
Main: Guy
Garvey

Elbow

Britain's Olympic Band

If you haven't already heard of Elbow, you soon will. The British alt-rock band composed the theme tune for the BBC's 2012 Olympic coverage, and when the Games kick off in London in late July, Elbow's music will reach a worldwide audience.

The band from Bury's success has been a long time coming. They formed in 1990 as a college band in Manchester, and now 22 years and five studio albums later they are widely regarded as one of Britain's best rock groups, and have achieved the Holy Grail of all art – critical and commercial success. A Mercury Music Prize win in 2008 for their album *The Seldom Seen Kid* and the high-charting success of their follow-up album, 2011's *Build a Rocket, Boys!*, have consolidated the band's place in the Valhalla of British rock gods. They have a loyal following in Asia, including Singapore, where they closed the Esplanade's Mosaic Music Festival to a packed house earlier this year.





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Fame, however, does not seem to have affected the band members' outlooks, and, for rock stars, they remain disarmingly grounded and down-to-earth.

"We have the same group of friends we've had since we were 16," says the band's jovial lead-singer Guy Garvey. "We live in the same places we've always lived. You can buy a new lifestyle if you're that way inclined, you can. You can hang around in more expensive, more exclusive joints, you can have more celebrated friends, you can do all that [expletive] if you want. Don't get me wrong, it's great to taste the gâteau, but you don't have to eat the whole thing."

Bands from Manchester are not meant to behave like this. Elbow predecessors, The Stone Roses, imploded in 1996 citing "creative differences", just as their long-awaited second album, *Second Coming*, cemented their place in the alt-rock firmament. And the long-running fraternal feud between Noel and Liam Gallagher led to the breakup of perhaps the city's most successful band, Oasis.

"We're all northern gentlemen," says Garvey, who adds with typical self-deprecation: "It's not cool to be full of love all the time." He admits the band is actually troubled that they constantly offer "notes of hope" in everything they write.



Simone Cecchetti/Corbis

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"It does make you worry that someone's going to turn around and say you foppish, Swiss Family Robinson [expletive]. But, [expletive] it, so what? You know what I mean? To us, the best music is celebratory and comforting. I'm not saying all music has to be that way. I'm saying that what we all get out of music is comfort, beauty and relaxation. That's what we love the most about music. Don't get me wrong, we love angry music, but we've tried to do it and it just doesn't work. It's not where our talents

lie. We love Sound Garden; we love the Smashing Pumpkins. Half of what makes Hendrix Hendrix is anger. But we're not very good at it."

Given their signature celebratory sound, Elbow was an obvious choice for the BBC's Olympics theme, which they perform with the BBC Philharmonic Orchestra. A teaser of that track, entitled "First Steps", has already been released; it's a sweeping score with swirling violins, triumphant horns and beating drums which, in just over a minute, builds to a rousing crescendo. The full six-minute single, which includes Garvey's vocals and the Olympic Choir, will be released closer to the opening of the Games on July 27.

By that time the band will be part way through an ambitious two-year schedule of touring and writing their next album.

"We've never toured and written before in the way we'll be doing for the next two years," says Garvey. "It will definitely

change the way we work. It does kind of grind to a halt if you keep doing the same thing."

Opposite page: Elbow performs at Coachella, California.



Paul R. Glumata/Corbis



Hubert Bross/dpa/Corbis



So what makes the band tick?

“The stock answer, which is also true, is we’re five mates who love music, sharing ideas,” says Garvey. “We’ve acknowledged over the years that if one of us is not ‘in’ it’s a different feeling.”

“The way our music has evolved is the way everybody is at the time we’re making a record. *Build a Rocket*, *Boys!* was the easiest record we’ve ever made because we were ecstatic at the success [of *The Seldom Seen Kid*] that we’d kind of been hoping for for years. Not that it’s the be all and end all; we’d still be making records now if we hadn’t had the success that *Seldom* brought, but it was such a leap and changed all of us.”

Seldom’s largest single, the anthemic “One Day Like This”, was the band’s most popular single to date, spending 35 weeks in the UK Top 100, longer than any of the band’s previous singles, and won the Ivor Novello award for Best Song.

Was the band tempted to write more stadium-fillers?

“The great thing was that we all separately thought about this and we all said that we didn’t want to try to cash in on the success of the previous album,” explains bassist Pete Turner. “Basically, we didn’t want 10 ‘One Day Like This’. One of the nicest bits of feedback we received from music critics when we released *Rocket* is that they were all relieved!”

Having been together for over 20 years, Turner and the rest of Elbow’s ensemble, brothers Mark and Craig Potter (guitar and keyboard, respectively), and Richard Jupp (drums), are all now married with kids, except for Garvey who reveals he’s “very much in love” (though, with his Mancunian accent, this sounds more like “law-v”), but still single. How has that affected Garvey, with all his fellow band members being fathers and him still being...

Opposite page (top): Guy Garvey and Pete Turner.

Opposite page (below): (l-r) Craig Potter, Pete Turner, Mark Potter, Guy Garvey and Richard Jupp.

“The truth is we’re five mates who love music, sharing ideas.”

Guy Garvey

“A pisshead?” Garvey chimes in. “I actually couldn’t sing sober. I’d sound like [Canadian folk singer] Buffy Sainte-Marie, if I didn’t have a couple of gins in me. We did one gig in Seattle where we had to play sober and I was terrified. A good performance, but it literally felt like a band member was missing. And then I realised who it was. Mr. Alcohol was not on stage.”

“I’m still getting away with it,” he continues. “Honestly, fatherhood brings out the best in these four. It is a joy to see them with kids. And the kids are all happy, healthy, beautiful kids. Their memories of childhood will undoubtedly be connected to the thing we’ve built, which makes me very happy. The fact that what we do in little rooms, that takes us to Singapore, just from getting our heads together and working stuff out... the fact that that’s feeding our kids, it’s incredible actually.”

Will Elbow go on forever?

“It’s the only worry we have,” says Garvey. “I could never imagine it ending in a bad way. None of us can. Sure, we all want to have an affair. I’ve done some writing with other people. Mark [Potter] is in a blues band.”

And having now achieved Olympic status what is there left for the band to achieve?

“Reinvention,” says Garvey. “I think the most responsible thing you can do for your art is to not be too afraid to change. But it’s also the most difficult thing. If you’ve had success with a certain sound, to venture into new territory is really brave.” **TR**

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