

Welcome back, my friends, to Greg Lake's *Songs of a Lifetime*

By John Costello

For fans of Greg Lake from his years with King Crimson, Emerson, Lake and Palmer (ELP) and as a solo artist, it probably has seemed like a long wait for another "show that never ends" of any kind.

Lake, who will bring his *Songs of a Lifetime* tour to the Varsity Theater May 10, was last seen and heard live in the Twin Cities in 2001 when he was a member of Ringo Starr's All-Starr Band.

"I did a tour a while back with Ringo, and of course the Beatles' music has penetrated everywhere into people's lives and, thank goodness, that is one of the lovely byproducts of being in the music business," he commented.

Besides remembering Ringo, Lake will share his unique recollections of Jimi Hendrix, Elvis and others throughout the performance, which will not only include some of the best-known songs from his days with King Crimson and ELP, such as *In The Court of the Crimson King*, *Lucky Man* and *From The Beginning*, but will also feature songs by other artists that have influenced his musical career over the years.

Greg gave a very detailed answer when he was asked whether he would perform the ELP song *Take a Pebble*, which would seem to perfectly fit the tour's theme with its thought-provoking lyrics: "Just take a pebble and cast it to the sea/Then watch the ripples that unfold into me/My face spill so gently into your eyes/Disturbing the waters of our lives."

"The way this tour came about was, I just finished writing an autobiography which, rather unsurprisingly, is called *Lucky Man*," Lake replied. "During the writing of it, various songs popped up that were very critical and influential in my life and in my career, and when I got to the end of the book, I realized that these songs really represented a journey that I shared together with the audience that had followed King Crimson and ELP."

"I thought it would be a nice idea to do a concert based on these songs. Each of the songs came along with a story, and I realized that, for the audience, too, many of them have got stories."

"Whenever I meet someone, they say things like, '*Brain Salad Surgery* got me through university,' or 'I met my wife at the Isle of Wight festival,'" he remembered. "There's always stories attached to it. I thought that it would be a nice idea to do an intimate concert where we swap these stories, in a way. I came up with the title, *Songs of a Lifetime*, because I think that's exactly what they are."

"Then, it was a question of sort of prioritizing what to do; I can't play everything from all the albums from both of those bands (King Crimson and ELP), so it was a question of making a selection, really" Greg continued. "I may change that selection in the future, and I'm sure *Take a Pebble* would be a nice song to do."

"Of course, it's a challenge doing a one-man show. I was determined that it wasn't going to be one of those sort of legend-in-his-own-lunchtime things, where you sit on the stool and bore everyone to death. I wanted it to be a dynamic, surprising and entertaining show, which is what it is."

"The response to the show has been absolutely stunning, to be honest with you, and people just love it, and I love it," he enthused. "It's a strange thing, when I walk onto the stage, it's more like walking into a family room. The feeling of warmth, the feeling of bonding and being together, it's something that, if you come to see the show, you'll see for yourself."

Lake doesn't have a new solo album to promote, but he is working on new material, and the past two years have provided ELP and Greg's fans with the release of a new, five-CD ELP box set, *From the Beginning*, and the reissue of his first two solo albums, *Greg Lake* and *Manoeuvres*, on CD.

Additionally, the company Razor & Tie has signed ELP to a new licensing deal for North America. The company's catalog reissue campaign will kick off this year with the release of newly expanded, remastered editions of the band's studio albums *Emerson, Lake and Palmer* (1970), *Tarkus* (1971), *Trilogy* (1972) and *Brain Salad Surgery* (1973), and the live albums *Pictures At An Art Exhibition* (1971) and *Welcome Back My Friends To The Show That Never Ends* (1974).

"I don't have an awful lot to do with reissuing; it's one of those things that I'm not really interested in it," noted Lake. "I'm told this new reissue package is extremely good, that they found a lot of outtakes and that kind of thing. I tire of those reissues where they reissue the whole catalog, and really all they've done is put it in a new wrapper."

Lake's self-titled solo debut included a song partially written by Minnesota legend Bob Dylan, *Love You Too Much*.

"I wanted to do a Bob Dylan song on an album because I respect him a lot as a writer and as a performer, and I had a friend who used to be his tour manager," Greg explained. "I didn't want to do one of the regular songs of Bob's that people cover. I wanted to see if I could get something unusual to sing, maybe something that he had not released."

"He gave me a half-finished song, and he said, 'If you can finish it, then that might be the best solution,' so that's what happened."

"When ELP finished, in around 1979 or 1980, it was a bit of a strange experience coming out of that type of band," Lake added. "When you're in one of those huge bands for that long, that becomes your identity. I think when the band stopped, I was really quite confused about what direction to take, because it didn't feel right continuing on in that sort of ELP direction."

"I wasn't into trying to replace Keith (Emerson) and Carl (Palmer). I realized that I would either have to form a whole new band or start a solo career. Those two albums are really all about searching, trying different things with different people."

Saxophonist Clarence Clemons of Bruce Springsteen's E Street Band guested on Greg's first solo album. "I had some very good people in the band, Gary Moore on guitar, Tommy Eyre on keyboards, very good players," he recalled. "It was just a period of experimenting, and I think most of the material on those albums is really good."

In 2009, guitarist Robert Fripp of King Crimson collaborated with Steven Wilson, best known as a member of the prog rock band Porcupine Tree, to remix the original eight-channel master tapes of King Crimson's experimental debut album, *In the Court of the Crimson King*, into 5.1 Surround Sound for a 40th Anniversary edition. "It was a very high-quality revisit, and to that extent, that's fine, I was happy with it," commented Lake.

"I was in bands for 10 years before King Crimson, but I was the only one, really, who had any experience of being in a rock band," he continued. "Everyone came to it more or less fresh."

"Obviously, there were things I'd had the experience of, and which would benefit the band, but it was also the thing that (keyboardist) Ian (McDonald) and Robert hadn't been in a band before. There were benefits to that because they didn't have any set, predefined idea of how it should be, and in a way, that made things very fresh."

Not long after Lake left King Crimson, he had an interesting roommate, bass player Chris Squire of the band Yes.

"I lived with Chris for a while, and we shared a flat in London," Greg recalled. "Yes had a pet name for ELP, they used to call us 'Henderson, Snake and Charmer.' We called them 'Maybe.'"

"There was a guy in the early '50s called Joe 'Piano' Henderson. He played honky-tonk piano, and it was sort of a play on words of that, really. He was very corny."

Lake is often asked whether ELP, which performed at the High Voltage Festival in the U.K. in 2010, but hasn't toured since 1998, will do another tour.

"I would never say never," he remarked. "If Keith and Carl wanted to do a world tour, I would do it. Not for a king's ransom; I would do it because I believe that people have been good enough to buy the albums."

"Then, you have an implicit duty, an obligation to perform for them, so that's my position on it. I would say, at the moment, that Keith and Carl don't want to tour, so it's highly unlikely, but if that changes, then here I am, and I would be happy to do it."

When asked what he would say if he had a conversation with the '70s version of himself, Greg responded, "It is very difficult to be objective about yourself. I try not to look into mirrors too much, I try and do what I believe is right."

"I play the music that I like, that I believe in, and just hope that other people like it," he concluded. "I don't do too much self-analysis. There's the saying, 'To thine own self be true,' and I think that, if you do your best, and you're honest, you're likely to come out OK."

Varsity Theater, 1308 S.E. Fourth St., Mpls., \$28.50-\$31.50, 8 p.m.