

Cellists' Corner

Brief Career Details of Important Cellists

prepared by David Johnstone from public information

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SPECIAL FEATURE on HUGH ALEXANDER MCDOWELL

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Birth: 31st July 1953 - Hampstead, London

Death: 6th November 2018

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Hugh McDowell started playing the cello at the age of four-and-a-half; by the age of 10, he had won a scholarship to the Yehudi Menuhin School. Only one year later he made his first professional appearance in Benjamin Britten's *The Turn of the Screw*, in which he sang. Later he attended Kingsway College of Further Education, the Royal College of Music and the Guildhall School of Music and Drama. He played with the London Youth Symphony Orchestra, the London Schools Symphony Orchestra, National Youth Orchestra and the London Youth Chamber Orchestra.

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He was persuaded by Wilf Gibson to join The Electric Light Orchestra, and McDowell performed with the first live line-up of ELO in 1972 while still only 19 years old, but soon left with founding member Roy Wood and horn player/keyboardist Bill Hunt to perform with the group 'Wizzard'. During his time in Wizzard he played both cello and Moog synthesizer; however he returned to ELO in 1973 to replace Colin Walker. McDowell's return was partly motivated by a desire to play more cello and less keyboards as he had done with Wizzard. He remained with the group until Jeff Lynne removed the string players from the line-up. McDowell appeared in promotional videos for the *Discovery* album, despite not having played on the record. He performed with Electric Light Orchestra Part II in 1991.

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In 1980, McDowell played on the album *Gift Wrapped* by former ELO cellist Melvyn Gale, who had founded the group Wilson Gale & Co. That autumn, he began teaching part-time at the musical instrument technology department of a London higher educational college, the London College of Furniture, now part of the Guildhall University. He conducted a children's orchestra and other orchestras at several London schools. For a short time around 1982, he was a member of Radio Stars and recorded the single "My Mother Said" with the group.

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McDowell was a member of the 20th-century chamber groups George W. Welch, Harmonie Band, and Quorum. He joined the Cornelius Cardew Ensemble, a contemporary music group, in 1995. More recently, he worked on the 2004 Simon Apple album *River to the Sea*, on the 2005 Saint Etienne album *Tales from Turnpike House*, the 2005 Wetton Downes album *Icon*, and appeared as a guest artist on the 2007 Port Mahadia album *Echoes in time*. He also played cello on Asia's 2008 album *Phoenix*, on "An Extraordinary Life" and "I Will Remember You".

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McDowell also arranged and recorded for numerous pop, rock, and jazz-fusion albums, as well as collaborating in dance, film, and theatre projects. He was involved with computer programming and published a music composition program called Fractal Music Composer in 1992. He developed a suite of four programs: Mandelbrot Set Composer, Julia Set Composer, Mandelbrot Zoom and Play Midi.

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Personal life - Unmarried, with one daughter
McDowell died of cancer on 6th November 2018

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Fellow ELO member Melvyn Gale said of him:

"We met in our mid teens and were close until we left ELO in 1980. He was a beautiful free spirit, had such a natural gift as a cellist and [was] just a lovely bloke."

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Electric Light Orchestra video, with brief images of the cellists!:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XLbqJz90VeE&t=3s>

(Rare promo clip of this song from A New World Record album - 1976)

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