

= The Nice =

The Nice were an English progressive rock band active in the late 1960s . They blended rock , jazz and classical music and were keyboardist Keith Emerson 's first commercially successful band .

The group was formed in 1967 by Emerson , Lee Jackson , David O 'List and Ian Hague to back soul singer P. P. Arnold . After replacing Hague with Brian Davison , the group set out on their own , quickly developing a strong live following . The group 's sound was centred on Emerson 's Hammond organ showmanship and abuse of the instrument , and their radical rearrangements of classical music themes and Bob Dylan songs .

The band achieved commercial success with an instrumental rearrangement of Leonard Bernstein 's " America " , following which O 'List left the group . The remaining members carried on as a trio , releasing several albums , before Emerson decided to split the band in early 1970 to form Emerson , Lake & Palmer . The group briefly reformed in 2002 for a series of concerts .

= = History = =

= = = Early career = = =

The Nice evolved from Gary Farr and the T @-@ Bones , which keyboardist Keith Emerson and bassist Keith " Lee " Jackson were both members of before the band dissolved in early 1967 . Emerson then briefly played with the VIPs , who toured the Star @-@ Club in Hamburg , and his playing style became influenced by the organist Don Shinn , including standing up to play the instrument and rocking it on stage . Meanwhile , P. P. Arnold , a performer who reached a higher level of popularity in the UK than her native US , was unhappy with her backing band , The Blue Jays , and wanted a replacement . Her driver suggested Emerson would be able to put together such a group . Emerson agreed , but only on the condition the band could perform on their own as a warm @-@ up act . Since it effectively meant getting two bands for the price of one , manager Andrew Loog Oldham readily agreed . Emerson recruited Jackson , drummer Ian Hague former Chris Farlowe & The Thunderbirds as well as a Mark Leeman Five member , and finally ex @-@ the Attack guitarist David O 'List , the latter by recommendation from journalist Chris Welch . The name came from Arnold saying , " Here comes the Naz " , which the group misheard as " the Nice " .

The band played its first gig in May 1967 , and had its first major break at the 7th National Jazz and Blues Festival in Windsor on 13 August . Oldham had managed to secure a separate set for the group in a side tent away from also accompanying Arnold on the main stage , where they gained attention . The next week , Welch wrote in the Melody Maker that " it was the first time I had seen a group actually in the act of winning its first following in quite dramatic circumstances . " When Arnold went back to her family in the US shortly afterwards , Oldham offered the group a contract of their own . Hague was not interested in the " progressive " direction the group wanted to go in , so he was replaced by former Mark Leeman Five and Habits drummer Brian Davison .

Now a band in their own right , the Nice expanded their gear , recruiting roadies Bazz Ward and Lemmy , the latter of whom provided Emerson with a Hitler Youth ceremonial dagger to stick into the keys on his Hammond organ . They spent the end of 1967 on a package tour with Jimi Hendrix , Pink Floyd , the Move and Amen Corner . The Floyd 's then leader , Syd Barrett , missed several gigs and O 'List had to stand in for him . The group 's first album was recorded throughout the autumn of 1967 , and in October of that year they recorded their first session for John Peel 's Top Gear . The album included classical and jazz influences including extracts from Leo? Janáček 's Sinfonietta and a rearrangement of Dave Brubeck 's " Blue Rondo a la Turk " renamed as " Rondo " , changing the time signature from the original 9 / 8 to 4 / 4 in the process . The group clashed with producer Oldham in the studio over the length of the track , but eventually won the argument and the full eight minute piece was included on the album . After the album was released , the group realised they had a conflict of interest with Oldham as manager and record company owner , so recruited sports journalist Tony Stratton @-@ Smith to take over management duties .

For their second single , the Nice created an arrangement of Leonard Bernstein 's " America " which Emerson described as the first ever instrumental protest song . The track used the main theme of the Bernstein piece (from West Side Story) but also included fragments of Dvořák 's New World Symphony . The single concludes with Arnold 's three @-@ year @-@ old son speaking the lines " America is pregnant with promise and anticipation , but is murdered by the hand of the inevitable . " The new arrangement was released under the title " America (Second Amendment) " as a pointed reference to the US Bill of Rights provision for the right to bear arms . In July 1968 , Immediate publicised the single with a controversial poster picturing the group members with small boys on their knees , with superimposed images of the faces of John F. Kennedy , Robert F. Kennedy and Martin Luther King on the children 's heads . A spokesman for the band said " Several record stores have refused to stock our current single the Nice feel if the posters are issued in United States they will do considerable harm " . During the tour that followed the release of their second album in July , the group spawned controversy when Emerson burned an American flag onstage during a performance of " America " at a charity event , Come Back Africa in London 's Royal Albert Hall . The group were subsequently banned from ever playing the venue again .

By summer 1968 , the group had become concerned about O 'List 's reliability and matters came to a head following a gig in Croydon 's Fairfield Hall in September . According to Ward , O 'List had an altercation with him in mid @-@ performance . Emerson subsequently called a band meeting with Jackson and Davison and stated flatly that O 'List should be sacked . They agreed , and immediately after their performance at The Ritz , Bournemouth in October , he was fired by Stratton @-@ Smith with the rest of the band present . O 'List , however , claims that he left the band voluntarily because he was upset at Stratton @-@ Smith 's decision to make Emerson the front man , saying " I left the band and waited for Keith to get in contact ... I should have gone straight to Keith , but I didn 't . "

= = = Reduction to a three piece = = =

The Nice briefly considered looking for a replacement , with Steve Howe trying out at an audition . Howe got on well with the rest of the band , but a week later had second thoughts and decided not to join . Emerson tried to learn guitar so he could cover some of O 'List 's old parts , but gave up after one gig .

The band 's second LP *Ars Longa Vita Brevis* featured an arrangement of the Intermezzo from the Karelia Suite by Jean Sibelius , which the band 's friend Roy Harper had recommended they covered , and the album 's second side was a suite which included an arrangement of a movement from J.S. Bach 's Brandenburg Concerto No. 3 . The group used an orchestra for the first time on some parts of the suite . The band were on the bill at the 1969 Isle of Wight Festival and briefly toured Ireland with Yes and the Bonzo Dog Doo @-@ Dah Band , which by all accounts was fraught with logistical problems .

The third album , titled *Nice in the UK and Everything As Nice As Mother Makes It* in the US , featured one side recorded live on their American tour and one side of studio material . As with previous albums , it included arrangements of classical material , in this case the Third Movement of Tchaikovsky 's Sixth Symphony (*Pathétique*) , and rearrangements of Bob Dylan 's " She Belongs to Me " and Tim Hardin 's " Hang on to a Dream " .

In 1969 , the band found time to contribute to other projects . Emerson performed as a session player for Rod Stewart and the Faces , while the whole group provided instrumental backing for the track " Hell 's Angels " on Harper 's 1970 album *Flat Baroque and Berserk* . Mid @-@ year , tour promoter Michael Emmerson asked the Nice to write some music for the Newcastle upon Tyne Arts Festival . The result was the *Five Bridges* suite . The group premièred the piece on 10 October 1969 at Newcastle City Hall . A complete version with an orchestra was performed at the Fairfield Hall , Croydon on 17 October , which was recorded for the album of the same name . The title refers to the city 's five bridges spanning the River Tyne , and Jackson 's lyrics refer to his Newcastle childhood and the St James ' Park football ground .

By late 1969 , Emerson thought the Nice had progressed as far as it could musically , and was

particularly dissatisfied with Jackson 's limited vocal style . He asked Jack Bruce and Yes ' Chris Squire about forming a new band , but both turned Emerson down . While on tour in the US with King Crimson , Emerson held a meeting with Stratton @-@ Smith and declared " the Nice had outlived its usefulness " . By the end of the year , Emerson and Crimson 's Greg Lake had decided to form a band together . The group carried on touring into 1970 , but sometime early in the year , Emerson told Jackson that he would be leaving the band . Matters were not helped by Immediate Records filing for bankruptcy ; the band later said they received no royalties from the label while an active group .

In February 1970 , the group collaborated with the Los Angeles Philharmonic Orchestra , led by Zubin Mehta . This was broadcast in the following month as part of the " Switched @-@ On Symphony " program . Following standard television procedure of the day , the Nice 's contribution (a version of " America ") was recorded ahead of time and the band mimed for the cameras .

By March , the group had confirmed they would split , and a report on the band 's decision was printed in Melody Maker . The group played their last British concert on 22 March at the Fairfield Hall , Croydon , and after a short German tour the band broke up , playing their last gig on 30 March at the Berlin Sportpalast .

= = = Post @-@ Nice and reunion = = =

Emerson and Lake recruited Carl Palmer from Atomic Rooster and formed Emerson Lake & Palmer (ELP) . In 1971 , the posthumous Nice album Elegy was released . It included different versions of previously released tracks , two being studio versions and two live from the 1969 US tour . Emerson had no involvement with compiling the album , which was done by Jackson , Davison and Charisma Records . The album reached No. 5 in the UK .

Jackson formed Jackson Heights which released five albums between 1970 and 1973 . Emerson supported the band and became a fan . Davison formed " Every Which Way " which released an album in 1970 . Both Jackson and Davison formed Refugee with keyboardist Patrick Moraz in 1974 , but Moraz left the group after one album to replace Rick Wakeman in Yes .

After over three decades of inactivity , the Nice reformed in 2002 for a series of concerts . A three @-@ CD set Vivacitas was released , with the third CD being an interview with Emerson , Jackson and Davison . Dave Kilminster guested on guitar at the concerts . Davison died on 15 April 2008 aged 65 in Horns Cross , Devon , from a brain tumour . Emerson died on 11 March 2016 in Santa Monica , California , of an apparently self @-@ inflicted gunshot wound to the head .

= = Musical style = =

The Nice were primarily a live band . Their stage performances were bold and violent , with Emerson incorporating feedback and distortion . He manhandled his Hammond L @-@ 100 organ , wrestling it and attacking it with daggers (which he used to hold down keys and sustain notes during these escapades) . Emerson 's playing was inspired by Jimi Hendrix , Billy Ritchie of Clouds , and Don Shinn as well as earlier figures such as pianist Jerry Lee Lewis .

The group 's early sound was geared more towards psychedelic rock with only occasional classical influences . Following O 'List 's departure , Emerson 's control over the band 's direction became greater , resulting in more complex music . The absence of a guitar in the band and Emerson 's redefining of the role of keyboard instruments in rock set the Nice apart from many of its contemporaries . He used a combination of Marshall Amplification and Leslie speakers in order to project a full sound to compensate for the lack of a guitarist .

Jackson never considered himself a great singer , partly because the group chose poor keys for his vocal range , but his bass playing , with heavy use of a plectrum , was a distinctive part of the band 's overall sound . He was influenced by Bob Dylan , whose songs were common currency at the time ; the Nice interpreted several of them , typically reducing them to three or four verses and featuring a long improvised middle section , such as " She Belongs to Me " .

== Legacy ==

The Nice were one of the pioneering progressive rock bands and their fusion of styles strongly influenced the movement into the 1970s . Their commercial success on Charisma Records was key to establishing the label , which went on to include several other progressive acts , including Genesis and Van der Graaf Generator . Genesis were fans of the Nice and " The Knife " from their album Trespass was directly inspired by the band . Though the Nice were not the first to combine a rock band and orchestra , they did inspire similar attempts by other groups , such as Pink Floyd 's Atom Heart Mother .

The group have often been compared to ELP , but there were important differences between them . Emerson 's showmanship was more important in the Nice , and he mostly used just Hammond organ live as opposed to a wider range of keyboards , including the Moog synthesizer , in ELP . John Peel , an early champion of the Nice , infamously called ELP " a waste of talent and electricity " .

== Members ==

Keith Emerson ? organ , piano , vocals (1967 ? 1970 , 2002 ; born 2 November 1944 , Todmorden , Yorkshire ? died 10 March 2016)

Keith " Lee " Jackson ? bass , guitar , vocals (1967 ? 1970 , 2002 ; born 8 January 1943 , Newcastle upon Tyne)

David " Davy " O 'List ? guitar , vocals (1967 ? 1968 ; born 13 December 1948 , Chiswick , London)

Ian Hague ? drums , percussion (1967)

Brian " Blinky " Davison ? drums , percussion (1967 ? 1970 , 2002 ; born 25 May 1942 , Leicester , Leicestershire ? died 15 April 2008)

== Discography ==

=== Studio albums ===

The Thoughts of Emerlist Davjack (Immediate , 1967)

Ars Longa Vita Brevis (Immediate , 1968)

Nice (aka Everything As Nice As Mother Makes It) (Immediate , 1969) UK no . 3

Five Bridges (Charisma , 1970) UK no . 2 , US no . 197

=== Live albums ===

Elegy (Charisma , 1971) UK no . 5

America ? The BBC Sessions (Receiver , 1996)

The Swedish Radio Sessions (late 1967) (Sanctuary , 2001)

BBC Sessions (Sanctuary , 2002)

Vivacitas (Sanctuary , 2003)

Live at the Fillmore East December 1969 (Virgin , 2009)

=== Compilation albums ===

Autumn ' 67 ? Spring ' 68 (Charisma , 1972 , UK) , released as Autumn to Spring (Charisma , 1973 , USA)

Keith Emerson with The Nice (Mercury / Polygram 1970) , material from Five Bridges and Elegy

Nice Hits Nice Bits (BMG Fabricated , 1999)

= = = Singles = = =

" The Thoughts of Emerlist Davjack " / " Azrial (Angel of Death) " (Immediate IM 059 , November 1967)

" America " / " The Diamond Hard Blue Apples of the Moon " (Immediate IM 068 , 21 June 1968 ; in India issued by Stateside ESS . 82)

" Brandenburger " / " Happy Freuds " (Immediate IM 072 , 8 November 1968)

" Diary of an Empty Day " / " Hang on to a Dream " (Immediate , 1969)

" Country Pie " / " One of Those People " (Charisma , 1969)