

The Nice - Keith Emerson With The Nice (1970)

Written by bluesever

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1. *The Five Bridges Suite*: - I. *Fantasia - First Bridge* (6:08) - II. *2nd Bridge* (3:59) - III. *Chorale - 3rd Bridge* (3:30) - IV. *High Level Fugue - 4th Bridge* (1:02) - V. *Finale - 5th Bridge* (3:34) 2. *Intermezzo Karelia Suite* (9:00) 3. *Pathetique Symphony No. 6, 3rd Movement* (9:27) 4. *Hang On To A Dream* (12:43) 5. *America* (10:27) 6. *My Back Pages* (9:12) - Keith Emerson - keyboards - Lee Jackson - bass & vocals - Brain Davidson - drums & percussion

The history of this CD, originally a double LP combining the contents of two separate LPs (*Five Bridges*, *Elegy*), is strange. "Five Bridges" was a suite mixing rock trio and orchestra, in the same form though more ambitious (and successful) than their earlier "Ars Longa Vita Brevis." But their record label, Immediate Records, went bankrupt in late 1969, and the trio was left without a recording contract and owed a lot of money. In the meantime, Keith Emerson had been making plans to leave the trio and form a new group that would, among other differences, be stronger in the vocal department, but until the spring of 1970 he was still playing with the Nice. Amidst this chaos, the group's manager, Tony Stratton-Smith, had kept possession of about three LPs' worth of unreleased tapes by the band, keeping them out of the hands of Immediate and away from that company's creditors (of which the group was one). After Emerson's departure, he released the first of the group's posthumous albums, *Five Bridges*, which had been recorded late in 1969 -- Emerson wasn't happy to see the not quite finished project (as far as he was concerned) out and there were lawsuits, but the album came out, on Mercury Records in America and on Stratton-Smith's own newly formed Charisma label in England, and it did well -- enough so that Stratton-Smith was back a few months later with *Elegy*, a collection of live performances from the Fillmore East augmented with some late studio tracks. Mercury later cashed in on Emerson, Lake & Palmer's sudden rise to superstardom by combining the two as the budget-priced double-LP *Keith Emerson With the Nice*, packaged rather misleadingly with a photo of Emerson on-stage from a performance with ELP.

In the long run, despite Emerson's objections, the material on these two LPs has proved to be some of the group's best -- the concert versions of "America" and "Karelia" run their studio

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equivalents into the ground, and the live performance of "Hang On to a Dream" is a definitive representation of the group, combining elements of classical, jazz, rock, ragtime, blues, and even Broadway into an extraordinary 13-minute tour de force, not only for Emerson but for bassist Lee Jackson as well. "Five Bridges Suite," also cut live with an orchestra, points the way toward Emerson, Lake & Palmer's mix of pomposity and fun without ever being as pretentious as ELP got. The rendition of "My Back Pages" here is a complete deconstruction of the song, breaking it into parts for virtuoso instruments and vocalist -- the unfamiliar may well be delighted as well as surprised by the results. The live Fillmore cuts have some flaws in the original recordings, especially overloads on volume, but their propulsive energy carries them. And if you listen closely, you can hear riffs and passages that surfaced later on in Tarkus and other ELP works. The original double LP contained two additional tracks, "One of Those People" and the studio version of "Pathétique" Symphony No. 6, 3rd Movement, which were left off the CD to hold down the running time. [Note: All of this material has been reissued in England on two separate CDs -- Five Bridges and Elegy -- in better sounding editions by Virgin Records, with extensive bonus tracks.] ---Bruce Eder, allmusic.com

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