



Carla's Corner-2012

Songs of a Lifetime with Greg Lake



Greg Lake:

Current resume includes-
Legendary bass and guitar player with super groups including King Crimson and Emerson Lake and Palmer-Guest musician with the likes of Ringo Starr and Roger Daltrey among a host of others- Velvet Vocalist-Songwriter-Family Man-Charity Spokesman-Cultural and Political Connoisseur-and even a bit of the Mystical Wandering Minstrel thrown in for good measure!

Affectionately known as “The Voice,” Greg has been an icon in the music industry for a lifetime now. With his new tour looming on the horizon and aptly named, “Songs of a Lifetime,” Greg is now sharing with the world the songs and stories that have influenced his life and the lives of many of his fans worldwide, once again proving that Greg Lake is still a “Lucky Man” indeed.

No Greg, it is your fans that are lucky and with his new tour coming this spring to the US shores, I was lucky too and got a chance to speak with Greg to share a bit about his life and his love of music...

Photo credit: Lee Millward

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Since we have just finished with the holidays I wanted to start off by asking you if you have ever been out doing your holiday shopping and heard your rendition of Father Christmas on the store speakers and how does that make you feel?

Greg: Oh yes. I have heard that for a many years now.

Do you go running and hiding in the frozen food aisle or what? laughs

Greg: It's a strange experience but quite nice really. It's strange because I did the song and yet I am surrounded by thousands of people and nobody really connects the two things together. Apart from that, it is quite lovely to hear your song played every Christmas. I have gotten quite used to it now.

Kind of like having a big secret and nobody knows it?

Greg: Yes, and I just recently performed it this year at Salisbury Cathedral with Ian Anderson. It was a strange feeling singing in that type of venue.

I saw that on YouTube recently and it was a really fantastic performance. How did that come about?

Greg: We do these things every year. Last year we did one at Canterbury. It's Ian's thing mostly. These churches are all in need of repair and they only way they get the funding they need is through public donations, so we try to help them with that. It's been pretty good.

Well the acoustics and performance were excellent from what I saw. Speaking of performances, I want to ask you about this upcoming tour. I have heard this is going to be a one-man show for you.

Greg: Yes it is. I am currently writing this book and it's the account of my life. I have some funny anecdotal stories and a bit of the goings on behind the scenes through the years. It's not going to be a tell-all type of book but a way to give people an idea of the history and the way we did things, reasons why certain songs came about etc. The sides of things that people don't normally see. Everybody has seen things like the Isle of Wight Festival or the California Jam or Olympic Stadium concerts, but they don't get to see the other side of things. All the small and interesting stuff that goes on behind the scenes. I have wandered through these stories and found some interesting parts from the bands I've been in and the things that we went through during those times. It will consist of all the type of things that I recall that struck me as being unusual and being most memorable. I was once talking with Tony Ortiz (ELP archivist) and I mentioned to him that I was thinking of writing a book and he said to make sure that I put in all the great little stories that happened back stage that made life interesting. He thought that it would make a great book.

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I hope we can all get to read it soon.

Greg: I'm working on it as quickly as possible and really hope that I can get it out for the tour.

That would be awesome. The tours in April...no pressure. Hint hint....I hope to see it on the merch table! ;)

Greg: laughs

Now the last time I saw you personally was when you were on tour with Keith a couple of years ago. Then you all got together and did the High Voltage Festival and were in front of thousands of people once again. Which do you think is more scarier or high pressure, a huge show like High Voltage or a one-man show where all eyes are completely on you?

Greg: Well I wouldn't say scary is the right word but I know what you mean. You always try to give a great performance with every show but sometimes it isn't your performance that is the factor. In a bigger show there are so many variables that a performer can't control. In this one-man show I will be the one in control of everything so if anything goes wrong it will be up to me. In the case of the High Voltage Festival there were a lot of things that had nothing to do with me, and in that case it makes it quite nerve-wracking. When we walked on the stage at High Voltage it was a one off show and it felt as if it was the first night of a tour. It had to be right. Unfortunately, the band just didn't have time to play a few small shows beforehand and build the whole thing up, which I found regrettable. To be honest, I would have preferred to do a world tour. That's when the band really plays at its best. I was a part of it and would have liked to have done some things differently but it all came together in the end. There were a lot of good things about that show. It was very nostalgic and we had quite a lot of young people who came to see what the ELP legend was all about. That probably was the last show for ELP and in that aspect it came together pretty well.

Well I know in this upcoming solo tour that you will be having a lot of fans that will be coming out to see you. I personally think it that it will be a really nice evening and that most of your fans will be completely forgiving if you if you break a string or anything that is beyond your control. Everyone is really looking forward to seeing you in an unplugged mode and in a relaxed intimate setting which I gather these shows are providing for the most part.

Greg: Well the tour is called "Songs of a Lifetime" and it is about songs that have had an impact on my life. Some of them are written by me, some are co-written and some are from other people that have influenced me during my lifetime. It's a mixture of those songs and some of the stories that go along with them. I won't have a

band with me but I may on occasion have a guest come onstage and visit. That will be a "where and when" type of thing. Strangely enough I have had a few people pull me over and say, "Hey, I hear you are on tour. I would love to come up and play with you sometime." I am looking forward to having a few guest performers and it should be a lot of fun. It still will be an intimate show and I think a very entertaining show.

Well leading off of that answer, you have played with so many different performers from Ringo Starr to Crimson to ELP and ASIA etc. Is there anyone that has escaped that "Greg Lake Wish List" that you would like to play with?

Greg: I have so many people I love, be it either musically or spiritually. There are far too many people that I would just love to play with. There a literally hours worth of people that I can mention. Every time I play with people I get a little tickled. For instance, I was in Germany and Percy Sledge was there. His guitar player had fallen sick the day of the show. It was a TV performance and Percy asked if there was anyone there that could play guitar. I said that I did and asked him what he wanted to do? He then said he was going to play this song, "When a Man Loves a Woman," and I said, "Yeah, I know it." So I played acoustic guitar with him and it was a lovely and a very different approach to it. It was really beautiful with acoustic and his voice was just the way he normally sings it. At the end of it and he turned around to me and he says to me, "That's cruelty, man!"- laughs - He even put a little message on my website. That really gave me a lot of pleasure. There are so many people I want to play with that I will never get a chance to do. Ringo was lovely to work with.

One of the things about being in a super group is that you get trapped playing the same 20 songs all of your life. The bigger you are, the more trapped you become. You just don't get to play enough of a variety of material and you can tend to become spiteful. So playing with others can be a real relief sometimes.

How do you feel about hearing different covers of your songs being done?

Greg: Well some of them I really like and some I don't. When I play I try to play things on my own; I choose to put more of my own work and myself into it. Some things work out better played by others, some not. I make it more of a Greg Lake show rather than a show about another band. It's one of those things that comes along with a band identity. Mick Jagger still is identified with the Stones, I will be identified a lot with ELP. I am proud of that and I am proud of my accomplishments and with particular things. I want to show people the different components that went on to make up some of these things that happened. These are songs from a lot of people's lifetimes and for me it just seemed appropriate. These are things that have meant a lot to me and hence the tour was named "Songs of a Lifetime."

Is your book going to be titled the same?

Greg: I don't think so. I have to think a bit about it still.

So since life gets busy so much, what do you do to relax in your spare time? Do you still do your calligraphy and things?

Greg: Well I fly fish and I also collect books and pens. They don't really don't take up an awful lot of time. I don't spend a huge amount of time at it. I may go to a book fair or an auction once or twice a year but not too much. I haven't done too much calligraphy lately. Funny thing, the calligraphy I learned as a punishment in school. laughs

This sounds like a good story! laughs

Greg: Yeah, it was a punishment because I had been a brat in class somehow and the teacher said that I had to write out a thousand lines and that I had to do all of it in italics. He was an expert in calligraphy so he wrote out line 1 and told me to do the other 999. After I finished I was quite good and it stuck with me ever since.

So you have said you are going to do some older songs that we associate you with and also songs that have inspired you in your lifetime, will we be hearing any surprise new material in your set list?

Greg: Well there are some things I feel that I really have to do and some things I haven't really decided yet. I think the element of surprise interests me and is something that is important.

So we aren't getting any hints then?

Greg: I am giving you all that I can do right now and by that I mean I can't give every little detail of the show because somebody might come to the show expecting that I will do something and sit there and say, "Yeah, he's going to do this or that, I read it somewhere or yeah he didn't do it." I am very reluctant to discuss what I am going to do on a tour till we are very close because the element of surprise is part of a performance. That was something that ELP tried to do. To do something a little unpredictable so it wasn't something that you always would expect. I can guarantee you that there will be things about the show that may shock people. It won't just be me sitting there for two hours just strumming the guitar. There will be elements in there that will surprise people. My main concern is really when the people go out of the room at the end of the show that they feel really good about it, they have been entertained and they are happy with what they saw and also hopefully they are moved by it. I want them to have been touched by what they saw. That's what makes a good

show. It's made up of all these contrasting elements of shock, surprise and being touched that make for a good performance. That's what I'm looking for.

Speaking of stories from the past. We all know how you wrote Lucky Man when you were quite young. If Greg Lake now could give advice to Greg Lake then, what would he say?

Greg: Noooooooooo!! laughs –

Actually I get asked that question quite a bit. For instance, "My son has taken up guitar, is there any advice you can give him?" I don't think I would really tell him a lot actually. I would probably just say for him to stick with it, learn as much as you can, learn properly and do as well as you can. Certainly the guitar has been good for me but I am reluctant to give too much advice. What's right for one person may not be right for another. Young people need to find their own path in life. I don't like giving people proclamations of do this or do that and it will all be good.

Speaking of young musicians, are you at all disappointed that there are so many people out there now a days with seemingly little talent and yet make millions of dollars? So much new music is done in the studio and they can make anyone sing and play now.

Greg: I don't think that's true. There are some really talented people still out there now. Whether there is that much unique or innovative music is a different story. I don't think that there is as much originality or the search for originality. I think artists think for whatever reason that they are set within a certain framework or box and whatever works the best commercially. To that extent I don't think music is quite as bright and colorful as it used to be. Having said that, I do think that there are some incredibly talented performers out there. They ply their art in a kind of formatted way. I think that's what makes people think there isn't that type of absolute originality anymore as opposed to when I came up in the music business. You would hear a guitarist just explode out of nowhere and that would be Jimi Hendrix. You never would have heard anything like it in your life! Totally unique. Perhaps it may have to do with in my opinion, that rock and roll will be seen in history as an era. Once you have done so many things within that sphere of possibility it gets more and more difficult to do things that haven't been done or a story that hasn't been told, a musical influence that hasn't been used or borrowed or re-worked. The doorway of possibility becomes more and more narrow as the era of possibility comes to an end. I think what will happen is that rock and roll as an art form will exist and people will continue to play that genre of music. It just won't be the same type of all consuming cultural thing that it was 20 years ago. You used to have an airport filled with people just to see the Beatles. You don't have that anymore.

Do you think that as a songwriter in particular, that it has anything to do with people not feeling the same things emotionally any longer?

Greg: No, I don't think so. People still feel heartache and losses. They still feel poverty or a broken home. They still have all the things over time that any artist has had for emotional stimulators. I think that there is a premium on originality. At one time in the music business it was very desirable to be original. If you were original you would get a record deal. That criteria has changed. Originality isn't really what it's all about. Lady Gaga is very good but to me looks like another version of Madonna. She's good, but still the same. When you listen to Adele she has an amazing and beautiful passion in her music. The same as 20 or 30 years ago. That's the thing with progressive music. A lot has been said and some of it has been terrible but the underlying ethos for it was that you should try to make new music, hitherto unheard music. That element was good.

Well that can be said the same for you too. You were original; you came out of that progressive genre. When people refer to you as "The Voice," most people know who you are talking about.

Greg: For that I feel very proud of my little contribution. For me it is something that could still be made use of.

Is there any new music or albums coming out of you soon?

Greg: Well I have had an album that I have been working on for a few years. I have had it ready for a long time. I haven't had the right time or inspiration to get it out quite yet, but I will!

I know you do a lot with charity work. Are you still involved with the same charities?

Greg: I play with this band called the "RD Crusaders." It is run by a man named Richard Desmond, who does a lot charity work and runs a lot of UK magazines and TV channels. He actually plays drums in the band. The other people in it are Roger Daltrey, Lulu, Zoot Money, Simon Townshend and Russ Ballard. We get together once a year and raise a heck of a lot of money for different charities. We raise millions of pounds. That is because Richard is in that position that he can do so. I do the cathedral gigs with Ian a bit and I do some personal things on a certain level but I am not certainly some great philanthropist or anything.

Well it has been known that you do have quite an opinion from time to time. ;) laughs

Greg: Yes, I do manage to stand up on the soapbox on occasion! laughs

On that note I may as well just dive in the deep end. -laughs - Are you still interested in politics as much as you were in the past and if so, what do you think about the upcoming American elections?

Greg: Uh, I go into a panic state when the American elections occur.

So do we!

Greg: When things like a Sarah Palin occurs it can be frightening but it is also the basis of democracy, that anyone can be president. I do believe and want to make this comment that in America I do believe a sense of decency prevails. The reassuring thing is that there is this thread of common decency that permeates the country and most Americans understand and agree on. Whether it is north, south, east or west they all believe in what is right and proper. I see that a lot when I tour, this same basic decency and generosity. You do meet the odd person who isn't too pleasant but I can honestly say that in all my years of touring America I can probably count only on one hand any unpleasant people I have met. Most people are very decent and kind. I just hope that the media doesn't influence the elections all that much. I really love the American people, except for that business of getting arrested for swimming in the nude in a Salt Lake City hotel pool in the middle of the night, I have had a great time there. Remember to always keep your togs-(bathing suit) on when you swim! laughs

So we are all looking forward to hearing that story and many more when you come and visit us soon!

Greg: I am looking forward to it as well. The spirit I am doing the show for is in that I am sharing my life with people. For anyone who has come to see ELP or King Crimson and has shared that journey with me, that is who I am doing this tour for. We have all shared this music. We are a family really. I am sharing it with the people that I have shared my life with. When ELP and KC people get together they have a lot in common and it's really like a family. A coming together for people. A sharing of lives and music. That is what I want from this.

Thank you so much Greg and I hope to be seeing you soon!

Tickets are now on sale for Greg's current confirmed tour dates. The newest one has just been added for the Zeiterion Theater in New Bedford, Massachusetts as well as many others. Please check out <http://www.greglake.com> for all the latest!