

BEHIND THE CLASSICS



Lol Creme, Kevin Godley, Eric Stewart, Graham Gouldman

WRITTEN BY: ERIC STEWART AND GRAHAM GOULDMAN
RECORDED: STRAWBERRY STUDIOS, STOCKPORT, ENGLAND, 1974

PRODUCED BY: 10cc

ERIC STEWART: LEAD VOCAL, ELECTRIC PIANO

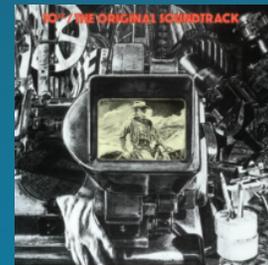
GRAHAM GOULDMAN: GUITAR, VOCALS

LOL CREME: PIANO, GUITAR, VOCALS

KEVIN GODLEY: DRUMS, VOCALS

KATHY REDFERN: VOCALS

ALBUM: *THE ORIGINAL SOUNDTRACK*, 1975



“I’m Not in Love”

10cc

Songwriters have always searched for new ways to say “I love you.” In 1974, when 10cc’s Eric Stewart set out to write a song for his wife, he decided to say the opposite. “I wrote it with [band member] Graham [Gouldman],” Stewart recalled. “We had what we thought was a very 10cc-ish idea for a love song that didn’t actually say ‘I love you.’ Instead it would say ‘I’m not in love with you,’ then give all the reasons for being totally in love.”

Formed in 1970, the Manchester-based 10cc was known for mixing quirky experimentalism with commercial pop. They’d had two previous hits in the U.K., “Donna” and “Rubber Bullets.” But what really attracted their fans wasn’t their singles, but complex songs that pushed the usual ABAB form deep into the alphabet.

Stewart and Gouldman knocked out “I’m Not in Love” in two days. The original version had a bossa nova feel inspired by “The Girl From Ipanema.” The band recorded a demo, but they were unhappy with the results. “We put the song aside to work on others,” said Stewart. “But every time we walked into the studio, either the secretary or one of the assistant engineers would be singing ‘I’m Not in Love!’”

As the band tried out different arrangement ideas for their problematic tune, drummer Kevin Godley suggested using a vocal bed for the backing track. Keyboardist Lol Creme then devised a plan to create tape loops with voices for each individual note of the song. Stewart recalled, “We spent three weeks making loops. We recorded the first note on a 16-track machine, then Kev, Lol and Graham just sang ‘aah’ in the studio for days, while I, as the group’s engineer, kept recording and multitracking them until I got this block of ‘aahs!’”

With a whopping 240 vocal overdubs, the band had at their fingertips a kind of Gregorian chant synthesizer. Individual vocal loops could be combined to make chords—and the resulting sound was like a vaporous harmonic cloud. “We then manned the control desk and fed in the loops, with all of us moving faders so that the chords changed throughout the song as the lyrics were going to change,” said Stewart. “It took three weeks and a lot of sweat to do that!”

To their tape-loop choir they added acoustic guitar, Fender Rhodes and Stewart’s lead voice. As a finishing touch, the band brought in Strawberry Studio’s

winsome secretary Kathy Redfern to whisper, “Be quiet, big boys don’t cry.” Stewart said, “When that was added, we knew we had something quite special!”

Their label thought so too, and wanted it as a single. But the band hesitated. Stewart said, “We wanted to do quirky, strange songs. But due to massive pressure from everybody, we released it.” It flew to No. 1 in the U.K., but was kept out of the top spot in the U.S. for a month, first by the Bee Gees’ “Jive Talkin’,” then the Eagles’ “One of These Nights.” In 1990, Will to Power took their cover of the song to the Top 10, and in 2000, Olive had a No. 1 on the dance charts with their reworking. The song has also been covered by Richie Havens, Tori Amos and Grandaddy. In 2014, it was featured on the soundtrack to the hit movie *Guardians of the Galaxy*.

“I’m Not in Love” remains a prime example of how limitations can become innovations. In a pre-sampling, pre-push-button era, 10cc’s mix of memorable songwriting and wild experimentation produced a five-minute masterpiece that sounds as fresh today as it did 40 years ago.

—Bill DeMain