



Elton and bass player Kenny Passerelli make mean mugs.

Elton...a name worth \$650,000

By PATRICIA BEACH SMITH

Tilt! The board lights up wildly. Bonus! One song after another. Miracle! Three encores. It was like watching a pinball board come to life as Elton John shot his encore into Pon-Met Stadium Sunday.

No one gets left out of Elton's game. Everyone is a player. The flippers and the flags, the spinners and the bumpers were humming, but they couldn't be heard above the din that is a rock concert at Pon-Met.

What could be heard is this small Englishman's inimitable and versatile music. Hearing it is like being in a warm, sensual and elegant chinchilla-lined envelope.

On stage it's a flash here and a flash there. It's Elton striding from one side of the stage to the other — over his silver-flecked piano that looks like a mishmash super bowling ball, complete with lighted "bumpers" that change colors in mid-phrase.

If glitter rock has disappeared, Elton hasn't heard about it. In a combi-

nation of 50s tacky, 2½ art deco and 70s short-circuit, the hand roars on with Elton at the keyboard in his shiny green silk "Island Girl" jacket and solid gold banana. (It's no Bic.)

From the audience came more flash — thousands in the first few minutes of the concert. All those tiny automatic cameras complete with flash-cubes were working to record their owners having seen this pinball wizard.

The wizard advertises himself as "Louder than the Concorde, but not quite as pretty." The first holds true, although the almost 65,000 fans didn't seem to mind a bit.

It wasn't the "Yellow Brick Road" which brought them to Pon-Met — and the CKLW Trafficopter proved it. Things didn't go so smoothly for some, but getting to a rock concert on time is not a major concern.

The starting time of 7 p.m. was a joke and the cogniscent were prepared with Frisbees, blankets and various other amusements.

Elton John finally appeared atop his spectacular piano, dressed as the Statue of Liberty (his bicentennial salute, presumably) at about 10 p.m.

Divisions like the excellent Dave Mason aggregation entertained during the pre-show.

It was also a time for the electronic wizards to do their pre-thing, warming up this and that, including a closed-circuit video system that would later project Elton's every image onto a gargantuan screen suspended above the stage. One learns quickly that there is nothing intimate or subtle about a rock concert.

Everything is up front, from the cost of putting on such a show — hence the \$10 per ticket price — to the general hype in the form of "Elton" visors and Frisbees to tee-shirts galore and program books.

Also up front were banks of speakers — 24 powerful giants on either side of the stage, plus dozen more in var-

ious other areas. The result of all this sound is exhaustion, pure and simple. The pounding of the bass and the strident singing get you, if the tumult of the crowd at the end of each song doesn't.

It's easy to see how the expression "crash" came into use, because that's about all a body has strength to do after such an audio-onslaught.

And it's difficult to avoid getting caught in the act, so to speak, with all the attendant noise and movement. Elton John is like a perpetual motion machine and he kept his end of the night's deal by performing almost ceaselessly for more than two hours.

Those two hours were filled with a "son et lumiere" show that would knock the socks off any ordinary Frenchman.

The only upstaging that was done came in the form of Detroit's current favorite four-letter word, "Bird." Mark Fidrych was honored before the show with a ticker-board salute that flashed "Bird, Bird, Bird" for about five minutes.

The crowd roared. "Could this be? A rock and roll crowd is cheering for a sports figure," someone gasped. It was — in spades.

But cheering isn't the only form of salute. The recently-adapted rock concert custom of holding lighted matches or lighters aloft after a song — a way of requesting an encore — is surprisingly quiet and charming, if not a fire hazard.

The play worked and encores he gave. From a stunning rendition of "Saturday Night" which raised the rush level of the audience even more, to the quiet "Your Song" he was every inch a star.

But the final encore, "Pinball Wizard," a Who tune which raised the Fiberglas ravers in ecstasy, was an all-out game won by the super shooters who came to get it on with Elton John doesn't.



65,000 fans at \$10 per must be right.

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