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## Jeff Moehlis: Greg Lake's Songs of a Lifetime in Ventura

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By Jeff Moehlis, Noozhawk Contributing Writer



Greg Lake meets up after the show with Oxnard keyboard prodigy Rachel Flowers, whose solo performances of Emerson, Lake & Palmer's songs are truly amazing. [Click here to check out one such performance.](#)

Prog rock legend performs songs by King Crimson, Emerson, Lake & Palmer and more



At his concert at the [Majestic Ventura Theater](#) on Thursday night, [Greg Lake](#) told how the song "Lucky Man" came to be recorded by the then-new prog rock supergroup [Emerson, Lake & Palmer](#). The band had run out of material to record for their first album, and Lake suggested recording that particular song, which he had written as a kid.

Keyboard player [Keith Emerson](#) was unimpressed by it and went to the pub while Lake and drummer [Carl Palmer](#) recorded it and filled it out with overdubs. When Emerson returned from the pub, he was surprised at how well it turned out and added the Moog synthesizer solo at the end, with the released solo just meant to be a run-through. Of course, this went on to be one of ELP's best-known songs.

Lake, whose voice still sounds great, was in a reminiscent mood, having just finished his autobiography, also called *Lucky Man*. The Ventura show was a stop on his Songs of a Lifetime solo tour and presented songs, accompanied by backing tracks, that are of special significance to his life and career.

This included much from [King Crimson's](#) pioneering 1969 debut album *In the Court of the Crimson King*, on which Lake played bass and sang vocals, such as the show opener for which he dramatically took over from the sample of "21st Century Schizoid Man" in [Kanye West's](#) song "Power." Later in the show, Lake played bits of that album's "Epitaph," the lush "The Court of the Crimson King" and "I Talk to the Wind."

Reflecting on his time with that band, he said, "King Crimson was a very strange band, you know?" He told how he and guitarist [Robert Fripp](#) had both had the same guitar teacher, multi-instrumentalist [Ian McDonald](#) had never been in a rock band before but had been in a military brass band, drummer [Mike Giles](#) could play in different time signatures with all four of his limbs at the same time, and lyricist Peter Sinfield was the concert lighting person for the band before they discovered his lyrical skills.

Lake also talked about that album's iconic cover art, done by Sinfield's friend, Barry Godber. Godber dropped off the artwork the day they recorded "21st Century Schizoid Man," unknowingly and unforgettably capturing the spirit of that song. Sadly, he died shortly thereafter.

Of course, Lake also performed songs from his tenure in ELP, with more of a focus on his contributions in the singer-songwriter vein like the aforementioned "Lucky Man," "From the Beginning," "Still ... You Turn Me On" and "C'est la Vie," rather than the band's more epic prog rock workouts. Well, except for the encore performance of "Karn Evil 9: Second Impression" — think "Welcome back my friends to the show that never ends."

Lake also paid tribute to some of his important musical influences, including [The Beatles](#) with the sing-along "You've Got to Hide Your Love Away" (he also talked a bit about touring with [Ringo Starr](#) a few years ago), the [Johnny Kidd & The Pirates](#) song "Shakin' All Over" (a 1960 hit in the United Kingdom but probably best known in the United States for the cover version on [The Who's](#) album *Live at Leeds*), and [Elvis Presley](#) with the "greatest rock song ever written," "Heartbreak Hotel."

Speaking of Elvis, Lake recalled seeing him perform live at Lake Tahoe on a day that ELP had off from touring. His telling: after the intro [Also Sprach Zarathustra](#) (famous from [2001: A Space Odyssey](#)) on the P.A., the band started playing "Jailhouse Rock" and Elvis appeared with his back to the audience and a spotlight casting a huge shadow at the back of the stage. When Elvis started singing three women fainted, then the band switched to "Heartbreak Hotel" and another woman fainted. Lake joked that only two minutes into the show, it looked like a bomb had gone off.

A real treat was Lake opening the evening up to comments and questions from the audience. This included a question about the [California Jam](#) concert in Ontario in 1974, which was apparently attended by a fair number of people in Majestic's audience (and about 250,000 others). Lake called it "one of the best shows ELP ever played."

Another person mentioned that he was at an ELP concert at [Soldier Field](#) in Chicago — Lake's

recollection of that show was that they hired a helicopter to take a picture from above so they could count how many people were there, estimating it to be 80,000. But he immediately noted that regardless of how many people might have been in the audience for a given show, “you’re only ever playing to a single person,” “playing from soul to soul.”

Another audience member mentioned that the ELP song “Closer to Believing” had been played at his wedding. Lake was happy to hear this, and told that when they wrote it, he and Sinfield decided that “every single line would contain some element of universal truth.” Lake was also asked about the infamous ELP orchestra tour, which Lake pointed out showed that classical music was no longer just for the elite, although the tour lost \$3 million as they tried to support a whopping 140 people on the road.

It would be hard not to agree that in many ways Greg Lake is a “lucky man,” but those in attendance were also lucky — to have seen and interacted with a prog rock legend in such an intimate setting.

### **Setlist**

21st Century Schizoid Man  
Lend Your Love to Me Tonight  
From the Beginning  
Heartbreak Hotel (Elvis song)  
Epitaph / The Court of the Crimson King  
You’ve Got to Hide Your Love Away (Beatles song)  
Touch and Go  
Trilogy  
Still ... You Turn Me On  
Shakin’ All Over (Johnny Kidd & The Pirates song)  
C’est la Vie  
Lucky Man  
People Get Ready (Curtis Mayfield song)  
Karn Evil 9: Second Impression

— [Noozhawk](#) contributing writer *Jeff Moehlis* is a professor of mechanical engineering at [UCSB](#).  
Upcoming show recommendations, advice from musicians, interviews and more are available on his Web site, [music-illuminati.com](#).

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