

[Home](#) // [Music](#)

Lucky men

by **Michael Lello**
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When Keith Emerson and Greg Lake perform Friday night at the Sherman Theater, history will come to life. Much of that history is that of Emerson, Lake & Palmer, the progressive rock trio. However, King Crimson, The Nice, classical composers like Aaron Copland and Modest Mussorgsky and even Jimi Hendrix, who was scheduled to jam with and possibly join ELP a few weeks before he died, are part of it.

One of rock's first supergroups, ELP formed when Lake's King Crimson and Emerson's The Nice played a show together at the Fillmore West in San Francisco, and the two musicians met. They left their respective bands, signed drummer Carl Palmer and reinterpreted classical compositions, wrote their own concept albums and became one of the 1970s biggest bands with hits like "Lucky Man," "Karn Evil 9" (known for the lyrics "Welcome back my friends to the show that never ends") and "From The Beginning."

The idea to showcase these songs on tour, as well as tunes like Crimson's "21st Century Schizoid Man" and selections from The Nice, arose when Lake (bass, guitar and vocals) and Emerson (keyboards) were writing new material in Lake's London studio.

"Every now and then we'd stop and take a break, and we would just sort of play through an old ELP piece or maybe a King Crimson bit or a Nice, and every time we did it we realized. ... We identified it had a special appeal for us," Lake says during an interview from his New York City hotel room during the tour. "We realized it was the first time we heard those pieces in the original form in which they were written in 40 years."

It was announced Thursday that former King Crimson flautist Ian MacDonald will join Emerson and Lake for the final two shows of the North American tour, including the Sherman concert.

"This is probably the closest people will ever see to the original King Crimson," Lake said in a press release. "As we are inviting audiences to experience the music as it was written and originally performed, it was natural to invite Ian to join us."

The tour — which had early dates postponed, Lake shares, "because we just couldn't get it right, basically" — is the first of its kind for the duo and is billed as "An Intimate Evening with Keith Emerson and Greg Lake."

"We talk about the songs, how they got written, some sort of background stories. We also allow the audience to ask any questions they want," says Lake, in the interview. "Sometimes they come up on stage. It's a bit of a funny thing; each show is not the same."

When the duo first released news of the tour, some observers equated "intimate" with "unplugged." Lake assures that's not the case.

"In the beginning, I think people got the impression that because it was intimate it was unplugged," he says. "I use my guitars, a bass, obviously I sing, and Keith does all the keyboards."

Asked what Emerson, known for touring with a large stable of instruments like his Moog synthesizer, has this time around, Lake simply says "everything."

Before he was the voice of ELP, Lake played bass and sang lead on the first few King Crimson albums, including the British band's iconic debut "In The Court of the Crimson King." For Lake, choosing a most memorable or most successful album is a challenge because with each one, "I try to give absolutely all I've got to it." But the first Crimson album is a standout.

"I'd be lying if I didn't say 'In The Court of the Crimson King' didn't hold a special thing for me," Lake says, "because it was a breakthrough album; it was a moment in time that transcended even the people that made the record. It was just being caught up in a cultural moment, and (it) caught on this following wind. A very strange experience really. So that holds a special place with me.

"So does 'Trilogy,' so does 'Brain Salad Surgery,' so does 'Pictures At An Exhibition,' so does 'Tarkus,'" he adds, referring to four of ELP's biggest releases. "They have a special power, a special chemistry. They affected a lot of people, and no one more so than me."

Emerson, Lake & Palmer have not played together since "10 years ago or more," Lake says, but that will change on July 25 when ELP headlines the High Voltage Festival in London. Unlike Pink Floyd's one-off 2005 reunion at Live 8, this one might have legs.

"I'm looking forward to it, and I know Keith and Carl are as well, and I'm hoping we can take it and do more shows," Lake says. "I hope that we're able to do it. We'll see, but I sincerely hope it turns out well."



An Intimate Evening with Keith Emerson and Greg Lake, Friday, May 14, 8 p.m., Sherman Theater (524 Main St., Stroudsburg). Tickets: \$45, \$50, \$63, www.shermantheater.com, Ticketmaster outlets. Info: 570.420.2808, www.shermantheater.com

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