



STEWART YOUNG

He cut his teeth in the music industry when he was in his mid-20s, and now ELP's former manager has overseen a new anthology celebrating Greg Lake's illustrious musical career. Young reminisces over the pioneering band's heyday and his long-lasting relationship with the late musician.

Words: Grant Moon **Portrait:** Kenny Smith

In 1971 Stewart Young was working for his father's accountancy company when an up-and-coming rock trio called Emerson, Lake & Palmer asked for help to get their business affairs in order. At just 25, Young was appointed their financial advisor and subsequently became their manager, despite having precisely zero experience of the music industry. He continued to look after Greg Lake into his solo years, the two remaining good friends until Lake's death from pancreatic cancer in 2016. Young still manages artists such as Foreigner and Italian superstar Zucchero, and has overseen the making of *Greg Lake: The Anthology – A Musical Journey*. The lavishly presented two-disc, 32-track retrospective stretches back to Lake's early days in 60s psych bands The Shame and The Shy Limbs, along with highlights from his tenures with ELP and King Crimson, and his solo catalogue.

Had you heard of Emerson, Lake & Palmer before they knocked on your dad's door?

No. The first time I saw them play was Thanksgiving in 1971, their first time at Madison Square Garden. They started with *Hoedown*, these three guys making an unbelievable racket – I was blown away. When they fell out with their management my job was to find them a new manager. I interviewed Peter Grant, Bud Prager, David Geffen, but eventually the band said, "Why don't you manage us?" I told Greg I wasn't sure as I knew nothing, but he said, "Look, it's a new business, nobody really knows much, and we can help you." Ahmet Ertegun [co-founder of Atlantic, ELP's US label] set me up to speak to everyone in his company, to listen and learn.

Were ELP a handful to manage?

All artists are a handful if they're real artists. In Greg's case, everything had to be perfect. He was very into detail – he always said, "It's the little things that are important." He was obsessive like that, which made him difficult to deal with in some ways. Keith was a little more spontaneous, and Carl was always trying to push the envelope with the drums. But even when the band were

past their sell-by date they were never difficult at all. The difficulties came in the challenging things they put you through organising the shows.

Business aside, you and Greg clearly became good friends.

Great friends. I think he was an incredible, underrated artist and I wanted the anthology to cover that and to be suitably high quality. The booklet is very beautiful and we did a lot of work on the setlist. I wanted Greg's wife [Regina] to be happy. It's been a real labour of love.

In what way was he underrated?

Because the band [ELP] were in a way. Not at the time, but there was incredible talent in that band, and they covered all sorts of aspects of music, from classical covers to folk like *Lucky Man*. They were able to do many different forms of music, and were an incredible band live.

It's good to hear curios like The Shame's *Don't Go 'Way Little Girl*, but which tunes were the real must-haves?

You couldn't not have *Lucky Man*, *From The Beginning*, *I Believe In Father Christmas*. The version of *The Court Of The Crimson King* came from the concert in which Greg and Keith met [the Fillmore West, San Francisco, December 15, 1969]. King Crimson are very careful with their material but Robert [Fripp] let us use this recording, and when I realised what happened on this date and that it was part of ELP history, I was very pleased.

Did it ever bother Greg that, for all his achievements, to the mainstream audience he would always be best known for his Christmas song?

I don't think so. Greg was very spiritual but not religious, and he loved Christmas. It's not easy to write a Christmas song that isn't too sugary, and everybody likes it when people like something you've done, and he was proud about it. He was pretty stubborn that way!

What a soulful guitar solo he plays on *Oh My Father...*

I always thought he was a very nice guitar player because he played so tastefully. But, you know, sometimes these people don't realise. George Harrison was a wonderful player, but he was always a little bit negative about his own playing...

The Great Gates Of Kiev is a very good example of Greg's strengths as a lyricist. It's no mean feat to set words to music by Mussorgsky...

Lyrics play such an important part in Greg's music. We've done a beautiful lyric video to *Closer To Believing (Final Version, 2016)*, and I really think that's an amazing lyric. That was the last thing he recorded. Towards the end, when he was in the hospice, I got a mix of it from the engineer and I played it for him, and he liked it. I played him the final mixes for [2017 solo record] *Live In Piacenza* too. He made two or three comments, asking for minor changes, which we made, and he died four days later. Greg was a very good producer. He had that feel for what the best take was, or when a track needed something. He was really fascinated by that side of records.

What was he like as a man, Stewart?

When he called me to tell me about his diagnosis [in 2014] he said, "Don't feel sorry for me. Coming from where I came from, a prefab, to this life, I couldn't have asked for all this." Greg was one of those people who monopolised a room when they came in. He was six feet tall and had a very big personality and a wonderful smile, and he was very warm, loyal and generous. He loved a good life, enjoyed drinking a nice glass wine or two, or three. He collected books – first editions – and liked travelling, to Italy, to Paris. He didn't take fools gladly but if you fucked up – as I did several times – he would explode, then five minutes later he'd be buying you a drink.

Greg Lake: The Anthology – A Musical Journey is out now via BMG.



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Greg Lake and Stewart Young, back in the day.

