The Elton John Model (EJM)

A Descriptive NLP Modelling of Creative and Performative Strategies

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To Elton John, a force of nature and a legend of music, thank you for inspiring me for more than forty years on multiple levels!

Abstract

This paper presents a descriptive NLP modelling of the sensory and decisional sequences that govern Sir Elton John's approach to composition, performance and collaboration. The analysis synthesises publicly observable data from three contexts: (a) television and documentary footage in which composition occurs in real time; (b) studio work with collaborators, where lyrics, arrangements and performances are negotiated; and (c) live stage performances, where persona, rhythm and audience synchrony become visible. The corpus is restricted to verifiable public sources such as Elton John's authorised autobiography, officially released audio-visual material and continuous recordings of live events.

The aim is to formalise observable sensory and decisional chains into a clear technical engine that can be taught, replicated and measured. Using standard NLP notation (V/A/K for visual, auditory and kinaesthetic experience; internal vs. external coding; and TOTE loops for decision cycles), the model describes: (1) a compositional sensory pipeline (Ve → Vi → Ki → Ae → Ai) in which printed lyrics trigger an internal "film", a kinaesthetic pulse, external sound and an internal prosodic test; (2) a stage-performance strategy in which minimal gesture, strong downbeats and prosodic leadership organise collective rhythm; and (3) a collaborative protocol that protects the composing state through separation of roles and phases.

Didactic assessment criteria (B1–B7) are proposed so that learners can be evaluated on film vividness, prosodic settling, kinaesthetic "clicks", audience synchrony, verbal economy, protection of a silent window and hot replication rates. The model is offered as a structured, evidence-based description of Elton John's excellence, suitable for use in NLP training and creativity coaching, while explicitly acknowledging the limits of inference from public material and the need for experimental validation.

1. Background: Elton John as a Modelling Target

Sir Elton John is one of the most enduring and prolific figures in British and global popular music. Since the late 1960s he has released dozens of albums, placed a long sequence of singles in the charts and performed thousands of concerts, ranging from intimate television appearances to stadium-filling tours. His career is also marked by a uniquely productive partnership with lyricist Bernie Taupin, in which lyrics are often delivered in finished form for Elton to set to music.

For readers who do not have Elton John's work vividly in mind, three images are sufficient to locate the territory:

• A flamboyantly dressed pianist at a grand piano, often wearing distinctive glasses and jackets, seated at the centre of the stage.

• A melodic style that combines strong, singable choruses with rich harmonic movement, drawing on rock, pop and gospel traditions.

• Concert moments in which the audience claps and sings in tight synchrony, particularly on well-known choruses, while Elton marks the beat with head and torso.

Several features make Elton John an attractive subject for professional NLP modelling. First, there is the speed and reliability with which he turns printed lyrics into complete songs: in interviews and documentary footage we repeatedly see him receive a lyric sheet, read in silence for a few moments and then move to the piano, where a musically coherent song appears in minutes. Second, there is his ability to hold attention and synchronise very large audiences with relatively economical gesture, often seated behind the piano. Third, his collaborations with lyricists and producers follow clear phases and role separations, which makes the structure of interaction more visible.

The Elton John Model (EJM) does not attempt to summarise his entire biography or catalogue. Rather, it focuses on the specific question: how does he transform finished lyrics into music at speed, lead large groups in performance, and protect his creative state within collaboration?

2. What We Modelled – and Why

In classic NLP terms, to model is to map the syntax of excellence: the relatively stable sequence of perceptions and decisions that generates outstanding performance. The intention here is descriptive, not therapeutic. We are not treating problems or analysing pathology; we are extracting a high-quality programme from a consistently excellent performer.

This framing follows the classic NLP tradition in which Bandler and Grinder treated modelling as the extraction of a "syntax of experience" from exemplary performers, and echoes Dilts' later work in Strategies of Genius, where artists, scientists and leaders are analysed in terms of reproducible cognitive patterns.

The central questions guiding this modelling are:

• How does Elton John move from finished lyrics on paper to a complete song, with coherent melody and prosody, so quickly?
• How does he enter and maintain the compositional state once the lyrics arrive?
• How does he protect that state during collaboration with lyricists, producers and musicians?
• How does he lead and synchronise an audience in performance with relatively economical, piano-centred gesture?

NLP offers a language to capture these phenomena as sequences of sensory operations (visual, auditory, kinaesthetic) and tests that must be satisfied before the process moves forward. Instead of explaining Elton John's work as mysterious 'talent', the EJM suggests a structured set of operations that can be taught and tested in training settings.

3. Corpus and Observation Contexts

The model is grounded in three families of publicly verifiable material:

1. Real-time composition on camera – documentary and studio segments in which Elton receives printed lyrics and begins composing at the piano while cameras are running.

2. Studio collaboration – footage showing Elton with lyricists, producers and musicians, where lyrics are introduced, arrangements are discussed and performances are refined.

3. Live performance – concert and television appearances with good audio-visual capture of posture, gesture, head movement and torso rhythm, especially during recognisable choruses.

These sources are cross-checked against first-person testimony in his official autobiography and interviews, and against convergent findings in psychology and neuroscience on topics such as improvisation, entrainment and enclothed cognition. The aim is not to claim experimental authority, but to avoid inventing mechanisms that contradict established knowledge about creative performance.

4. Notation, Integrity and Limits of Inference

The EJM uses familiar NLP notation:

• V, A, K – visual, auditory and kinaesthetic channels.
• e / i – external versus internal (Ve, Vi, Ae, Ai, Ke, Ki).
• TOTE loops – Test → Operate → Test → Exit (or Stay), to describe decision cycles.
• Simple cue–response mappings – for example, printed lyric → internal 'film'; pre-climax pause → audience clap.

The notation is descriptive. It offers a compact way of expressing what is seen and heard on the footage. To preserve integrity, the modelling follows several rules:
• Only describe internal processes when behaviour strongly suggests them and they are needed to explain stable patterns.
• Pay attention to timing and latency, not just content. How long does he read before playing? How quickly does repetition appear?

• Anchor major claims in an Evidence Matrix (Appendix A), where each statement is linked to examples and categorised as primary (P), curated/stagecraft (C) or scientific (S).

Even with these safeguards, the model has limits. Public footage is edited. We usually see successful, broadcast-worthy examples rather than failed attempts. The model reflects Elton John's methods at particular points in his career, not necessarily across all decades. Accordingly, the EJM is presented as a well-founded descriptive hypothesis rather than as a final, experimentally validated theory.

5. The Technical Engine: From Lyric to Prosody

Across the various contexts, a remarkably consistent technical engine emerges: read to see → play without losing the image → test prosody → lock and repeat.

When Elton receives a completed lyric, there is typically a short silent window in which he looks at the page (Ve – Visual External), then lifts his gaze slightly as if watching an internal scene (Vi – Visual Internal). His hands move to the keyboard and a brief motif appears (Ae – Auditory External), guided by an internal kinaesthetic pulse (Ki – Kinaesthetic Internal) that marks the metre.

The decision to keep or discard a musical attempt is governed by prosody (Ai – Auditory Internal): the fit between the lyric's stressed syllables and the musical bar. If tonic syllables fall naturally on strong beats, with no awkward stumbles, the attempt is accepted and immediately repeated without re-reading the lyric. If the prosody does not settle, the line is abandoned and another attempt is made.

In NLP notation, the compositional sensory pipeline can be summarised as:

Ve → Vi → Ki → Ae → Ai → (Test: prosodic fit?) → Exit or loop.

This simple engine is elaborated into three macro-strategies:

• EJMCOMP – the compositional loop from lyric to song.
• EJMPERF – the performative strategy that organises audience attention and synchrony.
• EJMCOL – the collaboration protocol that protects the composing state.

6. EJMCOMP – From Page to Piano

The compositional strategy begins when Elton receives a completed lyric sheet. The sequence is:

1. Silent reading (Ve → Vi). He reads in silence for a few seconds. Gaze then lifts slightly, suggesting that attention has moved from the physical page to an internal visual representation – a 'film' evoked by the lyric's imagery and narrative (Elton has often talked about how the lyrics turn into a film in his mind, and then his hands go to the keyboard as he writes melodies for that film.).

2. Internal pulse (Ki). Simultaneously, an internal kinaesthetic sense of tempo is

engaged. This is not yet a melody but a bodily sense of metre – where strong beats are likely to fall given the phrasing of the lyrics.

3. First motif (Ae). His hands move to the keyboard. A short musical motif emerges that seems to 'belong' to the film. There is little fumbling; the hands appear to follow the film rather than search blindly on the keyboard

4. Prosodic test (Ai). As the motif is repeated and extended, Elton gives particular weight to prosody: how the lyric's stressed syllables land relative to the musical bar. Internally, this is checked as an auditory pattern, sometimes accompanied by slight mouth movement or subvocalisation.

5. The K-Click and repetition. When the prosody settles – lyric and metre interlock – a kinaesthetic confirmation occurs, the 'K-Click' (Ki): a felt sense of "that's it". Behaviourally, this is seen as immediate repetition of the phrase without re-reading, rapid mapping of sections (verse, chorus, bridge) and a move to capture the material before the state fades.

Formally, this can be described as a TOTE loop:

• Test 1 (T1) – Is the internal film connected to the lyric?
• Operate 1 (O1) – Play while maintaining the film and pulse.
• Test 2 (T2) – Do the lyric's tonic syllables land naturally within the metre?
• Stay / Exit – If yes, repeat and capture; if not, return to O1 with a new melodic attempt.

Thus EJMCOMP explains how Elton John can compose quickly without sacrificing structure: speed is a consequence of a clean decision criterion, not of random inspiration. For illustration, consider the opening line of a well-known ballad such as "Your Song". Even without quoting the lyrics in full, it is easy to hear how the stressed syllables naturally fall on the strong beats of a simple 4/4 pattern. This is precisely the kind of prosodic alignment that EJMCOMP tests for: the lyric, the internal "film" and the kinaesthetic pulse converge so that the line feels as if it *belongs* to that metre rather than being forced into it.

7. EJMPERF – Stage Engineering and Collective Synchrony

In performance, Elton employs a minimal but precise strategy for leading large groups. Three elements are particularly relevant for modelling:

1. Persona entry and state-cues. Glasses, jackets, jewellery and characteristic posture operate as anchors (an instance of enclothed cognition), helping him step into a stable performer state each time (Adam & Galinsky (2012). Sitting at the piano, he places himself at the centre of a rhythmic ecology: band behind (sometimes he is alone with the piano in solo concerts), audience in front.

2. Downbeat marking and torso rhythm. Rather than constant broad gestures, he uses the torso and head to mark the downbeat clearly. This gives the band and the audience a stable reference. The relative economy of gesture increases precision; each movement carries information about timing and emphasis.

3. Prosodic leadership. As in composition, prosody is central. The way he shapes phrases, delays resolutions and emphasises particular syllables creates tension and release that the audience can predict and follow. Choruses are introduced early and repeated, with clear rhythmic and melodic profiles that invite participation.

Across many performances, a simple three-phase arc can be observed:

• Rhythmise – Establish a clear common metre and tempo.
• Lead – Offer a strong, memorable chorus early so that the audience can latch onto it.
• Liberate – At climactic points, allow the audience to carry the chorus alone for a few bars before returning for closure.

The success of EJMPERF can be assessed by audience latency – how many bars it takes for the crowd to clap or sing in time after a cue – and by the stability of synchrony once it is established.

8. EJMCOL – Collaboration that Protects the Creative State

Elton John's long-standing collaboration with Bernie Taupin and his work with producers reveal a third macro-strategy: EJMCOL, a collaboration pattern that protects the compositional loop. The core principle is orthogonality of roles and phases: different people do different things at different times, minimising destructive interference.

In practice, this looks like:

• Separation of tasks. Taupin completes the lyrics before Elton reads them. Elton does not participate in lyric writing at that stage, and Taupin does not comment on the composing while Elton is at the piano.

• Silent window. After receiving the lyrics, Elton is granted a silent window in which no one comments, suggests chords or debates arrangement. This protects the EJMCOMP pipeline from premature evaluation.

• Phased negotiation. Only after a melodic nucleus is secure – once the K-Click has occurred and sections are mapped – does discussion of arrangement, production choices and commercial considerations begin.

EJMCOL therefore has three phases:

• Phase 1 – Briefing and delivery of finished material (lyrics, brief, script).
• Phase 2 – Protected composing/creative state (silent window).
• Phase 3 – Evaluation and negotiation (arrangement, structure, production).

Without this structuring, the compositional pipeline would be constantly disrupted. EJMCOL is as crucial to Elton John's productivity as EJMCOMP and EJMPERF.

9. Didactic Assessment Criteria (B1–B7)

To make the EJM teachable and testable, the model proposes behavioural measurement criteria for training environments. These criteria can be used to assess learners while they attempt to apply EJMCOMP, EJMPERF and EJMCOL in practice.

Code	Name	Description	Example Scale / Observation
B1	Film vividness: Learner reports stable, cinematic imagery while reading and keeps it during performance	Quality of the internal film (Vi): colour, depth, movement and stability while reading the lyric.	0–10 scale: 0 = no discernible imagery; 10 = vivid, stable multi-sensory scene.
B2	Prosodic settling	Degree to which stressed syllables land naturally on strong beats with minimal hesitation.	1–7 scale: 1 = frequent stumbles; 7 = consistently natural alignment without strain.
B3	K-Click	Strength of kinaesthetic "that's it" confirmation when lyric and metre interlock.	Behavioural index: immediate, fluent repetition without re-reading; rated 0–10.
B4	Audience synchrony	How quickly and stably the audience	Measured in bars from cue to full

		entrains to the performer's cues.	clapping/singing in time; lower is better.
B5	Verbal economy	Ratio between time spent talking about options and time spent producing material to K-Click.	Qualitative: Low / Medium / High talk; aim for high output with necessary but concise discussion.
B6	Silent window protection	Presence and respect of a protected window after receiving lyrics/brief.	Binary plus notes: Was there a silent window? Were there violations?
B7	Hot replication rate	Number of successful repetitions within minutes of the K-Click without re-reading material.	Count how many times the pattern is repeated fluently in the first three minutes.

10. Transversal Applications

Although derived from a musician, the technical core of the EJM can be transplanted into other domains:

- Oratory. Speakers can read notes to see a scene rather than memorise words,

establish a clear downbeat in their delivery and design talks with a Rhythmise–Lead–Liberate arc, allowing the audience to carry key phrases.

• Teaching and tutoring. Teachers can open classes by rhythmising the group (shared focus and pace), leading with a central concept and then liberating learners to explain, demonstrate or teach back the material. Voice, gesture and pacing can borrow consciously from EJMPERF.

• Facilitation and design. Teams can adopt EJMCOL by introducing a silent generation phase (no criticism or evaluation), followed by structured negotiation. This mirrors the protected composing window and helps avoid premature analytical interference.

10.1 Using the EJM in NLP Training

For NLP Trainers and Master Practitioners, the EJM is not only a descriptive model but a source of concrete drills that make "modelling" experientially real in the training room. Because EJMCOMP, EJMPERF and EJMCOL are specified behaviourally and linked to clear criteria (B1–B7), each macro-strategy can be turned into a focused exercise that illustrates how perceptual sequencing and state management drive observable excellence.

One simple design is to treat the three macro-strategies as parallel training streams:

- **EJMCOMP drill (from text to pulse).** Learners are given a short text (which may be a lyric, poem or quotation) and invited to build a vivid internal "film" from it. They then speak or play a simple rhythmic pattern while silently running the film, adjusting their timing until stressed syllables and musical accents feel naturally aligned. The debrief uses B1–B3 (film vividness, prosodic settling, K-Click) as explicit feedback markers.
- **EJMPERF drill (entraining a group).** Here the focus is on audience synchrony and state leadership. Participants use a short refrain or call-and-response phrase and practise marking a clear downbeat with minimal but precise gesture. The group is invited to "carry" the refrain once the leader drops out. B4 (audience synchrony) and B5 (verbal economy) provide the assessment frame: does the group stay together, and does the leader do less while achieving more?
- **EJMCOL drill (protecting the composing state).** Small groups simulate a composing session with a protected silent window. In phase one, one person generates material (words, sketches or musical motifs) while others explicitly agree to suspend critique. In phase two, structured evaluation and refinement are introduced. The contrast makes B6 (silent window protection) and B7 (hot replication rate) tangible: learners experience directly how premature analysis collapses the generative state.

Used in this way, the EJM becomes a bridge between classic NLP strategy work and contemporary training practice: it offers a concrete, culturally recognisable case study that can be unpacked, rehearsed and assessed without requiring participants to be professional musicians

In all these cases, the fundamental idea is the same: protect the creative loop, lead by prosody and rhythm, and only then negotiate and refine.

11. Discussion: Orthogonality, Limits and Pedagogical Value

The value of an NLP model lies in its ability to make excellence explicit and transferable. The EJM offers three main contributions:

1. Creativity as structured strategy. Elton John's output is presented not as mystical or inaccessible, but as the result of a structured sequence of operations and tests that can, in principle, be taught.

2. The power of orthogonality. EJMCOL highlights that separating roles and phases – lyrics versus music, creation versus evaluation – is not a luxury but a condition for speed and depth. When teams attempt to compose and criticise simultaneously, flow is easily broken.

3. The centrality of prosody and somatic confirmation. Prosody (the marriage of language and rhythm) and the K-Click (kinaesthetic confirmation) together provide a clear decision criterion. The system knows when to stop searching because lyric, rhythm and bodily sense of "rightness" align.

At the same time, the limits of the model must be acknowledged. Footage is edited; we seldom see failed attempts or private experiments. The corpus reflects certain periods of Elton John's career and may not capture all variations in his method. Finally, the EJM has not yet been subjected to systematic empirical testing with control groups.

For these reasons, the EJM should be viewed as a structured descriptive hypothesis, strong enough to guide teaching, coaching and further research, but open to refinement and falsification.

12. Conclusion and Future Directions

The Elton John Model (EJM) offers a coherent description of how a world-class artist:

• turns finished lyrics into fully formed songs at speed (EJMCOMP);
• leads and synchronises audiences through minimal but precise gestural and prosodic cues (EJMPERF);
• protects the composing state through clear role separation and phased collaboration (EJMCOL).

By linking observable behaviour to a clear sensory pipeline (Ve → Vi → Ki → Ae → Ai) and anchoring major claims in an Evidence Matrix and related research, the model moves Elton John's creativity from the realm of 'natural talent' into the realm of structured competence.

The next step is experimental validation. For example, novice composers could be trained explicitly in the EJMCOMP pipeline and evaluated with the B1–B7 criteria: does their prosodic settling improve? Does the latency to K-Click decrease? Do hot replication rates

increase? Similar protocols could be applied to speakers and teachers who adopt EJMPERF and EJMCOL.

If such studies support the descriptive model, the EJM may evolve from a mapping of one artist's excellence into a general training protocol for creativity, performance and collaboration – not only in music, but wherever people must transform text and ideas into impactful, embodied performance.

Appendix A – Sample Evidence Matrix

This appendix illustrates the structure of the Evidence Matrix used in the modelling process. Each row links a modelling claim to example scenes and classifies the source as Primary (P), Curated/Stagecraft (C) or Scientific (S). In a full research version, each row would include precise programme titles, dates and timestamps.

Code	Modelling Claim	Example (short description)	Source Type
M1	Rapid composition from finished lyrics	Lyric sheet is handed over; after brief silent reading Elton moves to the piano and a complete song structure emerges in minutes.	C (documentary/studio footage)
M2	Silent reading then lifted gaze	Short period of quiet reading followed by gaze lifting slightly above the page before hands move to keyboard.	C

M3	Internal film guides hand movement	Hands move with minimal fumbling; first motif appears aligned with lyric imagery rather than random exploration.	C + P (autobiographical remarks about "seeing" songs)
M4	Prosody as acceptance test	Attempts are kept or discarded based on whether tonic syllables fall naturally within the metre.	C + S (prosody and rhythm research)
M5	K-Click kinaesthetic confirmation	When prosody settles, there is immediate, fluent repetition and movement to capture the idea.	C
M6	Persona entry via clothing and posture	Stage wardrobe and posture reliably precede shifts into performance state.	C + S (enclothed cognition)

M7	Audience synchrony to downbeat	Audience clapping/singing locks to the downbeat after a small latency once chorus is introduced.	C + S (entrainment and synchrony research)
M8	Orthogonality of roles in collaboration	Lyrics delivered as finished text; composition occurs in a separate phase; arrangement discussions happen later.	P (autobiography) + C
M9	Protected silent window	No comments or suggestions are made while Elton first reads lyrics and begins playing.	C
M10	High hot replication rate	New material is repeated several times quickly without re-reading,	C

consolidating the

pattern.

Appendix B – Essential Glossary

EJM – The Elton John Model, comprising three macro-strategies: EJMCOMP (composition), EJMPERF (performance) and EJMCOL (collaboration).

EJMCOMP – The compositional strategy that converts finished lyrics into music through a pipeline of sensory operations and prosodic tests.

EJMPERF – The performative strategy by which Elton John enters a stage persona, marks the downbeat, leads prosody and organises audience synchrony.

EJMCOL – The collaboration protocol that separates roles and phases, protecting the composing state with a silent window and phased evaluation.

Ve / Vi – Visual External / Visual Internal. External refers to what is seen in the environment; internal refers to images generated in the mind.

Ae / Ai – Auditory External / Auditory Internal. External refers to sounds in the environment; internal refers to imagined or subvocal sound.

Ki – Kinaesthetic Internal. Bodily sensations, including felt sense of rhythm, pressure and the ‘K-Click’.

K-Click – A kinaesthetic confirmation (“that’s it”) experienced when lyric, metre and melody align sufficiently to justify committing to a musical direction.

Prosodic settling – The process by which stressed syllables in the lyric find natural placement within the musical metre, reducing awkward accents or stumbles.

Hot replication – Rapid repetition of newly created material without re-reading or re-checking inputs, used to stabilise and encode the pattern.

Orthogonality – In this context, the separation of roles and phases so that different operations (e.g., lyric writing, composing, arranging) do not interfere destructively with each other.

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