

# Greg Lake

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**Gregory Stuart Lake** (10 November 1947 – 7 December 2016) was an English singer, songwriter, bassist, guitarist and record producer. He gained prominence as a founding member of the progressive rock bands King Crimson and Emerson, Lake & Palmer (ELP).

Born and raised in Dorset, Lake began to play the guitar at the age of 12 and wrote his first song, "Lucky Man", at the same age. He became a full-time musician at 17, playing in several rock bands until his friend and fellow Dorset guitarist Robert Fripp invited him to join King Crimson as lead singer and bassist. They found commercial success with their influential debut album, *In the Court of the Crimson King* (1969). Lake left the band in 1970 and achieved significant success in the 1970s and beyond as the singer, guitarist, bassist, and producer of Emerson, Lake & Palmer (ELP). As a member of ELP, Lake wrote and recorded several popular songs including "Lucky Man" and "From the Beginning". Both songs entered the UK and US singles charts.

Lake launched a solo career, beginning with his 1975 single "I Believe in Father Christmas" which reached number two in the UK. He went on to release three solo albums with his Greg Lake Band with guitarist Gary Moore, recorded 1981 through 1983 (two studio albums, one live album), as well as collaborating and performing with other artists and with various groups in the 1980s, had occasional ELP reunions in the 1990s and in 2010, and toured regularly as a solo artist into the 21st century. He also sponsored other artists, producing their recordings and helping them to get recording contracts.<sup>[3]</sup> He also was a fundraiser for the National Center for Missing & Exploited Children. He died on 7 December 2016 in London, of pancreatic cancer, at the age of 69.

## Early life

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Greg Lake was born on 10 November 1947 in the Parkstone area of Poole in Dorset, to Harry, an engineer, and Pearl, a housewife. He grew up in the residential suburb of Oakdale. Speaking about his childhood, Lake said he was "born in an asbestos prefab housing unit" into a "very poor" family, and remembered several cold winters at home, but credits his parents for sending him money and food during his time as a struggling musician. He later described his upbringing as a happy one.

and left the latter in 1963 or 1964. He then took up work loading and

## Solo career and other projects

In 1975, while still a member of ELP, Lake achieved solo chart success when his single, "I Believe in Father Christmas", reached number two on the UK Singles Chart. It has become a Yuletide perennial. In the UK, the single sold over 13,000 copies in two days.

Several months following the break-up of ELP in 1979, Lake began to write new songs and had "put down a tremendous amount of material" for his first solo album. He travelled to Los Angeles and worked with a group of session musicians to develop his songs further, but he found a lack of personality in the music, though not at the

fault of the performers. Lake realised he wished to play as part of a group, and began to assemble members of the Greg Lake Band. The result, *Greg Lake*, was released in September 1981 on Chrysalis Records, and reached number 62 in both the UK and the US. The debut concert for the tour of the album took place in August 1981 at the Reading Festival, with bandmates Gary Moore on guitar, Ted McKenna on drums, Tommy Eyre on keyboards, and Tristram Margetts on bass. A concert at the Hammersmith Odeon during the tour in 1981, broadcast live on the *King Biscuit Flower Hour*, was released as a live album in 1995.

Lake's second solo album *Manoeuvres* was released in July 1983. He disbanded the Greg Lake Band soon after completing it, without promoting or touring the album, and split with his record company. In a 1997 interview, he explained his decision: "It was a weird time for me, and for the music business. I was pressured into writing songs that the record company thought radio programmers wanted to hear. Hence, there was not the passion the first album had. There were some nice ballads, but the record lacked the pure vision that a hit album needs to succeed." He gave further insight in 2011: "It was great to be the rhythm guitar player in that line-up. Gary is a fabulous player, and the bass was covered properly. The problem was the solo albums really lacked direction. I was lost in a way. Once you've been in a band like ELP, if you try a solo career you can do it, but the public voted 'You're part of ELP. That's who you are'... When you try and search for an alternative identity, it's difficult. For a long while, I was kind of lost and would try different things. It was fun, but also a bit here, there and everywhere." Adding to the decision, lead guitarist Gary Moore had written solo material that brought him a recording contract: "I was working with Greg Lake for two years during '81 and '82 and we did two albums. At the time I was with him, I was writing songs ... I did some demos after the U.S. tour with Greg to see what would happen, and I got a deal with Atlantic. I really wanted to get out on my own at that stage, and I wanted these songs recorded – they weren't suitable for Greg... so I set up a deal with Virgin, and went in and did 'Corridors Of Power'. We didn't even set out to form a band, but the album took off, so we went on tour."<sup>1</sup>

In October 1983, at friend Carl Palmer's request, Lake briefly joined Palmer in the 1980s supergroup Asia, to replace fellow King Crimson alumnus John Wetton for four scheduled concerts in Japan. Lake agreed and spent six weeks learning Asia's songs, culminating in his performance in the "Asia in Asia" concert at the Nippon Budokan Hall in Tokyo, 6 December 1983, the first concert broadcast over satellite to MTV in the United States, and later made into a home video. Lake left the group after the tour, having joined as a favor for the Japanese concerts only.

In 1986, he and Keith Emerson decided to re-form Emerson, Lake & Palmer to record another album. However, Carl Palmer continued to have commitments to Asia, so Lake and Emerson auditioned other artists. They found good rapport with drummer Cozy Powell, and recorded their eponymous album *Emerson, Lake & Powell* with him.

In 2001, Lake toured as a member of the seventh incarnation of Ringo Starr & His All-Starr Band.

In 2003, Lake played bass on The Who song "Real Good Looking Boy". The group's usual bassist Pino Palladino was touring at the time of recording, and Lake was asked to play bass.

In 2005, Lake toured Germany and the UK with his group, the Greg Lake Band, which now included David Arch on keyboards, Florian Opahle on guitar, Trevor Barry on bass, and Brett Morgan on drums. The tour was sponsored by UK entertainer and

long-term ELP fan, Jim Davidson. But the shows were not a sell-out, the US leg was cancelled, and the two men then fell out.

In 2006, Lake played as a member of the supergroup the RD Crusaders in aid for charity. Lake performed "Karn Evil 9" with the Trans-Siberian Orchestra at several shows. He was a special guest on their album *Night Castle* (2009).

In 2010, Lake and Emerson completed an acoustic world tour, performing ELP songs. The tour got off to a bad start following a backstage altercation between the two, but "we completed the tour and it was very happy. We actually ended up enjoying ourselves".<sup>[</sup> That July, Lake joined Emerson and Palmer for a one-off gig from Emerson, Lake & Palmer at the High Voltage Festival in Victoria Park, London, to commemorate the band's fortieth anniversary. The concert was released on CD, DVD, and Blu-ray as *High Voltage*. It was the final performance by the group. Lake wished to continue touring, but claimed his bandmates "didn't want to", thus ending such plans.

Lake continued to tour solo in the 2010s. His Songs of a Lifetime Tour began in 2012 which featured songs of his career and those by his favourite artists, including Elvis Presley and Johnny Kidd & the Pirates. The tour ended in December of that year<sup>[36]</sup> and produced the live albums, *Songs of a Lifetime* (2013) and "Live in Piacenza" (2017).

On 9 January 2016, he was awarded an honorary degree in music and lyrics composition by Conservatorio Nicolini in Piacenza, Italy, the first degree awarded by any conservatory, ever.

Lake spent several years writing his autobiography *Lucky Man*, originally planned to be published in 2012 but eventually released posthumously in June 2017.

On 19 June 2017, the Municipality of Zoagli (Genoa) Italy awarded the Honorary Citizenship post mortem to Greg Lake and engraved a marble plaque that is next to Castello Canevaro where the musician performed on 30 November 2012.

## Death

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Lake died in London on 7 December 2016, at the age of 69, after suffering from cancer. His manager announced the news on Twitter, describing Lake's battle with the illness as "long and stubborn".<sup>[</sup> Numerous fellow musicians paid tribute, including Rick Wakeman and Steve Hackett, Ringo Starr, John Wetton, Opeth's Mikael Åkerfeldt, Jethro Tull's Ian Anderson and ELP drummer Carl Palmer. With Lake's death and that of Keith Emerson earlier in 2016, Palmer is the last surviving member of the group.