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AMERICA'S ONLY BRITISH ROCK MAGAZINE

**BEV BEVAN: An Interview**

**AUSTRALIA: An Underview**

**WIDOWMAKER: An Ariel View**

**BE-BOP DELUXE: A Personal View**

Tommy James

Grimms

**elo**







Ron Gott

Lynne picks, Mike Edwards plucks.

By Joel Bellman

Jeff Lynne, a graduate of what once was called the "Birmingham School of Mid-Sixties Pop Music," has covered quite a bit of ground between his first professional band, the Idle Race (see TPP 3 for that story in detail), and his current chart-topper, the Electric Light Orchestra. Although there has been a measure of stylistic continuity, each project has retained an individual identity and made a particular contribution to Lynne's development.

In case you tuned in late, the Idle Race began releasing records in late '67. With Lynne (a founding member), they recorded two albums: *The Birthday Party* and *The Idle Race*. (There is a third LP, done after Lynne's departure, but that's not important to our story here.) Despite an amazingly polished sound coupled with imaginative and highly original songwriting, the group was not commercially successful.

By mid-1970, Lynne had left the Idle Race. His long-time friend Roy Wood had just offered him a spot in the Move for a second time, following the departure of vocalist and occasional bassist Carl Wayne. The Move and the Idle Race were close because, besides the fact that both were from Birmingham, Wood had been in Mike Sheridan's Lot with Dave Pritchard and Roger Spencer from the Race. Lynne had turned Wood down once before, in January of 1969, right after bassist Trevor Burton quit. At that point, Rick Price from Sight and Sound had been recruited to fill the gap.

So our story really opens as Jeff says "Yes!" to Roy. It must be admitted that by 1970 the Move were in the unfortunate position of being sneered at by many of the people who initially had liked them. They were dismissed as being just another singles machine for dumb kids, and even the music press had grown tired of the endless contrived exploits of Wood and company. Thus, joining the the Move in 1970 had something of a stigma attached to it, rather like rushing out to buy a ticket for the

# JEFF LYNNE sees the light

## Moving from Idleness to Incandescence

Titanic. Lynne was cautious, wishing to avoid a dead-end job in a flagging pop act. However, almost immediately after he accepted, press releases circulated quoting Lynne and Wood as planning an entirely new concept in music; a fusion of rock and classical which, according to drummer Bev Bevan, would "pick up where 'I Am the Walrus' left off."

Although that statement now makes them cringe, it turned out to be a fairly accurate description of their first few recordings after Lynne joined up. "10538 Overture," the first ELO single released in June 1972, was actually recorded in 1970. The Move were still making singles as well, but primarily to pay for the costs of setting up the new band. "Brontosaurus" was released as the first Move single to feature Lynne, and it became a Top Ten hit after a few months on the fringes of the charts. It's a slow-building, ponderous song, which finally chugs along towards the end. Overly dense production was its main flaw.

The Move's recorded output of that period has since proved to be an amazing glimpse into the futures of both Lynne and Wood. Their LP from this period, *Looking On*, is required listening for any serious student of this branch of pop music. The Move, when appearing on *Top of the Pops* to promote singles from the album ("Brontosaurus" and the ill-fated but great "When Alice Comes Back to the Farm"), included Wood dressed in the same type of sorcerer's costume he would wear constantly three years later with Wizzard; Bevan would sometimes wear a bear or gorilla suit. Lynne's compositions, such as "Looking On" and especially "What?," sound far more like classic ELO than the nondescript disco sludge of "Evil Woman." While Lynne brought his more melodic, classical Idle Race influences to bear, Wood was expanding his playing capabilities. Of course, it is arguable whether oboes have any place in rock music; the sound was also hampered by Roy's seminal attempts to imitate Phil Spector's production while scraping away at triple-packed cellos. There are also some embarrassing attempts to rip off Beatles tricks (a totally unnecessary reversed drum track in the middle of "Looking On"), but all in all it is a fascinating, appealing album. Everyone knew the next one would be worth waiting for.

*Message from the Country*, released in the fall of 1971, got rave reviews in America, but English critics were a bit harsher, expecting more from the announced "Electric Light Orchestra" plans.

One review called it "entertaining, but not bursting with progressive ideas." Most agreed that the production was brilliant, and the more concise and memorable songs were sheer pleasure to listen to. Wood's instrumental work was utilized to good effect, with more subtlety and less pretense. Lynne's songs were also outstanding; their Beatles sound was becoming more a tribute and less a steal. "The Minister" was a direct link to "Paperback Writer," with veiled references to an Eleanor Rigby/Father MacKenzie-type clergyman, and high Lennon-style harmonies.

Due to contractual problems with his own label for solo releases, Rick Price had left the Move as bassist when the group switched labels from Fly to Harvest. The rest of the band were able to get by without him, since they were no longer touring and Wood could double on bass. "10538 Overture," recorded while they were on Regal Zonophone but not released until 1972 on the Harvest label, features Price on bass. That was the last song he recorded with them.

There were several more Move singles released which later appeared on the last semi-official LP (*Split Ends* in the US, *California Man* in the UK). Like the Beach Boys and the Kinks, the Move were the victims of numerous reissues, anthologies and samplers, although *Message from the Country* turned out to be the last real Move LP recorded as such.

At this point, the American discography becomes quite confusing. "Tonight"/"Don't Mess Me Up" was released on Capitol following the release of *Message from the Country*. "Tonight," an excellent Wood A-side, was not on that LP, although the B-side, written by Bevan, was. After this single flopped, the Move left Capitol. The next recording they did was a single for MGM of "Chinatown"/"Down on the Bay," but this apparently was never generally released. They immediately switched labels again, for the last time, to United Artists. The first thing UA released was a reissue of the aborted "Chinatown," but it still did nothing.

The next Move single proved to be an epic event in pop/rock music. Released in Britain on a maxi-single (where it was stuck on the B-side, with "Ella James," of Wood's "California Man"), "Do Ya" was only a moderate hit initially, but has maintained a phenomenal popularity. "California Man" is a strong Wood rocker in the '50s mold—but "Do Ya" is positively the best song the Move ever recorded, and one of Lynne's



finest compositions. The vocal harmony (Wood and Lynne) is superb; their voices blend like some other-worldly musical instrument. Wood's slide guitar bits add just the right plaintive touch, Bevan's drumming thunders along like a juggernaut... and catch the cowbell and woodblock!

The lyrics feature the typical Lynne strangeness associated with all of ELO's better songs:

*Ah, in this life I've seen everything I can see, woman,*

*I've seen lovers flying through the air hand in hand,*

*I've seen babies dancing in the midnight sun and*

*I've seen dreams that came from the heavenly skies above;*

*I've seen old ladies crying at their own gravesides,*

*I've seen pigs out sitting watching picture slides...*

UA's re-release of "Tonight" after "Do Ya," good as it is, was hopelessly anticlimactic and, needless to add, another flop. The B-side this time was a Wood-Lynne collaboration called "My Marge," a '20s-style joke from *Message from the Country*.

By this time, the *UA Split Ends* collection had come out, containing the *Message from the Country* album minus "Don't Mess Me Up," "Ben Crawley Steel Company" and "My Marge." Substituted instead were both sides of the first two UA singles and "Tonight." Lynne's "Down on the Bay" is another killer rocker, making for quite an exciting album; assiduous searching of cut-out bins should yield a copy. Except for the release by A&M in mid-1974 of *The Best of the Move*, featuring only one Lynne track, this was the end of Move releases.

Following *Split Ends* however, other things began to appear. June 1972 saw the first official ELO release, "10538 Overture." It's an odd, semi-classical/mystical piece, featuring Wood's overdubbed cellos and French horn by Bill Hunt. It can be stated fairly that the best material from the first ELO LP, *No Answer*, which followed the release of the single by several months, was Lynne's. Wood's songs were just too ponderous and clumsy to be very appealing. Such Lynne pieces as "Mr. Radio" and "Queen of the Hours" have a beautiful baroque quality; his voice sounds lost and lonely, and the strings in his songs add a stately, ancient air to the ethereal melodies.

Although "10538 Overture" and *No Answer* were auspicious debuts, ELO didn't really get going until the release of a second album and single—"Roll Over Beethoven," from *ELO II*. It reached number six in the UK charts, but only 42 here. It was enough, however, to gain ELO a significant FM following. By this time (May 1973), they had revamped their lineup to include Mike De Albuquerque on bass, Richard Tandy (a songwriter friend from the Move days) on keyboards, Wilf Gibson on violin, and two cellists, Mike Edwards and Colin Walker. Wood had

departed to pursue his big band-rock concept in a new group, Wizzard, leaving Lynne as the clearly-defined leader of the group.

*ELO II* shows a radical change in sound. The recording quality and production was superlative; gone were the "horrible whistling, banging and farting noises" (as Lynne described them in an interview), and in their place were majestic, soaring passages of symphonic richness. There are only five songs on the LP but each one is constructed like a classical piece, with themes that keep recurring and variations that build into stunning climaxes. "Kuiama" is the cryptic story of a soldier's confrontation with a victim of the war he is fighting and the ultimate resolution of his moral dilemma. It's an eleven-minute masterpiece.

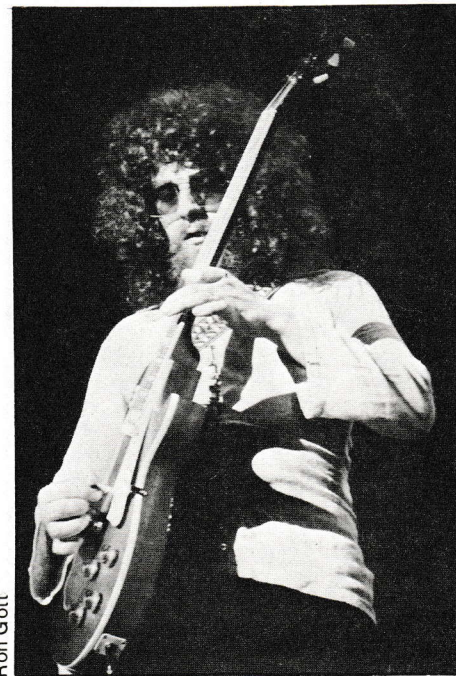
ELO began to tour a bit (though on the bottom half of bills) and did some guest shots on TV. However, it was not until the release of their third album, *On the Third Day*, and their single, "Showdown," that they got any heavy AM airplay. An appealing R&B number reminiscent of "I Heard It through the Grapevine," "Showdown" was a minor hit; it was even covered by Odia Coates, protégé of Paul Anka, who did a funkier version than ELO.

*On the Third Day* represents a compromise between the songwriting styles Lynne was experimenting with. Though he has since emphatically rejected the second album's structure ("I find it boring and pretentious"), he retained the symphonic organization by linking together several songs in a suite, rather than one long piece. Side one of the UK pressing of *On the Third Day* contains a sort of mini-concept, consisting of "Ocean Breakup," "King of the Universe," "Bluebird Is Dead," "Oh No Not Susan," and "New World Rising"/"Ocean Breakup Reprise." The US pressing tacks on the single of "Showdown" right after these, spoiling the coherence a bit.

Side two contains the second single taken from the LP, "Ma-Ma-Ma Belle," which is a great heavy-metal piece reminiscent of "Do Ya." This too was covered; Earthquake performed it live and it appears on their *Rockin' the World* album. Also found on the second side of *On the Third Day* is the ELO treatment of a genuine classical piece by Edvard Grieg, "In the Hall of the Mountain King." (This furnished the lead-in for a rousing version of "Great Balls of Fire" in their stage act at the time.)

By mid-1974, ELO were topping the bill in various locations. A live album was planned, and at a Long Beach show it was announced that this was to be "the" concert. Although UA did give the proposed album its own catalogue number, *The Night the Light Went On in Long Beach* was only released in Germany, on Warner Bros. ELO delivered a fine performance but the recording quality is actually worse than many bootlegs. Material from this LP has appeared on the B-sides of the last three UK singles, and the live "10538 Overture" (with its teasing, truncated "Do Ya" riff in the middle) is the American B-side of "Evil Woman."

Once the fourth LP, *Eldorado*, was released in October 1974, ELO began to catch the attention of a significant number of pop



Ron Gott

listeners. The first single, "Can't Get It Out of My Head," became a big hit—their first Top Ten entry in the US—but once again the equally strong follow-up "Boy Blue" did not. At this point, however, their concerts could be counted on to sell out and their audiences had grown to encompass fans of all pop persuasions, instead of the more exclusive hardcore Move followers they had previously attracted.

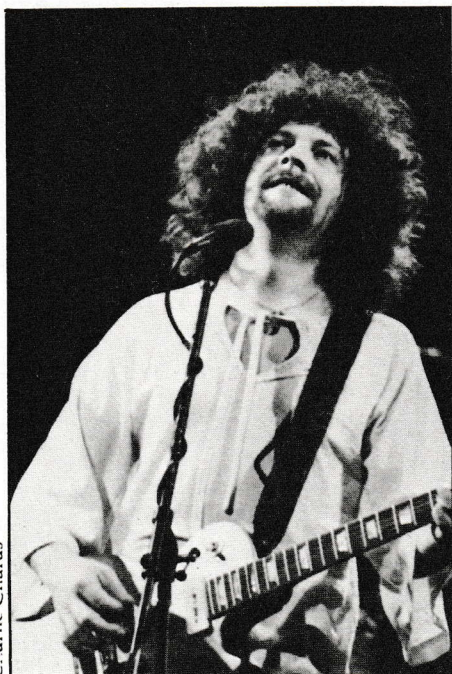
*Eldorado* continued the evolution of the suite format of their albums. Each track could be readily distinguished as an individual song, rather than just a portion of the side. "Eldorado," the title track, and "Mister Kingdom" are the two most orchestral tracks; "Boy Blue," "Poor Boy" and "Illusions in G Major" fall into the rocker category; and "Nobody's Child" is a little foray into a sophisticated '30s blues/jazz mode.

After a 10-month wait, October 1975 saw the first new ELO material since the flop of the "Boy Blue" single. In the UK, prospects were dim for commercial success. Their new British label, Jet Records, was leery of spending too much on their promotion, since *Eldorado* sold an embarrassing 28,000 copies there as opposed to more than 600,000 here. A battery of lawyers extricated them from their UK and European Warner Bros. contract after many expensive months of wrangling; apparently the band and their management blamed Warners' publicity (or lack of it) for the album's failure in England. Nevertheless, *Face the Music* came out first in the US, and gave encouraging signs to Jet that it would do well there, too. In fact, it rocketed up the charts, and when "Evil Woman" was pulled as the single... The rest, as they say, is history.

*Face the Music* is one of the more uneven ELO releases. The dreadful disco "Evil Woman" was followed by an equally lame nonentity called "Strange Magic," which has also proved a huge hit. An additional curiosity is the quirky "Down Home Town," which sports a twangy bluegrass

\*"Do Ya"—United Artists Music Co., Inc./Jet Music Incorporated/Chappell Music Co. (ASCAP)





Charlie Charas

vocal and—shades of Silver Convention—a shrill gospel chorus consisting of "gotta get down, gotta get down." Thankfully, the whole thing is rescued by some powerful rockers like "Poker" and the relentless drive of "Nightrider." Also, there is the catchy instrumental opening of "Fire on High" (with more reversed vocal tracks, Bevan this time), and two absolutely brilliant cosmic wonders called "Waterfall" and "One Summer Dream." These last two prove that Lynne can still write stunningly beautiful melodies.

The lineup of the band now differed from **On the Third Day** by the replacement of bassist De Albuquerque by Kelly Groucutt, who joined up just in time for the Fall 1974 **Eldorado** tour. Wilf Gibson had left after the second album to be replaced by the extraordinary Mik Kaminsky, whose solos on the violin have been a mainstay of their live act. Hugh MacDowell replaced cellist Colin Walker, who also left after the second album. Mike Edwards, the other cellist, quit just before **Face the Music** came out, and was replaced by Melvyn Gale.

During the time between the failure of "Boy Blue" in January and the release of **Face the Music** in October, some interesting ELO offshoots appeared. The first of these was a catchy pop collaboration between Del Shannon and Lynne on Island Records, called "Cry Baby Cry," which was no relation to the Beatles' song. It features nice vocal backing by Lynne and a production by Shannon and ELO assistant Dan Bourgoise. Shannon and Lynne recorded several other songs, but only one, "The Ghost," was released, and that only in Australia.

In May of 1975 Bevan recorded a single for Jet covering the old Sandy Nelson hit "Let There Be Drums," with Lynne on guitar and Roy Wood allegedly sitting in on sax. As Bevan described the record, "It should be a good one for the discos." Just what we've all been waiting for.

In September, barely a month before **Face the Music** was released, a record that seemed too ridiculous to believe was hovering around 14th place in the UK charts.

"Funky Moped," by Birmingham comedian Jasper Carrott, is the saga of a wimp who likes to pedal around on his little motorcycle despite all the laughs and threats from bullies. It was produced by Lynne and features him on lead guitar, Bevan on drums, and Tandy on keyboards. The real reason it was a hit, though, had nothing to do with the foolish A-side; the B-side, "Magic Roundabout," was an off-color satire of a popular British kiddie TV show. That was a great favorite at pubs; no one played the "Moped" side except the BBC.

Most recently, former bassist De Albuquerque has surface in the backing band of Maxine Nightingale, and played on her hit "Right Back Where We Started From." Strings for that single, as well as for the album, were arranged by none other than former ELO violinist Wilf Gibson.

ELO have now reached a critical point in their recording career. Now that the commercial success they richly deserve has been attained, where can they go? As numerous scribes have pointed out, nine times out of ten a band sounds better when it's poor and unheard-of. Regrettably, ELO does not seem to be the exception to this rule. They have had their greatest success by simply leaping on the current wave of disco music. As a result, people in the audience in Los Angeles seemed to have come only to hear "Evil Woman," completely ignorant of things like "Kuiama" from **ELO II**. Will ELO completely forsake their own development and maturity to wind up wrecked and out-of-fashion when the godawful disco craze finally blows over once and for all? The recent re-release of "Showdown" seems to be another step in this direction, exhuming their most disoriented number prior to "Evil Woman."

The latest ELO action has just appeared, namely **A New World Record**, as described by Bev Bevan in the interview with him. At this early date, it's a bit difficult to appraise it fully, but it strikes one as being an especially good mix of the same sort of stuff they have been recording for the last few years. The songs are interesting and varied with bases touched in Chuck Berry rockland, disco country, and the soft-ballad-cum-classical pieces that have become one of ELO's trademarks. For whatever reason, they have actually included a version of "Do Ya" which sounds like a Sweet-ened version with violins. It's not really a new interpretation, it's more of a translation, an update. The album has one obvious hit single, "Livin' Thing," which should be rocketing up the charts while the presses are rolling with this issue. It's not as horrible as "Evil Woman," but there seems to be a definite pattern to the songs that ELO has hits with. It has the androgynous choir on shrill backup vocals and a repetitive chorus, but it's fairly listenable anyway.

If ELO is a band of trends going in different directions at the same time, then I would venture to suggest that this **New World Record** is the best collection of ELO trends yet. For a band that is basically treading water, this is a record of sideways progression that is somehow moving forward.

—IR

# TALK TAL

Interview by Dave Schulps and Ira Robbins

TP: I guess a good place to start is the beginning. What are your feelings about the Move?

BB: I have no feelings at all.

TP: The reason we ask is because your liner notes for the A&M Move reissue seem to show a certain fondness for the old days.

BB: I just thought I'd finish it off once and for all. By now, I've talked about it so long that I've got no inspiration to discuss it at all. My memory's not even that good.

TP: What would you like to talk about?

BB: How about ELO?

TP: OK. How would you compare the new album with previous work?

BB: I think it's the best. I suppose it's similar to **Face the Music** in the general sound.

TP: When ELO started, it was a concept band as far as the media was concerned. Did you and Jeff and Roy have a concept when you formed it?

BB: Mainly, we were bored with the Move and we had the studio time so we decided to mess about with cello and violins. There was no set idea. Some of that album worked, and some is embarrassingly bad. I disregard the first album. As far as I'm concerned, we started with **ELO II**.

TP: What do you figure is the general thrust of ELO these days? The group's been successful at so many different things—disco, progressive, AM . . .

BB: We don't plan albums to be disco, or commercial, or anything—Jeff just writes what he feels. I think it's really good that we've been accepted by everyone—there's not too many bands like that. Well, the Beatles, everybody liked them.

TP: What do you see ELO evolving into?

BB: Everything's gone right so far. It's been a gradual rise. No one could call us an overnight success—we've been touring here for over three years. Each album sells more than the last, and as long as that keeps up . . . We once had the ambition to have a gold album, and now the last three have all been gold, so . . . Once we dreamed of playing to ten thousand people, now we've done that, but we don't like playing in stadiums because it doesn't suit the music. We've got to play places with good acoustics.

TP: What about the personnel changes? Is the group loose that way?

BB: It's not loose any more—we've had the same seven guys in the band for 18 months now. We wanted a very tight group like this—it just took a while to find the right formation. We reckon we've found it now. In the past, it was always personality things—we've always had good players in the band, but it's important to get guys that you get on with as well.

TP: What's happened to the people that have come and gone from ELO?



# KIN' with BEV BEVAN

## ELO's drummer takes center stage



Ira Robbins

BB: Roy Wood seems to have become a hermit lately. Mike Albuquerque did a second solo album, but it hasn't been released yet, I think. The other guys are doing session work, which is mostly what they were doing before they played with ELO. Mike Edwards, the cellist, quit to become a mailman. He said he couldn't stand the pressure of being on the road. Now he's a traveling minstrel.

### Stick Talk

TP: You have a fairly identifiable drum sound. Who are your influences?

BB: I like Bonham's drumming more than anyone else's. I like really powerful drummers. I'm very loud on stage—I don't know if I hit harder than anyone else, but I like loud players, like Ian Paice.

TP: Why do you point your sticks down?

BB: Only on my left hand. I use double-ended sticks—they're more like baseball bats. I broke my left wrist playing soccer, and it's a bit weak. I used to drop too many sticks, so I adopted this style, which is pretty weird. I keep a good grip on the stick this way. It's also very powerful for rimshots, which I do all the time. That's probably something that isn't copyable—it rips your hand to pieces.

TP: Did you ever have any difficulty playing drums in a group that is very light and delicate at times?

BB: I use a different technique on record than I do on stage. I play very simple on record because there's so much going on. A lot of messy drum breaks and drum solos all the time would spoil the whole thing. On stage, I'm a lot looser. I play what I want, and I put a lot more into it.

### Song Talk

TP: What was the basis for the title of the "10538 Overture"?

BB: The original idea was taken from a neighbor that Jeff's parents had. He was a bit lacking in the brains department. He was a really weird guy—he thought that he could fly. You'd hear crashes from next door—he'd taken off from the ceiling or something. He used to walk around the

Continued on page 24

## ELO DISCOGRAPHY

NO ANSWER  
ELO II  
ON THE THIRD DAY  
ELDORADO  
FACE THE MUSIC  
THE NIGHT THE LIGHT WENT ON IN LONG BEACH  
OLÉ ELO  
SHOWDOWN  
A NEW WORLD RECORD  
10538 Overture/First Movement  
10538 Overture/Marston Moor  
Roll Over Beethoven/Queen of the Hours  
Showdown/In Old England Town  
Ma Ma Ma Belle/Daybreaker  
Ma Ma Ma Belle/Oh No Not Susan  
Showdown/Roll Over Beethoven  
Can't Get It Out of My Head/Illusions in G Major  
Boy Blue/Eldorado  
Evil Woman/One Summer Dream  
Evil Woman/10538 Overture (live)  
Strange Magic/New World Rising  
Nightrider/Daybreaker (live)  
Showdown/Daybreaker  
Living Thing/Ma Ma Ma Belle

US  
UA UAS-5573  
UA LA-040  
UA LA-188  
UA LA-339  
UA LA-546  
(German only) Warners K56058  
UA LA-630  
NR  
UA LA-679  
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Harvest SHVL 797  
Harvest SHVL 806  
Warners K 56021  
Warners K 56090  
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(German only) Warners K56058  
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Harvest SHSP 4037  
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Harvest HAR 5053  
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Harvest HAR 5063  
Harvest HAR 5077  
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