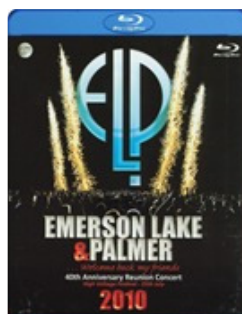




DVD REVIEWS FEEL LUCKY? OUR SOAP BOX EXTRA FEATURES ARCHIVES LINKS CONTACT DMC

## EMERSON LAKE & PALMER: 40th ANNIVERSARY REUNION CONCERT

*Blu-ray Edition*



Review by Mark Wiechman

Stars: Keith Emerson, Greg Lake, Carl Palmer

Audio: Dolby 5.1 and 2.0

Video: Color Widescreen 1.33:1

Studio: Concert One Ltd.

Features: See Review

Length: 120 minutes (including extras)

Release date: August 23, 2011

*“Do you wanna be an angel, do you wanna be a star? Let me play you some magic on my guitar...”*

### Film \*\*1/2

In the late 1960's anything seemed possible in popular music. The more experimental and “far out” a band was, the better. Britain was the birthplace of a style of rock music featuring musicians with plenty of experience playing jazz and classical literature, who enjoyed flaunting their chops and elevating songs to new heights with longer, more developed ideas and counterpoint. Greg Lake and Robert Fripp founded King Crimson, one of the first experimental “progressive” bands. Lake was both an excellent guitarist and bassist, his rich and almost royal baritone seemed to fit well into tales of the Court of the Crimson King, and his composing haunting tunes such as “Epitaph” were mysterious as they were complex.

But he soon left Crimson to form Emerson, Lake, & Palmer. In many descriptions of the band, and the booklet accompanying this Blu-Ray concert, their hubris shows clearly, especially when Greg Lake claims to have been the first to use round wound bass strings. This is nonsense. John Entwistle of the Who is widely known to have been the first to do this, though Lake may have done it and no one noticed. Also, ELP was not the first “super group” since Cream was clearly the first all-star band of virtuosos to play rock. Lake's claim that he is the “voice of his generation” as his website boasts is preposterous and presumptuous.

ELP was never as innovative or lyrical as Yes, not as interesting as King Crimson, nor as mysterious as early Genesis, but they produced a very clean, tight sound with adventurous harmonies and tonalities. They were also very *fun*, drawing huge audiences in the 70's and selling millions of albums. And many of their tunes are easier for a pop listener to handle. But the lyrics with their forced rhymes and the simple fact that these were three soloists and not truly an ensemble cannot be denied, and their music does not have the timeless quality of the other bands of the genre.

The drawback of the drums-bass-keys trio is that there is only so much even these geniuses can do with it. There is no "Heart of the Sunrise" or "Three of a Perfect Pair" here, but "Tarkus" is long, melodic, somewhat brooding, and rewarding as a composition. Lake's folk songs blend nicely with the Moog. Emerson may be the most well-rounded keyboardist of all the bands, and Lake's voice is the most conventional. No one questions Palmer's mastery of the drums or his pride in having his name on the double bass drums a la Ginger Baker. But they are no "power trio" with great lyrics such as Rush and their "Works" albums and "Trilogy" are interesting but do not transport the listener to 2112 or the Gates of Delirium.

Perhaps ELP's best recording is "Jerusalem", which is practically the National Anthem in everything but name for the UK. This is an example of a stunning arrangement that I doubt any other group could have pulled off. However, it is noticeably absent from this Blu-ray and was very disappointed.

The band's 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary coincided with their first live appearance since 1998, and while this set is somewhat shorter than their classic concerts of the 70's, they do not sound weary or over the hill. The Blu-ray is very well-shot; plenty of good angles of all three band members and the sound quality is excellent in surround or stereo. It is unfortunate that Greg Lake has gained so much weight (as so many of us have!) and his voice has continued to darken as it did in the 1980's. Another oddity is the drum machine congas on

I am not sure why Keith Emerson just had to bring his huge analog Moog synth just to use on one or two numbers, though it sounded magnificent on "Lucky Man." From my personal experience with these dinosaurs of synth, modern versions sound just about the same in a much smaller package, and soft synths enable any user to make the proper modifications. Emerson has computer displays on his other two keyboards, and if he can get by without a real B3 I don't know why he had to bring a huge Moog that is nearly two stories high. Again, this is a pioneer trying to remind people of his innovations, but who cares? They are not just going through the motions, but...well, it's just not the same band that did the double live album "Welcome Back My Friends..." in the 70's. "From the Beginning" has a drum machine playing congas, for instance, though that does free Carl up to use mallets. There are small technical glitches in which the band members have to wave or fuss at the techs for help, which I know happens at every show, but usually they do not leave that in the final product.

### **Video \*\*\*1/2**

A truly lovely picture, plenty of rich blue spotlights. In my opinion it is the expanded color palette that makes Blu Ray so wonderful, not the increased picture definition.

### **Audio \*\*\***

The 5.1 mix is adequate although the rear channels are rarely used for more than ambience. The sound overall is more boomy than bassy, and could have been a little better but you can hear everything clearly. The stereo mix is almost more rewarding since the boom is lessened.

### **Features \*\***

The documentary is not bad, interviews with each member and their manager discussing how the reunion happened. No startling revelations or anything like that here.

### **Summary:**

A reunion that will please most ELP fans but leave them slightly unsatisfied, more of an appetizer than a meal. This was naturally due to the show being at a festival rather than a concert hall. Clearly the band can still pull it off and please an audience. Maybe they will record a longer show that really can be the "show that never ends."