

IGOR KOTELNIKOV

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THE TOP OF THE END
(*Earring drive Heep to a Box*)

Nowadays rock-n-roll is actually an occasion to get and drink a sip or two of beer together. Within a few years, the old generation of Russian Heep-fans have either got drunkards on the basis of betrayed hopes in the new capitalist reality or got used to the rat races of the so called business (which offers wonderful music of a different kind, that of the rustling banknotes and exquisite feasts in the background of poverty). That is why **today** we do not add new chapters to the legendary book *Wonderworld of Uriah Heep in ASIA* about the legendary *URIAH HEEP* — we just hammer in the last nail into the coffin in which the illusions of the "Wonderful worlds" are buried. Where are they, ever so wonderful, now, after the decade of broken expectations, false predictions and slow dying of the group, which the author has been witnessing in the succession of personal meetings with them in Russia, Germany and in their own motherland?

But to hammer in a nail (or to crush "another Brick in the Wall") does not mean to put an end to. It means to begin, rather. We know well that the magic wonder of music will last until the humanity is there. Only the last magicians were exiled from *URIAH HEEP* yet twenty years ago. *THAT HEEP* has survived only in our Asian hearts, whereas the group under this name, now agonising by and by, is but a colourless shadow of the former superband. Yet the story goes on as does music. In the end of the 1990-s, very few musicians have survived to develop rock-n-roll in the right direction. It is my debt to enumerate the most distinguished of them: the irreproachable *Camel 96/99*, sweet *America 98*, developing *Kerry Livgren* from *KANSAS*, elegant *Marillion 99/01*, resurrected *Styx* (plus solos of Tommy Shaw), wonder-guitarists Steve Hackett, Snowy White, Robin Trower, Jeff Beck, Rik Emmett (ex-*Triumph*), finest Gary Wright 99 from *Spooky Tooth* and, last but not least, entrancing *Golden Earring*.

Present-day HEEP

With stubbornness worth a better use, they go on telling about how their new pieces "wonderfully" go together with the old ones, and about Mick Box — the keeper of Heep traditions. Everything would have been all right if the present state of the group had been estimated only by the self-satisfied Heep who have turned themselves into their own bronze busts or by a group of their devoted fans whose importunate "rejoicing group" reminds of the "mature socialism."

Yet the curious process of the decay is witnessed by many other Heep-fans who have not gone nuts. Strangely, they do not agree with Mick Box. God save us from teaching him how to do his sacred performance! However, the new discs are not distributed free yet, and the shows cost much enough, which leaves us only one right — the right to formulate our own assessment of the product we have to buy (for we are as naive to expect the "return to fantasy").

How long are they going to exploit our expectation of the miracle?

How long shall we last out if the search and rush of the 70-s that generated the crazy Heep music degenerated in the 80-s and have come next to the end by the beginning of the new century?

The laws of rock-n-roll are ruthless: if your music answers the mood of the millions, you are a platinum millionaire. If instead of the original ideas you start mechanically multiplying God knows what, it does not necessarily mean that you will as easily multiply profits from your new albums; today many can play, and some can play even better than Box did 30 years ago. Music does not survive when your heart is not put into it. True, for the last years Heep have dug out something in their hearts: when the "Different World" was worth only switching it off immediately, their last acoustic album intrigues at least as a self-tribute. But the impression does not last long for soon enough you understand that the track-listing includes pieces from the 70-s easily adaptable to acoustics. This album should have rather been called "A Tribute to Original Uriah Heep." It caused a strong impression that it is not Heep but some OTHER group who play Heep's music. Good gracious! And with all that Mick is arrogant enough to say that acoustics is very difficult to perform! Let him learn from *GOLD-EN EARRING* who were among the first to play "live acoustics" alongside with such men as Eric Clapton!

Now, to the so-called excessive expenses that are required to do acoustics, which Mick is not tired to mention. For God's sake, Mr Box, and what about Golden Earring who play up to three live concerts a week — and have not gone bankrupts yet? The video version "Acoustically Driven" on DVD rises many unpleasant questions. Couldn't you find more good-looking girls with less wretched voices for back-singing? And what about those awful accents in Bernie Shaw's vocals, which definitely kill away the nostalgic mood of the masterpieces of the past? Bernie's artificially "cheerful" smile in the background of the blank and melancholy faces of the other performers can convince only Bernie himself in the wonder of the performance. Finally, the appearance of Ian Anderson with his flute led only to the over-arrangement of the eternal "Blind Eye" ballad, and the flute only looked an alien body on the stage.

The string group of support looked school-like to sadly strum and to eventually get down in "Lady in Black." I'd better not say a word about how "The Wizard" sounded. The original masterpiece of the "Paradise" in this performance fully persuaded us that one can drink away whatever talent. (By the way, my university mate, yet in 1975, improvised the piano version of the "Paradise / The Spell" during the break between lectures right in the classroom, and he did it so expressively that I still remember it now. But it is only by the way.)

Speaking about history, let us recall once again that, as a group, Uriah Heep issued but the only album. Next followed discs of Ken Hensley's group called "Uriah Heep" in two ver-

sions: "Hensley - Byron Band" and "Hensley - Lawton Band." After Ken's resignation, the Uriah Heep team simply has no right to be. It may be whatever, "Mick Box Band," if you like, but not the Uriah Heep. For all his career, Mick did not play anywhere except SPICE (with their only single) and URIAH HEEP. Nowhere. Never. With ho group or performer! Can such a musician develop into a big guitarist or composer? Though having written the book about Uriah Heep, I am not their fan, as well as I am nobody's fan! More, the criticism of the Heep of 80-s, which seemed so sharp in the book, turned out to be not quite true, for in reality Heep appeared very strange indeed when I first met them. For instance, Box forgets about you just a minute after your conversation and greets you as a complete stranger ten minutes later! The grey face and dull eyes of Bolder can attract perhaps only his most devoted fans. Lanzon is much more pleasant to communicate with, but what can that mean when his keys sound so expressionless — and that in the group where Ken used to play with such a magic solemnity...? Poor Lanzon seems as if to serve some compulsory conscription, having not composed anything worth attention for 15 years. Fluffy Kerslake, with all his seeming good-naturedness, is the most vehement ill-wisher of Ken Hensley in the band. To my mind, he hates him as Sallieri hated Mozart (having no poison opportunity), though his best years were spent beside Ken in the group. Suffice it to say that Kerslake is known only due to his work with Hensley, like the notorious villain Mark Chapman who is known only because of his role in the tragic fate of John Lennon. It is Kerslake who spread lies about Hensley's alcoholism while their tours. He'd better play like Iain Clark (the best drummer of Heep, in my opinion)! Darling Bernie Shaw... The eternal question about who was the best vocalist in Heep: we must admit that **now** Shaw is a much better one than Pete Goalby. But there is so little of spirit and emotion in his voice.

The hostage of his own ambitions, Mick Box has turned into the leader of an ordinary and kitschy band. No wonder that for the last decade the group has issued only two full studio discs. As before, Box is the leading character of the band. His characteristic guitar sound is the only feature that has survived since the old times of Heep. But what about the rest of them, are they good for nothing? Besides, the fan-club and its newspaper, small and modest by appearance but very interesting by its contents, have been suffocated. Now, under Box's keen guidance, a new and pompous magazine is published, stuffed with the ads of T-shirts and mugs. Welcome to business! Away with that "creative activity"... To complete the absurdity of the merchandising situation they should only supply "Magician Birthday Party" with the ad of *Magician's Condoms*.

From this angle, the situation with the 30th birthday of the group and Heepvention 2000 became demonstration events. As soon as Box had realised that Hensley and Lawton were not only going to sit in the hall and to weep with envy over the success of their former mates — but to play on the stage together with them, Mick and his Heep group lost any desire to participate in their own jubilee! Thus they exposed themselves as a mediocre band who had just misappropriated the name of the legendary group.

However, they were clever enough to sell their albums with stamped autographs through Internet. An autograph is worth getting when it is personal and is accompanied with emotions of the moment. I cannot be proud of the one bought in the shop, yet the sale is very active and profitable — oh mores!

Box and his team did not appear at Heepvention. What is it but a mean and petty revenge to Hensley and Lawton? And to all of us, too. I wonder, what does David Owen, the administrator of the fan-club, feel when he is forced to issue a glossy price-list of T-shirts, autographs and mugs instead of the journal about the creative activity of the group? Barred from reality, Heep are not aware of the fact that just three years since its issue "Sonic Origa-

mi" 1998 has only reached the status of a silver disk (50,000 copies)! There were times when it was not less than a million...

Former Heep

Heep have grown old. They feel nostalgic for their old days. They dream about the overcrowded stadiums and triumph of the 70-s. At their age, awoken, all people would forgive their neighbours debts and sins and make peace with God. All but Box and his team.

This Heep dreaming can be shaken only by the other Heep. When Hensley issued his solo "From Time To Time", they had to answer with the album of 1995, which was, at least, perceivable. Competition may be very useful. Three years later Heep fell as low as to issue "Sonic Origami" which is much worse than "Sea of Light". Even Bolder's "Shelter from the Rain" cannot save the complete failure.

The concerts cause even more despondency because the new things merge into one common grey background. Yet as soon as they start playing their "old rags" (we attend these damned concerts just for the sake of those "rags"!), there is some melody and beauty back there! One would like to recommend, "Don't you rape yourselves, guys, just play your own tributes! Then you will make a good machine like "Music Box!" Which was proved by "Acoustically Driven" and probably will be soon proved by "Acoustically Driven 2." We are all waiting. Suffice it to say that even our Russian "pirates" steal only old Heep disks of the 70-s (with Ken Hensley). They have already pirately issued the last Hensley's discs, even "Hensley Lawton Band." Meanwhile, no "pirate" is eager to steal Heep of the 80-s & 90-s! There is the true market mirror!

I dare suppose that we would not be disappointed if we could get new Heep variations of the old "trivial" things like "July Morning".

It is notable that since the new Heep production does not inspire the consumers, the rating of old things fall lower too, and the Uriah Heep music is getting out of the market. They'd better not bring such a shame onto the old good name of Uriah Heep!

There is centuries long experience: when your house is decaying you should rather replace the girls than change the style of the make-up. It would be the best solution of the problem according to the capitalist mentality, otherwise welcome to socialism, which is known to the West only by "political threats" of the cold war times.

"Heepvention 2000"

I was not eager to go to "Heepvention." Why so? Because the event was planned as the apofuckosis of Uriah Heep, which I have seen many times, I definitely refused to go. I saw them in all states and masks. Why should I go to London then and to spend a heap of money just to hear the same songs and to see the same faces? By no means!

But when those famous push-pull events with Hensley and Lawton began, and there was promised a competitive alternative to the present-day Heep, I thought the other way. Besides, it became clear that Golden Earring took time-out up to the end of 2000, which meant no long-awaited festival of the Motherday-2000 with GE. Then I got the news that there would be no Uriah Heep as such at Heepvention, and I thought in favour of going there by all means. Thanks to the psychological support of Alexander Kolesnikov (Omsk, Russia) the decision was formed as final. Russia was presented there by a decent group of 5: Kolesnikov and his sister Olga, me with my son (technical support) and daughter (non-simultaneous interpreting).

The tension was very high indeed: what would we meet there? Photos are but pictures only, even "live"; they lack something very important. They lack what springs between people as a live contact: it either is or is not there. Now we are at "Heepvention", walking in the crowd. It is difficult to understand who is who, though some faces are familiar. Kolesnikov feels much better, he spent many years in Germany in contact with fans. The first character we saw was Mr Lawton. He appeared to be a short lean blond with thinning hair. I introduced myself and was very much surprised later when during the two days he remembered me and even the names of my children, and was very nice (though an Englishman!). I should not down that his wife Iris Lawton play a rather important role in his career. It was evident that Iris had a heavy stone against the present-day Heep. Undoubtedly, she dislike certain people. Lawton's voice is still grand, and when he sang in full on the second day it became clear that he is one of the best rock-vocalists of nowadays.

Then I saw Ken. Though my idea of Lawton turned untrue, with Ken it proved to have been absolutely right. The only difference with the Ken I had imagined was his voice. Usually, the singing voice is thinner than the speaking one. With Ken it is just the reverse. When he speaks his voice is rather high, almost like a woman's, but when he sings it becomes much deeper. Lawton was quite amicable, you might slap him on the shoulder or go joking with him. On the contrary, Ken looked a monument, one would not think of familiar terms with him. He is a true "rock star" and keeps you at a distance. He has some sort of a noble aura about him, like an English lord. A very communicable lord, though. He does not make himself attentive, he is attentive. Probably he has changed greatly owing to all those metaphysical ideas and dramatic events of his private life in the 90-s.

His frankness of today is a drive of the soul that is aware of the fact that probably there is not much time left in this life for him. There was some misunderstanding in our conversation when I tried to solve some of our mutual problems. The conversation was not quite a success, it was simply impossible to talk at ease in that nervous atmosphere. We will never make friends with him, for we lived differently, and we will live differently. For example, I have never got pernicious habits, which Ken did. I never lived arty-farty, which Ken did all his life. We have very little in common but one: to perceive life through music. When you stay close to somebody for hours, you can clearly see it.

People around treat Ken with definite respect, next to worship; perhaps it is why Ken adopts unaffected manners and avoids mass idolatry — just not to be made a fetish of. Certainly, he was the magnetic centre of those days, as well as he was the main giver of autographs. Now I feel a shame to have used him for half an hour signing all those booklets for me but I realised the degree of my arrogance only in the process of the signing ceremony. Reuben Kane, the guitarist who had just been performing side by side with him on the stage through the whole concert, rather shyly came up to him and asked for one single autograph! Even his team mates feel this great distance.

The next was Paul Newton.

It is impossible to know him by the pictures of 30-year ago Heep. He is very tall, very solid and seems to stand firmly. He is awfully straight-forward and independent; perhaps these qualities have prevented him from higher achievements. But the cause may have been different: his complexion witnesses a huge amount of beer he has consumed in his life. Newton is moderately tough, moderately polite, though there is something steady in him.

They seem close friends with Hensley; their friendship is long enough and is based on many years of their joint way to the fame, of drinks and girls. When they recall something

nice together they start laughing infectiously. By the way, Paul was the only guest at the event who was allowed to mock at Ken, to make faces at him. It is out of question that anybody else could do it.

Paul bass guitar sounds as monumental, slow and thunder-like as 30 years ago. His manner of playing is recognisable at once, but sometimes it sounds funny, especially in the things written after 1971, that is without him in the group.

Alex Napier

It is he whom I really liked! Rather short, exclusively sun-tanned, sinewy, smiling, one of those lively men who always play the first fiddle in the company. Though he had spent only a few months with Heep, fans immediately surrounded him. It was interesting to watch his reaction to them: he was invited, he had never been very famous, he could not actually understand the reason for that hullabaloo about him. He never played in any other band after Heep and was very far from music altogether. Now, all of a sudden, they asked his autographs like some rock star, they took photos of him! Alex was taken aback... Of course, deep in his heart, he was in the 70-s at that moment.

Iain Clark. His name is spelt just so!

He deserves **particular** attention. He is one of those good-looking and decent men whom you would trust your children to teach. In his post-music life he became a teacher. Of course, he has changed with the passing years, but his facial features are the same. He played for just a year with Heep — but what a year it was! and how he did play! At the concert of *Hensley-Lawton Band* I was lucky to sit between Iris Lawton and Iain Clark, and I professionally watched the reaction of both of them. Iris reacted stormingly and emotionally to what was happening on the stage, smoking constantly because she was agitated for John and was really happy with his success. Iain was very reserved but quite attentive, and his piercing eye caught everything; deep in his heart, he was on the stage. When *July Morning* started, tears came to his eyes; the thing was arranged while he was in the team, and it must be very dear to him.

I did not notice him communicate with Ken. Iain tried to stay apart. I cannot understand what attracted me to him, but the recollections about our meeting are very dear to me.

Denny Ball, bassist in solo projects.

He appeared only in the end of the second day, May 7. Ken introduced him telling about their current partnership.

Ball was modest, aloof, as if he were somewhere far away; yet he produced a pleasant impression as a friendly man with a nice sense of humour.

Robert Corich

A bright personality. Towering above his improvised counter and selling discs by his own self (in Russia, it might drive him into a sick asylum), the legendary sound engineer and rock-producer committed a high deed to have restored many forgotten groups — and with bonus tracks.! It was a pleasure for me to talk with him — and to buy many discs, thus enriching his company.

Concerts

We can say much or nothing about them. A concert is better to be heard rather than rendered. Ken's performance was irreproachable, Lawton's vocals splendid, Newton's playing excellent. There was such a harmony as if they had been playing together all those years. They did *Wise*

Man superbly, and quite lyrically. I don't think words will do with this. My son took a video of all the events and, from time to time, we arrange a sort of a holiday for ourselves to witness and discuss anew all the nuances of that grand performance.

One might feel crazy to feel Ken's constant presence, now with his guitar on the stage, now at the table with a piece of chicken (the food was great, by the way). Five years ago it would have been an impossible dream. No wonder, some of those present were almost out of their wits, nearly in some sort of trance. On the second day there appeared much less of the public, but Gun Hill did not show they bothered. During the two days fans were performing too, they did Heep things of different periods. Sometimes Hensley and Lawton joined them on the stage to perform songs together.

It was all very refreshing and special.

The anonymous rock-star club

On the second day Ken and Lawton sat on the stage on high stools taken from the snack-bar and answered our questions, sometimes very serious. Ken was very frank. He admitted all his merits and shortcomings, all his crushes on drinks and narcotics, everything he did and undid. It sounded as if we were present at the session of an anonymous alcoholics club. It was funny in a way, but we were much more interested in getting answers to our own questions about the history of the group, for example, how Lawton was admitted to the group and how he resigned, how the group survived all this, etc.

It is worth mentioning that in such situations Heep would use some vague phrases about their joint creative period, while Hensley and Lawton were absolutely sincere, which was so attractive! They were not ashamed of anything, nor did they consider their former mates as rivals, and seemed to have reached the philosophic view upon life. I can recollect how Box and Kerslake permanently accused Ken of duplicity. I guess, it was true. No doubt, Ken was none of an angel, nor is he now. But we, **all of us**, are not angels, **all of us** are two-faced (some are even multi-faced). Suffice it to say that we are lying all our life to everybody and in everything; we are envying, pulling others' legs, dissembling and guiling on petty advantage. For example we inevitably lie when answering the simple question of how we are getting on. More often than not we are getting on pretty bad, but we smile and answer yes everything is fine. We tell big and small lies to our wives, children and friends, though we cannot even find any excuses to our lies. We idealise and polish our childhood, youth and accomplishments, yet we modestly conceal shameful facts of our own biography. Man is a weak being, and our psychic structure provides us with a convenient quality of not to concentrate on failures but to strive for new achievements. It is only important to repent in time and not to do mean things on our further way. But we are different, not everybody is able to repent and think over his own self.

Eventually, our value is measured by how kind and useful we are to our folks for the sake of whom we only live...

Gun Hill Concert

As is well-known, this is a club band, even their discs are home-made, something like our *samizdat*, self-publishing. They sounded much better when "live" on the stage and were most effective in hard, tempo things. Lawton sang very well indeed, especially when he, by drive, invited Hensley from the hall onto the stage to sing "Lady in Black" together. In his turn, Ken revealed himself as a talented impressionist pretending a super-star: he manipulated

the microphone through all those tricks, directed it towards the audience, forced his voice in a certain manner, etc. It looked so natural that inspired a thought, "well, a keyboardist, one of the best, but we have definitely lost something since he did not do vocals." Just so.

Hensley-Lawton Band

Lawton broke all the stereotypes of registered vocalists and became a really good frontman in 'Hensley-Lawton Band'. John claimed that neither he nor Hensley would like to be compared to "Uriah Heep". But an independent observer would still come to the conclusion that the group with the best composer and one of the best rock vocalists from Uriah Heep was doomed to comparison. Which would inevitably be in favour of Ken and John's group, with Rock Voice of John's, a decent substitute for Byron's vocals — and against the poor copy performed by Mick and Bernie who can still play but are like many other good professionals on the stage. Though, professionalism won't go for talent and fresh ideas.

Anyhow, some more of professionalism would do only good to Hensley and Lawton as they have not appeared on the stage for about twenty years. They understand this, for they evidently used Heepvention to polish their tricks of relationship with the public. Here we can witness a sort of primal reincarnation. The union is rather strange though, if to think, because from the very beginning the band was planned with the participation of the now Heep members who are evidently driving towards Bon Jovi manner. Box's guitar drive could have cemented the group of Hensley and Lawton. But it is impossible to imagine Box in one band together with Hensley and Lawton now.

For a while we have got only one thing, the open position. Let us review what Hensley has reached in his new solo. Composed under his new helpmate, the disc was to be promising against the previous one, regular yet somewhat boring. Anyhow, the American analogue of Heep, "Styx", underwent their reincarnation which was much more impressive. Their joint album turned out to be stronger than all the previous ones. Meanwhile, Uriah Heep have transformed themselves into an advertised brand, like Coca Cola...

Since July 2001 we have witnessed another long-awaited phase of communication and cooperation among ex-Heep. Now it was John Wetton who appeared in the studio with Ken, and Ken's solo was suspended. Together they decided to record five more things. And to give a joint concert. And... Lawton may become a variant of the union — then the self-proclaimed Heep may be put into a Box!

The latest news about an invitation for Ken to participate as a special guest of one night only (December 7) in the group of pseudo-Heep are an evidence of another failure of the management. The 2,500 person hall is reserved, while there are a few times less applications from the public, so they have decided to find the way out of the situation in such a Jesuitical fashion. I have been always dreaming of at least partial re-union of the old days Heep but now I must admit it would be unnatural.

24 HOURS WITH GOLDEN EARRING

The most progressive of the melodical.

The most melodical of the progressive.

The most political of the apolitical.

The most apolitical of the political.

There was one impression that stayed for ever, in the epoch-making 1971, when we in the USSR had not yet heard either "In Rock" or "July Morning", when we had not heard anything actually. And all over sudden there appeared the album "Seven Tears" of a group from Holland (!) — psychodelia, post-Beatles melodics, and excellent motoring drive of the album worked on the sub-consciousness... We will not discuss the long way of rises and falls of that group, "Golden Earring", that impressed us so strongly then. This might be a theme for a special book which is unlikely to come to life.

What is important to mention, this is the oldest performing rock-group of nowadays. Suffice it to say that in a way Golden Earring are older than Rolling Stones, who issued their first album a year earlier though. Golden Earring, who issued their first album in 1965, formed a group in 1961, when no "Rollings" were in sight yet...

Earrings recorded their first album when they were just eighteen years old (some of them a year younger, a year older)! Under the all-round Beatles-mania, the album from Holland entered the top lists of hit-parades! Since the very first album they have become Holland Number One up to now, alongside with the splendid "Earth and Fire", "Kayak", "Focus", "TRACE", "Supersister", "Livin' Blues", "Nits". They started with typical beat to play the excellent rhythm-and-blues with the elements of psychodelia in their third album. In the fourth album there appeared nothing of Beatles-mania. There was nothing of rhythm-an-blues in it either. The fifth album smelled some of Led Zeppelin blended with Black Sabbath.

By the mid-70s Golden Earring were rated all over the world. Anyhow, the USSR, at least in the Ural, was no exception. Though it is a common opinion that the Russian soul will not accept any rhythm-and-blues, let alone of Dutch vintage. Conceivably, Golden Earring who openly expressed their moods and emotions were the only exception. Everybody who came across the group at least once would stick to it forever. Perhaps there was something in the band. And still is, despite the fact that in the middle of the 70-s the band was considered to be "out of the market" after a succession of failures. You may say "failures", but is it correct when the group and their leader George Kooymans were evidently seeking their own new style, experimenting, introducing a keyboardist, dismissing a keyboardist, introducing and dismissing a second guitarist? A commercial failure, they developed as musicians.

In the beginning of the 80-s they returned to big show business, as it had been long awaited. However, by that time, in Russia they had been happily forgotten by many but a few most devoted fans. Forgotten for a long time, if not forever for many, for in the USSR of those times they actively moved forward Italians, disco, electric pop and... the new-born Russian rock-and-roll, sweet and delightful to a Russian ear (despite their striking non-professionalism).

Only the most dogged were listening to the genuine music. And only they were stubbornly waiting, though in the end of the 80-s, when vinyl discs ceased to be delivered to Russia while Golden Earring did not issue CDs, we found ourselves in the wilderness. After a pause our favourable Dutch group issued a few of their last albums on CD, and since then their music has stayed splendid, fresh, ever so unusual and unique. The albums of 1989 and 1991, "Keeper of the Flame" and "Bloody Buccaneers", were superb, yet we were really struck by their acoustic "Naked Truth" (1992), one of the first acoustic rock albums. Let Mick Box admit that the pure acoustic is beyond Uriah Heep abilities even now, in the beginning of 21st century, ten years later. Nor could he do in acoustics "Look At Yourself" or "Stealin" or "July Morning" or "Gypsy" in 1992!

It is GE who really managed to do it then! They performed the monumental hits in live, without any electricity. More than that! The Dutch arranged their acoustic shows on the wide scale, touring all round Holland, and a few times too. With "Bombay" ("Bombay!"), "Radar Love", "Twilight Zone"!!! Almost every week. Is it fantastic! The group are just not

able to turn on pot-boilers, which makes them so distinguished among their so-called "music mates".

Eventually, we got the "Face It" (1994) and, quite by chance, their two clips, "Twilight Zone" and "Turn the World Around". To tell you the truth, by that time we had been sick and tired of various third-rate clips when you cannot know whether they are illustrations to songs or songs to illustrations. Evidently, GE do not use the services of those morons who are called clip-makers (nobody knows why). Resulted are their own clips, in which the sense of the song is closely connected with the theatre and both together reveal the collective talent of the group. In their clips the performance is active, grotesque, with the elements of choreography, and the costumes are superb. Each clip is a unique piece of art. Just another side of their talent!

But let's come back to "Face It." Well, what a surprise could it be? In the times, when we can predict absolutely everything about Uriah Heep, Deep Purple, ELP, and Black Sabbath, it is Golden Earring who are always strikingly fresh and take you aback with every new album. When you expect the development of the 1968 ideas they just offer you something Zeppelinwise; when, after 1971, you expect another and more tragic album, they shock you with the art-progressive. I prognosed that after "Moontan" they would produce something super-monumental — and I lost the bet: they issued their "Switch", an album of impossible music with magic passages. The next album was like a heavy blow with its gloomy hard rock. After such turns, "The Hole" (1986), with its Negroid rhythms and tunes, was perceived as something like a nice joke of slightly tired geniuses.

Well, suffice it to say, that my 16-year old son, whose classmates are mad after *Britny Spiers* and "acid music", listens to GE and says, "It's just my music!" And this is all happening in the 90-s, during which Heep have only issued two albums and Ken Hensley but one and a half... While Golden Earring who are older, who started earlier, who have got more tired, might be supposed to have lost it — after all those years of rock-and-roll accompanying "frailties", after such a diversity of themes... How could they have managed to issue six superb, quite different, mighty albums during the 90-s?! More than that, to issue two video acoustics, the grand electric video "millennium" show, a film about the recording of "Face It" in live, and, last but not least, a feature-length film about the group — all in one decade?

The tributive "Love Sweat" (1995) included songs of the 60-s, which GE used to like in their green years. No wonder, we had another precious album of GE in their full size plus their love to the idols of the 60-s. By the way, it was an only album where they sing **somebody else's** songs, which they never did, with the exception of a "Birds"'s thing in the 1969-album, and a song in their debut album (let's forgive them their youth).

1994 was the year of the radical changes, like it happened in the 70-s and 80-s. As if afraid of getting old, they splashed their bright talent out. Their last album (1999) included quite a few mega-hits (we can wonder at "Deja Voodoo", for one). The main song of the album was presented in the form of a clip, unusually political and traditionally professional. 4 CD-Box in the end of 2000, aimed at the most ardent fans was among the first fives on the Dutch charts for half a year, successfully competing with pop solos that flooded the market. Can you imagine the number of copies of the album? It is enigmatic how GE manage to combine their commercial success with the devotion to the traditions of the spirit of rock. Another unimaginable commercial success was the tremendous number of singles (to each album), which the other groups had stopped to issue. You see, it does not pay! It pays for Golden Earring, anyway. Resulted, fans were knocked down: you just try to buy not only superalbums, one after another, but also numbers of singles with original, unique songs! Besides, they gave at least 2 or 3 concerts per week. They have toured all Holland through, and not once.

1994 drew my attention to the group anew. Each of them is an extra-rate musician. Yet in the 60-s Kooymans played like Y. J. Malmsteen did in the 80-s. Where is Malmsteen now? Rinus Gerritsen, bassist and keyboardist, in the end of the 60-s — the beginning of the 70-s was already as good as Lord and Emerson. Besides, there are two singing vocalists in the group, Barry Hay and George Kooymans. The former one, in addition, plays the flute so brilliantly that Ian Anderson (professional name Jethro Tull) may resign to rest!

All this intrigued me so that I did all impossible to get to the Motherday 12 May 1996, where I happened to have my 24 hours with Golden Earring. The happening started at 19.00 p.m. 11 May in the small town of Oostzaan near Amsterdam and ended at 19 p.m. 12 May in the miraculous city of Arnhem. In between there was a sleepless but dashingly funny night spent in the bars of Amsterdam (we learnt that the Central Station is closed at nights, and trains just do not go); later there was a very important meeting with legendary Casper Roos. I hope he is all right.

Now, I'd like to use the occasion for to thank my interpreter, Tamara Kazakova, for it is her professional enthusiasm that made the trip a success. Let us take, for example, my negotiations with Rob Gerritsen, the GE manager, who started with the full denial of all fan's delights like videofilming or "just a minute" in the backstage, in the first telephone talk. The manager (Rinus Gerritsen's brother) grew more cordial only during the personal meeting when he learnt where we are from. He was so moved by the fact that they were known in Russia, as it turned out, that he, quite all of a sudden cancelled all the taboos that are normally never cancelled for whomsoever. Thus we got our 24 hours to be spent with the group and the right to do video and audio recording.

By the way, there is another peculiarity of GE (or, rather, of their management). When most of the rock groups have got used to issue such "poacher" materials in plenty and to the great delight of fans (and to the favour of the groups), GE management has still hampered (and does it rather firmly) my unique recordings. All my appeals to their sense and to the way of consensus have gone to nowhere. Could it be one of the causes of their failure on the international scale, off Holland? Anyhow, my great thanks to Rob for the personal pleasure and delight of the film that I did to the envy of all other fans. When in Russia (you cannot understand it, you can just love it), I am absolutely free to spread this video material for I did not sign any restricting agreements, nor would Russia protect the rights of the group.

Yet I am waiting for the reasonable position on their part. Well, let us go on.

First we saw Barry Hay, the vocalist. All you can say about Ken Hensley, will be true about Barry. A fashionable coat, head proudly set, he looked a true rock star and was very attractive. You could immediately tell he is a character. Then we saw Cesar Zuiderwijk who prefers to play the role of a jester in the group. Out of it, he is registered as the best drummer in Holland, has organised a music school of his own, and regularly arranges striking percussion shows and performances for the drummers of Holland and all over the world, extending all thinkable and unthinkable borders of the drum. He is a solid and rather cautious man, which I saw at our meeting in Breda, May 2000. My children and I had a rare pleasure of the two-hour percussion show with Cesar and *Percossa Percussion* band.

Now, to George Kooymans. He is special. For he is the cement of the group. Most of the songs were written and composed either by himself or co-authored with Hay. He also sings about half of them. (Does it remind you of a group?) He does not look impressive at all, and is very modest. Medium size, stooping. Very sad eyes. You may meet him in the street and pass by without a slightest guess that this is a cult figure in the Dutch rock culture, a born producer who has composed music for a countless number of performers and projects. He as if lives in a cocoon, especially when he plays. Then he seems to see or hear nobody.

Last but not least to meet us was Rinus Gerritsen, a bassist and also keyboardist (though the latter part is often played by Robert Jan Stips, another legendary figure in Holland, worth a separate story). Gerritsen is the oldest in the group, two years Kooymans's senior. We had the honour of a special interview with him. In the course of the interview he was very curious to learn what the hell we were seeking in Holland and how the hell it could so happen that in the country of bears they know about Golden Earring (!). In spite of all the spontaneity of our conversation, it was very informative and rather funny. It is Rinus who always speak for the group with the press. Besides, he is a kind of the monitor of the group. Or a kind of informal leader, while their music leader is, definitely, Kooymans.

The first meeting was so striking and chaotic that I sincerely forgot all prepared questions. We were pressed for time, and rock stars are so special people that I decided to let it go. We talked much, though without any plan or reason. But it only seemed so. We talked about our lousy Russia (the word does not belong to Golden Earring — Ed.), about music... Eventually, to the end of the conversation I began to understand why they have not become any mega-stars of the international show business. They are just not ambitious! They are clever and sober enough to understand that any hunt for fame would kill their music, as it would kill their soul. In the beginning of the 70-s, they stopped at the last moment, on the crest of the success with their "Radar Love". Talking with them, I had a sensation of talking with old friends with whom you can discuss a Kaffka even if you have not read his books. (Try to talk like this with Mick Box or, let alone, Trevor Bolder — and you will see!)

Earring are different. It is Barry Hay himself who told us about it (in between cans of beer): "Do you know, we are crazy? We are very, very crazy men, and Golden Earring is the craziest of all the groups." There we are! People who are so honest and selfless in their job, who are always in search of the new, without any brutish habits, who are old and good friends, — they think they are "very crazy!" Even me, a Russian engineer *intelligentsia* (who has managed to survive), felt their company warm and friendly. Let there be more such crazy rock stars! And what if it is they who are normal? At their concerts you will see animated and inspired faces, people of all ages, families with children.

This is the music for all ages. This is my music. How can they feel so deep into everybody? How have they managed to produce so much of excellent music — and in so many copies? To compare with Heep who have barely reached 50,000 with their last studio album, Earring do not sell less than 200,000 just in Holland. Have all Europe and America gone mad? And what about time? 19 December 2000 the "Millennium" show is on, and in the very beginning of January 2001 a wonderfully designed album is already available. Meanwhile, Heep postpone the issue of every new disc for years...

Yet — why for the last 15 years Golden Earring do not leave their native Dutch walls, with the rare exceptions of tours to the neighbouring Germany and Belgium? Holland, which is smaller than Sverdlovsk province of Russia (I live right here), is crossed and re-crossed to and fro by Golden Earring, small villages included. And crowded halls everywhere! Year after year the Dutch attended these shows. It makes me think that my favourite group really serve their people, are really honest in their work, they do it for us, not only for themselves. They differ so strikingly from our home-made stars who think it petty to visit a small town, to play themselves away, and to let their prices be affordable for a common man. It would be a fantastic event for us if our Nautilus Pompilius started regularly tours round small Ural towns like Tavda or Krasnoufimsk. Away with it, they would never come even to Nizhny Tagil, a big industrial centre! Well, I can understand them: who will visit their show for the second time, if he is not sick? And Golden Earring do have crowded halls for decades! And they do sell their albums to the delight of fans! Probably, this is a kind of national mental disease...

But the same is true in Germany. And in the USA. Should we blame the Dutch Diaspora for their success?

But no English Diaspora buy the discs of the so-called Uriah Heep of the 90-s, let alone in million copies. Who makes American DJs constantly broadcast "Radar Love" and "Twilight Zone"? Who drives Hollywood producers to use in their films, at least twice a year, the music of some far-off and seemingly alien Dutchmen? Is it a world conspiracy of a kind? Why is this music so dear to not only Dutchmen but also to Germans, Americans, even to Russians?

All these 24 hours with Golden Earring did not help me to solve the riddle of the group; what I have understood is that they work honestly, professionally and selflessly. They have their talent, they trust in people, they are loved and respected by the people, by educated intellectuals as well, though Golden Earring have just been playing rock-and-roll all their lives through.

But let us come back to the Motherday. There we got the high quality product, complete retrospective of the group, a heap of accompanying goods, and, last but not least, the unforgettable show with the visiting old friends, Robert Stips (keyboards) and Bertus Borgers (sax), where the legendary things were played. I am awfully proud of my video film shot in the backstage, just two steps off Kooymans. I am awfully thankful to all the people who did everything possible and impossible for this unforgettable dream to come true.

And three days later we were in Germany, in the small town of Solingen, at Uriah Heep show; and after the show... There started sad comparisons and revaluation of old values...

What is ASIA without wonder?!

There were times when mentioning "Asia" we meant Wetton. That same Wetton who did not come up to some of our hopes in the 90-s. First, by some reasons, he left show business, then he recovered and began to produce album after album. The albums are fairly decent, professional, and all may seem all right. But he put a step on a slippery path, i.e., he began to produce in mass the so-called "live albums." One is easily tried to buy the same "lives" for the sake of one new thing. It is happening to Wetton what has already happened with Rick Wakeman: just a hack-work of selling the same well-known product in a new wrap. A kind of second-hand.

In the 90-s Wetton's career cannot be classified as a failure, it is rather a success. Though I would not call "Sinister" (2000) a wonder.

Wetton traditionally cooperates with his old and new mates in single joint projects, more than ten of them for the last six years. He shows his best in the projects. Lately we have witnessed a peculiar competition, in which Wetton, Glenn Hughes and Joe Lynn Turner as if try to embrace the unembraceable, and sometimes cross each other's ways.

On his way, Wetton took part in another original and very beautiful project with Clive Nolan, called "The Greatest Show on Earth." Nolan is a young art-progressist, connected with the groups "Pendragon," "Arena," and others. He is not a bad keyboardist. All these young musicians have the same problem: they can play but their themes are trivial.

Wetton reached the top of his art in the cooperation with the ex-Genesis guitarist Steve Hackett. Their joint tour and splendid video concert in Japan expose Wetton in his best, and Hackett's play makes one suspect that he is the only and last art-rock guitarist alive. An undoubted success is the retrospective "Monkey Business" with Richard Palmer-James. The album sounds very warm and friendly.

But nowadays, mentioning Asia we mean only Geoff Downes who has made fans treat him with respect, in spite Asia started as Wetton's. But the time has passed, and the arranger has turned into the leading keyboardist of art-rock, in spite of all his deviations. Probably "deviations" is too strong a word for what is but a few solo projects. "Light Program" — a music styled after Vangelis or Kitaro, just a background thing. "Evolution" demonstrates instrumental arrangements of famous things from various groups, which is not bad at all. There was yet another vocal project, "Vox Humana," with Max Bacon and Glenn Hughes; the thing is rather penetrating, in parts. His last project, "World Service" (1999), consists of short instrumental pieces, sort of nostalgic notes of an old radio with the names of cities written on the panel. Does not really work on you.

But the "Asia" story is quite different. Periodically inviting their old mates, Downes and John Payne have managed to produce a cluster of albums. Almost of all of them deserve a good mark. Not all, though. Some of the albums are very difficult to get. g., "Live Acoustic"-97 and "Rare"-99. You needn't bother. Take "Rare", for instance. True, it includes many rarities, such short instrumental popular melodies. Certainly, it is funny, but nothing more than a fun. Things are much more complicated with "Live Acoustic". Above, I was rather critical about Heep's acoustic product, probably, too critical. "Live Acoustic" is much worse. But Asia were quite objective to evaluate themselves and did not think high about their failure project; they stopped experimenting and produced a small number of copies of the thing, without any advertising. Conceivably, "Asia" are doomed to purely electric performance, with their music.

In the 1990-s "Asia" did a lot of tightrope-walking between hack and genius, when pop music reflects at least some spirituality. Of course, they have not reached the level Heep did in the old days. Their music sounds "made". However, they are quite decent heirs of the old Heep ideas. Their last album, "Aura," is especially good. It demonstrates that magic mood, which you can catch if listen to it all through. It will make you sigh deep, as it would happen about good old Heep in the bygone times. The splendid performance, superb sound and spirituality of the last album may build a bridge to the good old music (or vice versa).

The Heep of the old times and Asia of nowadays have something in common, and this something is soul and harmony in their music. In the due moment, the soul and the harmony find each other to join. Is it magic! "Asia" do not have striking new ideas, but they do not show mediocrity either. In the everlasting duel between the aggressive mediocrity and short-living genius, Asia have found the golden mean in burning not too bright yet not too short. Perhaps it is not the most wonderful end for the story but it indicates that the story of wonders is going on.