

ELO
Find Eldorado



PHOTOS BY PAUL GILMOUR

The Electric Light Orchestra should give some of the other overseas performers tips on how to perform before Western Springs' audiences.

Those other performers who give the impression they don't care what standard of performance they give during their one and only concert in our little known and quickly forgotten speck in the Pacific.

At the Springs one recent summer full moon night, ELO involved the audience in a way rarely seen there.

They knew and understood what sort of concert their fans expected and they added the small but important public relations exercise most groups don't care about — they made their fans feel important.

By warm happy comments, the group got the crowd in a two way conversation, singing along and jumping to their feet to the studio-quality diet of hits the crowd adored.

Gone was the usual lethargic crowd reaction refusing to have anything to do with calls from the stage for handclapping

and singing.

As ELO's driving force — singer, guitarist, writer, producer Jeff Lynne explained:

"I always feel sorry for big crowds in arenas like the Springs. They sometimes don't hear the sound and most never see what's on. It's pretty bad for people at the back.

"So we give them the giant laser light show so everyone can see what's going on more or less. And that is being fair to the audience."

The laser beams-coloured light you can see as it travels through the air — reached out and enveloped the audience like a spider's web.

Gone was the barrier between stage and audience. Gone were the days of sitting up in the trees catching only vague impressions that there was actually a live group somewhere out there in the distance.

Who can forget seeing the crowd respond to Captain Lynne, like a dog to his owner, when he commanded them to sit

down after dancing and listen in silence to hear cellist Hugh McDowell break into the "Flight of the Bumblebee" while the beams painted pictures in the trees.

Perhaps there is a future for the New Zealand Symphony orchestra yet!

And what of Lynne and his music?

His favourite composers are Lennon and McCartney. His favourite record, the Beatles *Revolver*. Listen to songs like "Mister Kingdom" off *Eldorado* and you would swear you were revisiting the era of Strawberry Fields.

Is ELO simply cashing in on a good scene, filling the gap where the Beatles left off?

Replies Lynne: "Obviously I'm very much influenced by the Beatles. But I can only call it a compliment if someone says I sound like the Beatles.

"I would never be offended by that."

But he is offended by some of the other things people are saying about his music.

The tag "classical rockers" for example.

It is an understandable tag. The unusual feature of the group is its incorporation of a string section into the rock group instead of it being additional to the group.

Explains Lynne: "There is a reason for this. Every group had guitar soloists and it was a nice change to have something else for the solo instead of the guitar."

Other reasons can be put for terming ELO "classical rockers." All the string section members once belonged to symphony orchestras. An opera singer appears briefly on the latest album *Out of the Blue*. The group incorporates snippets of classical music into their songs, leading to a purists' moan that they are stealing the cream of the classics and presenting a cheap version to the unsuspecting pop-orientated audience.

Says Lynne: "That's wrong. I don't think the term "classical rock" has ever accurately fitted our music. We do use string instruments, so I suppose to some people that's classical rock. But our music borders on a lot of styles."

Does Lynne have any knowledge of classical music himself?

"Um, no I don't know much about it. I've got a few favourite classical pieces but I don't know much about it."

Well what, are your favourite pieces?

(Side glance . . . what is this, some sort of expose?) "I like Dvorak best of all . . . but I mean I know so little about it compared with the string players who know really all the classical bits."

We turn to the striking familiarity of a lot of ELO numbers.

"Across the Border" with its melodic passage similar to "Heroes and Villains", the Beach Boys classic, and the Bee Gees feeling about "Starlight" and "Steppin Out."

Is it justified to accuse Lynne of stealing, perhaps unintentionally, other people's works?

"I can't say I like that suggestion at all. But I know it's untrue so my conscience is clean."

One review calls *Out of the Blue* hollow bland Muzak and an uninteresting and horrifyingly sterile package.

Is that fair?

"That's not very nice. I mean, the first four years of the group we got great reviews and no success. You know, great critical acclaim and no success but people like to knock you as soon as you have success. People always want to knock you down again. It's not a pleasant thing to read that sort of thing.

"I like the last album but then I always like the last album best. But it is the cleanest sound we have ever done."

Why was the group getting critics' praise for years but having no success?

"Obviously we were not appealing to people, only to critics at the time. But as soon as we start doing well, they start knocking us again, trying to give us hell."

What has brought the change in public reaction? In 1974 ELO couldn't quite fill the Town Hall for their one Auckland concert,

this time they had a captive outdoor audience of 20,000.

"It's difficult to say. Probably because our music is much better. It's very strange. That's the only thing I can think of.

"We worked harder and had better songs."

How has the music changed?

"It's become more accessible. Before, I used to write songs very strange, to say the least. And now I write songs I really like. Nice tunes."

Strange?

"Yeah, I was just writing to be cool, man. Now I'm doing things I think people will think is cool instead of doing things I just wanted to do."

ELO songs might have nice tunes but they never say very much. Rarely any noticeable passion or emotion, certainly containing no profound statement.

Lynne: "I don't know really. It's very difficult to say about lyrics. Very strange things to talk about. I try and make every number a single. I don't have any (sideward glance from manager sitting beside him) much say in the release of the single. That's our manager who does that."

I turned to trace briefly Lynne's musical background.

I began:

"You were once a member of the Move joining in 1971 . . ."

(Lynne's manager throws his hands in the air, his voice drowning me out): "I'll just stop you for a minute."

"What's wrong?"

"We're a bit short on time so perhaps we could end . . ."

"Don't you like mention of the Move?"

"Well there's just one thing. We only like to talk about ELO."

"Why don't you like talking about the Move?"

(In a slightly more agitated voice): "It's just, we like to talk about the future, not the past."

"Well, I would like to ask one question about the Move.

How do you view the group and your involvement in it in retrospect?

Says Lynne, somewhat reluctantly "Well to me the Move does not mean very much. I did not join until the Move had just about packed it in. I was with a group called Idle Race until then."

Interview time over. ELO are shown as a band which actually cares about the public. So it is no wonder their popularity is on the increase. Jeff Lynne dashes off to be presented with two gold, one platinum disc from Festival Records and there will be more to collect next time they come.

Which leaves two last thoughts on the ELO concert:

Firstly Golden Harvest. I was once told the theory that local groups who precede superstars at such shows are chosen because they sound bad and will be an incredible contrast to the overseas group.

If this is true, we won't be seeing much of Golden Harvest at the Springs. Their rendition of "All Along the Watchtower" Hendrix style was a knockout. Watch this group — it should have a big future.

Secondly: The usual straining for effect in the pre-concert blurb resulted in a most remarkable statement. It reads: "More than one reviewer has noted that while audiences of most rock groups leave a concert with a dazed and drained look on their faces, ELO audiences depart smiling and alive."

I checked it out and it is strange but true. The twenty thousand fans were widely happily though a little disappointed they could not have had double the 70 minute ELO dose.

But then come to think of it, I can't recall the last time I tripped over dead bodies on my way out from a concert or encountered an angry crowd raping and looting at the Great North Road bus stops!

Nigel Horrocks

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