock musician Peter Gabriel , released on 19 May 1986 by Charisma Records . After working on the soundtrack to the film Birdy ( 1984 ) , producer Daniel Lanois was invited to remain at Gabriel 's home during 1985 to work on his next singing project . Initial sessions for So consisted of Gabriel , Lanois and guitarist David Rhodes , although these grew to include a number of percussionists .

Although Gabriel continued to use the pioneering Fairlight CMI synthesizer , songs from these sessions were notably less experimental than his previous material , and fused pop and art rock with elements of traditional world music , particularly African and Brazilian styles . It is Gabriel 's first non @-@ eponymous album , So representing an " anti @-@ title " that resulted from label pressure to properly market his music . Widely regarded as his best album , as well as his most accessible , it transformed Gabriel from a cult artist into a mainstream star . It received positive reviews from critics , who praised its melodicism and fusion of genres , and was nominated for the Grammy Award for Album of the Year . Gabriel toured So on the This Way Up tour ( 1986 ? 1987 ) , with some songs performed at human rights and charity concerts during this period .

So is Gabriel 's best @-@ selling solo release , and has been certified fivefold platinum by the Recording Industry Association of America and triple platinum by the British Phonographic Industry . It spawned five singles , " Sledgehammer " , " Don 't Give Up " , " Big Time " , " In Your Eyes " and " Red Rain " . " Sledgehammer " achieved particular success , reaching number one on the Billboard Hot 100 and winning a record of ten MTV Video Music Awards . So was remastered in 2002 , partially re @-@ recorded for Gabriel 's 2012 orchestral project New Blood and issued as a box set the same year . It has been deemed one of the best albums of the 1980s and is listed at number 187 in Rolling Stone 's 500 Greatest Albums of All Time .

= = Background = =

Prior to recording So , Gabriel released four studio albums all titled Peter Gabriel . They received nicknames based on their sleeve art , which were designed by English duo Hipgnosis . His debut , Car ( 1977 ) , received positive reviews , mainly because of the hugely popular " Solsbury Hill " , which concerned the site of the same name near Ashcombe House , Gabriel 's estate to the north @-@ east of Bath in Somerset . His second album ? Scratch ( 1978 ) ? fared less well and it was not until Melt ( 1980 ) that Gabriel was considered a progressive solo artist . Melt included the emotive anti @-@ apartheid song " Biko " and the popular " Games Without Frontiers " , with Gabriel helping to " blueprint the sound of 80s rock through its trailblazing use of what became known as the " gated reverb " drum effect . " In the early 1980s , Gabriel embarked on various projects , including founding the World Music , Arts and Dance Festival ( WOMAD ) , with a WOMAD album featuring himself , Robert Fripp , Pete Townshend and other artists of the world music genre . His fourth album , Security ( 1982 ) ? also released in German as the Deutsches Album ( 1982 ) ? saw success with Gabriel 's music video for the eye @-@ opening " Shock the Monkey " . Gabriel won the Grand Jury Prize at the Cannes Film Festival for scoring the soundtrack to the film Birdy ( 1984 ) .

= = Recording = =

Since 1978 , Gabriel had composed all of his music at Ashcombe House , including his fourth studio album Peter Gabriel or " Security " ( 1982 ) and the Birdy ( 1984 ) soundtrack . An inexpensive studio existed in the house 's adjacent barn , consisting of two rooms , one where Gabriel would produce his vocals and work on lyrics , and another where the music would be assembled . When preparing for So , Gabriel considered Chic 's Nile Rodgers and Bill Laswell as potential producers . He eventually asked his Birdy collaborator , Daniel Lanois , to stay at Ashcombe and work with him further . Rehearsals began in May 1985 and consisted of Gabriel , Lanois and guitarist David Rhodes . Gabriel had begun work on some songs and provided Lanois and Rhodes with chord

structures , around which they built their own improvised compositions . Lanois recalled they had " a nice starting point [ as ] in that kind of scenario , it 's not a good idea to have a lot of people around because you get nervous that you 're wasting other people 's time " . Consequently , there was a relaxed atmosphere surrounding these sessions and the trio would jokingly refer to themselves as The Three Stooges , an American vaudeville act of the mid @-@ twentieth century . This also involved the wearing of construction site hard hats as they had a " turning up for work humour " . As sessions grew , engineer Kevin Killen , bassist Tony Levin , and drummer Jerry Marotta became significant contributors , and were aided by percussionists Manu Katché and Stewart Copeland and violinist L. Shankar .

The studio 's basic equipment consisted of " two analog 24 @-@ track machines , a Studer A80 , and a Studer A80 shell that had been modified by a local electronics wizard , with its own audio cards and transport controls " . To record vocals a Neumann U47 tube microphone and a Decca compressor were used without equalization . All of So 's songs were made in a similar format . Gabriel would record a piano demo on a modified " B machine " and play this to the band . During rehearsals , the band would listen to the B machine through headphones and record their output onto the " A machine " ; parts of Gabriel 's demo would also be transferred to the A machine at this stage . Subsequent takes of the song were then put onto the B machine in order for the band to hear what they had played with the demo , as well as the song 's new and old takes .

Other equipment included the " groundbreaking " Fairlight CMI synthesizer , which Gabriel said in an interview for Billboard meant " more human imagination is involved " . He added , " the creative decision @-@ making process has become more important than technique . You have a wider range of tools , a wider range of decisions " . Although remaining continually inspired to produce new music , he often struggled to write lyrics and would delay doing so by procrastinating . His proclivity to being dissatisfied with them required Killen to isolate certain vocal performances as the master track , in order to keep other tracks available so new lyrics could be edited in . Lanois took adverse measures to encourage his writing , such as destroying his much @-@ used telephone in the nearby woods and , on one occasion , nailed the studio door shut to lock him inside .

Towards the end of recording , Gabriel became " obsessed " with the album 's track listing and created an audio cassette of all the song 's beginnings and ends in order to hear how the sounds blended together . His original intention was to have " In Your Eyes " at the end of the record , but because of its prominent bass line , it had to be placed earlier in the listing on the vinyl edition as there is more room for the stylus to vibrate . With later CD releases , this restriction was removed and the track was placed at the end of the album . So was completed in February 1986 and cost £ 200 @,@ 000 to make . It was over @-@ dubbed at Power Station Studios in New York , despite Gabriel considering sending it via a computer @-@ telephone set up , reasoning , " that 's a lot of information to send via phone . Isn 't it amazing though ? You can send a song idea around the world to musicians then beam parts back by satellite " . It was mastered by Ian Cooper in mid @-@ February 1986 at London 's Townhouse Studios .

= = Composition = =

So has been described as Gabriel 's most commercially accessible and least experimental album . Like his previous albums , its basis is in art rock , although on So , Gabriel develops an increased focus on melody and now combines this genre with elements of soul and African music . Its songs are highly influenced by traditional world music , particularly African and Brazilian music , with Gabriel using the distinctive drum beat from these styles . In a 2011 interview for Uncut , Gabriel said , " I 'd had my fill of instrumental experimenting for a while , and I wanted to write proper pop songs , albeit on my own terms . " Jon Pareles of The New York Times notes that Gabriel " doesn 't just add on African drums or Indian violin to ordinary songs ; they are part of the foundation . " Daniel Lanois production was noted as textured , replete with ambient details and " immaculate warmth giving each note room to breathe , its textures lavish ( in the preferred style of the time ) without being sterile " .

== Side one ==

Gabriel wanted the album to " crash open at the front " and despite disliking " metal " percussion instruments , he was persuaded by Lanois to allow The Police 's Stewart Copeland to play cymbals and hi @-@ hat on its opener , " Red Rain " . The track sees Gabriel sing in his upper register with a throaty , gravelly texture , of a destructive world with social problems such as torture and kidnapping . Its concept originated from a dream in which he envisaged the parting of a vast , red sea and human @-@ like glass bottles filling up with blood . It was also intended to continue the story of Mozo , a recurring character in Gabriel 's first and second albums . The second track , " Sledgehammer " , was the final track to be conceived of . Although most of Gabriel 's band had packed away their equipment and were ready to leave the studio , Gabriel asked them to reassemble to quickly run through a song he had an idea for . " Sledgehammer " was partially inspired by the music of Otis Redding , and Gabriel sought out Wayne Jackson , who Gabriel had seen on tour with Redding in the 1960s , to record horns for the track . Opened by a shakuhachi bamboo flute , its beat is dominated by brass instruments , particularly Jackson 's horn , and features lyrics abundant with sexual euphemisms . Manu Katché 's drums were recorded in one take as he believed any subsequent version would be inferior to his original interpretation of the music .

So 's most prominent political statement , " Don 't Give Up " , was fuelled by Gabriel 's discontent with rising unemployment during Margaret Thatcher 's premiership and Dorothea Lange 's photograph " Migrant Mother " . The track began as a rhythm pattern of slow , low @-@ pitched tom @-@ tom drums that Gabriel made , and Lanois believed could serve as the centrepiece of a song . Tony Levin added bass to create a more harmonious sound , and during the second @-@ half of the track , put a nappy behind his bass strings to dampen the sound . Gabriel ensured the song , which follows a narrative of an unemployed man and his lover , was written as a conversational piece . He initially sought out Dolly Parton to portray the woman , although Parton declined ; his friend Kate Bush later agreed to feature . Bush serves as the song 's respondent , she assumes a comforting role and with delicate vocals , sings lines such as " Rest your head / you worry too much " . The album 's first side culminates with " That Voice Again " , in which Gabriel explores the concept of conscience , examining the " parental voice in our heads that either helps or defeats us " . Co @-@ written with David Rhodes , who plays guitar over Katché and Levin 's input , the song was written after Gabriel 's initial discussions with Martin Scorsese about scoring *The Last Temptation of Christ* ( 1988 ) .

== Side two ==

" In Your Eyes " has been described as Gabriel 's greatest love song . Inspired by the *Sagrada Família* and its architect Antoni Gaudí , Gabriel sings over a drumbeat of only feeling complete in the eyes of his lover . The track 's powerful atmosphere is created through the scat singing of Senegalese musician Youssou N 'Dour , who sings in his native language . Gabriel became interested in the late American poet Anne Sexton after reading the anthology *To Bedlam And Part Way Back* . He dedicated So 's sixth track to her , calling it " Mercy Street " after " 45 Mercy Street " , a poem released in another posthumous collection . " Mercy Street " is set to one of several Forró @-@ inspired percussion compositions that Gabriel recorded in Rio de Janeiro . When these compositions were unearthed in the studio , they were accidentally played back at a speed ten per cent slower than the original recording , giving them a grainy quality that Gabriel and Lanois thought highlighted the cymbal and guitars . It features two harmonious Gabriel vocals , one of which is a shadow vocal which is an octave below the main vocal , intended to give a sensual , haunting effect , although this was hard to capture except when Gabriel had first woken up .

The dance song " Big Time " has funk influences and is built on a " percussive bass sound " . Its lyrics satirise the yuppie culture of the 1980s , materialism and consumerism and are the result of Gabriel 's self @-@ examination , after he considered whether he may have desired fame after all . " We Do What We 're Told ( Milgram 's 37 ) " was a song written for Gabriel 's third album *Peter Dinklage* or " Melt " and is described as an interlude . It references the experiment on obedience

carried out by American social psychologist Stanley Milgram , intended as a reference to the obedience citizens show to dictators during times of war . Marotta 's drums on the song were said to resemble " a heartbeat heard from the womb " , these were coupled with Shankar 's violin and " two overdubbed guitar tracks by Rhodes " . The album is completed by " This Is The Picture ( Excellent Birds ) " , which Gabriel decided forty @-@ eight hours before his album submission , was going to be included . " Excellent Birds " was composed with American musician Laurie Anderson and featured on her 1984 album Mister Heartbreak . This was interpolated into another recording called " This Is The Picture " , which Nile Rodgers plays rhythmic guitar on .

= = Release = =

So is Gabriel 's first non @-@ eponymous album . Gabriel has noted his dislike for titling albums , mainly because it distracts from the sleeve design . In an interview for Rolling Stone , he explained that his American label Geffen Records refused to release Peter Gabriel IV until it was retitled Security . He elaborated that for So " [ he ] decided to go for the anti @-@ title ... It can be more a piece of graphic , if you like , as opposed to something with meaning and intention . And that 's what I 've done ever since " . When the album was profiled in the Classic Albums documentary series , Gabriel quipped that its short title meant it could be enlarged and useful when marketing it . The sleeve design is a portrait of Gabriel photographed by Trevor Key , who was then most famous for capturing the bell artwork for Mike Oldfield 's Tubular Bells ( 1973 ) . It was then designed by Peter Saville and Brett Wickens ; Saville was most known for designing several sleeves for Factory Records artists . Saville was paid £ 20 @,@ 000 for his design . Gabriel has since commented : " the only compromise I made was to go with Peter Saville 's idea for a retro @-@ style portrait . I was told my usual obscure LP sleeves alienated women . "

So was released on 19 May 1986 . It topped the charts of seven countries worldwide , including the United Kingdom , where it became Gabriel 's second number one album . In the United States , So became one of Geffen Records ' most commercially successful releases , peaking at number two and remaining on the chart for ninety @-@ three weeks . In April 1986 , " Sledgehammer " was released as the album 's lead single and became Gabriel 's first and only number one on the Billboard Hot 100 , displacing Genesis ' first and only US number one " Invisible Touch " . The track reached number four in the United Kingdom , where it ties with " Games Without Frontiers " as his highest charting single , and peaked at number one in Canada . The success of " Sledgehammer " can be seen , in part , due to its hugely popular and innovative stop motion music video , designed by Aardman Animations . Gabriel would go on to say in an interview for Rolling Stone that he believed the video exposed So 's songs to a wider audience , bolstering the album 's success . Two high @-@ charting singles followed , " Don 't Give Up " , which rose to number nine on the UK Singles Chart and a less successful seventy @-@ nine in America , while " Big Time " peaked at number thirteen in the UK and number eight in America . " In Your Eyes " saw moderate success in America , where it reached twenty @-@ six on the Hot 100 , while " Red Rain " peaked at forty @-@ six in the United Kingdom .

Bono contacted Gabriel to perform at A Conspiracy of Hope , a series of Live Aid @-@ inspired concerts that intended to spread awareness of human rights issues in light of Amnesty International 's twenty @-@ fifth anniversary . Gabriel accepted and in June 1986 , he performed alongside Sting , The Police , Lou Reed and Joan Baez , with a set that opened with " Red Rain " and featured " Sledgehammer " . Gabriel described it as " the best tour [ he 'd ] ever been on " . In the same month , Gabriel performed at London 's Clapham Common , along with Boy George and Elvis Costello , for Artists Against Apartheid . Gabriel eventually embarked on the ninety @-@ three date This Way Up tour to support So , beginning in Rochester , New York on 7 November 1986 . One of the dates was a special two @-@ night residency ( 20 ? 21 December ) at Tokyo 's Meiji Jingu Stadium to fund a global computer system for the University for Peace , a United Nations project . The tour suspended in early 1987 until June when it reached Europe , before going on to America and finishing at the Lycabettus Amphitheatre in Athens in October . Gabriel partially performed So at The Prince 's Trust Concert and at Human Rights Now ! Tour in 1988 .

= = Critical reception = =

So received mostly favourable reviews from music critics . Robert Christgau commented " Gabriel 's so smart he knows rhythm is what makes music go , which relieves him of humdrum melodic responsibilities but doesn 't get him up on the one ? smart guys do go for texture in a pinch . " Jon Pareles of The New York Times wrote " only a handful of Western rock musicians have managed to use exotic rhythms and instruments with so much ingenuity and conviction " . Pareles also praised his vocals , describing them as " grainy but not bluesy , ageless and joyless , the voice of some ancient mariner recounting disasters " . Tim Holmes writing for Rolling Stone described the album as " a record of considerable emotional complexity and musical sophistication " and was pleased that the records would assist exposing Gabriel to mainstream pop music . Terry Atkinson of Los Angeles Times viewed the album as offering " an amazing variety of tones , moods , and topics and a consistently powerful level of expression " . Although disliking " Big Time " , Atkinson concludes So is " a great album , possibly Gabriel 's best " . Chicago Tribune 's Lynn Van Matre praised the album 's " wave of funky rhythms " and called for more appreciation of Gabriel 's talent , but noted that there were no tracks as stand out as " Biko " , a single from his third eponymous album Peter Gabriel or " Melt " .

Stephen Thomas Erlewine of AllMusic commended So as Gabriel 's " catchiest , happiest record he ever cut " . Erlewine particularly praised Gabriel 's fusion of art rock with African music and soul . Jude Rogers of the BBC wrote " once you look past the bombast of " Sledgehammer " , ... you notice how easily its artful ideas slipped inside the 80s mainstream " . The Quietus ' Wyndham Wallace praised So 's sincerity and called it " a heartfelt journey through intense emotional territory , assembled and arranged with intricacy and commitment , laboured over with such care that it sounds effortless " . Ryan Bray , writer for Consequence of Sound , concluded So was an " all @-@ too @-@ rare record that manages to have it both ways , earning its richly deserved critical and commercial respect without giving so much as an artistic inch " . He added that " it still stands on its own two feet as one of the consensus best records of the 80s " . Mark Blake of Q described the album as " carbon @-@ dated to 1986 thanks to those blaring saxes and Fairlight CMI digital sampling synths " . He added that " Gabriel crafted an album of user @-@ friendly pop that was still reassuringly odd . " Mojo 's David Buckley contrasted the album with Gabriel 's earlier , more experimental work , claiming " on 1986 's So , he switched tack to write pop , and write big . The results are mixed . Sledgehammer , echoing both Stevie Wonders 's " Superstition " and David Bowie 's " Fame " , retains its punch . Elsewhere , Gabriel sounds airbrushed on Mercy Street , Red Rain and In Your Eyes , with only We Do What We 're Told a reminder of a daring past . " Writing in Uncut , John Lewis praised its state @-@ of @-@ the @-@ art production in parts , highlighting " Big Time " and " Sledgehammer " as standout tracks , but claimed elsewhere it interfered , such as the Fairlight CMI synthesizer on " That Voice Again " and whistling ambient accompaniment on " Mercy Street " . Terry Staunton of Classic Rock wrote " Red Rain was familiarly pensive and politically charged , but the radio waves completely surrendered to the record 's muscular dance rock and slower tempo eloquence . " Staunton concluded that Gabriel had displayed " a masterful confidence , delivering a satisfyingly unified whole " .

= = Legacy = =

At the 29th Annual Grammy Awards , So was nominated for Album of the Year , losing to Paul Simon 's Graceland ( 1986 ) , while " Sledgehammer " received nominations for Record of the Year , Song of the Year and Best Male Rock Vocal Performance . At the sixth Brit Awards , hosted by Jonathan King at the Grosvenor House Hotel , London , Gabriel won Best British Male Artist and " Sledgehammer " won Best British Music Video . Gabriel was most successful at the 1987 MTV Video Music Awards where he was honoured with the Video Vanguard Award and " Sledgehammer " won an additional nine awards including Video of the Year , a record that has not been challenged . Its video is the most played music video in the history of MTV .

So is often regarded as Gabriel 's best album , as well as one of the best albums of the 1980s . It enabled Gabriel to transform from a cult artist , acclaimed for his cerebral , experimental solo work in the 1970s , into a mainstream , internationally @-@ known star . Rolling Stone placed So at 187 on its 500 Greatest Albums of All Time and at 14 on its 100 Best Albums of the 1980s , noting that " despite its mass appeal , however , So also presented compelling challenges . " Stereogum placed it at number one on its list of Gabriel 's best albums , writing , " Peter Gabriel 's fifth studio album is a mesmerizing dichotomy : simultaneously hooky and experimental ; timeless , yet completely crystalizing its moment in history ... It 's a masterpiece . It has been profiled in the Classic Albums series and featured in 1001 Albums You Must Hear Before You Die . Slant Magazine listed the album at 41 on its list of the 100 Best Albums of the 1980s , describing it as " Gabriel 's most accessible yet ambitious work . A chronicle of political , emotional , and artistic exploration , the album [ attempts ] to balance standard pop orthodoxy with his still @-@ rumbling desire for sonic experimentation " . Conversely , The Guardian 's lead critic Alexis Petridis claimed Gabriel " suffered a musical mid @-@ life crisis " , describing it as " an album packed with ultra @-@ commercial priapic cod @-@ funk " and " a ruthless bid for mainstream success " .

It is Gabriel 's best @-@ selling album , having been certified fivefold platinum by the Recording Industry Association of America ( RIAA ) and triple platinum by the British Phonographic Industry ( BPI ) . [ 1 ] In 2002 , So was re @-@ issued and remastered . In 2011 , several of tracks from So were featured on Gabriel 's ninth studio release New Blood , a project of orchestral re @-@ recordings from Gabriel 's discography . In 2012 , for the album 's twenty @-@ fifth anniversary , a limited edition box set was released . It includes the remastered So album , the Live at Athens ( 1987 ) album and a So DNA album which examines its production , as well as new liner notes , photographs , vinyl collectibles and the So : Classic Albums documentary . In the same year , Gabriel embarked on the Back to Front Tour where Gabriel plays every song on the So album with several of the session musicians from its recording .

= = Track listing = =

All songs written by Peter Gabriel , except where indicated .

Notes

" This Is the Picture ( Excellent Birds ) " was not included on the original vinyl release .

= = Personnel = =

Credits adapted from So 's liner notes . The track numbers correspond to the original release .

Peter Gabriel ? lead and backing vocals , Fairlight CMI , Sequential Circuits Prophet @-@ 5 ( all except tracks 5 , 9 ) , piano ( all except tracks 7 , 9 ) , Linn LM @-@ 1 ( tracks 3 , 7 ) , synthesizer ( tracks 5 , 7 ) , percussion ( track 4 ) , Yamaha CS @-@ 80 ( track 6 ) , LinnDrum ( track 9 ) , Synclavier ( track 9 )

Tony Levin ? bass guitar ( tracks 1 , 2 , 3 , 4 , 5 ) , drumstick bass guitar ( fretting only ) ( track 7 )

David Rhodes ? guitar ( all except tracks 6 , 9 ) , backing vocals ( tracks 1 , 5 )

Jerry Marotta ? drums ( tracks 1 , 8 ) , additional drums ( track 5 ) , drumstick bass guitar ( drumming only ) ( track 7 )

Manu Katché ? drums ( tracks 2 , 3 , 4 , 5 ) , percussion ( tracks 3 , 4 , 5 ) , talking drum ( tracks 5 , 9 )

Chris Hughes ? LinnDrum programming ( track 1 )

Stewart Copeland ? hi @-@ hat ( track 1 ) , drums ( track 7 )

Daniel Lanois ? guitar ( tracks 1 , 2 , 4 ) , tambourine ( track 2 ) , surf guitar ( track 7 ) , 12 @-@ string guitar ( track 9 )

Wayne Jackson ? trumpet ( track 2 , 7 ) , cornet ( track 7 )

Mark Rivera ? tenor saxophone ( track 2 , 7 ) , processed saxophone ( track 6 ) , alto and baritone saxophone ( track 7 )

Don Mikkelsen ? trombone ( track 2 , 7 )

P. P. Arnold ? backing vocals ( track 2 , 7 )  
Coral Gordon ? backing vocals ( track 2 , 7 )  
Dee Lewis ? backing vocals ( track 2 , 7 )  
Richard Tee ? piano ( tracks 3 , 5 , 6 )  
Simon Clark ? Yamaha CS @-@ 80 chorus effect ( track 3 ) , Hammond , Fairlight CMI and bass ( track 7 )  
Kate Bush ? vocals ( track 3 )  
L. Shankar ? violin ( tracks 4 , 8 )  
Larry Klein ? bass guitar ( tracks 5 , 6 )  
Youssou N 'Dour ? vocals ( track 5 )  
Michael Been ? backing vocals ( track 5 )  
Jim Kerr ? backing vocals ( track 5 )  
Ronnie Bright ? bass vocals ( track 5 )  
Djalma Correa ? surdo , congas and triangle ( track 6 )  
Jimmy Bralower ? LinnDrum kick ( track 7 )  
Bill Laswell ? bass guitar ( track 9 )  
Nile Rodgers ? guitar ( track 9 )  
Laurie Anderson ? vocals ( track 9 )

= = Charts = =

= = Certifications = =