



STEINWAY & SONS

A LEGACY YET UNFINISHED

Unreleased Keith Emerson compositions discovered by his fiancée on track for posthumous development

BY NICK TATE

After months of mourning, Emo fans have cause to celebrate. Longtime Keith Emerson fiancée **Mari Kawaguchi** reveals that the legendary Emerson, Lake & Palmer keyboardist wrote prolifically in the months before his tragic suicide last year, leaving behind new music now in process for recording and release.

In an interview with *Progression* during February's Cruise to the Edge shipboard progressive music festival, Kawaguchi said musicians close to Emerson have been recruited to perform the new material comprising classical pieces, ballads, and progressive rock compositions.

Kawaguchi, 47, said she discovered "stacks of manuscripts" Emerson wrote but never recorded. "So, we are getting brilliant musicians to put together all the music and release it," she said.

She didn't specify when the songs might be recorded and declined to name everyone involved with the project. But a handful of Emerson's closest friends apparently have agreed, in principle, to participate. Among them: guitarist Mark Bonilla (Keith Emerson Band), keyboardist Jordan Rudess (Dream Theater), violinist/keyboardist Eddie Jobson (U.K.), guitarist Jeff "Skunk" Baxter (Steely Dan, Doobie Brothers), plus Toto guitarist/producer Steve Lukather and keyboardist Steve Porcaro.

In part, Kawaguchi attributes Emerson's death Mar. 11, 2016 at age 71 to antidepressant medication he was taking. She confirmed he was despondent over nerve damage in his right hand from decades of



nonstop performing that robbed him of his ability to play at the high standard he set for himself, despite attempts at corrective surgery.

Kawaguchi, who found Emerson's body in the couple's California home, acknowledged that declining ability haunted him and likely factored into his decision to end his life, compounded by adverse reaction to medications. "Music killed him, because he felt he could not deliver anymore," she said. "But ultimately, it was the antidepressants that egged him [on] to make that horrible decision."

Kawaguchi denied reports that negative media coverage and fan criticism of Keith's final public performances contributed to his despondency and ultimate suicide. She hinted at taking legal action relative to the prescriptions, declining to elaborate or specify what meds Emo was taking.

But the big news for fans is Mari's disclosure that new Emerson music will be heard posthumously. Her comments came after a midnight tribute on the cruise to recently departed progres-

sive legends Emerson, Greg Lake, and John Wetton, helmed by the Dave Kerzner Band plus guest musicians including singer/bassist Billy Sherwood (Yes, Asia), drummer/singer Nick D'Virgilio (Spock's Beard, the Fringe) and vocalist Leslie Hunt (District 97).

"Keith Emerson, Greg Lake, and now John Wetton—they're all gone," Kawaguchi said from the stage, surrounded by the players. "But they're not really gone because these guys are carrying on their legacies and their music. Just don't let the music die! Play on, play the music, sing, and just do it"

Progression: *First and foremost, condolences on Keith's passing. Is there anything in particular you'd most like people to know or remember about him?*

Kawaguchi: "Thank you. With Keith and other musicians, the most sensitive kind, their artistry comes from their sensitivity. I lived with [Keith] for 10 years and they don't think like us, in a way. Whatever they take in they take in 150 percent and that gives them more sensitivity, more insecurity, depression. But that's what creates great music."

Progression: *I'd heard that sometimes the two of you played music together.*

Kawaguchi: "I'm not a musician, but I've played piano since I was 3 years old. I used to play with him because, as you know, his right hand was failing. So I would play right hand for him and he would play with his left hand and we used to have so much fun."

Progression: *How much do you believe nerve damage in his arm/hand contributed to Keith's poor state of mind at the time of his death?*

Kawaguchi: "A lot. Because everybody said, 'Oh, Keith, if you can't play you can still compose, you can be a composer.' But for him, performing was so important. Not only was he a great musician, he was an entertainer."

Progression: *So there is new Keith Emerson music yet to be heard?*

Kawaguchi: "Yes, a lot. Many things. He wrote [many pieces of] music by hand. He never used Pro Tools or a computer. He handwrote manuscripts and we have stacks of them that are still unreleased."

Progression: *Is it in the ELP vein, more like Keith's solo material, or classical?*

Kawaguchi: "It's more Keith's solo stuff. Some of it is classical. Some of it is more prog. Many mixtures of things. You know, we had the Keith Emerson tribute concert with an incredible lineup [last] May 28 in Los Angeles and a DVD from that is coming out. I made a point of using musicians that Keith was actually close to and worked with."

Progression: *And some of those same musicians will be involved with these new recordings?*

Kawaguchi: "I can't tell you all of them, but everyone wants to do it. Probably Skunk Baxter, Steve Lukather, Steve Porcaro, Mark Bonilla of course, Eddie Jobson, Jordan Rudess, of course."

Progression: *Have you just approached them to ask or have they committed to getting involved?*

Kawaguchi: "They will do it. There will be a Keith Emerson tribute band concert in Japan, with Mark Bonilla plus Jordan Rudess, so that's going to tour. It's incredible. And at NAMM [the annual Anaheim, Calif. music-products industry trade show in January], Mark Bonilla and Jordan Rudess did snippets of 'Tarkus.'"

Progression: *Jordan, of course, has recorded his own cover of "Tarkus," so this is familiar territory for him.*

Kawaguchi: "Yes, that's what I like. It wasn't just a complete copy. Keith loved when people would take his music and do something different with it. One of the best [examples] we saw was Kevin Eubanks at the Baked Potato [club in Studio City, L.A.] when he played 'Trilogy.' It was the most brilliant, completely rearranged version. That's what he liked. It had to be original. He didn't like people to copy him, but take his music and make it their own."

Progression: *I must ask a difficult question: After Keith's death, Greg Lake said some pretty tough things about him, about his alcohol and drug use going back to the 1970s—the depression, anxiety, and that there were other issues. Is there anything you want to say about that?*

Kawaguchi: "Lots of things Greg said after Keith's death, and I know this from my own experience, were ... When you talk to the press, especially tabloids in England, they're notorious for it, they twist your words around. I was interviewed by the London Daily Mail and they twisted my words completely, 180 degrees, they changed my words around."

"They took my words and twisted it around and said Keith had read all the [negative fan] comments on Facebook and was upset about it. But I never said that. What I told them was, no, Keith never read those things on Facebook. I read it. But Keith wasn't exposed to it, he never read those things, so he was unaffected by it."

"But they put it like, 'Oh, Keith died because people were saying horrible things and had horrible opinions about him.'"

Progression: *Did Greg reach out to you personally at any point?*

Kawaguchi: "No, but his wife did. He was sick. He was ill and I understood that. But his wife and his daughter did."

Progression: *When I spoke with Carl Palmer last June, he told me the news reports suggesting Keith's death was due to depression were incorrect. He said Keith was certainly upset that he was losing some of his ability to play, but he wasn't in a deep suicidal depression.*

Kawaguchi: "Right. There was talk that he was so very depressed. No, he wasn't. Everybody who was close to him knew he wasn't clinically depressed. I hate that people say, 'Oh, he died because he was so depressed.' No, he wasn't. Those people who were close to him knew he wasn't like that."

Progression: *He was taking antidepressant medication, though.*

Kawaguchi: "He was. And it totally affected his judgment toward the end, as it does to a lot of people."

Progression: *So it was jumping to conclusions to believe he was so depressed it drove him to take his own life?*

Kawaguchi: "That's the thing, don't jump to assumptions. Only the people who were close to him like me, Mark Bonilla, etc. know how he was. Ultimately, yeah, it was probably his medication that affected his

judgment, but he wasn't severely depressed. And that's why we are all in shock. Because the day he died, in the morning, we were laughing. We were watching TV and laughing at the jokes on TV and it was like a normal day. Then later that day, I find him dead [from a self-inflicted gunshot wound to the head]."

Progression: *You had no indication he was at risk of harming himself?*

Kawaguchi: "No indication, no idea. All this medication he was taking, prescribed by the same doctor ... I don't want to say his name."

Progression: *And you think that was a major contributing factor in his death.*

Kawaguchi: "Yes, big, big factor."

Progression: *Can you say what the drug was?*

Kawaguchi: "No, I don't want to tell you because I want to take some action about it."

Progression: *There is clinical evidence that some antidepressants can contribute to increased suicidal thoughts.*

Kawaguchi: "Yes. This is the problem, especially in Los Angeles. I call them doctors of death—they're prescribing this [medication] like candy. It's like, trendy. You can call them up and it's just waiting for you at the drugstore. And it's not right. Ultimately, that's what happened with Keith."

Progression: *Antidepressants were involved, but you also said "music killed him." So other factors were involved as well.*

Kawaguchi: "Yes. To be honest with you, he was against suicide so I knew something contributed to [changing] that. But music was his whole life. And people say, 'Oh he didn't have to do that. He could still have his life after music and not be able to play.' But, no, people don't understand, music was his whole being. Performing—not just composing—performing was his whole being. And without it, he couldn't imagine life."

"The other thing was he was so afraid of being taken care of. He would always tell me, 'You know, Mari, when I get old and you have to take care of me, I'm going to break up with you and check into a [nursing home]. I'm not going to even tell you where I am because I don't want anyone taking care of me.' He was loving in that way, but also had pride."

"He always used to tell me because he was much older than me, 'Oh, Mari, you should find a much younger guy.' And I always told him, 'No, Keith, I'm going to find someone much older than you, someone's more mature.' So we laughed—so much, every day. Even the day he died, early in the day, we were laughing."

Progression: *I imagine those are the memories you cherish most today.*

Kawaguchi: "Yes. I am extremely sad, but I'm so thankful I had those glorious 10 years. I still think of him 24/7, I still cry every day. But the memories are becoming more beautiful, and I will never forget. Never forget." —