



On this special edition of [Something Else! Reviews' One Track Mind](#), we hand the reins over to prog-rock legend Greg Lake, co-founder of King Crimson and Emerson Lake and Palmer.

Find out more about what made Crimson's initial lineup such an endlessly interesting amalgam, the special chemistry that Carl Palmer brings to Emerson Lake and Palmer, and how the legendary keyboard solo on ELP's most memorable song almost got erased before anyone ever heard it. Lake also shares his memories his memorable initial encounter with ex-Thin Lizzy guitarist Gary Moore ...

**“BENNY THE BOUNCER,” with Emerson Lake and Palmer (BRAIN SALAD SURGERY, 1973):** *One of the more decidedly lighthearted moments on ELP's fourth studio album, this tune featured Keith Emerson assuming a ragtime cadence – he even had one of the strings purposely out of tune, to add to the honky-tonk effect – and a sendup storyline set in a working-class pub. In this way, “Benny the Bouncer” (nestled amongst both “Toccata,” a rewrite of an Alberto Ginastera piano concerto, and the prog-epic “Karn Evil 9”) becomes another showcase for the sweeping contrasts in Emerson's playing. The lyrics were by Lake and fellow ex-King Crimson member Peter Sinfield, whose contributions here marked the beginnings of a long association with ELP, as well. “Benny,” along with “Jeremy Bender,” “The Sheriff” and others, show a propensity for humor that not only balanced the deeper conceptual elements of their projects but also remains quite rare in the genre.*

**GREG LAKE:** In retrospect, I agree. But at the time, mainly, what they were was Keith Emerson doing this sort of honky-tonk bar piano. He does a lot of those interpretations, and some of them are good. Sometimes he'll come up with one that's really nice. And those were the things that were too good to pass by really. “Benny the Bouncer,” that had a really great left-turn stride piano. (Hums the piano signature.) A great figure. They made really great vehicles for songs with a humorous edge.

[**SOMETHING ELSE! INTERVIEW:** [Greg Lake talks about his upcoming 2012 solo tour across the U.S., which promises to be an intimate, once-in-a-lifetime experience for fans.](#)]

**“THE COURT OF THE CRIMSON KING,” with King Crimson (IN THE COURT OF THE CRIMSON KING, 1969):** *A Mellotron-driven burst of seminal prog-rock, this track reached No. 80 in the U.S. – becoming the first, and so far only, charting stateside single for King Crimson. It's part of a five-song cycle that moved boldly away from the blues underpinnings that moved through so much of popular music of the time, instead focusing on classical, jazz and European influences – even while it neatly presupposed the darker edges to come in post-psychedelic rock. While King Crimson, per se, had only been together less than a year, Lake and co-founder Robert Fripp were old friends – providing an air-tight musical symbiosis. Still, Lake says, that was only part of what made this incarnation of the group so special.*

**GREG LAKE:** I could play everything he was playing; he could play everything I was playing. We both knew where it came from. The other component that I would say is that (saxophonist/multi-instrumentalist) Ian McDonald had never been in a rock band before. He came out of a brass military band — very good musician, of course, but he had no real rock 'n' roll experience at all. What he did have was a great musical knowledge, a great sense of orchestral music. Finally, you have Michael Giles, the drummer who was just an extraordinary human being. When you meet Michael, it's as though you go back to 1910, 1920 perhaps. He's really like that. Everything about him is of that period.

He's really like a Gatsby character; very sweet man. Those are the things that made up that band. You perhaps can see now why the music is like it is. That's why it was both so fully formed, but also so unusual. In King Crimson, you had zero amount of the blues – whereas in every other rock band you had some, if not a lot. It was very European, and quirky. It kind of reached out and grasped rock 'n' roll, in a way – but in truth, while I grew up in rock 'n' roll, Robert, and Ian and Michael didn't really. So when I came into the picture, I really changed the band. Before, they were actually called Giles, Giles and Fripp. You don't even want to hear that record. It's offensive; it really is! They were writing funny songs about paraplegic people. It was dreadful! It was a kind comedy group, a high-quality musical comedy group. And they were going to be dropped from the record label. That's when I entered the picture, and I changed everything, really. They were such great musicians, though, and they adapted, and we became a rock band.

[**SOMETHING ELSE! REWIND:** [King Crimson's 'Condensed 20th Century Guide' illustrates how, from the first, the band acted as a sort of quality-assurance agent for rock music.](#)]

**“TOUCH AND GO,” with Emerson Lake and Powell, (*Emerson Lake and Powell*, 1986):** *A brawny, 1980s-era update of the old ELP sound, this tune was part of an off-shoot project that happened when drummer Carl Palmer became unavailable because of ongoing contractual obligations with the band Asia. After a series of auditions, Cozy Powell (a longtime friend of Emerson's who played with Jeff Beck, Gary Moore, Black Sabbath, Brian May and Thin Lizzy) was brought on board. The amalgam only last for one album, though the music template largely remained in place when the original members of ELP convened for a 1992 reunion project called Black Moon. Lake still performs the song with his regular band on tour. Powell died following a car crash in 1998.*

**GREG LAKE:** Cozy was great. When he joined the band, it was very, very nice. He's a great player, and a lovely guy. But the strange thing was, it wasn't ELP anymore. The chemistry was different. Not necessarily bad, but just different. There's something that Carl brought to the band which made ELP. You know when you mix chemicals together in a chemistry class, you put two or three together and nothing happens. Put the next one in, and the whole thing froths. That's a bit like ELP. Carl Palmer is very effervescent. It wasn't so much that there was a good drummer and a bad drummer. It was that Carl's personality was so energetic, and ELP missed that ingredient. It had been based around that chemistry. When that chemistry changed, you had another band actually. It was a good band. But it was a different band from that which the public had made popular. And that made for a fracturing of continuity.

[**SOMETHING ELSE! REWIND:** [Remembering when ELP's Carl Palmer remade “Fanfare for the Common Man” as something loud. No, not loud. Make that furiously, bashingly, skull-crackingly loud.](#)]

**“LOVE YOU TOO MUCH,” solo (GREG LAKE, 1981):** *A ballsy, straight-ahead rocker, with a feature role for scalding ex-Thin Lizzy guitarist Gary Moore — who also worked on Lake's 1983 solo follow up, as well as subsequent touring dates. “Love You Too Much” was actually a late-1970s Bob Dylan track, which he gave to Lake to complete. It found a home on a debut solo album that ended up as something of an all-star affair, as it included King Crimson's Michael Giles; Toto's Steve Lukather, David Hungate and Jeff Porcaro; Clarence Clemons, from Bruce Springsteen's E Street band; and Tommy Eyre (Joe Cocker, John Mayall, Gerry Rafferty), among others. The result is something more akin to the prog-pop of early-1980s bands like Yes, Asia and the Moody Blues — but with a blues-soaked centerpoint in Moore.*

**GREG LAKE:** On one of the sessions I did, I remember it vividly, I had Clarence Clemons in playing saxophone, and then an hour later, Gary came in – and he played on that track. Gary walked in with his guitar, and I'll never forget it: He had a leather overcoat on and the amplifier was already set up in the studio for him. He said, ‘Can I get set up?’ and I said, ‘Sure.’ I opened the studio door for him, and he went in and opened his guitar case, he took out the guitar and plugged it in then he just said: ‘Can you run the track.’ So we thought, ‘Straight away? Maybe he's got somewhere to go.’ It seemed like he just wanted to get on with it. So we ran the track, thinking he was going to do a rehearsal. But I always press the record button. I always do it. You never know what you'll capture the first time around. What you hear on the record is Gary's first time through the song. He'd never heard it before. That was all pure instinct, absolutely pure instinct. When you listen back to that track, knowing that, you really get a feel for good he is. Look, it's only a 12-bar, but the way he interprets the lyrics as they go down live? He's just hearing it, and he playing his part – and that was it. End of story, job done. I was absolutely knocked out by that. I said to Gary: ‘We've got to work together. You're such an inspirational player.’

[**SOMETHING ELSE! FEATURED ARTIST:** [We dig into a few of our favorite moments from Emerson Lake and Palmer — a list that spans everything from 'Trilogy' to 'Tarkus' to 'Black Moon.'](#)]

**“LUCKY MAN,” with Emerson Lake and Palmer (EMERSON LAKE AND PALMER, 1970):** *A late add to ELP’s debut, “Lucky Man” was a childhood composition of Lake’s that included one of the great improvised moments in the band’s history. The track peaked at No. 48 on the U.S. charts, helping Emerson Lake and Palmer’s debut into the Top 20 – and remains a centerpiece of the setlist for both Lake as well as ELP. Yet, Emerson and Lake had a legendary battle over it.*

**GREG LAKE:** To be honest with you, Keith couldn’t really find a part to play on the song – so, he went down to the pub. I made the record, basically. When he got back, it was pretty much finished and he said: ‘Wow.’ What he’d heard when he left was just me singing this plaintive little folk song. When he came back, what he was hearing was five-part harmony, triple-tracked acoustic guitars and all the rest of it – and he was quite shocked. He said: ‘I better play on it.’ It just so happened that on that very day, we had the Moog synthesizer delivered. So I said: ‘Why don’t you try out the new Moog on it?’ Of course, Keith said: ‘I haven’t had the chance to experiment with it yet; I’m going to need some time.’ I said: ‘Give it a go anyway.’ He went out there and started experimenting with the pormento – you know, how long it takes to go from one note and then to slide up to the other note. What the recording is, is him experimenting with the pormento. He experimented with it, and it just so happened – just like in the case with Gary Moore – I had the good sense to push the red button to record him. In those days, we used to run out of tracks, and we had no more tracks to record on to. Keith wanted to do another take. But I said: ‘No, we have to keep the take.’ We almost fell out over it. In the end, I said: ‘Please, Keith come in and listen to what we’ve recorded before we erase it – because if we erase it, it’s gone forever.’ And he came in, and he heard it. Well what would you say? You’d have to be deaf not to hear how good it is, right? So, it was a kind of perfect – because he hadn’t preconceived it. It had just come out of the end of his fingers, literally. I think that was the key to why it’s so popular. There was total fluidity. There’s not a moment where he stops to think. It’s free playing. If he hit a wrong note, he couldn’t give a shit. And right until the end, fantastic. There you are: That’s what art is all about. Sometimes, actually, you do get lucky. (Laughs.)

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Author: [Nick DeRiso](#) Nick DeRiso, writing from various kudzu-covered locales across the Deep South, has explored jazz, blues, roots and rock music for Gannett News Service and USA Today, Blues Revue Magazine, AllAboutJazz.com, Rock.com, Popdose, Living Blues magazine, the Louisiana Folklife Program and NoDepression.com, among others. He’s also been programmer and host for a series of radio shows across the same genres. So, yeah, you could call it an obsession.

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