

The ELO Story

Jeff Lynne was born in industrial Birmingham, England, on December 30, 1947. He grew up in the then-new Shard End City Council housing estate, a high-density residential development built on the eastern edge of the city right after the Second World War, with his parents Philip and Nancy.¹ He had a brother and two sisters.² Lynne's grandparents in his father's side were vaudevillian performers.³ More than thirty years later, Lynne would pay tribute to his birthplace in the ELO song "All Over the World," which mentions Shard End alongside other cities like London, Paris, Amsterdam, Rio de Janeiro, and Tokyo.

Lynne was a Brummie, a nickname for those blessed with the notoriously thick local Birmingham accent.⁴ Brummie is shorthand for *Brummagem*, the popular West Midlands way of pronouncing Birmingham.⁵ Brummie also has an unfortunate alternative dictionary definition: "counterfeit, cheap, and showy."⁶ The accent, which not everyone in the city shares, has even been described as representing the least intelligent dialect in the British Isles.⁷

Lynne grew up listening to Del Shannon, Roy Orbison,⁸ Chuck Berry, and The Shadows records.⁹ His parents did not always approve. About Roy Orbison's "Only the Lonely" playing on the radio, Jeff said "[t]hey were complaining that it was too sexy, or something, but that voice just made the hairs go up on my neck."¹⁰ At age thirteen, Lynne attended a concert by Del Shannon at Birmingham Town Hall, and from that point on dedicated his life to music.¹¹ He noticed immediately that live performances didn't come off like radio airplay of the songs.¹² The drummer's cymbals in Del's band, he remembered, "sounded nothing like they did on record."¹³ This didn't prevent him from pledging lifelong allegiance to Shannon.¹⁴ Del Shannon cut a rather rigid presence on the stage, just as Lynne would over the course of his own career, but he excelled in delivering brilliant vocals and guitar playing on such chart-topping singles as "Runaway" and "Hats Off to Larry."¹⁵ Said Lynne in an interview forty years later of his childhood heroes, "Those recordings – the atmosphere, the sound! I just can't account for the skill of the session guys who used to play them. If it was exactly as they tell me, they'd just walk in, learn the songs, have a three-hour session, and do it. [I don't know] how they thought of all those fantastic riffs and brilliant drum breaks in that short period of time. They must have been of a much higher standard than we are today."¹⁶

Lynne's father, who opted instead for a steady career as a street-paver for the Birmingham highway maintenance department,¹⁷ was a great admirer of Chopin, and encouraged Jeff to take a few piano lessons.¹⁸ Chopin's introspective *Fantasia Impromptu in C Sharp Minor* may have been an influence in his later song "Julie Don't Live Here Anymore." His father also got him placed in a boy's choir, and purchased first a plastic guitar with one string ("I thought it was very good, [but] I never knew about chords"),¹⁹ and later a Spanish guitar that "blew" his mind.²⁰ Jeff picked up both acoustic guitar and piano easily by ear, and practiced endlessly in the front room of his house at 368 Shard End Crescent.²¹

"My dad could play along with one finger to classical tunes and harmonise with stuff on the radio," Jeff remembered. "[B]ut he never got a chance to learn anything because he had to go out and support four kids. He taught me one great thing, though. One day, we were going down the street and there was one of those big steel pipes sitting in the road, about 40 foot long and four foot high. And he said to me, 'Listen to this.' And he leant into the pipe and went Aah aah aah aah, a note at a time, and it turned into a chord with all this reverb. I had a go, and this great big chord came back. It was amazing. That was my first experience of reverb and harmony."²² Jeff also began recording his playing on a small tape player.²³

Birmingham in Lynne's youth was brimming with talented and wannabe musicians. When Ray Thomas of The Krew Cats (later, singer and composer for the Moody Blues) returned in November 1963 from a band tour in Hamburg and northern Germany he found pandemonium: "There were about two hundred and fifty groups, half thought they were Cliff Richard & The Shadows and the other half thought they were The Beatles."²⁴ Talent scouts from labels, particularly Decca, were swarming the city looking for the next

breakout group. Locally famous Brum groups included The Applejacks, The Rockin' Berries, The Rest, and The Dominettes.²⁵

The Rockin' Hellcats was the first band put together by Lynne, then 16, with three other Birmingham teenagers: Robert Reader, 15, David Walsh, 16, and David Watson, 15, in 1963.²⁶ Reader and Walsh were students at Anderlea Boys Secondary School,²⁷ where several other young pop musicians emerged, including The Bobcats band members David Cowley, Gary Hedges, and Paul Willington.²⁸ Watson was a boyhood chum from Shard End Crescent.²⁹ The Hellcats played Spanish guitars exclusively before scraping together a whopping 300£ to purchase a drum set and electric instruments.³⁰ ("And we need more yet," said Lynne to a local news reporter.)³¹ Before these instruments had been purchased, Walsh helped keep the beat with a drummer's practice pad, which caused him to suggest the band be renamed The Handicaps.³² To avoid the suggestion of disregard for the disabled, they soon changed the name again to just Andicaps.³³

The switch to electric guitars and drums led to their ejection from band member's houses.³⁴ "Too much noise for our parents and the neighbours," the Andicaps admitted.³⁵ And so Walsh's father allowed the band to practice three times a week at the Shard End Community Centre at 170 Packington Avenue,³⁶ where there is today a rather tidy recording studio,³⁷ and also arranged for their first paid performance at a Centre dance.³⁸ "When the curtains opened, Jeff was as white as a sheet, and sweating," recalled friend Geoff "Jake" Commander of another neighborhood band The Lawmen.³⁹ The gig yielded the band the tidy sum of five pounds.⁴⁰ Becoming ever more popular, The Andicaps played regularly at the Centre on Friday nights,⁴¹ at one point playing "in aid of spastics."⁴²

The Andicaps also began attending the shows of other local bands.⁴³ Birmingham had dozens of pubs where performances could be carefully studied. One of the most accessible was The Harlequin. "The Harlequin Pub was roughly halfway between my house and Jeff's," noted David Walsh years later. The pub was constructed atop the farm home of Shard End's "most infamous resident" Abraham Thornton, accused of murdering twenty-year old Mary Ashford in 1817. The Ashford murder and subsequent events led the Crown to abolish two ancient legal rights: the right of a close relative to demand a retrial even when a defendant is acquitted, and the defendant's right to defend himself by challenging that relative to a duel (so called "trial by battle").⁴⁴ Upon such a foundation, the band was born.

Recalled Walsh, "The Modernaires were the resident band" at The Harlequin, "and many other groups also played there on Tuesday nights. All the Andicaps were too young to get in so me and Jeff would hang around the doors outside immediately adjacent to the bandstand and were able to get a good listen. It also afforded the opportunity to talk to the bands when they loaded and unloaded their gear into the pub. We were soon able to blag our way in and always stood 'nerdlike' right in front of the band so Jeff could see what 'Mo' (Maurice Jones) was playing on lead and I could drool over the subtleties and completely effortless relaxed style of Tony Finnister's playing."⁴⁵

At first the band played only instrumental versions of Shadows tunes.⁴⁶ Lynne did not sing, and regardless the band had no money for mikes and an amplifier.⁴⁷ Jeff soon began to compose new songs for the band and disclosed his appreciation for classical music.⁴⁸ The first song he wrote was simply called "Andicapped."⁴⁹ He also penned an arrangement of Tchaikovsky's *Swan Lake* called "Saturday Night at the Duck Pond."⁵⁰ (This tune was likely similar to the song of same name by The Cougars that briefly charted in 1963.)⁵¹ In 1964 The Andicaps extended their performances to include covers of Beatles songs, which made an immediate impact on Jeff and the band.⁵² The band's musical debt to the Beatles is immediately recognizable on the band's original song "You Make Me Happy."⁵³

The band's popularity grew to include Saturday matinee performances between film showings at the 2,000-seat suburban Handsworth Regal Cinema on Soho Road.⁵⁴ The original band members eventually agreed that they needed a regular singer, and brought in John Kerton to fill this new role as front man.⁵⁵ Several other young musicians cycled through the band as original band members graduated from school

(Jeff himself dropped out instead) and found other pursuits.⁵⁶ Walsh in 1964 was the first to leave.⁵⁷ Tired of squabbles with his bandmate Lynne, Walsh found another band.⁵⁸ "Jeff and I were always falling out," he remembered, "and I was propositioned to join The Boulevards who were rightly regarded as the best band on the Shard End/Kinghurst estate."⁵⁹

Reader left in 1964 as well.⁶⁰ To replace Walsh and Reader, Lynne tapped drummer Kevin "Kex" Gorin on drums and bass guitarist Dave Merrick.⁶¹ David Watson's brother Willie briefly played harmonica with the band in 1964, and the new group managed a second-place finish in the local Band of the Year competition.⁶² Lynne at the time had finished his secondary education at fifteen,⁶³ and begun supporting himself on a number of odd jobs – painter's apprentice, auto parts salesman.⁶⁴ None held his attention for very long.⁶⁵

Still, Jeff increasingly found his place in the band confining, and left for blues band The Chads just after Christmas 1964, where he replaced lead guitarist Mick Adkins.⁶⁶ Adkins had decided to marry and settle down, selling his Fender Stratocaster for fifty pounds and finding work as an electrician.⁶⁷ Now without Lynne, the Andicaps soldiered on for a few more years, touring in Germany and Lapland with new members Jake Commander, Malcolm Garner, and Mike Heard before hanging it up in 1968.⁶⁸

The Chads, founded in 1959 as the Sundowners, were an American-style rock-and-roll and blues band in the process of regrouping after a humiliating tour in which their promoter convinced them to wear green tights and pointed shoes, carry swords, and style themselves as Robbie Hood (Reg Calvert) and his Merry Men.⁶⁹ The band was relieved to find a guitarist with Lynne's talent. Remembered Adkins, "After I left they advertised for a lead guitarist. On the day of the audition, loads turned up most of them crap. So they packed up and where [sic] about to go home. It was pissing down with rain and Jeff rolled up soaked to the skin with his guitar in a plastic shopping bag. All the way from Shard End on the bus. The lads felt sorry for him so they set up the gear again to give him a try. It was obvious even then that he was good. So he joined them that night."⁷⁰

Besides Lynne, members of The Chads were Keith Harrison (drums), Joe Parsons (bass guitar), Keith Warrender (guitar), and John Williams (vocals).⁷¹ Lynne played lead guitar with the band in 1965, but again did not sing because, in the words of Mick Adkins, he remained "to [sic] shy."⁷² That year the Chads made an acetate record of four songs at Tettlows Recording Studio in Birmingham.⁷³ The first song was wholly instrumental, a cover of the Booker T. & The MGs' song "Green Onions."⁷⁴ The other three were "Hugging and Tugging the Line," "Short Dress Women," a cover of the Muddy Waters song, and "Preaching the Blues," a cover of the Son House song.⁷⁵ They represent perhaps the earliest extant recordings of Jeff Lynne's guitar-playing talent.⁷⁶

The Chads musically were located squarely in the middle of the emerging Brumbeat sound, even holding rehearsals in a Birmingham scout hut in the historic suburb of Acocks Green,⁷⁷ but they actually played most of their gigs in Coventry⁷⁸ – so many in fact that they were considered a local band there.⁷⁹ Lynne also joined Coventry band The Mad Classix for what amounted to three weeks, at the end of which time they lost all their band gear when their touring van was stolen.⁸⁰ Lynne also briefly played guitar with The Chantells in 1964-65, and with pop psychedelic band Tinkerbells Fairydust in 1965.⁸¹ With Tinkerbells Fairydust, Lynne wrote the song "Follow Me Follow," the original version of which is now lost. A version recorded by the band without Lynne's involvement later found its way onto the B-side of the band single "Sheila's Back In Town." Fairydust singer and guitarist Steve Maher recalled that the band "wanted to record it after Jeff played it to us. The first demo we did was just an acoustic guitar version with vocals. We recorded a demo with Jeff to try and convince Decca management that we should include the track. But they didn't seem very interested and wanted us to record a different song. So then we took it to a better recording demo, this time without Jeff singing on it. And we took it to our producer to listen to. He liked the song and then we recorded it properly the following week at the main studio. We really wanted it to be the next single. But this was not really going to happen as Decca would not allow us a decent budget to do the song properly. We wanted an orchestra. And I never really liked the version that we

finally recorded, which Decca insisted in making for the B-side of the single.”⁸² In March 1966, Jeff wrote “I Need Your Love,” a B-side for the single “Very Last Day” by the Norwegian group Wizard, then playing in Birmingham on tour.⁸³

Lynne moved on again, responding by public telephone to a *Birmingham Evening News* advertisement by The Nightriders for a “keen young guitarist.”⁸⁴ Lynne admired the technique of the band’s original lead guitarist Big Al Johnson – who left the band to Roy Wood in 1964 – and found himself invited to an audition by drummer Roger Spencer.⁸⁵ At the tryout, Lynne sang a rendition of Wilson Pickett’s “In the Midnight Hour” while strumming his guitar.⁸⁶ After the audition he returned to his job at an auto parts store. A week later he got the call that he was in the band.⁸⁷

Jeff Lynne played with The Nightriders for the first time at The Belfry Club in Sutton Coldfield on April 4, 1966.⁸⁸ The Nightrider’s had just lost their frontman Mike Sheridan, and after recording one final single and B-side with Lynne at Handsworth’s Hollick & Taylor Studios for the Polydor label, “It’s Only The Dog/Your Friend,” with drummer Roger “Ollie” Spencer singing vocals, the band members agreed that a complete break with the past was in order.⁸⁹ They briefly became known as the Idyll Race, before settling on The Idle Race.⁹⁰

Lynne would later immortalize his collaboration with the band in the song “Nightrider” on the *Face The Music* LP. “From £6 a week, I was suddenly on 15 quid, and I didn’t have to get up,” Jeff remembered. “On the Monday [after getting hired] my mum comes bounding up the stairs as usual, ‘Come on, get out of bed, you lazy sod!’ And I said, ‘No, listen mum, I haven’t got to get up today – or ever again – I’m a professional musician now.”⁹¹

Lynne flourished with the Idle Race, becoming the band’s chief songwriter and, finally, lead vocalist.⁹² The band played nearly every night. Remembered drummer Ollie Spencer, “It was just non-stop groups. I’ve known a week where we’ve done fourteen gigs. So you do seven pubs and seven nightclubs. You do your gig, get your stuff in the van and go across town and end up doing all these nightclubs that were going on all around. Perhaps a one-off but we did them all.”⁹³ The band played on bills with such noted acts as The Who, The Move, The Spencer Davis Group, Pink Floyd, The Moody Blues, Yes, and Tyrannosaurus Rex. BBC DJs John Peel and Kenny Everett counted themselves as fans.

The bands had moved away from rock-n-roll rhymes and R&B songs about love and loss, in favor of weird, proto-psychedelic tunes about surrealistic skies, freak shows, and strange medicinal preparations. The band attracted the friendship of musician Marc Bolan and future Queen guitarist Brian May.⁹⁴

All of this proved almost not enough. The band lost its contract with Polydor, but continued to record in London’s Advision Studios on New Bond Street – a favor granted by ex-Nightrider Roy Wood of the breakout proto-hippie band The Move.⁹⁵ The band signed with Liberty Records, and made their first single, “Here We Go Round the Lemon Tree” in 1967 with no involvement by Lynne.⁹⁶ The song, penned by Wood, became a B-side on The Move’s single “Flowers in the Rain.”⁹⁷ The single was not released in the United Kingdom, however, perhaps because the Idle Race did not want to appear to be a Move cover band, or maybe because Move producers were worried about fallout surrounding the Harold Wilson lawsuit (described below), which meant loss of royalties for the song.⁹⁸

Lynne’s first UK release with The Idle Race came in October 1967, a single called “Imposters of Life’s Magazine” with the B-side track “Sitting in My Tree.”⁹⁹ Both songs were composed by Lynne.¹⁰⁰ “Imposters” became a “turntable classic” on the radio, but generated miniscule sales.¹⁰¹ A second record, “The Skeleton and the Roundabout/Knocking Nails Into My House,” garnered more attention, in part because Lynne pronounced the word skeleton as “skelington,” a nod to Brum mispronunciation.¹⁰² Dave Thompson of *Goldmine Magazine* has called the pairing the “quintessential psych masterpiece” and “short stories in song that remain among Lynne’s most brilliantly realized compositions.” Lynne himself was not so sure: “‘Skeleton And The Roundabout,’ yeah, that was a weird sort of thing. I look back those

and I think, 'Oh!' I cringe because it's so strange, y'know. But then I think that was better because it was straight, not caring what anybody else thought about it, y'know, which is a good thing."¹⁰³ Neither single charted despite wide airplay.¹⁰⁴

"Skeleton" appeared on the Idle Race's first album, *The Birthday Party*, issued after months of recording in London's Advision studios in 1968.¹⁰⁵ Jeff wrote eleven of the album's thirteen songs.¹⁰⁶ The title track is about a woman reminiscing about sending out birthday party invitations to her friends. She can't figure out "how is it no one came." The song "I Like My Toys" is a rather bittersweet meditation on a parent's scolding of a sixteen year old who prefers playing with toy trains over getting a job. "Morning Sunshine" anticipates ELO tunes of the mid-1970s, mixing dense harmonies and languid guitar grooves over treacly lyrics about waking up in bed with a girlfriend. The inside cover artwork included a patchwork of photos of Brian Jones, Hughie Green, a number of Radio One DJs, as well as The Beatles, testament to the growing respect they were receiving by the music industry.¹⁰⁷ Live performances included psychedelic covers of "People are Strange" by The Doors, "Deborah" by T. Rex, "Born To Be Wild" by Steppenwolf, and Jimi Hendrix's "Purple Haze."¹⁰⁸

Lynne began producing the music he wrote and performed at this time as well. "At home I had a Bang & Olufsen tape recorder that did sound-on-sound, so you could start with a rhythm guitar, adding the piano by bouncing from the left to the right as you went along. Then you would add another instrument by bouncing from right to left and put the harmonies on, etc. I could get up to 20 tracks on it doing it this way. It sounded like shit; it was mostly hiss at the end of the day. But you could hear all these parts going at once, and I was fascinated by it, and it taught me how to produce. I realized that the first thing I had put on tap sort of disappeared, so I always had to put it back on again. The original rhythm guitar would be gone entirely, having gone down with each generation. So I'd put it back on and then that would sound like shit. So I'd wind up doing everything over again – on the same bit of tape, which you could practically see through by the time you were finished. When the Idle Race was asked to another album, I said, 'Well, I'll produce it. I know how to do that.' In any event, I did it. And I got away with it. Nobody said, 'Well, it should have a proper producer.' The second Idle Race record was my first official producer credit. That B&O was really small, about a foot wide. But I kept it in this great big box, with a couple of lights on it so it looked really impressive."¹⁰⁹

The psychedelic pop on *Birthday Party* did not sell well despite critical acclaim. "We didn't really have a proper manager and a direction to go in," said Jeff later, "but that was my apprenticeship."¹¹⁰ A second, self-titled album released in November 1969 was a personal disappointment for Lynne.¹¹¹ Not only had Lynne had written most of the songs, but had also decided to produce the album himself.¹¹² "Well Jeff, as always, whenever he did anything he knew what he wanted from the start and had it all in his head. That's why he's good at it – he can construct a song in his brain and it comes out, you know?" recalled Ollie Spencer. "He did demos and he had a little studio in his house in Shard End and he had a 'B and O'. This is all part of history. It was one of the first machines that you could double track on. It wasn't really a double track, but you could drop a track from the top of the tape onto the bottom so you could record two sounds together in stereo – I don't know how they did it but the machine was then able to mix the two together. You filled that, drop that down and so on so that slowly you built up the sound."¹¹³

The beatlesque "Come With Me" on *The Idle Race* became a personal favorite of George Harrison.¹¹⁴ Lynne also became adept at making his guitar sound like a violin. On "Big Chief Woolly Boshier," a tune about a Native American leader trying to protect his way of life, Lynne uses the violin-like whine of sped-up guitar fills to embody a crying child. "I think he had a Telecaster with a big knurled control knob to it and he'd switch the volume off," remembered Spencer. "And what you do is form your shape on the guitar and bash the guitar or play the string so that it resonates with no sound on, and as soon as you've hit it you bring the volume up. So instead of being 'Pdang' it's 'Mnyayh!' It's without the bang and you just get the ring of the note. Because you bring the volume of the note up you also get a violin effect. I think he used it when he did *Cloud Nine* with George Harrison."¹¹⁵

An ambitious Lynne expressed frustration with the industry as *The Idle Race* sank out of sight. "The scene is in a bit of a rut," he said. "You've got to be on Top of the Pops to get a hit. I'm sick of it really, it's a racket. Everybody in the world seems to say that's a good record, it should be in the charts, but that's it. We can't get that final thing that will get us in the chart and that's what we want. We've got a London agent and London management so I don't think it's because we come from Birmingham. 'Come With Me' sounds commercial to me and to other people, we get the radio plays but we just can't get any TV exposure. It's becoming a bit of a drag. It's a rut that seems like a dead end. We always get a good reception in the colleges and clubs because we're 'underground,' I suppose, but we don't always want to do that. You get much more money if you've got a hit and the colleges will still like us because John Peel plays us. Fairport Convention are in the charts yet they're still liked by the colleges. The colleges are so important. It's a bigger scene than all the ballrooms now and yet we're a pop group. I write pop songs. We include about half of our material on stage, and the other half is our versions of American stuff which we emphasise and build up a bit. It gives you a bit of freedom. No, I'm not really that depressed, I'm just a bit narked with it all you know."¹¹⁶

Spencer suggested later that poor management decisions might have had something to do with the failure of the band to generate record sales. "One of the biggest mistakes was that we changed agents. We saw their acts on Top Of The Pops with The Tremeloes and Fleetwood Mac and all these sorts and we thought we'd go with them. And they collapsed the week we went with them, totally fell apart."¹¹⁷ Still, he admits that the rock gods might have simply been fickle. "I just think that magic pop single thing never quite happened. You can't explain but we weren't just quite on the ball."¹¹⁸

Despite the poor sales for records, the band built up an enormous fan base. "I was thick and I didn't realize," recalled Spencer. "We used to do this one place and I forget what it was called now and we'd get there and there was a queue around the block. And I thought that was the normal thing. We'd get inside and do the gig and then the next place would have a queue around the block and we just assumed that was the way it was. Not until years later, of course, did you realise that you'd got quite a following."¹¹⁹ But when lead singer Carl Wayne left the band in January 1970, Jeff accepted a standing invitation to join Wood and The Move.¹²⁰ The Idle Race limped along for a time, eventually disbanding after the release of a third album in 1971.¹²¹ Ollie Spencer became a professional comedian.

The Move formed in January 1966 from the remnants of three prior bands: Carl Wayne and The Vikings, Mike Sheridan's Nightriders, and Danny King and the Mayfair Set.¹²² Singer Carl Wayne, bassist Chris "Ace" Kefford, and drummer Beverley "Bev" Bevan had come from Carl Wayne and The Vikings. Roy Wood, a guitarist, joined The Move from the Nightriders. Trevor Burton, another Move guitarist, came from the Mayfair Set.¹²³

Bevan took up the drums after convincing a girl he fancied that he was in a band. He loved Elvis right down to his distinctive forelock, and especially "Jailhouse Rock."¹²⁴ Bevan played gigs while holding down a job at The Beehive department store, eventually joining the lineup with Denny Laine & The Diplomats.¹²⁵

Wayne joined the skiffle group The Vikings in 1961 as a second singer behind Keith Powell. Tensions emerged, and Powell left the band to form his own group called The Valets.¹²⁶ Wayne accompanied The Vikings on a six month tour of Germany, then returned to the Midlands to play gigs and record three singles on the Pye and ABC labels: "What's a Matter Baby," "This is Love," and "My Girl" (originally recorded by Otis Redding).¹²⁷ After a second tour of Dusseldorf and Cologne, the band settled in at The Cedar Club on Constitution Hill in Birmingham.¹²⁸ Here they occasionally played as an ensemble with other house bands The Mayfair Set and The Nightriders.

Several band members remember Ace Kefford and Trevor Burton making the first suggestion to form an independent band.¹²⁹ "[A]ll the local bands used to play there [the Cedar Club]," Wood remembered. "If we had a night off we used to go there anyway just to see the band and maybe steal a few ideas from them. We happened to be talking at the bar one night, saying that we were fed up being a human jukebox

and playing all the chart material. I mentioned that I had some songs written and a couple of the guys were interested in hearing them. It just went from there, really. When we actually got a bee in our bonnet about doing it we used to get up and jam there at the Cedar Club. I think most of the people could tell from that that we were going to do something. And that's how The Move came together.”¹³⁰ The idea may actually have originated with David Bowie, then lead singer of Davy Jones & The Lower Third. Bowie sat down with Trevor Burton of Mayfair Set and Ace Kefford of The Vikings and suggested they form their own band.¹³¹ Regardless, Wood derived the name “The Move” from the common thread that united the band members – each of them had left another band to join this new Brummie supergroup.¹³²

After eight weeks of rehearsal, the Move gave a debut performance in February 1966 at the Belfry Hotel in Stourbridge.¹³³ Moody Blues manager Tony Secunda heard about the band, and listened to them play in April. By May Secunda had signed the band members, moved them to London, and made them regular performers at the Marquee Club.¹³⁴ The Move covered American bands like The Byrds, Moby Grape, as well as Motown acts. Their onstage guests included such rock luminaries as Pete Townsend, Mick Jagger, and Keith Moon.¹³⁵ “I wanted [the band] to sound as original as possible,” remembered Wood. “I suppose the influences that we had were probably from the actual power point of view we wanted to be like the Who. Vocally we wanted to be like the Beach Boys, whatever was good at the time.”¹³⁶ “[I]t was fantastic then,” said Burton, “I mean, the power of the harmonies, that was the power of The Move, I thought. You know, the four-piece vocals on the front all the time, sometimes five-piece, when occasionally Bev joined in. That power of the vocals was its force, I think. More so than the instrumental side of it, which got better later on.”¹³⁷

By June the band had received a film projector and strobe lights, then a novelty, which they used in performances to display psychedelic patterns around the stage. The band played the Windsor Jazz & Blues Festival in August, alongside the Yardbirds, Cream, Small Faces, The Who, and The Spencer Davis Group. The band garnered positive reviews after the festival in both *The Observer* and *The Guardian*.¹³⁸

The Move’s ace-in-the-hole was master songwriter Roy Wood.¹³⁹ Like Jeff Lynne, Wood had become smitten at an early age by the music bug, but rather than classical music and choir, attended Little Richard and Gene Vincent concerts.¹⁴⁰ He learned the drums, and then the harmonica, but over a lifetime would learn dozens of other instruments.¹⁴¹ Said Wood in an interview, “The first thing I ever played was drums, when I was six years old. And then I suppose the first musical instrument I played was harmonica at 10 years old. My dad was a member of a local club and I used to get up and play there. There was a little trio with drums and piano and bass. I used to get up and play with them. I didn't start playing guitar until later on. I was probably about 14. I didn't get into playing the other instruments that I've been noted for playing until much later on. I was in The Move then and I used to actually collect old instruments. It's difficult to collect them without actually having a go and playing them so I just got into it by accident just through collecting them.”¹⁴²

Wood first played with the Brummie band Eddy and The Falcons in the early 1960s.¹⁴³ Then he joined Gerry Levene and The Avengers. “Within the first six months of having a guitar I was in a band because there were a lot of guys that lived in the local area that had guitars,” remembered Wood. “In those days if someone in your area had a guitar you found out about it. You went to get together with him and learn together 'cause there was always one guy who knew more chords than you did. Some of the first things I learned to play were instrumental tunes from bands like the Shadows and the Ventures, groups like that. When I eventually joined the Falcons we were playing American rock, Little Richard, and Chuck Berry.”¹⁴⁴ Wood played with The Avengers for only four months, covering Chuck Berry tunes and other rock-and-roll standards.¹⁴⁵ Perhaps the most noteworthy moment in the band’s history came on November 19, 1962, when The Avengers played in a “battle of the bands” promo against Liverpool’s local favorite band The Beatles.¹⁴⁶

Wood, still a teenager, then became a member of the Birmingham group Mike Sheridan and The Nightriders.¹⁴⁷ Before Lynne joined the group, the band had an ironclad contract with EMI, which

recorded a number of their songs, including "Take My Hand" with the B-side "Make Them Understand."¹⁴⁸ Wood toured with the group in Germany, where they took up residency at the Storyville Club in Duisburg.¹⁴⁹ Wood's contribution to the stage act involved donning a wig and doing a voice impersonation of Dusty Springfield.¹⁵⁰ He also began writing songs for the band.

"The first thing I started to write was instrumental tunes. When I was in the Falcons we played a few of those. I didn't really get around to writing songs until the Beatles became enormous and everyone was influenced by the Beatles then. I was one of those people."¹⁵¹ Wood began writing lyrics for songs while attending classes at Moseley College of Art.¹⁵² "I wrote a book which was fairy stories for adults with a bit of a weird twist at the end of the stories. Obviously in those days I had no contacts. I didn't really know what to do with it. Consequently I used a lot of those ideas for lyrics when we got the Move going. Stuff like 'Flowers In The Rain,' 'I Can Hear The Grass Grow.'"¹⁵³ Almost all the early Move songs were penned by Roy Wood and produced by Denny Cordell.¹⁵⁴

Bev Bevan had played first with the Nicky James Movement, then the R&B group Denny Laine and The Diplomats, The Senators, and The Vikings.¹⁵⁵ Bevan is still considered one of the most intense drummers to come out of the Midlands.¹⁵⁶ "I was the loudest drummer in the area at the time," he recalled later. "[D]rums are meant for hitting, as opposed to being tickled."¹⁵⁷ "With Denny Laine and Carl Wayne, our bands were just playing the hits and what people wanted to hear," Bevan remembered. "We'd play a lot of Beatles stuff and the audience really loved that. It was the easy option."¹⁵⁸ Difficulty finding open venues in Birmingham led The Diplomats to try their luck in Hamburg, just like the Beatles, where they played seven forty-five minute spots with short break in between from seven p.m. until two in the morning, and three hour gigs in weekend matinees.¹⁵⁹

Drummer John Bonham learned the art of drumming in part from Bev in the early 1960s.¹⁶⁰ Bev remembered one particularly memorable evening that ended in an unusual drum battle: "John and I were invited for dinner with Phil the guitarist out of Denny Laine & The Diplomats. He and his wife had a little terraced house in Tamworth and they'd never met John before. John asked if he should bring anything and I said, 'Oh, just bring a bottle of wine or something.' In typical Bonham fashion he turned up with Pat his wife and they had a cardboard box each. They must have brought two dozen beers, half-a-dozen bottles of wine, a bottle of brandy, and a bottle of Scotch. There was just so much booze. But then we did proceed to drink quite a lot of it, and we ended up round the dinner table, pretty smashed. John and I had this five-minute drum battle with serving spoons on the table. You can imagine the state of the table when they took the cloth off next day. It was totally covered in dents and scratches. But our hosts saw the funny side and didn't care. Phil actually said, 'I'll auction this at Sotheby's one day.'"¹⁶¹

The Move quickly became one of the most popular Birmingham bands, and also among the most difficult to pin down. The band played in various musical genres, including pop, psychedelic, progressive, fifties-style rock, and also C&W.¹⁶² Music journalist Alan Clayson has written, "The Move were to exemplify Midland pop's coming of age, circa 1966. Repertoire developed from soul and classic pop in 1965 changed into a diverting mixture of Californian acid rock and Roy Wood's compositions. The first indication that The Move were out of the ordinary came in March 1966 when *Midland Beat* frontpaged Wood gripping a banjar, his own invention that combined the properties of both sitar and banjo."¹⁶³

By November 1966 the band had amped up its performances considerably.¹⁶⁴ Like The Who, their performances routinely included the "demolition of various worldly goods,"¹⁶⁵ breaking televisions, flash bombs, chopping the heads off politically-themed mannequins (effigies of Hitler and Ian Smith, for instance), and taking an axe to a 1956 Chevy.¹⁶⁶ Their act was so "ferociously wild" at times that they were banned from several venues.¹⁶⁷ Vocalist Carl Wayne was especially gifted with ax-swinging ability.¹⁶⁸ "Oh yeah, I had the side of my shoe chopped off [by Wayne] once by accident, remembered Wood. "It was a close one (laughs). One thing I was really upset about was it used to look like we were smashing our gear up. I always loved my guitar and I wouldn't do anything to hurt it."¹⁶⁹

"At the end of the night I used to pack it away like a baby," said Wood. "On the back of the guitar I had this sort of foam pad made to stick on the back of my guitar so at the end of the night I could slide my guitar across the stage on its back and it wouldn't hurt it. But we did this thing at the Marquee and everybody got a bit carried away and I threw the guitar across the stage and (laughs) Bev picked his bass drum and cymbal up and threw them at the guitar and smashed it to little bits. I was almost in tears holding the neck of the guitar with strings and stuff hanging off it."¹⁷⁰

Despite it all, or maybe because of it all, The Move landed a record deal with Decca label Deram.¹⁷¹ Secunda made sure this event got noticed by hiring a topless woman who bent over as band members signed the contract.¹⁷² Secunda turned out to be a brilliant choice for the band. His management was guaranteed to get the band noticed.¹⁷³ The band's first Secunda-inspired "stunt," for instance, was to get the band to dress in gangster suits and carry around twelve-foot pieces of aluminum which they assembled into an "H-bomb" in the middle of Piccadilly Road in Manchester.¹⁷⁴ Secunda made sure the band got publicity by inciting the crowd with taunts: "It's disgraceful! They should be arrested!" and "Go on, Charlie get arrested! Go and kick that copper. Get arrested."¹⁷⁵

The Move's first album was self-titled.¹⁷⁶ The album arrived belatedly in April 1968 because of the theft of the master tapes.¹⁷⁷ The Move's first hit, "Night of Fear," rose as high as #2 on the charts in January 1967.¹⁷⁸ "Night of Fear" had as its central feature an arrangement of the 1812 Overture by Tchaikovsky.¹⁷⁹ "My parents were classical music fans. They always had classical music on when I went 'round to the house," remembered Wood. "It was probably just in the back of my mind somewhere. I knew it was a Tchaikovsky riff and I thought, well, everybody knows it. Maybe if the record starts off with that we might be sort of halfway there. The song's all right, it was never my favorite song. If I could have chosen it I would have picked another song to be the single. I wanted to use 'Disturbance' as the single because I thought that was probably more representative of the band."¹⁸⁰

A second single, "I Can Hear the Grass Grow," hit #5 in May 1967.¹⁸¹ "I Can Hear the Grass Grow" was considered classic psychedelic music, and supposed drug references incited media frenzy.¹⁸² Wayne later took opportunities to dispel the rumors.¹⁸³ "Roy's songs, they certainly weren't drug-driven," said Wayne. "They were fairy stories, kids' stories that he transferred to songs, to music. And I suppose what he ended up doing was going to the bottom of the barrel for things like 'Curly' – which was about a pig!"¹⁸⁴

A third single, "Fire Brigade," inspired by Eddie Cochran,¹⁸⁵ hit #3 in late 1967.¹⁸⁶ The story of the writing of Fire Brigade reveals just how on fire the band was in those days. "We'd played a gig in London and we went back to the hotel and Carl Wayne came up to me and said we've just been told that we're in the studio tomorrow and we've got to record a single, have you got one? I said, 'Well not on me. Not at the moment.' He produced a bottle of scotch out of his pocket and gave me the key to one of the hotel rooms because in those days we used to double up. We used to share because we couldn't really afford single rooms in those days. It was the first time I ever had my own room in a hotel. He produced this key and a bottle of scotch and said, 'Get on with it.'"¹⁸⁷

"The other guys went out for a drink before the pubs closed. It must have been about 11 o'clock at night and I just wrote all the way through the night. Then at about 8:30 in the morning the band came in and I played it to them and they just sang along with it and said, 'Great, let's go and do it.' They had to sort of hold me up to do the session."¹⁸⁸

Prime Minister Harold Wilson sued The Move over a promotional postcard for the band's #2 hit single "Flowers in the Rain."¹⁸⁹ The postcard depicted the PM in a "compromising situation" with his secretary, whom he was then suspected of carrying on an affair with.¹⁹⁰ The postcard read, "Disgusting, despised and despicable though Harold may be, beautiful is the only word to describe 'Flowers In The Rain' by the Move."¹⁹¹ A settlement was reached such that approximately 25,000 pounds in royalty payments received for the song were given over to two charities designated by Wilson: the British Spastics Society and Stoke Mandeville Hospital.¹⁹² Wood has never since received a penny for the song.¹⁹³ "Flowers in the Rain" also

holds the less ignoble distinction of being the first song ever played on BBC Radio 1 on September 30, 1967.¹⁹⁴

The band hoped to poke fun at the government with their next song "Vote for Me," recorded in November 1967 with Trevor Burton as lead singer, but a single was never released because, as Carl Wayne put it, "the record company bottled out."¹⁹⁵ Single-sided test pressings of the song do exist, and sell for £50 or more.¹⁹⁶ The song bears a remarkable similarity to the single "Yellow Rainbow," the first track on *The Move*.

The first Move album peaked at #15.¹⁹⁷ The album, on the Regal Zonophone label, was produced by Denny Cordell who first hit paydirt in 1966 with the track "Go Now!" for the album *The Magnificent Moodies* by the Moody Blues.

The "Flowers in the Rain" controversy caused the band to look for a new manager.¹⁹⁸ They hired Don Arden, who had vaulted such acts as The Nashville Teens, The Small Faces, and Amen Corner to stardom.¹⁹⁹ Beginning in November 1967 The Move toured the UK with The Jimmy Hendrix Experience, Pink Floyd, Amen Corner, Eire Apparent, The Outer Limits, and The Nice.²⁰⁰

The Move toured America in 1969 without stirring up more than a ripple of excitement from their record company or the fans.²⁰¹ "It was put together very cheaply on a shoe string," remembered Wood. "We went over and landed in New York. We hired one of those U-Haul trailer things and a ranch wagon and put our gear in the back and just drove all the way across to San Francisco stopping off and playing on the way; it was one of those. It was a good way to see America because I'd never been there before. It felt like we weren't being looked after too well. We played at the Whiskey in Los Angeles. I remember when we were onstage seeing this guy carrying Jim Morrison out on his shoulder. He was sort of flaked out. That was one for the books for me. A gig that I enjoyed playing was at the Fillmore West. We were on the same bill with Joe Cocker and Little Richard. It was a great show. We weren't in America very long. We didn't do more than a dozen gigs."²⁰²

At one point the band ran into redneck trouble. Said Wood, "We had to make a hasty exit from this truck stop place that we stopped off for something to eat in Texas. These cowboys came up and in those days they didn't like long hair on people. They came up and tried to pick a fight and I think our roadie took the bait. It ended up this one guy took his belt off and hit the roadie with it and we all made a hasty exit because they were big guys."²⁰³ Bev Bevan recalled the incident this way: "We got into one or two fights with these Texan cowboys with shaved hair and screwed on cowboy hats. They were still saying 'Are they boys or girls?' We could have gone down well there if we'd got over at the time of all the Texas smashing for a proper tour, but we kept putting it off until it was too late."²⁰⁴

The band recorded a demo of their UK #1 hit-single "Blackberry Way" in Lynne's parent's house.²⁰⁵ "The reason I did that is 'cause Jeff was the only person that I knew that had a mellotron in his front room and it was the only way in those days we could get string sounds and it was great. It was quite late at night. Jeff and I had been 'round the pub. I played him this idea I've got for a song and he says, 'Oh, why don't we put it down?' He's got a sound-on-sound tape machine made by B&O, Bang and Olufsen. We were working on it for a while and then decided to put this vocal on. And of course, Jeff's parents were sleeping in the room above the room that we were using. In order not to keep them awake I did the lead vocals kneeling on the floor with the microphone and Jeff and a couple of other guys had a pillow 'round my face so that they couldn't hear it upstairs. It was quite funny. And I was sort of laughing all the way through it."²⁰⁶

Trevor Burton left the band in 1969, shortly after the recording of "Blackberry Way." Noted Burton, "Really for me, up to 'Blackberry Way' it was good, I think. And then, Roy's songs, to me, just got sillier. He sort of went into his 'clown mode.'"²⁰⁷ "I'd had enough of the pop world, really. That falseness of being told who to be, what to be, where to be. I wanted my own life. Also, I wanted to play different music, I

wanted to go more down the bluesy road, play – I don't know what to call it – real music, as opposed to pop music. I had to do it.”²⁰⁸

At the time Lynne joined the group in 1970, The Move had just issued the critically acclaimed album *Shazam* and had been touring the cabaret circuit.²⁰⁹ Cabaret touring, however, and the Wood-penned song “Blackberry Way,” led to a parting of ways between Wayne and the band.²¹⁰ “It got really strange at one point because Carl always had an ambition to be a solo artist,” said Wood. “When we left Tony Secunda, I think Secunda signed us up to this guy Peter Walsh, who used to manage bands like Blue Mink and Marmalade and the Tremeloes, those sort of bands that did the cabaret circuit. He actually mistakenly put us on the cabaret circuit and it didn’t suit us at all.”²¹¹

Said Wood, “As we went along I think Carl actually started to enjoy it but I didn’t. I was getting more and more distant from the band because of it. I mean, it wasn’t all cabarets we played. It was probably one a week. I didn’t like it at all and neither did Rick Price. He was with us then. It’s not what the Move was about. When we did the American tour, myself and Carl had a lot of big disagreements about the way the band should be going. When we came back off the tour that’s when Carl decided to leave”²¹² Also “[h]e didn’t like to sing my songs,” Wood noted later.²¹³ Wayne remembers, “I left the group for several reasons. Towards the end it became like a marriage gone wrong. We were no longer getting kicks out of recording hit records, or touring. By then, it was all down to living with each other’s personality and we couldn’t manage it.”²¹⁴

The Move recruited Jeff Lynne as Wayne’s replacement, largely because of his friendship with Wood dating back to Nightriders gigs. Wood has said that “[t]he only reason Jeff joined was to be under the same roof as me because we’d had the idea of the Electric Light Orchestra since ‘Fire Brigade.’ The sort of songs I was writing then couldn’t be done properly with just three guitars and drums. I thought that if I’m going to be writing this sort of stuff, wouldn’t it be nice to reproduce it on stage?” Lynne had actually demurred the previous year, favoring his dominant role in The Idle Race, but made the change as the band’s success remained fleeting.²¹⁵ It is uncertain whether Lynne’s marriage to a schoolteacher, Rosemary, that year influenced his decision.²¹⁶

With Lynne, The Move recorded two albums: *Looking On* and *Message from the Country*.²¹⁷ The almost heavy metal tune “Brontosaurus,” the first recorded with Lynne for *Looking On*, peaked at #7.²¹⁸ Roy Wood’s glam rock image stuck during a BBC television performance of the song. “We had to go on and do ‘Brontosaurus’ and we had a rehearsal and we were all in the dressing room and I had this long sort of coat which was made of black and white triangles of material. I was a bit nervous. It was the first time I’d ever been the lead singer on TV properly. I was thinking that it was time for a new image. The guys went to the bar and I put this jacket on and it looked like there was something missing that should have went with the jacket. So I got my comb and I combed my hair out so it looked really wild. I went down to the makeup department and borrowed some black and white makeup and I made my face up to match the coat with triangles around the eyes and I put a star in the middle of my forehead and this was the creation of the Wizzard image really but I did it then. When we did the program I started rolling around the floor and biting the neck off my guitar and all that as you do. To begin with I didn’t feel comfortable doing it but I had a few large vodkas before I went on so I was all right. We had a great reaction from that. Up until the breakup of the Move that was the image that we portrayed.”²¹⁹

Message From the Country included the #7 hit song “California Man” in May 1972, and “Do Ya,” a minor hit in the U.S.²²⁰ California Man was meant as flat-out American-style rock. “I just felt it was time for Jeff and myself to rock ‘n’ roll,” said Wood. “His favorite artist at that time was Jerry Lee Lewis and mine was Little Richard, so I thought, I’m gonna write a rock ‘n’ roll song, which is what I did, and we treated it that way. It was like one singer meets another singer and it worked out all right.”²²¹

Jeff Lynne and Roy Wood claimed that their next band, Electric Light Orchestra, was an experiment – and a way to put The Move on temporary sabbatical.²²² Of course, they never went back. “I think *Looking On* and *Message From The Country* were the end of an era,” noted Wood. “The only reason that Jeff actually joined the Move was so we could be under the same roof and get ELO together and I don’t think Jeff would have wanted to do any more albums with the Move.”²²³

The original members of ELO included Lynne, Wood, drummer Bev Bevan, bass player Richard Tandy, cellist Hugh McDowell, and horn player Bill Hunt. The name Electric Light Orchestra, or ELO, was selected in homage to the BBC Midland Light Orchestra of Pebble Mill Studios in Birmingham.²²⁴ In 1971 Bev opened a record store in Sparkhill, Birmingham, called Heavy Head.²²⁵ Attendees at the opening of Bev’s record shop were Ozzy Osbourne, Rick Price, Raymond Froggatt, Jeff Lynne, Tony Iommi, and John Bonham.²²⁶

ELO’s debut album was *No Answer*, released in December 1971 in the U.K., and in March 1972 in the U.S. The debut album was self-titled on EMI’s Harvest Records in the U.K., but a misunderstood memo notation (“no answer”) left by an executive or secretary at United Artists regarding a failed phone call to ELO manager Don Arden about various things, including the album’s title, led to a mistaken re-titling. *No Answer* was an experiment in the synthesis of classical tunes and late Beatlesque rock called Baroque rock or orchestral pop,²²⁷ or as progressive or “prog” rock. The Move had experimented with this type of sound built around a string section in the 1960s with their rendition of Tony Visconti’s “Cherry Blossom Clinic,”²²⁸ and had actually intended to record the “10538 Overture” before the formation of ELO.²²⁹ But this never happened.²³⁰

“How ELO got started was myself and Jeff had been talking about ELO for a long time before that and we were recording the album *Message From The Country* and Jeff had come up with a skeleton idea for ‘10538 (Overture).’ He’d just got the beginning to it. We got to grips with that. We actually put a backing track down to that. It was me, Jeff, Bev Bevan and Rick Price. We put it down as a Move backing track but then Rick and Bev went home and Jeff and myself were in the studio working out ideas,” remembered Wood.²³¹ “I’d been to a music shop about a week before and bought a cello,” said Wood. “That was when I started collecting instruments. It was like a Chinese copy of a cello. It was sort of yellowy in color but it sounded really good. It didn’t sound like a sweet, mellow cello, especially the way I was playing it. I was doing all these Jimi Hendrix riffs on it. It sounded really quite wild. I was just sort of messing about as they were playing the tape back in the control room. Jeff said, ‘Oh, yeah, put some of those on.’ So I ended up putting loads of them on and it sounded like an orchestra. That’s how the whole thing started.”²³²

Said Wood, “In those days you couldn’t get Barcus Berry violins and you couldn’t get electric stuff like that. We amplified the cellos using those sort of microphones that the army uses, those throat mikes. It’s a microphone that fits around your throat and you use it in the field. We got a couple of those and jammed them down the bridge of the cello and amplified them that way. They were like contact mikes but obviously if you turned them up too loud they used to whistle and feedback and all that. It got really difficult because Bev as a drummer was used to playing loud with the Move. So the rhythm section ended up being quite loud and a lot of times you couldn’t hear the strings enough.”²³³ Said Jeff later, “I remember being in a car going to a Move gig in Cornwall. Roy and I played a tape of it all the way down. We were going wild over it in the back seat. We had it on like a thousand times, and [Bev and Rick] up front were going, ‘Not that thing again! Shut up!’”²³⁴

Audiences, remembered Wood, “didn’t know what to make of it to start with. I think the first gig we ever did was Barbarellas in Birmingham. It was a big nightclub and actually most of the people in the audience were from other bands and just wanted to see what we were up to, what was going on. They were all saying afterwards what a weird atmosphere it was. It was quite an electric atmosphere, really.”²³⁵ The band found it difficult to consistently fill the string section with suitable musicians and make them heard live on stage. Said Jeff, “When we tried it out, it sounded like an accident in a violin warehouse. You

couldn't hear the strings because there were no string pick-ups back then, just mics, so there was loads of feedback. There were a lot of teething problems and we got pretty fed up with it."²³⁶

Despite doubts expressed by bandmates Bev Bevan and Rick Price,²³⁷ the "10538 Overture" benefited directly from the new orchestral approach. Lynne worked out the basic structure for the song at his Shard End home, again working quietly to avoid waking his parents, even using a piano stool as a snare drum.²³⁸ Wrote Lynne, "I had this guitar track, like a real big riff on a guitar. I laid it down in the studio and Roy Wood got his cello, his Chinese cello, and he overdubbed about fifteen cello riffs, just double tracking all the time – and it sounded fantastic. We thought, it was like 'Wow!' and we just sat round playing it for days."²³⁹ Remembered Wood, "After recording the basic backing track, the other guys went home, leaving Jeff and myself to run riot with the overdubs. At the time, I was very keen on collecting instruments, and had just acquired a cheap Chinese cello. After we had finished overdubbing the guitars, I sat in the control room trying out this cello and sort of messing around with Jimi Hendrix type riffs. Jeff said, 'That sounds great, why don't we throw it on the track.' I ended up recording around fifteen of these, and as the instrumentation built up, it was beginning to sound like some monster heavy metal orchestra. In fact, it sounded just Bloody Marvellous."²⁴⁰

The "10538 Overture" was intended as the B-side to a Move song, but instead it became ELO's first single, and reached position #9 on the U.K. charts. The song title comes from the serial number on a Philips Recording Studio mixing deck "1053" plus the number 8 suggested by Wood for rhyming purposes. Noted Wood, "Jeff was looking for a title to portray a man with a number instead of a name. After staring into the space for a while, we noticed the serial number on the modules of the recording console."²⁴¹ 10538, then, is the number of an escaped prisoner. The song fit the paranoid mood of Western civilization well. It has been said that 10538 could have been the "perfect theme song" for George Lucas' character THX 1138 in the 1971 movie of same name.²⁴² The Overture, which ends Frère Jacques-style, has been covered by many artists since, including Def Leppard. Lynne and Wood claimed that the band hoped to "pick up where 'I Am the Walrus' left off,"²⁴³ and the 10538 Overture is a convincing, albeit bleak, homage to both "Walrus" and the 1968 song "Dear Prudence" off the *White Album*.

ELO initially failed to engage as a live band. Don Arden publicized an initial tour in support of the debut album, but then heard the band practice and annulled the announcement.²⁴⁴ Beginning in spring 1972 the band lined up a handful of shows, including some in Italy. The first, at the 2,000-seat Dome in Brighton, attracted only 150 concert goers.²⁴⁵ Wood objected in particular to the staging. "I wanted loads of light, like a Pink Floyd thing," he recalled. "But I was given all kinds of reasons why we couldn't do that. It ended up looking experimental rather than lavish."²⁴⁶

First in the pantheon of Jeff Lynne's rock heroes was John Lennon.²⁴⁷ "Lennon was the greatest influence on my life and probably on everyone else's as well," said Lynne. "He was my idol. He was the one person I always wanted to meet. I saw him once but I never met him."²⁴⁸ A quarter century later Lynne would still assert, "Whenever I think about music like pop music or rock music, whatever you want to call it, there were all these groups and then there were the Beatles, they just sat on the top, and everybody else was sort of good and great, but the Beatles were the Beatles."²⁴⁹ The magic worked. Paul McCartney would later wonder, "Why do people need a Beatles reunion, when they've already got ELO?"²⁵⁰

Several members of the band wore their hair afro-style, and thrived in flared pants and stack-heeled kinky boots.²⁵¹ Lynne donned his now-signature sunglasses, worn everywhere. Wood himself dressed most outrageously, often wearing heavy stage makeup and flamboyant costumes that would soon become associated with glam.²⁵² Wood's look inspired the KISS's Gene Simmons to begin wearing makeup.²⁵³

Wood had an interesting perspective on the creative process. "I think I've always been a bit of a Jekyll and Hyde in that respect," said Wood. "I always feel that you should keep singles as commercial as possible so that the people can walk down the road and whistle a song. But on the other hand on albums I think you can afford to show people what you can do."²⁵⁴

ELO II, a prog rock album with five long songs, three on one side of the disc and two on the other, was released in January 1973. Only one song on the album charted, “Roll Over Beethoven,” but it was a breakthrough hit for the band, reaching #9 on the UK Singles Chart and the Top 100 in Australia, The Netherlands, Germany, and the U.S. It is regularly included in lists of the best rock songs of all time. The song, clocking in at eight minutes, cleverly borrows from Beethoven’s Fifth Symphony to completely rejigger Chuck Berry’s classic song. “In a corny way, ‘Roll Over Beethoven’ was what we were trying to do, so I decided to use the Fifth Symphony,” noted Lynne. “It turned out to be a good combination. I sing all the wrong lyrics but there’s a story behind that. We were in the studio, and we had just finished the backing track, we had all played and it had sounded good and we were ready to put vocals on it. At that point, I realised that I didn’t know what the words were, so we called up Bev’s record shop and his assistant was there, and he read me the words over the phone. He was getting it off the record, playing a bit at a time and telling them to me. It took about an hour to get the words – and they were wrong anyway!”²⁵⁵

Roy Hollingworth of *Melody Maker* said of the ELO tune, “Beethoven wouldn’t just roll in his grave, he’d get up and play with it!”²⁵⁶ Lynne wasn’t so sure. “We had these fantastic t-shirts made of ... a picture of Beethoven with his fingers stuck in his ears with this incredibly horrified expression.”²⁵⁷ Still, Lynne made the most of the Beethoven-Berry mashup. In a furious performance on *Top of the Pops*, Lynne matched his old partner Roy Wood for weird costume and behavior, wearing and metallic garland hair and beard, dark eye shadow, gorilla hair coat, and striped pants while uttering wild cries before an impossibly energized dancing crowd. Similarly energetic performances on *American Bandstand* and *Midnight Special* cemented the reputation of this new break-out band among American audiences.

Bev Bevan recalled that the frenetic cover version “Roll Over Beethoven,” was actually born out of desperation: “It started because we were so short of material, we never had anything for an encore, so someone suggested we do the inevitable Chuck Berry number. What was it to be? We decided on ‘Roll Over Beethoven’ with some genuine strings on at the start. At first we tried Beethoven’s Ninth, but finally settled on Beethoven’s Fifth. To our string section, all classically trained musicians, it was nothing. ‘Sure,’ they said. ‘Beethoven, Mozart, Bach – it’s all the same to us.’ But the moment an audience heard it for the first time, with those stirring strings sweeping into rock ‘n’ roll, they went wild. And when we finally released it as a single it made the top five in Britain and gave us a minor hit in America. It was perhaps the most important single we ever made.”²⁵⁸

The band recorded the song in AIR Studios in London. Simultaneously, in the room next door, Paul McCartney was recording “Live and Let Die” with a large orchestra. Unexpectedly, George Martin popped into ELO’s room, to hear the “slightly different version”²⁵⁹ of Chuck Berry’s song, recalled Lynne. “He was smiling and he liked it.”²⁶⁰ Lynne wanted the singing to be as primal as possible. Michael De Albuquerque explained how this sound was achieved, “Now, in this wonderfully equipped studio, Jeff is presented with a variety of microphones, which, in today’s money, might go in the region of £200 - £2,000 – maybe even more. So, there’s a range of Rolls Royce microphones, all put in front of him. Jeff looked at them and being a man of few words, you could tell something was on his mind. I think he was disgusted that rock ‘n’ roll could be transmitted to the audience by one of these posh microphones! He made a request to the engineer for, I think, a mail-order microphone that Tandy’s did, which probably cost 15 quid. They hadn’t got it. So he made a request for something of similar grottness – they hadn’t got that either. Jeff was momentarily lost for words, then said, ‘I know, let’s use one of these and drop it on the floor!’ Ladies and gentlemen, I don’t know how we got the sound, but we did manage to shit it up somehow!”²⁶¹ Later, Lynne would complain that the “vocals are horrible” on the recording but “you learn by mistakes.”²⁶² He never talked to Berry about the song. “I saw Chuck once in a coffee shop, but I didn’t fancy going up to him in case he said, ‘You messed up my song,’” said Lynne.²⁶³

Roy Wood left ELO that same year, bringing to an end his contributions to *ELO II*.²⁶⁴ Wood left ELO after starting work on *ELO II*, turning his attention to the formation of a new band called Wizzard. “We had a

few problems within ELO, which I personally think were caused by the management,” said Wood. “There was a lot of political stuff going on which caused myself and Jeff to have big differences of opinion about a lot of stuff. I swore that after playing in the early Move and going through all that stuff where we weren't speaking and not getting on very well, I didn't want to play in a band with that atmosphere anymore. I basically left ELO while we were still friends and before it went any further.”²⁶⁵

Said Wood at the time, “When I quit, I was so disappointed that I didn't want to form another group, and then Wizzard came up.”²⁶⁶ Wizzard was an eight-piece orchestral band that began playing before arenas of screaming fans almost immediately.²⁶⁷ Wizzard's first gig was at Wembley Stadium in August 1972 playing with Chuck Berry and Little Richard before an audience of 40,000.²⁶⁸ Wood became famous for his outrageous warpaint and glam rock costumes. The band issued two albums, *Wizzard's Brew* in 1973 and *Introducing Eddy & The Falcons* in 1974. Wizzard saw great success in 1973 with two #1 hits in the UK: “See My Baby Jive” and “Angel Fingers.” The band had ten top forty UK hit singles, including the perennial favorite “I Wish It Could Be Christmas Everyday,” before breaking up in the fall of 1975.

Prog rock album *On the Third Day* was released on the Jet label in 1973. Band members included Lynne on guitar and vocals, Bevan on drums, Richard Tandy on Mini Moog synthesizer and piano, de Albuquerque on bass, cellist Mike Edwards, and Mik Kaminski on violin. Guitar impresario Marc Bolan played uncredited on two album tracks, “Ma-Ma-Ma Belle” and “Dreaming of 4000.” Remembers Lynne, “I'd become friends with Marc Bolan when I was with the Idle Race. We used to play at the same places now and again. When we were recording *ELO 2* at Air Studios in Oxford Circus, in the next studio was Marc Bolan. He used to pop into our sessions for a bit of a jam and a few laughs.”²⁶⁹ The liner notes on *Unexpected Messages* explain that “[Bolan] wasn't credited on any sleeves, because it was very difficult in those days to play together with friends who were signed to another record company. Companies gave no courtesy or no permission, and thus many related works had to be done incognito.”²⁷⁰ The album was recorded at De Lane Lea Studios in Wembley, Middlesex. This would be the last time Lynne multi-tracked the orchestral instruments to achieve full symphonic sound. In the future, he would simply hire a whole orchestra.

“Showdown” which appeared on the U.S. LP but not the U.K. LP, is generally considered the greatest track on the album. “I kept trying different styles all the time and the Showdown one was trying to do like an R&B type thing, which suited the cellos, y'know, and I ... It's like using these strings that were there, in different ways, y'know,” said Lynne later. “Sometimes in a, like pseudo-classical way and sometimes in a ... trying to do a soulful way.”²⁷¹ The working title of the track was “Bev's Trousers No. 7.”²⁷² Bolan did not play on “Showdown,” but Lynne borrowed his 1951 Les Paul and 1953 Gibson Firebird guitars for the solos.²⁷³

In a *Disc* magazine interview, De Albuquerque compared the groove to the Marvin Gaye hit “Heard It Through the Grapevine.” Said de Albuquerque, “Obviously we've used the same notes but the rhythm is quite different. Anyone who's interested in the musical side of things could put our single on and know that there are different things happening in the bass and in the overall arrangement. We all love soul music in the group but with a difference, because we use strings as an integral part of the piece rather than as an additive, which is what the soul people do.”²⁷⁴ John Lennon, who really liked the song and the band he called “Son of Beatles,” thought it owed its origins to equal parts “Grapevine” and Lou Christie's “Lightnin' Strikes.”²⁷⁵ The song has also been compared to Del Shannon's “Stranger in Town” and John Mayall's “All Your Love.”²⁷⁶ Regardless, the song is a natural progenitor to later hit ELO singles “Evil Woman” and “Livin' Thing.” A funky cover version of ELO's “Showdown” became a solo hit for Odia Coates in 1975, and is used to great effect in the Bill Murray-Woody Harrelson bowling faceoff in the Farrelly Brothers' film *Kingpin*. The song is sometimes thought of as one of the greatest roller disco songs of all time.

Virtuoso electronic violinist Mik Kaminski joined ELO in 1973, shortly after Roy Wood left, playing for the first time with the band on "Showdown."²⁷⁷ Mik was born on September 2, 1951, in Harrogate, England.²⁷⁸ He began playing violin at age five. As a youth he attended the Leeds School of Music where he gathered together the band Cow, and performed at age 14 with the Leeds Orchestra.²⁷⁹ "I started off classical but the college ran a jazz course and I started to mix with people in the jazz set," said Kaminski. "That's how the electric violin first came to my mind."²⁸⁰ He played violin on Joe Soap's album *Keep it Clean* and Andy Robert's *Andy Roberts and the Grand Stampede*.²⁸¹ He answered an ad in *Melody Maker* for a classically-trained violinist with the band ELO.²⁸² Lynne has said that Kaminski was hired because in auditions "he was the only one who did not play a bum note." Fame came out of blue. "All of a sudden, I was on my first ever flight – to America. I didn't even have a passport."²⁸³ Mik's signature instrument was a blue violin, which he later immortalized on the ELO Part II album *Moment of Truth*. His virtuosity is on full display in his incredible ELO solo performance of "Orange Blossom Special."²⁸⁴

Lynne was generally pleased with the result of his work on the *Third Day* album. "That was the first time I was focused enough to write a pop song within the realms of this thing without trying to be fancy and weird," he said. "I always remember the mastering guy at EMI playing it and saying, 'That's a touch of class, that is.' This technical guy who'd been doing it for years liked the sound of it, and that gave me confidence." His father, though, complained to Jeff that "[t]he trouble with your tunes is that they've got no tunes." Jeff vowed his next album would definitely have "a tune in it." That tune would be the fantastically successful *Eldorado* song "Can't Get It Out of My Head."²⁸⁵

Eldorado, recorded at De Lane Lea Studios in London and released in 1974, was the band's first concept album. Lynne had by now become the group's producer, primary songwriter, as well as central player.²⁸⁶ For the first time, critics began talking about the "Jeff Lynne sound." Lynne struggled against the need for reverb in emulating the then-popular sound of The Rolling Stones. "I mixed myself right down, with echo – not reverb, particularly, but all gadgets. ADT and all that," remembered Lynne. "But that's insecurity and hiding, that's all."²⁸⁷ Band members included Lynne on guitar, vocals, and Moog; Bevan on drums and percussion; Tandy on piano, Moog, guitar, and backing vocals; de Albuquerque on bass; Michael Edwards and Hugh McDowell on cello; and Kaminski on violin.

ELO picked up Louis Clark, a professional orchestra arranger and conductor, for the *Eldorado* album. Clark grew up in next-door Shropshire, became captivated by Beatles records, and eventually joined Birmingham's Raymond Froggatt Band as a bass player in the late 1960s.²⁸⁸ While playing with the band he developed his skill as an arranger and composer at the Leeds College of Music.²⁸⁹ For *Eldorado* Clark directed a forty-piece live orchestra,²⁹⁰ replacing the band's overdubbed strings. Clark eventually toured with the group (beginning in 1981) on string synthesizer, and would remain ELO's chief arranger until 1986.²⁹¹ (Clark would later sell millions of *Hooked on Classics* albums recorded with the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra.)²⁹² By the turn of the twenty-first century Clark had arranged orchestral scores for some of the greatest artists of the rock era: ABBA, Ozzy Osbourne, Roy Orbison, Queen, and Phil Collins.²⁹³

Eldorado's Wizard of Oz inspired album artwork, which the band nearly rejected, had been done by John Kehe.²⁹⁴

Eldorado became notorious for accusations that "Satanic messages" had been interspersed within tracks by backward masking.²⁹⁵ The ninth track in particular ("Eldorado") was cited for its purported hidden message: "He is the nasty one. Christ you're infernal. It is said we're dead men. All who have the mark will live."²⁹⁶ Lynne rebutted his critics in a radio interview. "It is absolutely manufactured by whoever said, 'That's what it said,'" he explained. "It doesn't say anything of the sort. And, that was totally manufactured by the person who said it said that. Because, anybody who can write a song forward and have it say something else backwards, has got to be some kind of genius and that I ain't. And I was upset at first by the accusation by that. But now I think it's kind of funny. I was just going to say again,

categorically, that we are totally innocent of all those claims of devil stuff, it's a load of rubbish, and we're all God-fearing chaps."²⁹⁷

Before long, ELO had embarked on its sixth American tour. Cellist Mike Edwards, who as part of the act played his instrument with an orange before it exploded, became attracted to Buddhism and left the band for a job with the British General Post Office. Michael D'Albuquerque also left the band to raise his family and make an attempt at a career singly.²⁹⁸ Edwards was replaced by cellist Melvyn Gale.²⁹⁹

Bass player Michael "Kelly" Groucutt joined ELO in 1974.³⁰⁰ Groucutt had been touring near home on the West Midlands cabaret circuit with the band Sight and Sound.³⁰¹ Said Groucutt, "I used to do crazy things like shove balloons up a jumper and don a wig and hotpants and things, and do an impression of Nancy Sinatra and stuff like that."³⁰² Yet he was grounded in the music of Roy Orbison, The Everly Brothers, Johnny Ray, and The Beatles.³⁰³ Groucutt was an acquaintance of Jeff Lynne through Roger Ollie Spencer, the former Idle Race drummer then playing with Sight and Sound.³⁰⁴ Remembered Groucutt, "I left Sight and Sound in 1974, and for about six months I sort of buried myself alive in a nightclub [Snobs] in Birmingham, which was pretty awful. And then one night Jeff Lynne walked in with Bev Bevan and Richard Tandy and they stood at the back of the place and watched. One of the band members in fact noticed they were standing there and in the break Jeff came and asked me if I wanted to join ELO."³⁰⁵ Groucutt hardly hesitated, "I said, 'Yes, thank you! Please take me away from all this.'"³⁰⁶

Groucutt remembered feeling like he had been "thrown in the deep end" of the pool, joining the band only a few months before a U.S. tour.³⁰⁷ Groucutt had never before had a passport, had never left the U.K., and had never flown on a plane.³⁰⁸ Yet "[t]he atmosphere was really good," he admitted later. "We all got on very well. Hughie was the nutter. He'd do absolutely anything to amuse himself, but he also read the *National Geographic*. Richard would lock himself away for weeks to learn the ins and outs of a new keyboard. Melvyn talked a lot. Mik was a bit quiet, but a Yorkshireman through and through. Liked a drink. He'd hang out with Bev, who was the loudest drummer anywhere. Jeff and I hung around together. We used to go ten pin bowling, or to the cinema."³⁰⁹

Don Arden's daughter Sharon Arden [later Ozzy's wife Sharon Osborne] managed the American tours of the band from Jet Record's American office. "The whole lot of them were lovely, but total goody-goodies," she recalled. "Apart from Hughie, who was a free spirit and adorable. I was the one getting them thrown out of hotels. I saw no drugs – [T]here were a couple of droogie groupies hanging around, but it was hardly Led Zeppelin. And, you know, cellos? It was probably a little too highbrow for the big tits and the short skirts. I was waiting for those wild parties every night, but they never happened."

Groucutt first recorded with the band on the album *Face the Music* in 1975.³¹⁰ Mack engineered *Face the Music* at Musicland Studios, located in a dingy hotel basement in Munich, with some supplemental recording done at De Lane Lea Studios in London. The album was re-mixed at The Record Plant in New York. By now the band member lineup reached the zenith of its stability around Lynne, Bevan, Tandy, Groucutt, Kaminsky, McDowall, and cellist Melvyn Gale. Lynne wrote all the songs for the album. "Probably the happiest I could ever be was having the headphones on doing the lead vocal," explained Lynne. "I loved recording all the harmonies and then hearing them come in just right when I'm doing the choruses and thinking, 'Yes! It fits! There have been a few moments, signing something for the first time, where I've thought, 'Whew, that feels like a big hit.' It doesn't happen often, but it's great when it does."³¹¹

The most critically acclaimed ELO album is *A New World Record*, released in 1976. Lynne wrote the songs in a chalet in Bassins, Switzerland.³¹² The album charted for two years in America.³¹³ The others having failed to chart, *A New World Record* was the first to chart in Britain.³¹⁴

ELO released *Out of the Blue*, with an astounding five million advance orders, in 1977.³¹⁵ Lynne wrote the songs in only two months in the same chalet in Bassins, Switzerland. "It was dark and misty for two weeks

and I didn't come up with a thing," Lynne recalled. "Suddenly the sun shone and it was like, 'Wow, look at those beautiful Alps,' and I wrote 'Mr. Blue Sky' – which took a while – and then thirteen other songs in the next two weeks, all the melodies, chords, and basic arrangements. I did four in one day. And then went off to Germany to record them. Today I would think that's a lot of pressure to put yourself under, but I could do it then. That was me at my most focused."³¹⁶

The double album featured a four-song "Concerto for a Rainy Day."³¹⁷ Jeff had long been a football enthusiast,³¹⁸ and "Mr. Blue Sky" today is the theme song for the Birmingham City soccer club.³¹⁹ The song was written in Switzerland. "It had been horribly foggy for days," recalled Lynne. "Then the fog lifted and beams of this fabulous sunlight came down and the sky was blue. I wrote the song right there and then."³²⁰

In 1977 the band also provided six previously released tracks for the soundtrack to the obscure, low budget Canadian road movie *Joyride*. Several ELO songs, including "Tightrope," "Can't Get It Out Of My Head," "Boy Blue," "So Fine," "Telephone Line," and "Rockaria!" are weaved into the movie by way of the radio and a jukebox. The songs do not propel the storyline in any way, but testify to the popularity of the band at its peak. A half dozen other songs on the soundtrack are performed by Barry Mann or Jimmie Haskell. *Joyride* starred Desi Arnaz, Jr., Robert Carradine, Melanie Griffith, and Anne Lockhart. The film follows the exploits of three bored Los Angeles teenagers (Arnaz as Scott, Carradine as John, Griffith as Susie) with romantic dream of owning a salmon boat in Alaska. Along the way the teens fall prey to shysters who steal their car and take their money, leading the three into lives of hardship and despair. Eventually the teens hatch a plot to rob a pipeline payroll business, and take officer worker Cindy Young (Lockhart) as a hostage. After some dramatic car chases, and at least one near death experience, the teens decide that Alaska is not for them and that their ambitions might be better fulfilled in Hawaii.

Joyride aside, the band may have reached its actual apogee in a live performance at the Wembley Stadium "Flying Burger" concert in 1978.³²¹ The Wembley Stadium concert was part of the informally named "Spaceship" tour for *Out of the Blue*. Arden spent £100,000 constructing a stage that mimicked the sleeve art for the album, a jukebox-like spaceship logo designed by Shusei Nagaoka.³²² The timing could not have been better, as Spielberg's *Close Encounters of the Third Kind* was at that moment raking in huge receipts at the box office.³²³

Kelly Groucutt later admitted that the massive stage served as an impediment to direct engagement with the crowd. "[B]y that time the stage production was so big that you didn't actually see the audience, they were so far away with that huge spaceship set that we had that was sort of 50 feet across and miles away from the audience. ... [I]t was probably about the biggest production on the road that was going on at that time. And everyone was impressed with it but it was a pain in the butt actually, to work in that spaceship! So [those] were exciting times but I think probably the most exciting was just after I joined, playing to smaller audiences of perhaps 2,000-3,000 sometimes down to maybe 350. And, you know, that was really good because you were really close to the audience too."³²⁴

"That thing was a pain, it really was," says Kelly. "The sound bounced all over it. There were 500 lights in it suspended above our heads. If anything had gone wrong we'd have been in total trouble. Underneath were all the risers that lifted us up to the stage, each one on separate hydraulic lifts. There was a huge one for the keyboards and grand piano; Bev's, which rose up above floor level, and one each for all the backline. Quite a few times they'd go wrong. Richard often started the show partly submerged. On one occasion, Jeff and I stepped off ours and I turned round to see that Hugh's riser was still stuck some way down. As I watched,

this cello flew out of the hole and landed in a heap on the stage, and Hugh came clambering out cussing and blinding. The crowd on his side were killing themselves laughing.”

But “the big hamburger”, as Hugh dubbed it, is fondly remembered for its starring role in the group’s most spectacular performance, at the Universal Amphitheatre, Hollywood. Tony Curtis, acting as MC, walked on in front of the huge curtain suspended across the arena and began priming the crowd: “They’re coming, they’re coming!” In the darkness, the ELO spaceship approached from Burbank, flew over the stadium and landed behind the curtain. Alien astronauts appeared in the rigging 30ft above the stage. Tony picked them off with a laser beam and they tumbled to their deaths as the curtain dropped to reveal the spaceship, lights ablaze, thundering open in a cloud of smoke to bring forth “the greatest classical rock band in the universe! – E! L! O!”

“To climb out and see the crowd from that was an enormous buzz,” says Kelly. “That was an awesome show.”

“I used to nip out the back and stand in the crowd and watch the spaceship close at the end,” says Jeff, “It made me laugh, all this smoke bellowing out and that enormous rumble from the woofers. It went down better than us.”

Audiences at ELO concerts were generally sophisticated. “We were never sort of mobbed at all - thank God!” remembered Groucutt. “You know we never had sort of teeny boppers screaming after us, which believe it or not is a relief, was a relief, because I’m not sure I could stand that sort of thing.”³²⁵

Several bands opened for ELO in those heydays, including the Steve Gibbons Band and Charlie Curtis.³²⁶ Said Groucutt, “The one that springs to mind was in Anaheim, ... where Charlie Curtis opened the show with a sort of sudo laser shoot out with stunt men on top of the lighting rig, which was a long way up, shooting them off with a laser which was up his arm to look like a gun so he shot them down with little lights of laser beam. And that was a huge production, in fact there was a mockup of the spaceship flown in on a helicopter from a distance to look as if we would land in this spaceship ... behind the stage ... [b]efore the drapes dropped away to reveal the real stage.”³²⁷

“Over time, it became obvious that the band was split into a hierarchy and lower minions,” sighs Kelly Groucott. “People were whispering to Jeff, ‘You’re the one that counts, it’s all your music.’ And it was, I’d never deny that, but its success had a bit of help from the rest of us.” However, when such dissatisfactions arose, Don Arden came into his own.

“Don was a bully,” states Kelly. “He was okay to Jeff and Bev, but he looked down on the rest of us. We’d try and negotiate more money with him and it was impossible. You’d go in all nervous and he’d start saying, ‘If it wasn’t for this what else would you be doing?’ In other words, ‘If you don’t like it, fuck off!’ “

It was fatigue that finished ELO. Now a rich man in his 30s, Jeff had wearied of the album-tour-album grind.

“His bag was being in the studio” says Kelly, “after a while on tour he would get pretty pissed off.”

“Jeff could be bloody miserable,” agrees Sharon. “He only had three expressions, ‘Deaf it’ [a kind of Brummy ‘can’t be arsed’], ‘Fook it’ and ‘I wanna Heineken’.”

It was in this mood that he turned down the chance to headline at Knebworth, allowing Led Zeppelin a late moment of glory. He also rejected the chance to score several big movies but, strangely, accepted the offer for *Xanadu* – which must be among the very worst films ever shot.

In 1979 ELO released the album *Discovery*.³²⁸ The album, recorded at Musicland Studios in Munich, was almost immediately nicknamed “Disco Very” as it appeared to be heavy influenced by the disco sound.³²⁹ ELO shedded some of its orchestral accompaniment for the album, and with it Mik Kaminsky, McDowall, and Gale.

That decision and the surprising discoey whiff of the excellent *Discovery* album probably cost ELO some fans and, when the ‘80s arrived, the future looked glum for symphonic pop played by blokes in flares. Indeed, one of their biggest hits, ‘Don’t Bring Me Down’, struck a death-knell for the band by having, gasp, no strings attached. Soon after the album, the string players were abruptly dismissed with a letter signed by all the other members of the band.

Kaminski formed Violinski in 1979. Violinski was composed of Mik on violin, guitarist Mike de Albuquerque, Baz Dunnery, drummer John Hodson, Paul Mann, keyboardist John Marcangelo, and bassist Iain Whitmore. The band had one hit record, “Clog Dance,” at the height of ELO’s fame.

Wife: Sani Kapelson (m. 1979) Daughter: Laura (b. 7-Dec-1979) Daughter: Stephanie (b. circa 1981).³³⁰

This must have been galling to a homebody like Jeff. The demands to visit America were relentless – at one point reaching 68 shows in 75 days – and he was seeing very little of his wife Rosemary, a teacher whom he’d wed in 1970. When he had a fling with an American girl named Sandy Kapilson it spelt the end of his marriage.

"I don't think Jeff wanted it to end," says Sharon, "but Rosemary was heartbroken and just walked out. She was one of the most beautiful, intelligent women I have ever met. Everybody adored her. I went through a phase when I'd get pissed and start biting people," the future Mrs Osbourne continues, "and I always used to pick on Jeff because I knew it would annoy him the most. Rosemary would look at me as if I was out of my fucking mind, and I'd look at her and think, I wish I could be more like you."

Jeff and Sandy married in 1978 and have two children together.

Universal Studios released the movie *Xanadu* in 1980, starring Olivia Newton-John, Gene Kelly, and Michael Beck. The soundtrack album of same name – which included songs written by John Farrar and Jeff Lynne and performed by Olivia Newton-John, ELO, and The Tubes – was certified double platinum, reaching #4 on the American album charts and #2 in the United Kingdom.

The song "Xanadu," sung by Olivia Newton-John, reached #8 on the American Billboard singles charts and #1 in the U.K. in July 1980. On "Xanadu" Lynne provided backing vocals, and played guitar and synthesizer, Bevan played percussion and drums, Tandy assisted on keyboards and piano, Groucutt played bass, and the orchestral arrangement was provided by Louis Clark. The song marked the first time Lynne helped produce an independent musician.³³¹ Said Lynne, "It was very strange because I never produced anybody else but myself until now, so it was a bit strange ... sort of saying: 'Can you try that bit again,' but [Olivia] was such a nice person that everything I suggested she tried. ... We worked so hard for it, and now I'm so thrilled about how the songs worked out."³³²

Bev Bevan recalled the fervor that erupted around "Xanadu," a song he personally disliked. "I didn't really ... expect ["Xanadu" to go to #1]. Actually, I was never a great fan of the record. I can't say it's one of my favorites by any means, but it obviously caught the public's imagination. ... I think it's probably, if not the least, of all the hits we've ever had it's certainly one of my least favorites, I must say. But it was a really difficult song to record because Jeff had sent the demo ... of the song to the studio in Hollywood, and they had actually shot the dance sequence to the demo. So when we came to record it for real, we had to keep in time with the demo, and the demo was not in time, so ... it was a bit of a nightmare to actually record the thing. ... We were [at Musicland Studios] in Munich, in West Germany at the time doing it, and it became a very frustrating experience, making what should have taken a couple of hours took about three or four days, as I remember." Bevan developed a fondness for Newton-John, redubbing lyrics for the film over two days in the studio. "[W]orking with Olivia ... was a great experience 'cause she's a lovely, lovely lady, and ... a pleasure to work with."³³³

Lynne has said on many occasions that "Xanadu" is the best song on the album, mainly because of its "chord structure" and the vocals provided by Newton-John. Said Lynne, "I think the way it's constructed, it's one of me favorite songs I've ever done, believe it or not. It's a bit light. But it's a nice tune."³³⁴ The song was awarded an Ivor Novello Award for Best Film Theme Song by the British Academy of Composers and Songwriters.

The film as directed by Robert Greenwald was a box office disaster. The cavernous two-story set for the movie cost \$1 million to build over three months in Studio No. 4 of Hollywood General Studios. The box office take in the United States was a paltry \$10 million.

The second ELO concept album, after *Eldorado*, was *Time*. Lynne had long been a science fiction fan.³³⁵ The album was recorded at Musicland Studios, and engineered by Mack. Lynne made this album one of

the most underrated albums of the synth-pop era by admitting that it -- and the follow-up albums *Secret Messages* and *Balance of Power* -- was made largely to fulfill contractual obligations. Despite much adverse criticism the album charted well in the UK, holding the No. 1 spot for thirty-two weeks.

Jeff resented still being contracted to deliver another three albums, and it showed in the results. *Time* -- despite a few great songs -- was an awkward, semi-concept album that was definitely mistimed. Next, a late spurt of enthusiasm had Jeff getting into Fairlights and drum-machines, creating 20 new tracks for a proposed double set, *Secret Messages*, but CBS decided a double vinyl album wasn't practical during the early '80s oil crisis. Piqued, Jeff dumped songs like 'Hello Old Friend' -- an extended hymn to his hometown which some fans who've heard the proposed album consider his finest song ever -- and a tender tribute to the Fabs, 'Beatles Forever'. (Jeff apparently resisted recent attempts to restore the album to its original format.)

Comparisons are often made between *Time* and the earlier concept album *Eldorado*.

Lynne wrote often about rain and the color blue, and this album contains one of these sad and beautiful songs: "Rain is Falling." At the time of its release, Lynne gave one interpretation where the chief protagonist "is actually in this place looking out of this window and he's ... it's still in that future period. And, uh, I think it's just a depressing time just watching it all go by in the hundred year's future. And, uh, he's standing at this window watching everything go by. Yeah, his past that was, like, a couple hours before."³³⁶ In 2001 Jeff Lynne offered a second interpretation: "'I think it's about some scientists trying to mess about with time. But it's quite a nice tune.'" ³³⁷

In a 1981 interview on Perth Radio Bev Bevan said, "I don't really know [what inspired *Rain Is Falling*] ... except maybe our usual wet summer. But ... apart from that ... I think it's a fairly typical E.L.O. song. ... Again, it's another change of mood. I mean the whole album is one change to the next, y'know, we never ... We're only aware of not being caught up in the same sort of ... within the same sort of sound from track to track. We try to vary each one as it comes along. ... Yeah, um, yeah, again [the 'rain, rain, go away theme' is] getting back to the mystical thing, y'know, the visions of childhood and dreams of simplicity."³³⁸

Meanwhile, working on his solo record with Bev, Kelly Groucutt learnt that Jeff had decided to shut down ELO for good. Effectively out of work, he was dismayed that he'd not been informed. He also thought he was entitled to some kind of pay off. "When we split up, a couple of guys ended up on the dole," says Kelly. "A golden handshake would have been nice, having helped to make Jeff a multi-millionaire. I didn't want to sour my relationship with him, but I had a wife and four kids to support. I was advised to sue him. Which I did; and which I've regretted ever since. You've got to be pretty strong to handle the pressure that goes with a lawsuit, and I wasn't. It did my head in. I ended up losing a nice house, getting in debt and becoming a cabbage for several months, which resulted in the break-up of my marriage. Eventually we settled out of court, but not for what anybody thought I might be getting. It put a rift between me and Jeff which hasn't healed. I'd love to sit and have a drink with him but he hates me to death. Nobody's fault but mine, as I instigated the suing but, in retrospect, it was just not worth it."

Kelly Groucutt released the solo album *Kelly* in 1982. The album featured Bev Bevan, Richard Tandy, Mik Kaminski, and ELO orchestral arranger Louis Clark. Groucutt also acted as a session musician on a number of Jack Green albums.³³⁹ Green had been a bass player for T-Rex.³⁴⁰

In 1983 Groucutt sued Lynne over royalty payments. Groucutt eventually recovered £300,000 in an out-of-court settlement.

Groucutt's suit marred production of ELO's 1983 album *Secret Messages*.

Jeff Lynne contributed two solo cuts to the *Electric Dreams* movie LP soundtrack in 1984, "Video" and "Let It Run." *Electric Dreams* is an MTV-style romantic comedy by Steve Barron, who also directed Michael Jackson's music video "Billie Jean."³⁴¹ San Francisco's budding tech sector provides scenic backdrop to the film. Starring Lenny Von Dohlen, Virginia Madsen, and Bud Cort, *Electric Dreams* is reminiscent of Kurt

Vonnegut's short story "EPICAC," as it depicts a bizarre love triangle among two humans and a home computer.³⁴² Lynne's power pop songs were overshadowed on the album by two others that made greater dents in the musical universe. "Together in Electric Dreams" by Philip Oakey and Giorgio Moroder³⁴³ became an international hit, as did Culture Club's "Love is Love."³⁴⁴ On the B-side of "Video" single was the rarely heard "Sooner or Later."³⁴⁵

ELO (Lynne, Bevan, and Tandy) issued their final album, *Balance of Power*, in 1986.³⁴⁶ In the liner notes to the 2007 reissue of the album, Lynne wrote, "I'm actually quite pleased with the way this one turned out after moving quite noticeably from the tropics to the winter in one fell swoop. This was to be the last ELO album of that century. Even so I think it turned out to be one of the better ones (the album, not the century)."³⁴⁷ The album departed from previous work by abandoning orchestral strings altogether in favor of the layered, synthesized sounds of the Synclavier II and the introduction of saxophone. The video for "Calling America"³⁴⁸ featured the band playing in front of the Centre Georges Pompidou in Paris.

The band engaged in a truncated live tour that included stops in the British Isles, Germany, and the United States. Lynne, backed by most of the players on the *Time* tour (excluding Groucutt, replaced by bassist Martin Smith), played the television shows *American Bandstand* and *Solid Gold* and made an appearance at Disneyland for the show *Summer Vacation Party*.³⁴⁹ On March 15, 1986, ELO performed at the Birmingham Heart Beat Charity Concert organized by Bev Bevan.³⁵⁰ George Harrison joined the band onstage for a rendition of "Johnny B. Goode." On July 13, 1986, the band made its last appearance together in Stuttgart, Germany, backing Rod Stewart.

After *Balance of Power*, a downbeat, synth-drenched album featuring only Jeff, Bev and Richard, and a series of triumphant farewell shows, ELO finally ceased to be in 1986. Hugh returned to classical music and now teaches. Melvyn runs a pressing plant. In 1991, Mik, Kelly, Bev and Louis Clark reconvened with new players as ELO Part II and released a new album. Bev struck a deal with Jeff for the rights to use the name as long as he was behind the drums. Finally tiring of playing mostly old songs on tour, in what was effectively becoming a tribute band, Bev bowed out last year. The others have decided to continue as Orchestra – but face legal action if any promoters suggest they've anything to do with the Electric Light Orchestra. The only other original member in Jeff's new version of ELO is Richard Tandy.

Lynne, now 53, departed the band to focus on solo projects and record producing.³⁵¹ His clients included Duane Eddy, George Harrison, Brian Wilson, Randy Newman, Tom Petty, Roy Orbison, and Del Shannon (who inspired him as a young musician).³⁵²

Lynne's first major producing gig was Quiet One George Harrison's album *Cloud Nine*, released in November 1987.³⁵³ In 1988 Harrison explained how he and Lynne came to collaborate: "I thought he'd make a good producer for me, and Dave Edmunds, who was a neighbor of mine, had worked with him before, so I asked if he ever saw Jeff to tell him I'd like to meet. That was back in 1985. So he came over, had dinner, and we just kept in touch and by the end of '86 I said, 'Well, I'm going to make a record soon, do you want to do it?'"³⁵⁴

Harrison claimed he "tricked" Lynne into producing *Cloud Nine*.³⁵⁵ "Jeff's input gave me a lift," said Harrison. "He's put so much time into the record, in a very selfless way. It still sounds like my record; his contribution was tastefully done. Jeff has a way of getting the best out of me, and it helped to have a friend to hang out with in the studio for all that time."³⁵⁶ Simon Leng argues that the collaboration with Lynne made the album "radically different from its predecessors."³⁵⁷ Lynne helped Harrison break out of his self-imposed isolation, and focused the music on Harrison's improbably beautiful slide-guitar playing.³⁵⁸ Lynne also brought in Eric Clapton to play Stratocaster guitar, Elton John for electric piano support, and session musicians Jim Keltner (drums) and Jim Horn (saxophone) to assist on the album effort.³⁵⁹

Lynne penned the song "This is Love" for the *Cloud Nine* album at Harrison's request.³⁶⁰ "When he brought it to me," said Harrison, "he had a choice of several different versions of the same song, and there are still enough bits left to write another two tunes. I chose the bits I liked from his versions and

then wrote some words with him for it.”³⁶¹ “He had the chorus all set, but he had four different versions of the verse part. So it was a matter of just playing them and saying, ‘I think I’d like it to go this way.’ So ‘This is Love’ was basically his, but I helped put it together and I wrote some of the lyrics.”³⁶²

Lynne also collaborated with Harrison on the song “When We Was Fab,” begun by the two at the Australian Grand Prix.³⁶³ “The idea was that it would evoke a Fabs song,” said Harrison. “It was always intended to be lots of fun. Every so often we took the tape of ‘Fab’ out and overdubbed more and it took shape to where we wrote words. We put wacky lyrics in the last line of each chorus.”³⁶⁴ For Lynne, the near-parody, became a fantastic vehicle for revisiting the late Beatles period catalog. The song is a lineal descendant of the tune “I Am the Walrus,” and is filled with musical references in the form of sitars, backward masking, cellos, and classical orchestra timpani.³⁶⁵

Lynne and Harrison co-produced another hit off the album, “Got My Mind Set On You.”³⁶⁶ R&B singer James Ray wrote the song shortly before the Beatles invaded America in 1964, and Lynne and Harrison paid tribute to the tune by replacing horns, banjo, and a backup choir on the original recording with guitars, drum synthesizers, and 12 to 14 tracks of saxophones recorded by Jim Horn.³⁶⁷ Harrison said the song sounded like it had been “stung by saxophones.”³⁶⁸

Jeff Lynne is known as a dry mix enthusiast, and beginning with *Cloud Nine* he often selected Richard Dodd as his preferred recording engineer. “When I came into contact with Jeff Lynne, it was like I was able to breathe a sigh of relief,” said Dodd in a 2003 interview. “There was this kindred spirit. It was fantastic: Here was somebody asking me to do something that I wanted to do. We got into it, and we found that we could make things drier and drier and drier. We could actually make it sound like it was drier than it was. We certainly developed a method between us of getting vocals.”³⁶⁹

As he collaborated with Harrison, Lynne reevaluated his embrace of the arms race in electronic audio technology. “I was always led to believe that you had to record in a proper studio and that you had to have all of this state-of-the-art equipment,” remembered Lynne in 1991. This was true especially toward the end of ELO, during the mid-80s, when I became deeply involved in high technology. I started using all these machines and all these tracks and all this digital stuff and then I suddenly thought, ‘I hate this now. I don’t even enjoy making records anymore. I think I’ll go back to the old way, the way I used to do it in the first place.’ This meant analog, lots of acoustic instruments, odd little rooms to record in, and a lot less than 48 tracks.”³⁷⁰

“Actually this was when it first dawned on me that you could create a great recording outside of a proper recording studio. George Harrison asked me to help out with his album *Cloud Nine*. I went to George’s house and his home studio to make it and it was such a great experience. His home studio didn’t have any kind of modern stuff. At least it wasn’t pandering to any kind of new gadget. It was just an old – a really old – desk, a great one, a 24-track tape recorder, and that was all. There were a couple of outboard things, but not much to be impressed with. Just some great musicians, great sounds, and a great recording environment. We made this analog record and it was a big success. And I realized, ‘Wow! You really don’t need all that stuff.’ From then on I’ve gone on to do a few successful records using the same principles, just analog and 24-track tape recording. And I really enjoy myself now. I mean, I can just do it, and it’s done. You don’t have to hire 43 technicians just to tell you what’s gone wrong with the equipment. But you do need a good engineer, and for me that’s Richard Dodd, whom I first worked with when recording *Cloud Nine*.”³⁷¹

Lynne helped choreographed a resurgence of interest in the music of Roy Orbison with *Mystery Girl* in 1989. Orbison had toured with the Beatles in 1963 and knew its members as old friends.³⁷² Lynne had listened to Orbison records in his formative years, but had not met his childhood hero until the middle of 1987.³⁷³ Around Christmas that same year, the two met at Roy’s Malibu home and began working on songs. Soon Tom Petty, who also had never collaborated with Orbison, joined them.³⁷⁴ Within 48 hours the trio had written “You Got It” and “California Blue.”³⁷⁵ In April 1988 Orbison, Lynne, and Petty met in

the studio at Rumbo Recorders in Canoga Park, California.³⁷⁶ Lynne underestimated the raw power of Orbison's voice based on a preliminary practice take.³⁷⁷ "Nothing I've ever experienced," explained Lynne, "was as great as working with Roy Orbison. It had long been an ambition of mine – just to meet him. Then, becoming his friend and cowriter, was an extra special thing. He'd come into the studio to sing and just blow you away. His voice was enormous. It had such a lovely, clear top, but this incredible deep bottom as well. As a producer, you had to work hard to contain it. Roll a lot of bass off. He was just so deep."³⁷⁸

Lynne co-wrote and produced three songs on the posthumously released album: "You Got It,"³⁷⁹ "A Love So Beautiful,"³⁸⁰ and "California Blue."³⁸¹ "You Got It" reached #9 on the Billboard charts, Orbison's first appearance in the Top 40 in a quarter century.

Lynne also collaborated with Tom Petty in producing the solo Petty album *Full Moon Fever* released in April 1989. "Tom's record was done in a second," said Lynne. "When I met with him to do it, he'd heard George's *Cloud Nine* album and he really liked the sound of that. He said, 'Would you fancy writing a song together and see what we come up with?' So we came up with 'Free Fallin' in Mike Campbell's garage, and we recorded it there. I didn't treat Tom's album as I'd normally treat a project. We did the track, I went home and worked out all the parts for the guitar, keyboards, everything. And I always play bass if I'm producing someone – it's in the fine print – just kidding. But then when we finished it, we said, 'Well, that was fun. Let's do another one.' So we finished that song and mixed it. The whole album went like that: 'Well, let's do another one.' I ended up doing the whole lot. Usually, I would be working on ten songs at once."³⁸²

Harrison, Orbison, Petty, and Lynne joined Bob Dylan in the late 1980s to form the "accidental" supergroup The Traveling Wilburys.³⁸³ In a May 1988 interview Lynne remarked that he and Harrison came up with the idea of a "fictitious" band called the Trembling Wilburys during an all-night recording session for *Cloud Nine*.³⁸⁴ Said Harrison of the group's genesis: "[S]omebody was making these guitar picks and they asked what they should print on 'em. Everybody has some smart little thing written on their picks, so as we'd just been talking about these Trembling Wilburys, I had Traveling Wilburys misspelt on this guitar pick. At that point it was just a drunken thought in the back of my head."³⁸⁵

The band was born by happenstance as Harrison searched for a studio to record a third track for a 12 inch single of "When We Was Fab" for a German-only release.³⁸⁶ "I was in Los Angeles while Jeff [Lynne] was producing Roy Orbison and we were having dinner and I said, 'I'm gonna have to write a song tomorrow and just do it,'" remembered Harrison. "I was thinking of the way John [Lennon] recorded 'Instant Karma.' And I said, 'Where can I get a studio?' and Jeff said, 'Well maybe, Bob [Dylan], you know, because he's got this little studio in his garage.' He just went back to his house, phoned up Bob and he said sure, come on over. Tom Petty had my guitar and when I went to pick it up, he said, 'I was wondering what I was gonna do tomorrow.' And Roy said, 'Well, give us a call if you're going to do anything. I'd love to come along.' We wrote this tune the next morning when we got to Dylan's house, just the tune and then I thought, 'Well, let's stick a bit in here for Roy.'³⁸⁷ Remembered Lynne, "We were just on the lawn in Bob Dylan's back garden, all strumming away, and we said let's write a bit for Roy. And then Roy tries it out and it's perfect for him. It all came together like that, because everybody was there who wrote the song."³⁸⁸

"I always think it's a bit daft having all these people standing round and only I end up singing, you know," said Harrison. "When they actually were doing the vocals, at one point, I just said to Jeff, 'Hey Jeff, this is it! The Traveling Wilburys!' It was like magic, it just happened. If you'd have tried to ring everybody up, saying, 'Hey, we've got this idea, will you do it?' you would never have gotten through all these record companies and managers, it would've been impossible. But it was so spontaneous, we were doing it even before we realized."³⁸⁹

Harrison came up with the song's title while rummaging around in Dylan's Malibu home studio.³⁹⁰ "I was walking round with a bit of paper and a pencil and I was looking 'round Dylan's garage looking at lists of

his song titles, trying to think of a title ... and I was saying, 'Come on, where's the words?' thinking all these people are such great songwriters so give us some lyrics then! Anyway, I looked behind his garage door and there was this big cardboard box [that had a bright orange sticker] that said, 'Handle with care.' Once we got the title it just took off. I thought, 'I've been beat up, battered round,' and then the lyrics were flying. I mean, we could've had twenty-nine verses to that tune, it was brilliant."³⁹¹

Recorded on Dylan's near-antique Ampex tape recorder, "Handle with Care" languished in Harrison's hands for some time, however, as he and the record company Warners tried to figure out how to market a tune that was too good to remain a B-side.³⁹² Harrison, dubbed the unofficial manager of the group, convinced Dylan, Lynne, Petty, and Orbison to reconvene at the home of Dave Stewart of the Eurythmics and "write a tune a day" over the course of nine or ten days for a complete album.³⁹³ The Wilbury concept was simple: "[A] very self-contained group ... five Wilburys and one roadie."³⁹⁴ Roy was Lefty Wilbury, Dylan was Lucky, Petty was Charlie T., Lynne was Otis, and Harrison was Nelson.³⁹⁵ Together the Traveling Wilburys recorded at Stewart's studio in Los Angeles from May 7-17, 1988.³⁹⁶ Lynne and Harrison then retired to Friar Park to work on final production.³⁹⁷ "Handle with Care" appeared as the first track on *Vol. 1* in November 1988.³⁹⁸

Harrison noted that Dylan became re-energized in the collaboration with the quintet: "A lot of people take Bob seriously, but if you know Dylan, he's such a joker really. And he just sat down and we said, 'Okay, what are we gonna do?' And Bob says, 'Let's do one like Prince!' And he just started banging away, 'I love your sexy body!'"³⁹⁹

Vol. 1 went double platinum – even receiving a Grammy – and demand for a sequel was great.⁴⁰⁰ Roy Orbison died of a heart attack at age 52 on December 6, 1988. *Traveling Wilburys Vol. 3* was recorded in April 1990 and released on October 23, 1990.⁴⁰¹

Lynne continued to distance himself from the soulless electronic gadgetry used in making New Wave synthpop: "The technology that I have access to now, I actually don't use any of it. ... I went through a period where I used it a lot and got to think this isn't really much fun ... you know, playing with computers. ... It wasn't what I wanted to do. I didn't want to be a typist; I wanted to be a musician. So when I did George's album, which was my first venture into production in my new career as a producer, we both said to each other 'no machines eh?' ... And so since then all the records I've done have been played by hand, you know ... like real pianos, real guitars, real drums, real everything ... and so the technology, the latest thing that the Wilburys use is like ... electricity ... that's about the latest invention. ... I wanna make new sounds with a microphone, and guitar and piano ... and I sort of try to mic it up so the sounds that I use have like a sixties type of feel to 'em ... which means, like really open and sort of ambient and as though, you know ... it's like a group in the studio. ... I just want to bring that sort of feel to my new music."⁴⁰²

Said Lynne of his 1990s recording style: "We're spoiled because we've got 24 tracks, or more, and we can keep second-guessing forever, which can be a bad thing. It's nice to have the luxury, but sometimes you lose track of what you're doing, because you keep fiddling about so much, mainly because you're able too."⁴⁰³ "I only use a couple of tracks for miking drums, ever," explained Lynne. "I see sessions where there are 17 drum tracks and three machines locked together. I like to get it all on 24 tracks. If I can't get it all on that, I shouldn't bother."⁴⁰⁴

Harrison made a guest appearance on Lynne's solo album *Armchair Theatre*, released in 1990.⁴⁰⁵ Lynne gave the name *Armchair Theatre* to the album after an old British television show.⁴⁰⁶ The album was recorded in Lynne's restored 15th-century manor house called Walsh Hall in Meriden, Warwickshire, England.⁴⁰⁷ "After seeing the kind of studio George set up at home, I set up one of my own," said Lynne in 1991. "It's a real analog environment. ... I literally did almost do it from my arm chair. I put in a desk, a Raindir, which is not a famous one, but the guy who builds them makes them all by hand. It's really warm on the bass end. A lot of desks, I think, are just too hard. The Raindir also has a nice EQ on it, which you don't have to use much anyway. For recording, I always use an Otari 24-track, which is very robust and it

seems to always work for me. It doesn't go bang in the night. I got to a point where I was sick of linking up two machines. The one sound I got to hate more than any other was that 'rrrhmm, woowooooow!' as the two 24-tracks got into sync. And I decided, 'If I can't get it all on 24 tracks, when the Beatles used to get it on four ...' Of course, I do sometimes think, 'Ah, shit! If I only had another six tracks I could really have some fun on this.' But I've been trying to discipline myself. In the past I tended to go, 'Well, it needs piano.' So I'd have eight pianos. Of course, I retain my options. It's still an inventive process. I may still want eight pianos on it. There aren't any rules. But the way I work now has evolved through trying all these various systems and working things out. Now I'm thinking, "Simplicity is the best thing after all." The fewer gadgets and boxes and shit in the way, the better. To tell the truth, I like a microphone and a tape recorder best of all."⁴⁰⁸

On *Armchair Theatre* Lynne worked hard to "create out of the same set of values that informed a record from the '60s with people knowing what they're doing and being good at it."⁴⁰⁹ "I wanted to get the vocals real dry and up there, like I did on Tom [Petty]'s album [*Full Moon Fever*], because Tom's got a great voice, and I think in the past he's always been sort of swamped in reverb and stuff. I'm not a fan of reverb at all," noted Lynne. "I spend a lot of time putting the mic in different places, because the sound of a room is much nicer to me than the sound of a gadget. I love the intimacy of a dry vocal up front."⁴¹⁰ "You can almost picture it," said Lynne. "The singer is right there in front of the band in the middle, then the instruments are where they should be. That's what I try to get, anyway."⁴¹¹ "I've lately gotten into the thing of, 'Well, if he's singing it, we might as well hear it. Otherwise, don't bother.' I've really taken a lot of care over the past years with miking," explained Lynne.⁴¹²

Meanwhile, Kelly Groucutt and Mik Kaminski had reformed a band dedicated to ELO tunes and new music under the name OrKestra (the "K" is for Kelly and Kaminski).⁴¹³ Other band members were Terry Pardoe and Chris Tew on synthesizer, Clive Poole on guitar, and Mac Poole on drums.⁴¹⁴ Remembered Groucutt, "Mik had done solo stuff [as Violinski] and not been sort of wonderfully successful with it. ... I'd done some solo stuff and sort of you know, didn't really have the sort of recondition that I'd liked to have got and there was still ideas floating around so we decided to pool our resources and put together a band called OrKestra which was, I suppose, a forerunner of Electric Light Orchestra Part II. In [OrKestra] we played a lot of the old ELO standards and medleyed, if that's the right word, you know some of the really well known ones because there was so many and interspersed them with OrKestra material from the new album that we did."⁴¹⁵

OrKestra played for the first time at the Allied Breweries Sport and Social Club in Burton upon Trent, Staffordshire on April 24, 1987, following up the performance with a tour.⁴¹⁶ Simon Fox took over from Mac Poole on drums in January 1988.⁴¹⁷ OrKestra toured the United Kingdom again in 1988 under the moniker "Beyond the Dream," kicking off with an event at the Newcastle Playhouse. The group soon became involved in penning new tunes for the forgettable sex romp "Summer Job."⁴¹⁸ The band even appeared briefly in the film's pool party dénouement scene, playing "Some Kind of Magic."⁴¹⁹ Remembered Groucutt, "At first it was just 'Some Kind of Magic,' but then it escalated to four tracks."⁴²⁰ The band also delivered two songs, "This Is The Night" and "Crazy, Crazy" (later renamed "Who's That Calling") for the Lynn Redgrave/Tony Curtis thriller "Midnight."⁴²¹ Kelly and Mik eventually produced two albums together, *Beyond the Dream* and *Roll Over Beethoven*.⁴²² The 11-track *Beyond the Dream* was recorded at Bullet Sound Studios in Nederhorst den Berg, The Netherlands, and released in November 1991. One of the album's songs, "Fly Away," became a Top 10 song on European charts.⁴²³ *Roll Over Beethoven* was released as an exclusive UK release in May 1993 with thirteen tracks, eight of them recycled from the previous album.⁴²⁴

Jeff Lynne, through his attorney Edward Cohen, filed for an injunction against the band, as some of the advertising material for an OrKestra May Ball at Shotover Hall in Oxfordshire referred to the band as ELO.⁴²⁵ Lynne, Cohen said, had been worried about the effect of the confusion on the original band's name and legacy. The mistake cost the band £5,000. The band extricated themselves from further legal proceedings by referring to themselves only as ex-ELO band members.⁴²⁶

Into the Great Wide Open, released in July 1991, was the second Tom Petty and the Heartbreakers album produced with Jeff Lynne, after the success of 1989's *Full Moon Fever*. Lynne again preferred the low-tech approach in the recording of the album. "We recorded in Studio C at Rumbo Recorders. It's as close to recording at home as you can get in a commercial facility. It's this tiny little studio, with an Otari 24-track and this tiny little Trident desk. We even used the kitchen there to record the drums."⁴²⁷

The miracle of technology allowed Lynne to virtually fulfill his lifelong fantasy of playing with all the members of the Beatles together on the *Anthology* project, which included the release of a book, a miniseries on commercial television, and three double-CDs.⁴²⁸ Lynne produced and played on two new singles, "Real Love" and "Free as a Bird."⁴²⁹ These two songs represented the first new Beatles releases in 25 years.⁴³⁰ Both songs had been originally written and recorded on audiocassette in the late 1970s by John Lennon, and had been in the possession of his widow Yoko Ono Lennon.⁴³¹ Recalled McCartney, "Yoko gave us the cassette with John's voice on it and even then I gave her a veto on the project, saying that if she didn't like what we did on the song, we wouldn't put it out."⁴³² Lynne began meticulously eradicating tape hiss, clicks, and other artifacts from the original tapes.⁴³³ George Martin, the legendary arranger, composer, and producer of the Beatles' original albums, did not contribute to the reconstruction project, likely because of hearing loss. "The Beatles are very good record producers and they don't need me anymore," Martin answered when asked about the project. "I knew about it, I knew it was happening and there was no rancour about it. What they did with John's tape is exceptionally clever and very good. Jeff Lynne has done a brilliant job, and having heard it now, I wish I had produced it."⁴³⁴

"Free as a Bird," from 1977, was re-recorded at Harrison's home in Henley-on-Thames in secret in 1994 to avoid premature publicity.⁴³⁵ "When we did *Sgt. Pepper* we pretended we were other people," said McCartney. "It sometimes helps to get a little bit of a scenario going in your mind. So we pretended that John had just rang us up and said, 'I'm going on holiday to Spain and there's this one little song that I like. Finish it up for me, I trust you.' Those were the crucial words, 'I trust you.' I think we were all emotional before we started work, wondering how it would be. Before the session started, we were talking about it, and I was trying to help set it because we never even knew if we could be in a room together, never mind make music together after all these years. But we know each other so well, we just put on the headphones and got on with it. There was some tension between George and I when it came to the time to write a few new lines for the song. We were vying for the best lyric. I think we've done it well. Yoko sent over a sheet of lyrics and we tried them, but they didn't fit. When Ringo heard 'Free as a Bird' in the control room, he couldn't contain himself. He shouted, 'It sounds like the bloody Beatles!' It actually takes off because there are a lot of harmonies that come in and stuff. I thought, 'Wasn't it strange playing along with John Lennon's cassette?' It was very strange and very magic. It was very spooky and very wonderful. We pulled it off and that's the thing. I don't care what anyone says. ... To do this song, we took a cassette of John's, not multi-tracked ... it was him and piano, interlocked. You couldn't pull the fader down and get rid of the piano. We did a lot of technical stuff on the tape to make it work. And, not being boastful with Jeff Lynne, we did a really good job. We recorded it, George, Ringo, and me, and Jeff Lynne was very good."⁴³⁶

"Free as a Bird," released on December 4, 1995, appeared on *Anthology 1*.⁴³⁷ "Real Love" made its debut on *Anthology 2* in March 1996.⁴³⁸ Lynne noted that "Real Love" was "much simpler than 'Free as a Bird,' sort of a love song, and bouncier. It's a beautiful tune as well and they all do great harmonies with John."⁴³⁹

In a 1996 interview accompanying the release of *Anthology*, Lynne said, "When you hear George and Paul sing along with John, you go, 'God, it's the Beatles.' Absolutely the greatest group ever."⁴⁴⁰ He basked in the glow of the recording sessions with the reunited Threetles, reveling in the knowledge that he had personally resurrected his hero John Lennon for the recording session. "The mood in the studio was mostly upbeat," Lynne said. "It's the only session I've ever done where the talk in between the takes was so good that I didn't even want to start recording. They were all doing all the old anecdotes and one of

them would laugh and say, 'What about you, you old bugger!'"⁴⁴¹ Lynne's comments masked semi-private worries expressed by George and Paul. First, there was the obvious problem of overdubbing voices and backing instruments onto a very old recording. McCartney worried about the possible influence of too much Lynne sound. "I was worried because it was going to be George on slide. When Jeff suggested slide guitar I thought, 'On it's "My Sweet Lord" again,' it's George's trademark."⁴⁴² The finished product, however, led McCartney to admit that Harrison's guitar playing on "Free as a Bird" was "fantastic."⁴⁴³

Lynne co-produced more than half the tracks on Paul McCartney's wintry, stripped-down studio album *Flaming Pie* ("The Songs We Were Singing," "The World Tonight," "Flaming Pie," "Heaven on a Sunday," "Souvenir," "Little Willow," "Really Love You," and "Beautiful Night") released in 1997.⁴⁴⁴ All of the songs were written by McCartney. Lynne contributed harmony and backing vocals, electric guitar, acoustic guitar, keyboard, and electric spinette harpsichord in the studio in Sussex, England.⁴⁴⁵ The eight songs Lynne contributed to show remarkable restraint; only a thin but unmistakable gloss of his trademark brushed metallic harmonies is detected on the album. Critics admitted that Jeff was "clearly the best collaborator McCartney has worked with since Elvis Costello."⁴⁴⁶

Lynne produced *Brainwashed*, a posthumous album by George Harrison that appeared after his death in November 2002.⁴⁴⁷ George and his son Dhani began arranging songs written in the 1990s into an album in 1999.⁴⁴⁸ "We started working on the album in 1999," noted Lynne. "George would come round my house and he'd always have a new song with him. He would strum them on guitar or ukelele. The songs just knocked me out. George talked about how he wanted the album to sound."⁴⁴⁹ George and Dhani continued to work on the disc in Montagnola, Switzerland, right up until October 2001, when George left for what would be his last trip to the United States.⁴⁵⁰ George had nearly finished *Brainwashed*, down to multiple takes of his six-string guitar solos and string arrangements recorded on synth, before Lynne began the process of transcribing the tapes, finishing bass tracks, and recording backup vocals and piano.⁴⁵¹ Said Lynne, "He told Dhani a lot of things he would like to have done to the songs and left us little clues. There was always that spiritual energy that went into the lyrics as well as the music."⁴⁵² *Brainwashed* was released in November 2002.⁴⁵³

Bev Bevan, who liked to tour much more than Lynne, formed Electric Light Orchestra Part II.⁴⁵⁴ The name was settled upon for legal reasons related to the original conflict with Lynne over promotion of OrKestra.⁴⁵⁵

Louis Clark took up the role of orchestral arrangement for ELO Part II.⁴⁵⁶ Eric Troyer sang lead and backing vocals on the first ELO Part II album.⁴⁵⁷ Troyer is an American, born in the Midwestern town of Elkhart, Indiana.⁴⁵⁸ After college, Troyer moved to New York City, where he became a popular session musician.⁴⁵⁹ He also began collaborating with Jim Steinman on songs for Meatloaf, John Lennon, Bonnie Tyler, James Taylor, Carly Simon, Julian Lennon, Sisters of Mercy, Billy Joel, and Celine Dion.⁴⁶⁰

ELO Part II returned to the Wembley Stage in 1991, backed by Louis Clark directing the Moscow State Symphony Orchestra.⁴⁶¹ Between May and June 1991 ELO Part II toured Europe with the Moscow State Symphony Orchestra.⁴⁶²

ELO Part II released the *Moment of Truth* album, recorded at Carriage House Studios in Stamford, Connecticut, in October 1994. One of the best songs on the album is "The Fox." Groucutt, who wrote the tune, said, "I'm an animal lover. I've got a soft spot for animals, and I think fox hunting is particularly despicable, but this song wasn't actually written as a protest song. It was purely something that popped into my head one day when I was playing around with a drum machine and it turned out to be this song about a fox that sounds like it's a protest song, but it's not. But it is, in fact, the story of a fox hunt as seen from the perspective of the fox."⁴⁶³

In March 1995 ELO Part II toured Australia with the Australian Rock Orchestra.⁴⁶⁴ On March 29, 1995, the band played the Singapore Indoor Stadium backed by the Singapore Symphony Orchestra.⁴⁶⁵ After the tour, ELO Part II released the concert album *One Night: Live in Australia*.

ELO Part II also played with several local orchestras during their tour of America in 1996 and 1997.⁴⁶⁶ When Bevan left the band in 1999 he sold his half of the rights to the ELO name to Jeff Lynne. The band soldiered on as The Orchestra.

Jeff Lynne resurrected some element of the band's sound as a near-solo project in 2001 with the album *Zoom*.⁴⁶⁷ "I just realized how long it was since the last album, and where did the time go? You know?" explained Lynne when asked about the album's title.⁴⁶⁸ "Now I realize that I sort of ran out of people I've always wanted to [produce], and it was about time I did some music of my own."⁴⁶⁹

Lynne recorded *Zoom* in different rooms of his house in Bel Air, California.⁴⁷⁰ Said Lynne at the time of the album's release, "All the rooms in the house have got microphone lines. Eight mikes can be plugged into each room to record anything you could ever imagine – well, within reason."⁴⁷¹ Ringo Starr put down drum tracks for two of the songs in Lynne's living room.⁴⁷² "I like the natural sound of a room," said Lynne in an interview with Paul Clinton. "All the rooms have their own sound, so it's a matter of putting it [a microphone] where you like and seeing what it sounds like."⁴⁷³ George Harrison can be heard playing slide guitar on two *Zoom* tracks.⁴⁷⁴

Richard Tandy is the only former ELO band member who is credited on *Zoom*.⁴⁷⁵

The only other original member in Jeff's new version of ELO is Richard Tandy.

In front of his first audience since 1986, Jeff goes into 'Evil Woman' and notes ruefully that "it came true recently." Acrimoniously divorced from his second wife, Jeff now lives in LA with the singer Rosie Vela, who joins him in the new line-up. The best song on new album *Zoom*, 'Moment in Paradise', is dedicated to her tonight.

In the intervening years, Jeff has landed some dream gigs, producing records with all his big heroes: Roy Orbison, Del Shannon, Tom Petty, even, of course, The Beatles. "They're all still up on pedestals, though," he says, believably.

Two days later, at our interview, he's still on a high about the 'comeback' show. Though thrilled at the way his music has endured, when talk turns to recurring themes in his songs or a wider significance of his work, Jeff sits back in his seat and the shades go a shade darker. Part of him still smarts about being the kid from the Birmingham estate who failed his 11 plus and he mistrusts any attempt to intellectualise his motives. "I was making records for myself and whoever liked them. Every time I released one I was getting platinum albums and that's what mattered to me – real people were going out to buy my records. That's the kind of criticism I like."

Why, after so many personal goals scored, does Jeff want to revive the old firm?

"When the last three albums were done I thought, I'm free, I don't have to do it anymore. But two years ago I suddenly thought about having a group and being the singer and writing all the songs like I used to, making a nice record and going out to play it. This has elements of all the things I've learned since ELO, even down to letting me be the singer. It took me years to find my natural voice and this is it.

"It's a very nice atmosphere, now. That show was so much fun, I couldn't quite believe how much fun it could be. It wasn't a pain or anything.

Lynne abruptly canceled a US tour of his resurrected ELO in the summer of 2001 due to poor ticket sales, but did appear in concert for tapings of VH1 *Storytellers* and the special *ELO: In The Spotlight* shown on PBS affiliates in August and September 2001.⁴⁷⁶

Concert for George, 2003.

In 2004, Bev Bevan retired from live performing and ELO Part II disbanded for good.⁴⁷⁷ The rest of the band, renamed The Orchestra – Mik Kaminski, Louis Clark, Kelly Groucutt, Eric Troyer, Parthenon Huxley, and Gordon Townsend – continued on a Y2K and Beyond Tour.⁴⁷⁸ They billed themselves as "The Ultimate Symphonic Rock Celebration."⁴⁷⁹

In February 2005 Orchestra released the album *No Rewind* on the Argentinean label ART Music.⁴⁸⁰

The stage musical *Xanadu Live*, the brainchild of Douglas Carter Beane, which hit Broadway in 2007. *Xanadu* appeared at the Helen Hayes Theater in May, and is directed by Christopher Ashley.⁴⁸¹

In 2012 Jeff Lynne released a cover album of favorite songs called *Long Wave*. Many of the songs had been played by his father as he grew up in Birmingham. "I kind of hated it when I was a kid, but all these years later, I get all of this old stuff. Without being too slushy about it, I've never heard songwriting as good."⁴⁸²

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