

- [Movies](#)
- [Political Hollywood](#)
- [Robert Downey Jr](#)
- [The Avengers](#)

[More](#)

[Log in](#) [Create Account](#)

May 4, 2012

# HUFF POST ENTERTAINMENT

THE INTERNET NEWSPAPER: NEWS BLOGS VIDEO COMMUNITY

Edition: **U.S.**

- [CA Canada](#)
  - [Québec](#)
- [FR France](#)
- [US United States](#)
- [UK United Kingdom](#)

Like 68k Follow

[This is the print preview: Back to normal view »](#)



## [Mike Ragona](#)

Radio Personality on Solar  
Powered KRUU-FM, Music  
Biz Vet

GET UPDATES FROM Mike Ragona

[Like](#)

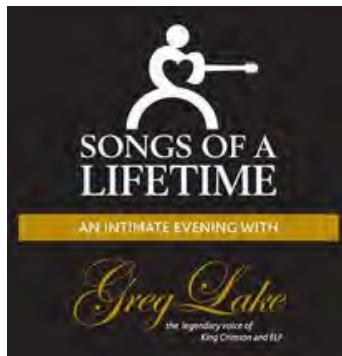
374

# *The Highest Pass and Songs of a Lifetime: Conversations With Jon Anderson and Greg Lake*

Posted: 05/04/2012 10:53 am

Follow

[»](#) [Asia](#), [Carl Palmer](#), [Chariots Of Fire](#), [Greg Lake](#), [John Wetton](#), [Johnny Hallyday](#), [Jon & Vangelis](#), [Jon Anderson](#), [Keith Emerson](#), [King Crimson](#), [Michael Mollura](#), [Paul O'Neill](#), [Pink Floyd](#), [Robert Fripp](#), [The Beatles](#), [The Highest Pass](#), [The Nice](#), [The Rolling Stones](#), [Trans-Siberia Orchestra](#), [Blade Runner](#), [Elp](#), [Vangelis](#), [Yes](#), [Entertainment News](#)



## A Conversation With Greg Lake

**Mike Ragona:** Greg, your *Songs Of A Lifetime* tour is like your autobiographical tour, right?

**Greg Lake:** You're quite right. *Songs Of A Lifetime* came about, really, while I was writing my autobiography, which is unsurprisingly titled *Lucky Man*. During the writing, songs kept popping up that were really influential, sort of pivotal to my career. It occurred to me that they also represented a journey, really, that we'd been on together, the audience and myself, and we've shared this music over the years -- not only my songs but other people's songs as well. I thought it would be a nice thing to relive that journey as a concert. Along with that go a lot of stories. I was interested in telling stories to the audience. I came up with the title "Songs Of A Lifetime." It is really fascinating to play a song and to hear the audience tell their sort of side of that story.

**MR:** You're touring initially in the UK?

**GL:** I'm going to the UK later this year with it and also all over Europe and Japan.

**MR:** Have you performed *Songs Of A Lifetime* in the States yet?

**GL:** No, we just started up.

**MR:** Are you surprised how your music has become a part of people's lives?

**GL:** I'm not surprised because every time I meet someone, they tell me something in a bar about *Brain Salad Surgery*... You get all of these stories, some of them are quite remarkable. Music, generally, especially over the last few decades, has sort of been a tapestry through most people's lives. It's been a very important part of the culture, so I'm not surprised. Music, for a lot of people, is a kind of identifier for certain periods of their lives.

**MR:** Yes, it's like mile markers, and for many, important ones.

**GL:** I hope so. Occasionally, you get big traffic stories, but most of them are happy, thank goodness. That's why I love doing it. When I'm walking out on stage, it's not like walking out for a concert, it's more like walking into a family room, with a tremendous feeling of warmth and happiness in there. I've never done a tour quite like it. It really is phenomenal, the amount of goodwill. I suppose people just love to remember those good times.

**MR:** It's like a commentary track, a behind-the-scenes concert, as opposed to just standing in front of them playing a bunch of songs. You've taken the experience into the living room aesthetically.

**GL:** I think that is right. You know, it is good thinking about how these songs came about. It makes it more interesting than just standing up there and performing them. I sometimes talk to people in the classical world about the way the conductor walks on stage, doesn't stay a word, picks up his baton and starts the music and then walks off afterwards and not a word is spoken. I think that's one of the reasons classical music is not more popular than it is -- the absence of communication.

**MR:** While you were being an prog-rocker with Emerson, Lake & Palmer and King Crimson, you integrated classical music into a lot of people's lives. For example, there's *Pictures At An Exhibition*. You've slyly taught people about classical music int the format.

**GL:** As a by-product, it's true. We opened the door to classical music to ordinary people. Before that, classical music was really for the elitist, the well-knowns, the intelligencia of Europe. We brought it right down to ground level and said it's for everybody, come on. The other part of it was, up until King Crimson, around that period, as far as British brands were concerned, they all took their influence from the blues, American music, soul, gospel, and some country and western. In order to be original and different, we turned to European music for our inspiration. That is what really made bands like ELP -- to some extent -- Pink Floyd, and people

like that, have more of an original sound because they weren't drawing from that same well of the blues, soul and gospel. But I would hate anybody to get the interpretation that we were in any way trying to be smartasses, because that wasn't the case -- quite the reverse. We were trying to make it accessible. For us, it was just in order to be original. I think the first album like that actually was Sgt. Pepper, and that didn't take its influence from the blues, really.

**MR:** We have to get to King Crimson. You were a childhood friend of Robert Fripp. Do you have any stories about you and your childhood friend, Robert?

**GL:** Well, Robert and I had the same guitar teacher and we would practice guitar together as kids. We grew up together, Robert and I. It's a long story, really. But when it came time to form King Crimson, Robert had never been in a band before and I had for many years so he was worried about how he should dress on stage. For some reason, he had always been interested or intrigued by the violin player Paganini. Paganini was sort of a Satan worshipper; he'd play his violin between two black candles challenging people to play in competitions. He was really a weird character. So Robert decided that that's maybe how he should be dressed. We went down a place called Portobello Road in London. We bought him a lot of this gear, like a black cloak, a black top hat, black silk shirts, and all of this stuff. So, we went home, and later on that day, we went to London to watch a band perform. I came back late that night into the flat. I opened the front door, I pressed the light to go up the stairs because we were on the first floor, but it didn't work. It was dark and I thought, "Well, I've got to go upstairs and started to walk upstairs. All of a sudden, I noticed, upstairs, there was a candle flickering, and all of a sudden, there was Robert. I didn't realize it was him at first. He dressed himself in all this gear. He put these false horror teeth in, and he had a candle up by his face. He was pretending to be Jack The Ripper. It frightened the life out of me. Of course, it gave me great pleasure.

**MR:** Oh my, look what you created.

**GL:** From that, of course, came this whole thing Robert did playing with his back to the audience or playing behind the speakers. All of that came from that one idea of some stage clothes.

**MR:** Greg, with King Crimson, you have the classic track "21st Century Schizoid Man." Are we all 21st century schizoids?

**GL:** I think we are.

**MR:** Yeah, and how could we not be when we multi-task all day long.

**GL:** I think you're right. There is too much multi-tasking for people. I was on the train from Boston back to Philadelphia, and every single person on that train had a computer working away. Every split second of life is answering emails and sending texts. You're available and accessible 24 hours a day. I'm not sure it's a good thing, it doesn't give people a piece of mind. It's important to work, it's great to work. But, if you watch any great athlete, they don't train all of the time. They train, they rest, they train, they rest.

**MR:** That's a very good point.

**GL:** People are 24 hours a day. It's just too much.

**MR:** I've worked with young people and I was amazed at how addicted they were to their devices. Then again, I am too. What sucks is if somebody texts you, it comes off as more urgent than email. So if you don't reply to that text in an instant, the texter thinks there's something wrong.

**GL:** I mean, I have to say, way back over 30 years ago now, this was before faxes were invented, there was an ELP song that said "Load your program. I am yourself." It was about computers. It goes more and more to the simple device almost controlling your life.

**MR:** Prophetic. Let's take it one step further. With Facebook, Twitter, website pages, etc., it's almost like your identity is that page, it's not the human being anymore.

**GL:** You're right. It's a vicarious form of life. I think in the end, it needs to rebalance itself and it probably will. It's the newness of it all. I'm fairly convinced it's not a good thing.

**MR:** But we have to do it, it's where we are.

**GL:** You have to do it. I heard Apple -- the corporation Apple -- was the biggest corporation in the world, and all they make is little boxes with electronics in them.

**MR:** Electronics that, without endorsing Apple, I also happen to like very much.

**GL:** Me too, I love them.

**MR:** (laughs) Okay, let's get back to your *Songs Of A Lifetime* tour. We're going to see it in the States too, right?

**GL:** Yes, yes. Traveling all over the United States.

**MR:** Greg, how did Emerson, Lake & Palmer start?

**GL:** It formed in an amazing way. On the very night that King Crimson broke up, we were playing at the Fillmore West in San Francisco. Two members of King Crimson decided they didn't want to tour anymore. They wanted just to be recording artists -- that was Ian McDonald and Michael Giles. When they left the band, I just felt that it would have been impossible to replace them, really, and for the band to be the same thing. I just didn't want to continue on with that name. Coincidentally, on the same bill that night was a band called The Nice that was Keith Emerson's band. After the show, Keith and I met at the hotel bar. We started chatting. He asked me how King Crimson was going, I said, "To be honest with you, we're breaking up." He said, "That's amazing because I'm just coming to the end of The Nice, we're breaking up. Maybe we should think about getting together and starting a band." So, that's really how it began. Later on, we found Carl Palmer and it became it became ELP.

**MR:** One of the classic ELP tracks is your song "C'est La Vie."

**GL:** Lovely song. I wrote it when I lived in Paris. I just had a fancy to write a song with a French feeling. It was recorded by a French artist, Johnny Hallyday. It became number one in France, which I'm very proud of because it's very unusual for an Englishman to write a French number one.

**MR:** The album it comes from, *Works*, was a pretty ambitious album.

**GL:** It was a good album. But in a way, I think it was the beginning of the end of ELP.

**MR:** How so? Was it because of the segmented sides?

**GL:** No, no, not so much. Because the band no longer had that sort of hallmark of records like *Tarkus*, *Trilogy*, *Brain Salad Surgery*... All of a sudden, it was orchestral, straight songs really. Good songs and arrangements and everything, but it wasn't the ELP that people came to love. These records were conceptual and visionary, whereas *Works* really was more conservative, straight-forward, using real orchestras and I think that was really the landmark where I would say that was the end of the golden era of ELP.

**MR:** Solo albums include *Greg Lake* and *Maneuvers*. What are your thoughts about your solo recordings?

**GL:** My solo career was a kind of searching; I was searching really for direction. I'd just come out of this enormous band and was quite confused really with how I should move forward because I didn't want to continue on repeating ELP, but that's who I'd been for the last decade. It takes a while to sort of recover and collect your self. But I met a great guitar player, Gary Moore. Basically, he played guitar for me. Those were a couple of great records and it was a terrific band.

**MR:** And, you also joined Asia briefly.

**GL:** Yeah, well, to be honest, I was only together with Asia for a week. What happened was they had fallen out with the singer John Wetton. Carl called me up and asked, could you do me a favor? I thought he wanted to borrow a guitar. I said what do you want? He said, "You have to come and play with Asia." He told me the story. I asked when it was and he said next week. So I had to fly to Japan and learn all the music within a week, which I did in the end. I had a prompter onstage, a screen, and I managed to get through it. It was very difficult. That was my brief encounter with Asia.

**MR:** And you were back together with Carl for a bit during that, which must have felt great.

**GL:** Well, that was the big reason I did it really. And I was always quite good friends with John Wetton... a strange thing, we stayed friends after that. Johnny rejoined the group so all's well that ends well.

**MR:** Your "I Believe in Father Christmas" has become a Christmas essential.

**GL:** It did turn out to be a bit of a classic. I'm really pleased because what the song is about is restoring Christmas to be peace on earth, good will to all men, rather than a huge marketing exercise that it has become. It was a protest song for Christmas being used for financial gain rather than for good will. That's what that song is all about, really.

**MR:** I recently interviewed Trans-Siberian Orchestra's Paul O'Neill, and you're on the group's *Night Castle* album.

**GL:** I play with Trans-Siberia from time to time. We're just friends, really. He asked me as a favor, he just wanted me to be on the album. He's a very interesting guy. We get together with friends. We play together often.

**MR:** Greg, what advice do you have for new artists?

**GL:** Well, it's a tricky thing. The music business is not the logical path it used to be. I would say play your music honestly and play it for yourself and if you like it, other people will probably like it too.

**MR:** Other than the tour and the autobiography, what's in the future for Greg Lake, maybe on the personal side?

**GL:** I'm going to be recording this summer a new album and touring the rest of the year, and I'm really happy about it because this tour is going really well. It's taking up all of my efforts and my attention, but I'm having a great time. It's a fantastic thing. I'm going to take it all around the world.

**MR:** Will there be any guest appearances at the shows, perhaps some interesting reunions?

**GL:** I don't know, people are talking about that.

**MR:** Greg, thank you, this has been a joy.

**GL:** Thank you very much. This has been terrific.

*Transcribed by Brian O'Neal*

This Blogger's Books from 



[Greatest Hits](#)  
by Mike Ragogna



[Spider-Man: Rock Reflections of a Superhero](#)  
Various Artists



Follow Mike Ragogna on Twitter: [www.twitter.com/ragz2008](http://www.twitter.com/ragz2008)

FOLLOW ENTERTAINMENT

[Like](#)

68k

Enter email for Entertainr Get Alerts

FOLLOW US

- 
- 
- 
- 
- 
- 
- 

Connect with your friends  
Check out stories you might like,  
and see what your friends are sharing!