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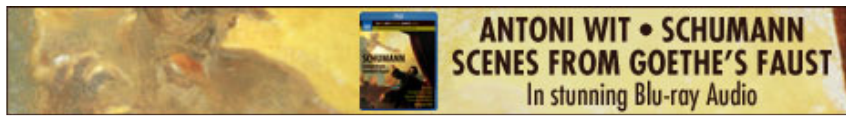
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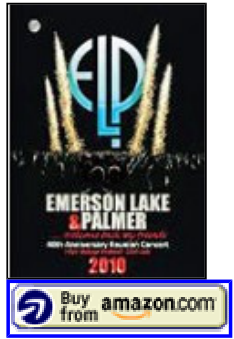
Emerson, Lake and Palmer...Welcome Back My Friends: 40th Anniversary Reunion Concert (2010/2011)

A triumphant reunion from the most successful progressive rock trio.





Published on November 2, 2011



Emerson, Lake and Palmer...Welcome Back My Friends: 40th Anniversary Reunion Concert (2010/2011)

Studio: Concert One /MVD Visual MVD5219D

Video: 1.77:1 for 16:9 Color

Audio: Dolby 2.0, DD 5.1

Extras: 28-minute "High Voltage" documentary; 12-page booklet with biographical notes, concert photos and DVD/live credits

Length: 91 minutes

Rating: *1/2**

Progressive rockers Emerson, Lake and Palmer (ELP to their fans) are both heralded and vilified, their music considered either overtly pompous or the acme of prog rock's fascination with merging classical music with hard-charging rock. For some, the ELP brings out the worse genre-bending tendencies of prog rock, while for others the trio is an exciting entity which melds disparate elements into a unified whole. ELP is actually two bands in one: in one corner is singer/bassist Greg Lake who has strong pop inclinations and has penned several radio-friendly singles; on the flip side are keyboardist Keith Emerson and drummer Carl Palmer, who have virtuoso instrumental chops and revel in creating arena-scale material with musical and visual pyrotechnics.

The trio formed in England in 1970 with an extensive pedigree. Lake was King Crimson's bassist and singer; Emerson did time in The Nice, who also amped up classical music; and Palmer was the powerhouse drummer for The Crazy World of Arthur Brown as well as British progressive-rock ensemble Atomic Rooster. Throughout ELP's initial existence from 1970 to 1978, the group was second only to Yes among the prog rock genre in terms of record sales (50 million albums sold

to date), concert tickets and numbers of fans. After ELP broke up, there were solo endeavors, membership in other bands (Palmer was a co-founder of hit-makers Asia) and the three artists reunited for tours and two studio projects during the 1990s.

It was another reunion which brought Lake, Palmer and Emerson together again on July 25th, 2010 as headliners of the High Voltage festival, designed to showcase heavy metal, classic rock and prog rock artists on three stages: the event also included Uriah Heep, Foreigner and others. ELP's one-off reconciliation is commemorated on the 90-minute DVD *Emerson, Lake and Palmer... Welcome Back My Friends: 40th Anniversary Reunion Concert*, which presents the band's theatrical stage show with music culled from various ELP albums spanning 1970 to 1992. As Greg Lake explains, during a half-hour bonus documentary on the DVD, the concert was an opportunity to perform for both older supporters and a younger audience who had never seen the group.

Despite increasing age (Palmer is the youngest at 60) and waist expansion (Greg Lake and David Crosby probably share the title for heaviest weight gain amongst aging classic rockers) ELP has not slowed down and the trio still has the ability to parse out music from the band's boom years. That is evident from the start with a thunderous version of "Karn Evil 9: 1st Impression, Part 2," taken from the 1973 conceptual release, *Brain Salad Surgery*. The tune is loud and bombastic, with somewhat nonsensical lyrics and is a triumph of instrumental muscle. ELP follows with other material from the early days, such as "Knife Edge," with Emerson's keyboard fugue and a dark mood which shifts between unnatural calm and intensity; and the obscure "Bitches Cathedral," notable for Palmer's 6/8 beat patterns and Emerson's playful honky-tonk piano. Less successful are unfamiliar tracks such as "From the Beginning," which has undernourished lyrics and an awkward balance between Lake's acoustic guitar and Emerson's archetypal synth sounds. It is curious the group did not also choose bona-fide favorites like "C'est La Vie" or "Still... You Turn Me On." However, Lake's "Lucky Man" does make a late appearance. While Lake's voice has deepened over the decades, he can still belt out the big notes and put nuance into quieter moments. Nevertheless, musically, Lake is still the weakest link, his adequate bass chords workmanlike but not equal to Palmer's percussion brilliance or Emerson's volatile keyboards.

The highlight is a 16-minute installment of *Pictures at an Exhibition*, based on Mussorgsky's piano suite, which ELP bowdlerized into a dynamo of classical themes, pounding rhythm and the combination of a major orchestral melody with heavy rock components. Some classical music listeners abhor this effort, but it remains one of ELP's most-treasured live performance pieces. ELP concludes with a medley which includes a driving rendition of Aaron Copland's *Fanfare for the*

Common Man, which ELP turned into one of the biggest instrumental hits of its day; and an overbearing adaptation of Dave Brubeck's "Rondo," where Emerson stabs and destroys a vintage Hammond organ. Palmer's set-closing drum solo, sandwiched between the two tracks, is hyperbolic and watching Palmer peel away his shirt to reveal his naked middle-aged paunch is a sight best seen only once.

The film is both an auditory and visual treat. The production crew utilizes numerous long, medium and close-up shots; multiple cameras pan over the stage, the crowd (including soaring crane footage) and the individual players. The variety of angles illuminates the impressive lighting and also provides zoom-ins so viewers can see each musician's artistry, from Emerson's quick drumstick flicks to Emerson's fast keyboard runs. The sound is very well mixed and comes across particularly fine on the Dolby Digital 5.1 Surround option. Dedicated enthusiasts should also watch the 28-minute bonus documentary which features interviews with Lake, Palmer and Emerson; their band and tour managers; music journalists and others, who describe the trio's significance and history, the behind-the-scenes work which culminated in the stage show, and other related ELP information. One caveat: the DVD's main menu and track selection/chapter page has very tiny print, making it hard to read track names except on the largest of screens.

—Doug Simpson

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