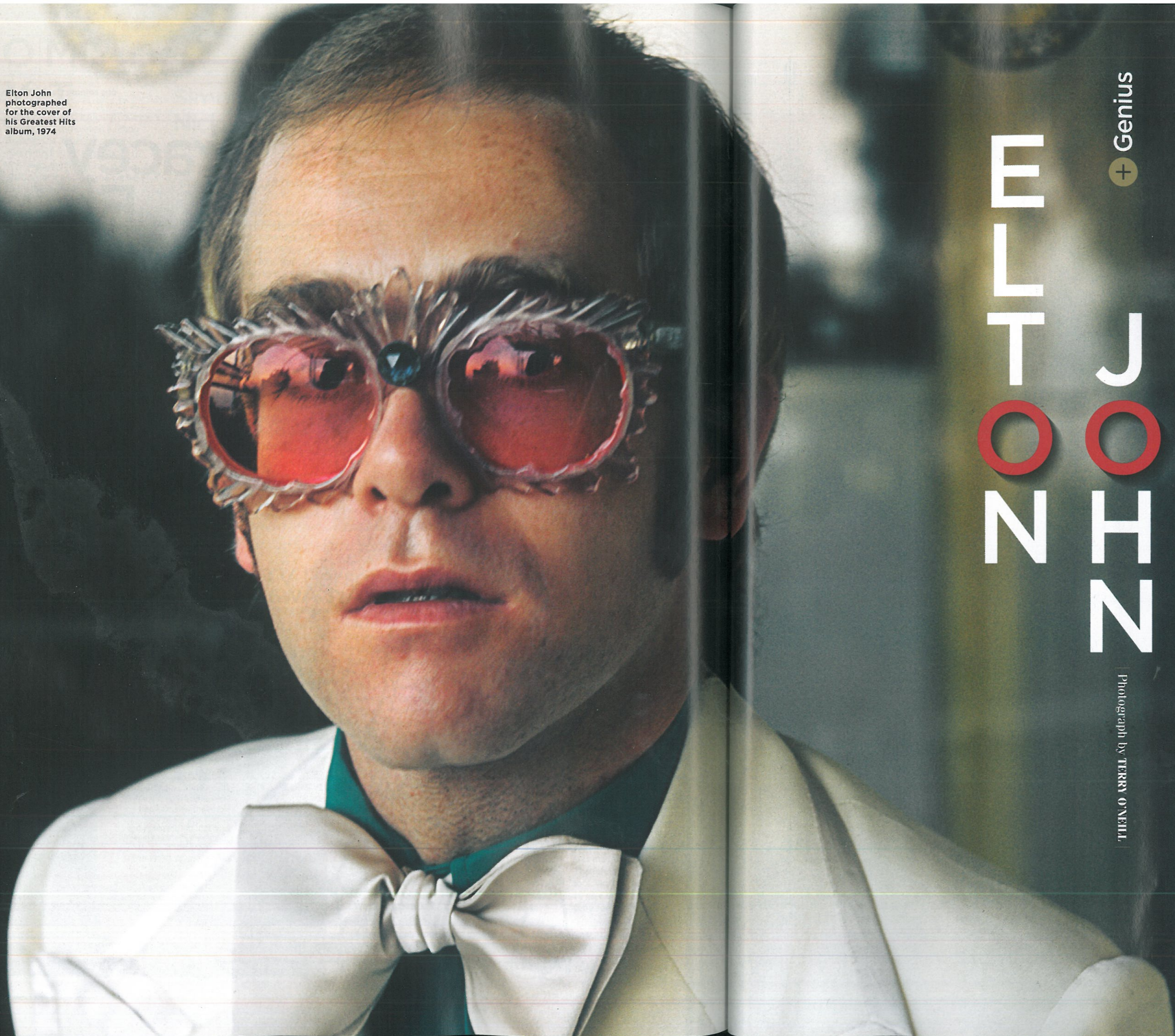


Elton John photographed for the cover of his Greatest Hits album, 1974



ELTON JOHN

+ Genius

Photograph by TERRY O'NEILL

BY DYLAN JONES

For the last decade or so, Sir Elton John has been turning into Philip Roth. Like the American novelist, who has produced more great books in the last 20 years than in the rest of his career, Elton has been experiencing a late purple patch, a re-blossoming that has resulted in an extraordinary run of albums that began in 2001 with *Songs From The West Coast*, and includes *Peachtree Road* (2004), *The Captain And The Kid* (the 2006 sequel to *Captain Fantastic And The Brown Dirt Cowboy* that includes one of Elton and career-long conspirator Bernie Taupin's finest ever songs, "Tinderbox"), *The Union* (his 2010 solo collaboration with Leon Russell), the remarkable *Good Morning To The Night* (a reinterpretation of his Seventies back catalogue by the Australian duo Pnau, which appeared last year), and now *The Diving Board*, yet another collection of reflective, intricate songs that equal anything he has done in the past.

A return to the stripped-back studio sound of the early Seventies, it is an album that relies almost completely on its material. All of the songs have been written with Taupin and all are testament to Elton's determination to continue to make good music in spite

of the throwaway, fly-by-night nature of much of today's chart fodder.

The piano man is doing things his own way and is as proud of this album as any he's recorded in the last 40 years.

"The great advantage of having Bernie as a lyricist is he's a very cinematic writer," says Elton. "I get a piece of paper from him and it has a story on it. Then I sit down at the keyboard, and because the story he's telling affects what I'm hearing, something comes out. I don't know what it is. It's as exciting as it was when I wrote the first melody to his first lyric, way back in 1967."

At the age of 66, Elton appears to be getting better and better, and while he can still fill a stadium, a sports arena or a Las Vegas showroom at the drop of a turquoise astrakhan fez, his albums are becoming more intimate, more considered, and, dare we say it, more mature.

As for Elton's next album, who's to say it won't rival *I Married A Communist*, *The Human Stain*, *The Plot Against America* or *The Humbling*? **GO**



Above: Sir Elton John with lyricist Bernie Taupin at the Tribeca Film Festival, New York, 20 April 2011