

WHAT GOES ON!

MOJO EYEWITNESS

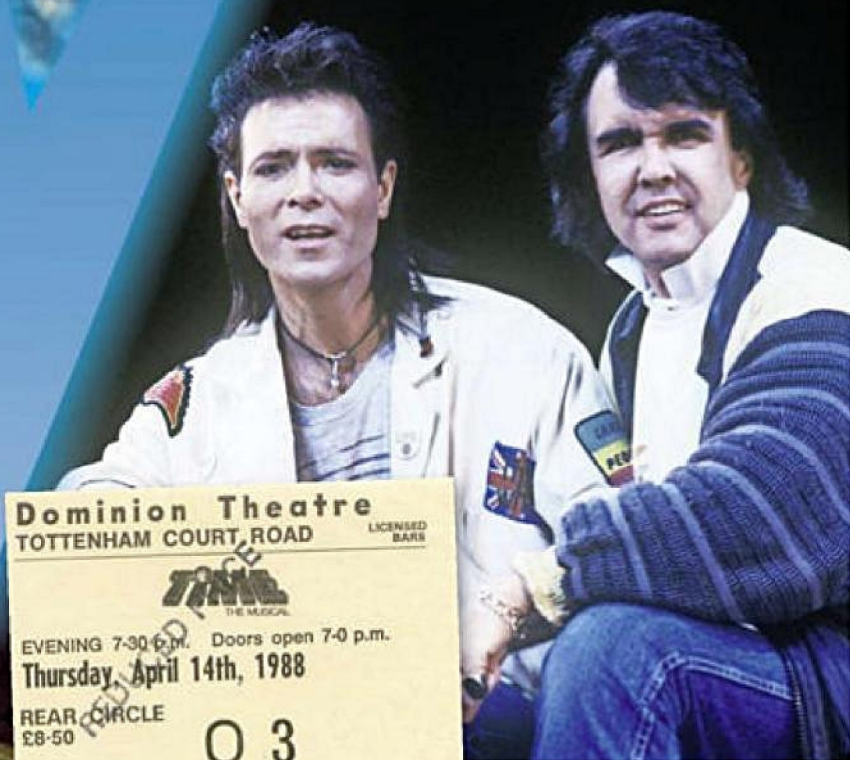
DAVE CLARK'S TIME THE MUSICAL, 1986

On April 9, a new show at London's Dominion Theatre put Cliff Richard on trial at the High Court Of The Universe – with Laurence Olivier as the god-like Akash, The Ultimate Word In Truth. Freddie Mercury and Stevie Wonder got involved as well. But how, by the sign of infinity, did this happen?



PART 1 "EVERYBODY WENT CRAZY."

Rock of ages: (clockwise from main) Cliff Richard (left) and Freddie Mercury at a special gala performance of *Time*, April 14, 1988; the soundtrack LP; Laurence Olivier's Akash seaks; Cliff with Dave Clark (right); Clark with the new Chris Wilder, David Cassidy, and co-star Stephanie Lawrence; Clark, Lord Olivier, and the latter's 45; a ticket for Freddie's show.



Producer/mastermind Dave Clark on his original cosmic vision, drinks with Sir Larry and spending £4million.

"I thought it'd be great to make a musical about another planet where everything is timeless and everybody's ageless, where there's no disease, no war, no famine. But they realise that the Earth is screwing up. I decided the best person to speak for Earth would be the biggest rock star in the world [character Chris Wilder]. So the idea was to have him in the middle of a concert in front of thousands of people and all of a sudden everything gets frozen and he's transported to the High Court Of The Universe to speak on behalf of the Earth.

A musical is about the song, so I made a demo album of it. I was in LA and played it to Stevie Wonder and he was so knocked out with it he said, 'I'll record two songs [for the soundtrack album].' I played it to Dionne Warwick and she said, 'I love it.' Freddie Mercury committed immediately.

Now, Cliff [Richard] had wanted to do a musical for years but had never found a vehicle. Laurence Olivier was always my first choice for [the narrator] Akash. I went to his house in Chelsea and it was all very formal. The script was there and he had meticulously dog-eared **every** page he had dialogue on. He said, 'Mm, well if I was to consider doing this, I'd have to drop my voice an octave like I did in *Othello*.' I said, 'Lord Olivier, if you do that, you're totally wrong for the part.' He went, 'I beg your pardon?' He got quite agitated. I said, 'Akash is what everybody epitomises as their favourite uncle or a loving God giving words of wisdom. If you drop your voice an octave, it becomes dictatorial.' He said, 'Good point, forget the tea, let's have a drink.'

It took six weeks to film him for the show. His head as it appeared wasn't a hologram and I've never let on how it was **done**. We sprayed the inside of the Dominion Theatre **black**. In the middle of the rock concert, all of a sudden there was this terrible rumble and this 40-foot flying saucer comes towards you. Planets begin dropping and then this magnificent head appears and he says, 'Welcome to the high court of the universe. Don't be alarmed.' Everybody just went crazy.

I built a proper recording studio under the stage and got the best session musicians. I paid for the whole production myself. The problem with special effects is you don't know what's gonna happen. I had a budget for it, but if something doesn't work, you've got to improvise. To get investors in, it was getting too complicated. It's crazy, really, looking back, but it was three-and-a-half million. Then we spent another half a million on promotion.

I don't remember a lot about the opening night. I think I was numb. The reviews were amazing, which blew me away. The only problem we ever had was when one of the insurance people came down to inspect the set and went down one of the hatches and slipped and pulled somebody down with him and broke his leg, so we had to cancel the performance.

We couldn't let Olivier come to the opening night because it would've given the illusion away. So we had one matinee where we didn't sell the dress circle – that way he wouldn't be bothered. And, of course, when people knew he was there they went crazy and he stood up like a king. He just waved for 10 minutes.

Cliff was in it for a year and then we had David Cassidy in for six months. It played for over a million people. The reason it closed [in April 1988] was because we had a problem with the theatre. They were gonna knock it down or sell it and it was a nightmare. But I think the message of *Time* still applies to today. It's the maimed and the crippled who are left to build broken lives after each confrontation."

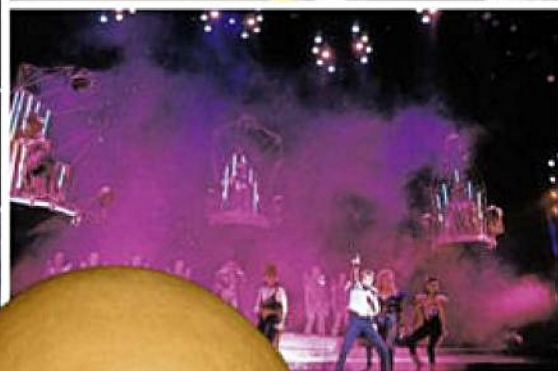
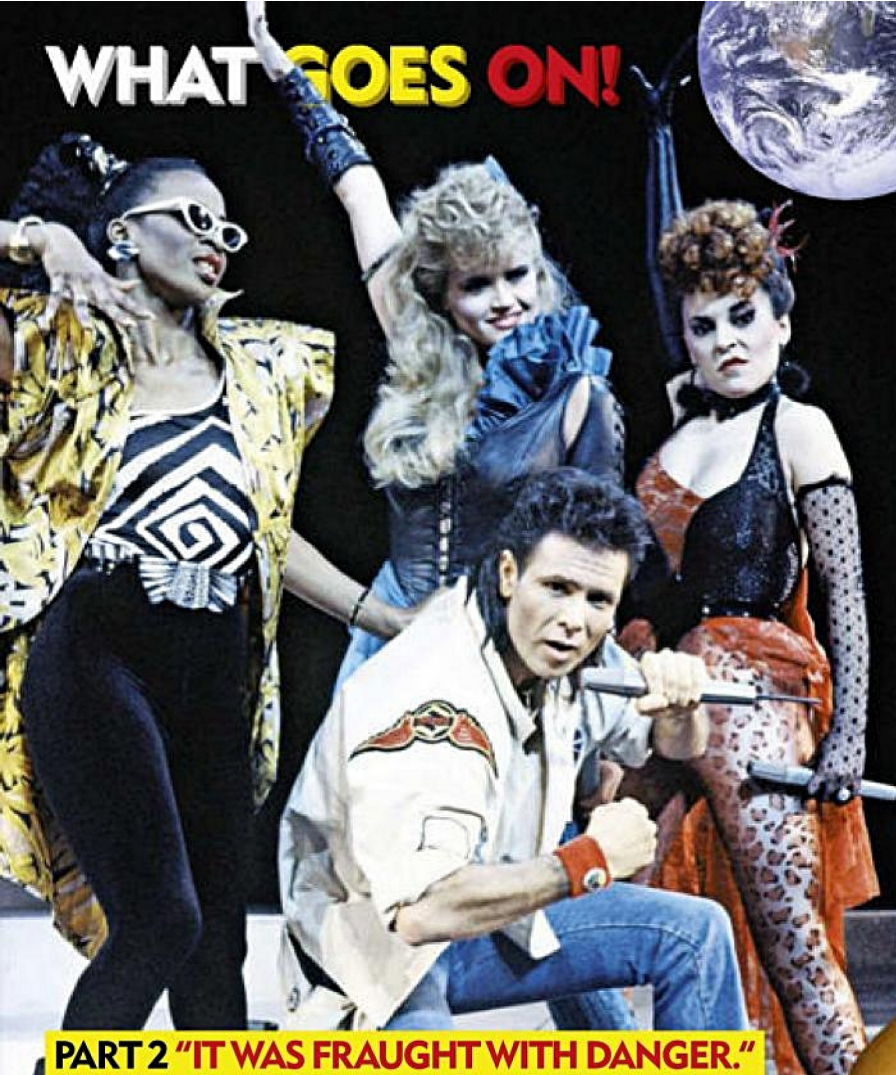


"THIS FLYING SAUCER COMES TOWARDS YOU, PLANETS BEGIN DROPPING AND THIS MAGNIFICENT HEAD APPEARS..."
Dave Clark



TURN OVER! HOUSE MUSICIANS RAY RUSSELL AND MIKE MORAN RECALL INNOVATION AND WINGING IT.

Nobby Clark/ArenaPal (2), PA, Alpha Press



PART 2 "IT WAS FRAUGHT WITH DANGER."

DAVE CLARK'S TIME THE MUSICAL, 1986

Crack sessioneers Mike Moran and Ray Russell on Cliff, playing below-stage and hovering aliens.

MIKE MORAN (musical director): "I was involved with Time right from the outset, collecting songs and looking at the style of the show and designs. We did the album at the same time as setting the show up, which was a crazy idea really.

Cliff was approached because the story is of A Rock Star, and in the mid '80s Cliff was mega big all over the world, maybe apart from the United States. It was a bit of a coup, 'cos Cliff has a massive fan club as well and that guarantees you a certain amount of presence in the box office. It really was a logical fit.

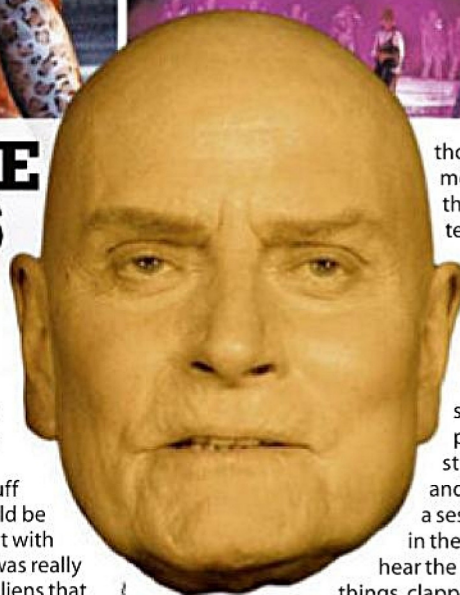
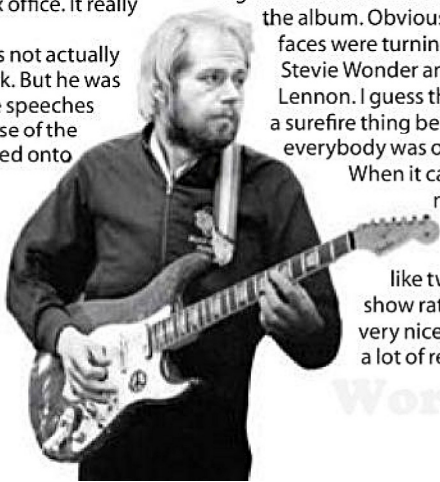
Larry Olivier was not actually that well, to be frank. But he was amazing. When the speeches were filmed, because of the way he was projected onto this 15-foot-high three-dimensional head, it had to be absolutely in sync and lined up with the head within a fraction of a millimetre to make

it all work properly. Larry had to be almost cemented into a chair so he wouldn't move. It didn't always work 100 per cent. If you were slightly off with the lining up on the camera, you'd find his nose three foot to the right.

It was groundbreaking stuff technically. Nowadays it would be so much easier 'cos you'd do it with video mapping. But, man, it was really analogue. There were three aliens that looked like they were floating around, but actually they were on three of those platforms you see engineers using when they're fixing a power cable."

RAY RUSSELL (guitarist): "I knew Mike and we'd done lots of sessions together. He asked me to come and do the album. Obviously a lot of faces were turning up, like Stevie Wonder and Julian Lennon. I guess the album was a surefire thing because everybody was on it.

When it came to the musical itself, we got paid something like twice the going show rate, which was very nice. It was quite a lot of rehearsal



though. It was very meticulous because there was a lot of technology for the time.

It was fraught with danger, really.

We couldn't go on-stage so they had to remake the underneath of the stage as a big sound-proofed recording studio. We had cans on and it was just like doing a session. We had speakers in the studio so we could hear the audience's reaction to things, clapping and whatever.

Laurence Olivier's head was the most adventurous thing ever. There was one matinee where I had a dep[uty], so I was actually watching the show. That particular afternoon the film wasn't shining on the head, so there was this thing moving around completely blank and the image of Laurence Olivier pointing to a corner. It was absolutely hilarious. When it went wrong, it was spectacularly wrong.

Once we got into the actual run, there were all sorts of things going on. I seem to remember there was a problem with tickets where it could appear sold out and it wasn't.

For something that was so successful and pushing so many boundaries, it's strange it just came to an end because of all the other more mundane logistics."

Tom Doyle

(Clockwise from main) (from left) Dawn Hope (Babs), Jackie Wilson (Louise), Maria Ventura (Carol) with Cliff aka Rock Star Chris Wilder; Lord Melchisedic played by Jeff Shankley; Mike Moran; in action; Sir Larry as Akash; Ray Russell.

"WHEN IT WENT WRONG, IT WAS SPECTACULARLY WRONG."
Ray Russell