



Carla's Corner

A Conversation with Greg Lake!

November 2009

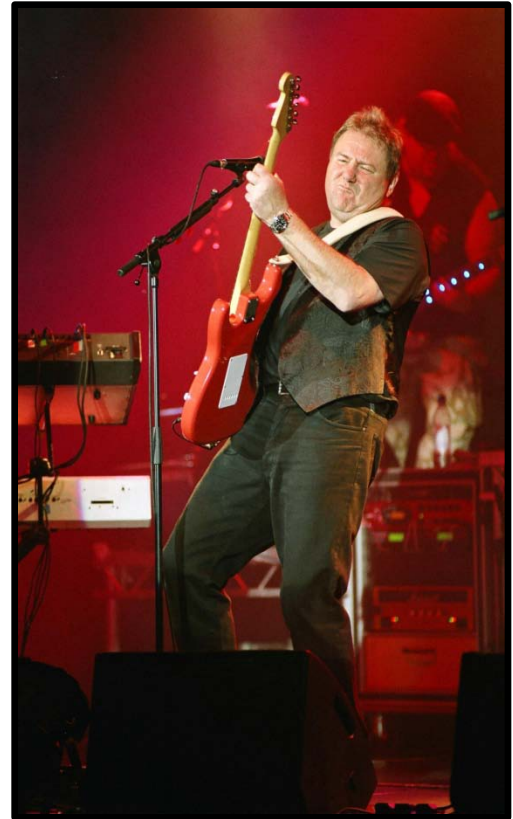
Carla Huntington for www.bostonprog.org

Known to many as "The Voice," song writer, producer and musician Greg Lake has been entrancing audiences for decades. Originally honing his craft with the UK band s "The Shame" and "The Gods," Greg burst onto the scene with the progressive rock pioneer group "King Crimson." Invited to join "Crimson" by childhood friend and guitarist Robert Fripp, Lake brought a depth and power to the vocals and his production skills to the albums "Court of the Crimson King" and "In the Wake of Poseidon."

Meeting master keyboardist Keith Emerson of "The Nice" on a North American tour, Lake embarked on a career move that included "Atomic Rooster's" amazing percussionist Carl Palmer and the legendary group of "Emerson, Lake and Palmer" was born.

Lake's song writing capabilities penned a hugely successful string of albums and featured his guitar balladeer creations that included "Lucky Man", "From the Beginning" and "Still... You Turn Me On," among many others. Greg joined with poet and "King Crimson" veteran Pete Sinfield for collaborations on some epic ELP creations including the piece "Pirates" that featured a ground breaking orchestral accompaniment. Lake's chart topping single, "I Believe in Father Christmas" ranked number 2 in the UK charts and still remains an international holiday favorite today.

Following the breakup of ELP, Greg filled in temporarily with the band "Asia" as well as releasing two successful solo albums "Greg Lake" and "Maneuvers."



With the audiences still clammering for ELP material after the initial breakup, Lake once again joined Keith and drummer Cozy Powell for the 1986 album and tour of "Emerson, Lake and Powell."

The nineties decade brought Carl Palmer back in the picture and "Emerson Lake and Palmer" released two albums and subsequent tours.

As the singer of "21st Century Schizoid Man" reached the 21st century, Greg Lake has been working diligently in many areas of the music industry. Writing and producing a new album and tour for his own "Greg Lake Band," Greg has also appeared as a guest with many other artists including the likes of Ringo Starr, Jethro Tull, and the Trans Siberian Orchestra.

With a highly anticipated "Emerson, Lake and Palmer" reunion looming on the horizon and the unveiling of Lake's new interactive website, Greg graciously took time out of his busy schedule to talk about his views on life, music and give us a rare glimpse of the man behind "The Voice."

Carla: First let me wish you an early happy birthday on November 10th.

Greg: Thank you very much!

Carla: My first question concerns your upcoming big news for your website. I know that you have had a popular website in the past so why and what are the big changes now?

Greg: I think what it was (pause) is that generally my site needed updating. That was the first thing. Then when I got to think about rebuilding it I started to realize that I haven't been pro-active enough in it. You know it is such a wonderful means of communicating with people that I realized I haven't used it really to its fullest potential. What I am trying to do in this site is to do more things to enable me to communicate directly with people from my site and the general things that people do to update regularly and to build more interest. I wanted to do things to promote the site and make it function better. Also, ELP's website as well needed to be updated. Both of those sites were really languishing and they weren't really being paid attention to. So one day I just decided that enough was enough, and that was it really. Then we started to rebuild them. I have a really good team of people working on this. So generally that is the story of it. It's time had come and as I got into it more I developed a refreshed enthusiasm. It's like anything. If you pick anything up and start doing it you will almost inevitably develop some sort of passion, some sort of interest, some sort of enthusiasm for it. It's just human nature.

Carla: Are you still going to have all your "fun stuff" (pause) the Greg Lake Museum, the interactive links and other things that you had on the old one?

Greg: Yes... I tried to keep the things that were good about the old site and I thought were worthwhile and I've tried to add new things in. I've tried to prune away things that were more redundant and not being used. I've replaced them with things that were more useful. I have a "Live Chat" for example, where I can go online and talk with people and we will be doing that on November 15th.

Carla: Now by doing that and directly exposing yourself to all the fans, doesn't that put you in a bit of a precarious position with the public? They can ask you mostly anything and are you mentally ready for something like that?

Greg: I think you have to be. When you are out there in the real world that's what happens. I am quite used to it actually. I'm not a sensitive flower really! (laughs) I think overall I am quite proud of my history. Most of it has been great so I don't mind what anyone asks me. They are free to ask me.

Carla: How involved are you in the production aspect of this? Are you a hands-on guy or a part-time closet computer geek? (laughs)

Greg: (laughs) I am not physically designing the actual pages but I am involved in it all. I have some very talented people that are helping. The site is designed by a woman named "Roz" (Rosalind Marchetti), a wonderful lady who is a really talented designer. The new website is just really stunning. One of the best websites I have ever seen. Really beautiful to look at and functions wonderfully. It's kind of a new level of website design. It's very cinematic in a way. When I started this thing my initial idea was to do one that was an entertainment for people, but really I have modified that view to yes, it is an entertainment tool, but also a communication tool and a reference tool. People can check into the history of things and see how it happened and when it happened (pause) the history of it all. That's why I have this thing "Were You There?" I think it is a wonderful thing to have this human bank of memory of people who shared those times. When you look through the hundreds of shows that played, I shared them with the people in their memories. I think it is a wonderful thing to have that vault of memories and emotion. One thing that made me do that was that every now and then on the road, you get someone whose life was affected by the music, you know. I have had some incredible stories told to me. I wish I could share them all.

Carla: Well in my experiences the internet can also be a way to bring people together through their memories. You can establish relationships and even friendships through shared experiences.

Greg: Well yes, that's right.

Carla: On a different subject (pause) I have heard that you and Keith are writing together again?

Greg: We are writing together, Keith and I.

Carla: How do you find writing together after all these years? The two of you have had your own solo musical experiences and you have different things to bring to the table, is it kind of like riding a bike and you can just go back to the beginning again?

Greg: I think it is pretty much the same really. Of course life and life's experiences are bound to affect anyone and everyone that writes in one way. Strangely enough as a music writer you kind of are what you are. You don't really change much over your lifetime. I've looked at a lot of people and artists over the years that haven't changed much. Dylan hasn't changed much, McCartney hasn't changed much, and Elton hasn't changed much. The songs are different but some things are still the same. Here is the thing about any great writer. You know in the first 3 seconds who it is. The crap guys you don't know.

They can go on for an hour and you still don't know who it is. (laughs) Somebody who is really outstanding starts to play and starts to sing and you say, "That is... whoever it is". I think that Keith and I have that certain chemistry that will always be the same. We are inescapably ourselves and we do have a very special chemistry. I can sense it. You know what it is when you sit in a room like that and it all works.

Carla: Like a marriage? (laughs)

Greg: Well it can be. It can be volatile too (pause) but you know it is in terms of musical partnerships that it is a rare thing. Not common actually. Real chemistry is not common. At one point people can put together these "super groups" and chuck these names into a pot and it will all add up to be a wonderful thing. To be honest with you "Emerson, Lake and Palmer" were kind of responsible for that. We invented the term "super group". We were the first band that they used that name about. The reason was that Keith and I mainly came from really well known bands. It was a tag that they could put on it at the time. So we were the first "super group". I really hated that concept when it came about. It sounded like you were the son of a rich and famous father.

Carla: and it's a bit of a label to live up to...

Greg: Well yes...you're forever standing in the shadow of a rich and famous father, but the truth is that Keith or I never had it easy. I starved and slept in the back of transit vans for many years before I had any success. So I wasn't part of any "super group" in that sense. That was the title that was laid at our feet. I suppose it had some benefits..(laughs) but I didn't like it for that reason.

Carla: Speaking of those early days... I saw on the net that (ex-manager) Dee Anthony had recently passed away. What was the most important lesson that Dee gave you for your career?

Greg: I could tell you what he gave me personally. I remember it singularly. Just before I tell you I would like to say that Dee Anthony was a man with so much charisma it is hard to describe it to you in words. You know when they say or talk about people who walk into a room and the room lights up, well that really did happen with Dee. He was like a candle. You could bring him into a room and it wasn't like he was the center of attention it was like he radiated light. Some people in life are merely reflectors. Most people reflect light. Now and again you come across someone that is truly luminous and that was Dee Anthony. He was a wonderful artist/manager. He could inspire you beyond the limits of your own self belief. That is a remarkable talent as a manager.

Carla: Wow...

Greg: Well anyway, the story is that one night we were playing Madison Square Garden and it was the first time I had ever played Madison Square Garden. I came out of the dressing room about 20 minutes before we were due on. I just wanted to look out at the arena. It's a big place and it was a bit awe inspiring. I thought "Go on, take a look," and that way it wouldn't be such a shock when I got up on the stage. Then it would be something that I didn't need to deal with when I stood there in the wings. So I stood there in the dark and looked at Madison Square Garden. It's an awesome sight when full. It's

very tall with people lining the walls. Dee came out with me and I said to Dee, "Look at all those people out there!". He said, "No, you're going to be fine". Then I said, "Well it's the biggest place I have actually have played indoors". Dee said, "Always remember that there is only one person out there". I then asked, "What do you mean"? He said, "Well look...to every person that is watching you they are individually just one person. They are not 20,000 people. You may see 20,000 people in your eyes but to them, they are only one person watching. In reality you are only playing to one person!" I never forgot that. I always went on in some of these big places like the "California Jam", with 600,000 people. I would go on and remember these words, "You're only playing to one person." That made it very personal so when I sing, I only ever sing to one person in the auditorium. That was fabulous advice. He was a fabulous man, full of love. He was the best. He was a great man.

Carla: A lot of your lyrics in the past have been filled with loads of emotion. Love, anger, strength, duty, wars, peace etc. Do you think that with the current world situation as it is, that people now are still wanting to hear this message? In other words... do you write songs with a thought that you need to get out for yourself or do you write with a message that people need to hear at the time?

Greg: Well I don't really think in those terms. I don't really think of messages or the message I want to convey or anything like that. I am first and foremost a musician (pause) it is the music that really comes first. I am guided always by the music. The second thing is I suppose, when you are very young you are very opinionated and questioning the meaning of life. Now I know the meaning of life. I am old enough to say that I now know the meaning of life. I've seen enough, probably a bit more than most. I do feel that I understand now what it is all about and why people feel the way they do and I have purged all the questions about belief. (pause) Spiritual beliefs and so on. I don't have to ask any more questions. There is really nothing I feel that I have to express in a political sense. It is the human condition that interests me as a writer. The human emotions interest me more. I don't think that time has much to do with it. Time isn't it.

Carla: So can you still find that kind of inspiration?

Greg: Age is a factor, life experience is a factor and I suppose what is going on in the world is a factor, but the human experience is what it's all about. That is what fascinates me the most.

Carla: and that is timeless.

Greg: Yes, that is timeless. It's colored differently. It looks different in the same way just as the way people in 2010 are dressed differently to people in 1960, but essentially it is the same game isn't it? It never really changes. When you really think about it it all is the same. There is very little new under the sun.

Carla: On a different note... you are known by the very honorable nickname of "The Voice." Outside of yourself, who would you give that name to in your lifetime?

Greg: laughs

Carla: I didn't say this would be an easy question! (laughs)

Greg: There are so many many singers. Singing is a technical thing as in Pavarotti or classical singers who are very technically adept. There are singers who can hardly sing at all. You wouldn't really say that Dylan had a great voice but he could certainly get a song across. If you listen to "Lay Lady Lay" or any of his great hits then you realize that there is singing, and there is singing. I think the question is who communicates or how deeply they communicate. That is the real test of a singer. You can be as clever as you want but if you aren't reaching inside people then it doesn't work. That's where it lies.

Carla: and who does that for you?

Greg: Too many people to mention really. I could just reel off names. Do you like Elvis? Little Richard? John Lennon? It's everlasting!

Carla: Well who is in your cd player right now?

Greg: I don't listen to too much music to be honest. I have heard it all. (laughs) Well at least most of it! I tell you what I played a little while ago....Randy Newman. He is great! Let me just check my iTunes I have here. Do you want to know the things I have bought recently?

Carla: Ok, sure!

Greg: Edith Piaf! Tremendous. (Still checking his iTunes)- Quite a lot of classical music...here it is..."Sail Away, Randy Newman" . "In America you'll get food to eat / Won't have to run through the jungle / And scuff up your feet your feet!" Beautiful! He truly defines for me a classic American writer. He is in the league of Bernstein and Copland. People like that. Definitive American writer. Apart from Aaron Copland, Randy Newman is right up there. When you listen to "Guilty" or "Rednecks", "Feels Like Home" and "I Think it's Going to Rain Today" they are simple, beautiful songs. I could sit here all day and tell you about the songs I love and the things I love in music. That's what makes it great for all of us you know?

Carla: So have you got anything else in the works soon? We were going to try and get ELP this past October for our Boston audiences. Most ELP fans never say never. Do you have anything to say about that? Do you have some stuff coming up?

Greg: Well I think that ELP will be performing again. There will be an announcement shortly about that. I would love to go out with Keith in a two man show, like an unplugged thing. It's funny when Keith and I write. We get quite reflective sometimes. Keith recently played me a version of Lucky Man and it was sort of "Gershwin-esque" on the grand piano. It brought tears to my eyes. The pathos in it was heartbreaking. It was phenomenal. It is things like that forty years later you return to. It's that perspective that interests me.

Carla: Well in the past, we have had different versions of ELP favorites from all of you on your respective tours.

Greg: The original chemistry is the original chemistry. It's the same whenever you hear an original band get back together and play. There is something about it, you don't know what it is. It's not that ELP are

great musicians. We're not great musicians, but... it's the chemistry inside the band which is highly charged. A chemical reaction. That is what is important. That's what happens when you go to see the solo bands, mine included, when we all play the ELP music that chemistry is missing. The music can be spectacular and you can have great players, but where is the chemistry? That is the problem with all solo shows. They always are in competition with themselves in a sense. It is one of the reasons I don't do an awful lot of solo things really. I did a bit with Ringo a while back. It was fun.

Carla: and you recently were with the "Trans-Siberian Orchestra".

Greg: Yeah!

Carla: Do you find that people almost expect too much of ELP? Again using that word "super group". Life goes on. Music changes. I am hoping for a different slant on things after all this time myself.

Greg: I am afraid you can't control people's expectations. You just better fulfill them if you know what's good for you! (laughs) I must say really that an audience is very forgiving in that sense.

Carla: Well you have a lot of unconditional love in your audience!

Greg: I remember going to watch Elvis play just a few days before he died. It was in Knoxville I believe. It was dreadful! However the audience behaved as though it was the same great Elvis. They were unbelievably forgiving because they loved him. They were kind of living that pain with him in a way. We in the end are all bound up in this one thing together. In the end we are all going to go to the same place. Nobody is here forever. I think the thing is to share the ride, enjoy the ride and be grateful for every day of your life. That is all you can do. That's what I do. That's me!

Carla: I always finish my interviews with this statement. In your case you have to fill in the blank. Greg Lake is _____.

Greg: Greg Lake is (pause)....passionate! I think that if you want an overall answer that I would apply to everything I do it is passion. That encompasses nurturing or everything from nurturing to force. It's making something happen because you love it. Whatever it is.

Carla: Well we are all looking forward to seeing you in the near future and can't wait to hear all the big ELP news soon. Take care Greg and thank you for talking with me.

Greg: Bye Carla

Stay tuned for the debut of the newly designed "Greg Lake Website" with an exciting "Live Chat" tentatively scheduled for November 15th, -10:00 pm GMT -at <http://www.greglake.com>

