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## Emerson Lake & Palmer - 40th Anniversary Reunion Concert

[Concert At Home](#) // Unrated // August 23, 2011

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Review by [Bill Gibron](#) | posted October 14, 2011 | [E-mail the Author](#) | [Start a Discussion](#)

### The Product:

They are the most prog of prog rockers, the dinosaurs that punk rebelled against and fans fled from once New Wave and other sonic possibilities arrived on the scene. Still, for a group so uniformly vilified, Emerson, Lake and Palmer remained wildly popular. Selling over 40 million albums and heralded for their pomp (and pretension), the trio constantly tempted aesthetic fate. Formed in the late '60s and first praised by the public with 1970's self-titled LP, Emerson, Lake and Palmer would go on have hits both likely ("Lucky Man," "From the Beginning," "Still...You Turn Me On") and unusual (their nine minute plus take on Aaron Copeland's classic "Fanfare for the Common Man"). Along the way, egos and bad blood, health issues and diminishing interest split the boys, each going off to often successful side projects. By 2010, the year of this live reunion concert at the High Voltage Rock Festival, they had not played together in nearly 12 years. While it occasionally shows, this is an event for the true ELP devotee. Sadly, that's about as far as its entertainment elements reach, even on DVD.

### The Plot:

Representing an overview of their entire career - including material off their 1992 comeback album *Black Moon*, a seeming ageless Keith Emerson (keyboards) and Carl Palmer (drums) join a decidedly overweight and less than polished Greg Lake (guitars, bass, vocals) for 15 selections - including mandatory solos. Beginning with the classic "Karn Evil 9: First Impression, Part 2" and its epic opening line "Welcome back my friends/to the show that never ends," the concert careens from good workings of mostly instrumental material ("The Barbarian," "Pictures at an Exhibition") to prime Lake moments ("Bitches Crystal," "Touch and Go," "Farewell to Arms"). Of course, only Palmer is perfection. Emerson is constantly mangling his mostly fine chording with missed notes while his singing sideman can't hit the high notes anymore (he has real problems with the middle ones as well). By the time we get to "Fanfare" and the closing "Rondo," we're glad to see the men earn a rest. With them all in the 60s, the two hour plus performance is definitely a grind.

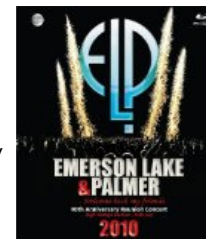
### The DVD:

Prog is all about musicianship. It's about letting talented men (and sometimes, women) walk into a studio with the very sketches of a song and then watching (or in the case of the fan, listening) as they fill in the blanks with as many artistic flourishes and sonic experiments as possible. While all such rockers reverted to regular songs once in a while - Yes with "Roundabout," for example - to keep their pop profile high, few found the right regular balance between ballads and anthems, ersatz rock symphonies and slow ambient explorations. For all the cliches inherent

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in the genre, Emerson, Lake, and Palmer seemed to defy many of them. Sure, a song like "Lucky Man" appeared to be a collision between a court troubadour and a slightly out of whack synth, but that was the joy - and the jaundiced death knell - that kept bands like ELP alive and relevant. During the mid '70s, they sold out stadiums and earned more FM radio airplay than Guns and Roses and Metallica do today. Today, few would even recognize their names, let alone their catalog. So something like this DVD really helps to explain who Emerson, Lake, and Palmer are. Unfortunately, the band has literally not aged well. Keyboard runs are rough and the less said about Lake the better (the man is a barrel shaped shadow of his former, fair-haired Renaissance Festival self). In fact, it's safe to say that, of all the musical genres that have been dug up recently and needlessly revived, prog is the one that seems the silliest. It is excessive and conceited, words we fans used to bristle at when we were younger. Indeed, there are very few practitioners of the mannered craft in 2011. Emo and boy bands are obviously easier to get involved with, and require less talent. If they were cool, if they were on the cover of every pop culture magazine this side of the world wide web, prog would be populating everything, from commercials to the latest lame comic book action sequence. Instead, groups like Emerson, Lake, and Palmer must play to a more nostalgia oriented audience. The results are rewritten all over this major/minor outdoor gig.

The fans are in full force, singing along where Lake cannot. They enjoy the faces that Carl Palmer makes from behind the kit and giggle when Emerson goes into full mad scientist mode, shifting cords and connections around on his massive keyboard kit. As the solos show, none have lost their fire. But it's the finery that appears to be missing. Even in a decade where everyone was dulled by drugs or dragged down by self-absorbed malaise, flawless recreation of their signature works was a must. Now, just getting by seems to be the norm. Take the hits "From the Beginning" and "Lucky Man." The instrumentation is mostly up to par, but the details of the performance are not. Lake cannot conquer obvious vocal issues and when called on to produce the patented send-off to the latter song, Emerson just can't. What he has to offer is just fine, it's just not what we remember. And since they hadn't played together in well over a decade, you'd think the desire to do things right would impart the band with a stellar work ethic. Instead, much of the material feels like ELP taking the piss, and as a result, getting away with it. While not a disaster by any far stretch of the imagination, the High Voltage show was a great example of being careful what you wish for. Emerson, Lake and Palmer were on stage once again. Sadly, their attempt does little to secure their lasting legacy.

#### The Video:

Offered in what the cover art calls "16x9 Hi Def", the anamorphic image here is actually pretty good. It's not Blu-ray quality, but it does do the digital aspects of DVD proud. The stage is well lit and director Marcus Viner does a nice job of giving each band member their due. There are bright colors and details everywhere, including in the face of each aging rocker. Palmer looks the best, while Emerson and Lake have their maturity issues.

#### The Audio:

The choices here are either Dolby Digital Stereo 2.0 (good) or Dolby Digital 5.1 Surround (Hmmm...). Here's the problem with the multichannel presentation. Emerson, Lake, and Palmer play from decidedly different parts of the stage (left, far back, and far right, respectively). The bigger mix exaggerates the spaces between them, rendering many of the songs hallow and flat. They don't fill the space so much as leach out of each area and eventually mingle in the middle. When they really pour on the power - say for Fanfare - the results are better. But for the most part, the 5.1 takes the concept of a concert far too seriously, separating out everything (including the crowd) to the detriment of the overall sonic experience.

#### The Extras:

We get a nice behind the scenes, showing how the performance came together and what it took for each member to come back to the fold and find a place in the trio dynamic. The interviews are insightful and sometimes rather sad. You can judge whose had the best post-ELP life from the comments made and the overall atmosphere during each Q&A. Aside from an insert pamphlet offering further explanations, that's it.

#### Final Thoughts:

Time for true confessions: yours truly was a huge ELP geek in high school. I saw them play at Soldier's Field in Chicago, entertaining a massive crowd with most -if not all - of their hit album *Works: Volume 1*. Then, The Ramones and The Clash came along and I couldn't have cared less for the dinosaur dung this group was spewing. Over the years, a bit of mellowing has occurred and I am once again capable of giving Keith Emerson, Greg Lake, and Carl Palmer a pass. Therefore, even with all its uneven qualities and less than polished performances, the High Voltage show earns a real **Recommended**. It may not be the band's best, but it does exemplify what they brought to the Me Decade dynamic. Today, prog may be

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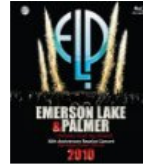
an indie/underground conceit...or nothing more than a cock rock joke. This show by ELP does little to dispel that reputation - not that it could have revised it in the first place.

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