

# Elton John reflects on farewell tour, new home in Toronto

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SPECIAL TO THE GLOBE AND MAIL

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“I don’t know if there’s going to be another Elton John record,” Elton John told me on Sept. 8. “I’ve made too many Elton John records, probably. The world doesn’t need one. It will have to be a different kind of concept.”

Sir Elton, who is 75, his Canadian-born husband David Furnish, 59, and I were seated around a dining table in their sprawling suite at the Shangri-la Hotel. Male assistants bustled about with luggage and laundry. It was the day of John’s final Toronto concert, ever, and the day Queen Elizabeth died. John knew her, of course, but wasn’t ready to talk about her. All he said was, “I lost a friend today.”

(He repeated that line later to the full house at the Rogers Centre, adding, “Queen Elizabeth has been a huge part of my life from childhood to this day, and I will miss her dearly. I’m glad she’s at peace. She worked bloody hard,” before playing *Don’t Let the Sun Go Down on Me*. A few weeks later, U.S. President Joe Biden awarded him the National Humanities Medal at the White House.)

John’s “I don’t know” about his next record was the only moment in our 25-minute chat where he didn’t sound absolutely certain; he struck me as a man who knows all his reasons. He wore a black velvet tracksuit jacket with the letter E in crystals on the left breast, and an N95 mask that made his ears fold over, which clearly drove him crazy.

Though he won’t play another Toronto concert, John will be spending a lot more time in the city: He, Furnish and their two sons – Zachary, 11, and Elijah, 9 – just bought a penthouse in King Toronto, the splashy complex from renowned Danish architect Bjarke Ingels that looks like stacked boxes of light. Called the Treehouse, because an actual tree grows inside it, John’s modernist two-storey condo boasts four terraces and ample space to hang the art he and Furnish collect. It will be their sixth home.

**Johanna Schneller:** Why did you buy in Toronto?

**Elton John:** The main reason I’m coming off the road is to spend more time with my family. David’s brothers and their wives and children are here. We spend a lot of the summer in Canada.

**David Furnish:** We just spent three weeks at Clayoquot Wilderness Lodge in B.C. We looked at bears, caught fish, hiked, kayaked – all that good Canadian stuff. [J.S. note: Elton John in a kayak! The mind reels.] In England we live in Windsor, so the boys find Toronto dynamic. Also, there’s a lot of divisiveness in the world – Britain pulling out of the EU, America struggling with its identity. But Canada is advancing, embracing diversity, accepting other cultures.

**JS:** Sir Elton, you perform 100 shows a year, and David, you manage him. How does the thought of coming off the road feel?

**EJ:** Fantastic. When I do the final concert in Stockholm next year on July 8, you’ll hear me from here, screaming with delight. I wanted to go out with a bang, and I’m loving the concerts.

**JS:** I was downtown last night when your concert let out, and it was so festive – people in sequins, angel wings, top hats. Boas everywhere. I even saw people carrying home metal folding chairs with your face on the seat back.

**EJ:** Pardon?

**DF:** You know those chairs in the kids' room? We offer them as part of a VIP package. You get to take home your chair.

**EJ:** This is the first I'm hearing of this! The crowds are so kind. But I've been doing this since I was 17. It's not a normal, 9-to-5 life, which I crave in a way. You're always rushing about. I will keep travelling, but to places the boys want to go, like Antarctica, India, the Galapagos. Seventy-five doesn't sound bad, but when you think it's only 15 years to 90 – this is makeup time for me.

**DF:** It's a retirement from touring, but not a retirement from Elton's passionate connection to his craft.

**JS:** What do you want from music now?

**EJ:** I've been doing my Apple Music show [*Rocket Hour*] for nearly six years, over 300 episodes. It's introduced me to a generation of new artists. I invite them on, play their music, become friends with them and record with them. Collaborating with the likes of Dua Lipa [*Cold Heart (Pnau remix)*] and now recently with Britney Spears [*Hold Me Closer*] – it keeps me vibrant. Recording with Britney was David's idea: "She's had such a horrible time, it would be good news if we could get a hit for her." Give her a bit of confidence back, because she's had such a battering.

So I'll work with other people, appearing on their records. But I'm not going to finish the tour and go straight into the studio to make a record. Who knows when or if I will? I get the lyrics from Bernie [Taupin, John's lifelong collaborator] and go from there. He doesn't write my emotions down, but he understands what my life is about, so we'll see where he goes.

Also the album as an entity is kind of finished. It's finished. Unless you're Beyoncé or Drake. Or Taylor Swift or Ed Sheeran. It's all about streaming tracks. If I do another record, I'll approach it not so much as making a whole album, as making a series of tracks which I think are happy and stand out.

**JS:** What appeals to you about collaborating?

**EJ:** I love it. Recording *The Lockdown Sessions* with Brandi Carlile and Charlie Puth, SG Lewis, Nicki Minaj – people I'd never recorded with before – it was just fantastic. You learn so much by working with another artist.

**JS:** You are one of the bestselling artists of all time, you've had a six-decade career, sold 300 million albums worldwide, set and smashed dozens of records. What could you possibly have to learn?

**EJ:** Just the energy you get. When I'm with people in their 20s, their adrenalin rubs off. People like Sam Fender, Rina Sawayama – I was like that once. I still have a lot of energy. But it's not the same as when you're on the rise, when the momentum is carrying you and it's infectious. Life is all about embracing the new. You never know what's going to come around the corner, what phone call you're going to get that might pull your life in another direction. I'm open to everything that comes my way.

**JS:** Are you surprised you're the king of TikTok?

**EJ:** David deals with that. I don't have an iPhone. I have an iPad so I can FaceTime my kids. But as far as technical abilities, I have none. I don't download anything, I've never streamed anything, I couldn't order anything from Amazon, and I don't want to. I certainly keep up with CDs, books, photographs. I go through magazines and newspapers and find wonderful things. I'm as excited about photography as I am about music. If I notice a new artist like Stephen Sanchez, who I'm crazy about, I'll introduce his music to people, including record companies. My brain is pretty active.

**JS:** How do you know when someone has it?

**EJ:** When it's not conveyor belt music: four chords, five chords, everything sounds the same. That's dross. I like artistry. Artistry means being able to write a really great song. There's no *Tiny Dancers* around at the moment, I can tell you that.

**JS:** Let's switch gears a bit. What surprised you about fatherhood?

**EJ:** I have never felt love that like in my life. Obviously I love David, but having children, there hasn't been one moment when I've not relished it. I just love them so much. It's taken me a long time to get here. These 11 years with Zachary and nine with Elijah have been the happiest of my life. It's endearing and enchanting to wake up and have a conversation with these kids. I love their voices, I love seeing them at breakfast. I can't believe I'm 75 and never been happier.

**JS:** Did you ever imagine, when you were younger, that this is who you'd be now?

**EJ:** My life has been ridiculous. It's literally a fairy tale – and you can take that whatever way you like [laughs]. I've been through so much: success, illnesses, addiction, betrayals, catastrophes, people dying. But you can get over anything if you've got someone like David to share it with. I don't think there's a stronger couple out there than us. It really helps that we're both in recovery. I'm 32 years sober, you're –

**DF:** Eight.

**EJ:** That makes everything easy. It gives you the tools to manage your life completely differently. Things that would be insurmountable beforehand are not insurmountable. When I look back on my life before sobriety I think, "God almighty, what a nightmare that was."

**JS:** What's left for you to want?

**EJ:** I've achieved everything I possibly could. I'm very close to my family. I've done and been rewarded with so many amazing things, I've met so many amazing people. There's nothing in my life I could possibly want, other than for my boys to do well. I just would like to remain at this level of happiness.

*This interview has been edited and condensed.*

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