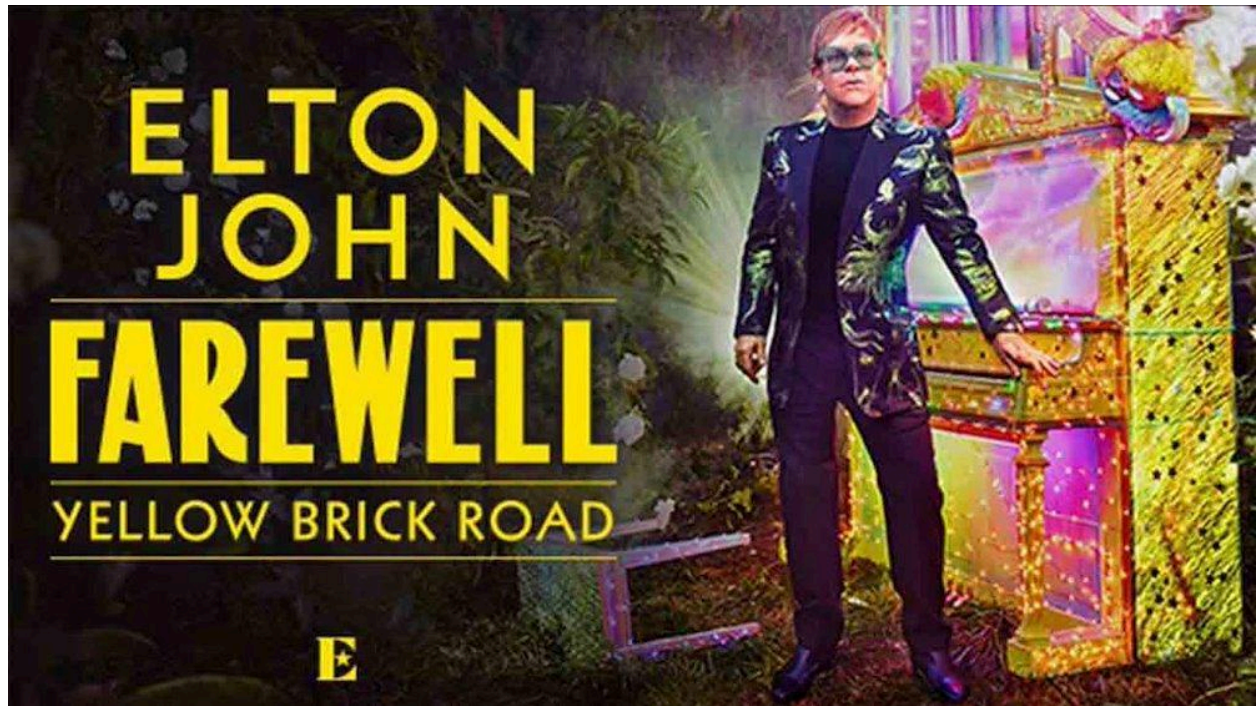


Longform Story



Farewell Yellow Brick Road tour poster. (Photo source: WTVD.)

Sir Elton John Visits Atlanta as Part of Farewell Tour

By: Justin Hartsell

ATLANTA — On Nov. 1, 2019, [Sir Elton John](#) made a stop in what he called his “home” of Atlanta as part of his final tour, titled [Farewell Yellow Brick Road](#), before he retires in 2021. John’s performance was essentially a cross-section of his life’s work, with John playing a set of songs that spanned decades, making three different wardrobe changes, promoting [his memoir](#) that was released in Oct. 2019, advocating for those who have [Acquired Immunodeficiency Syndrome \(AIDS\) from human immunodeficiency viruses \(HIV\)](#), and being an advocate for the [LGBTQ](#) community.

[State Farm Arena](#) in Downtown Atlanta hosted Sir Elton John’s appearance and was welcomed by a swarming crowd awaiting to get in for the event. [According to John’s official Instagram account](#), this concert marked a total of two million people who have come to see him since the beginning of his farewell tour.



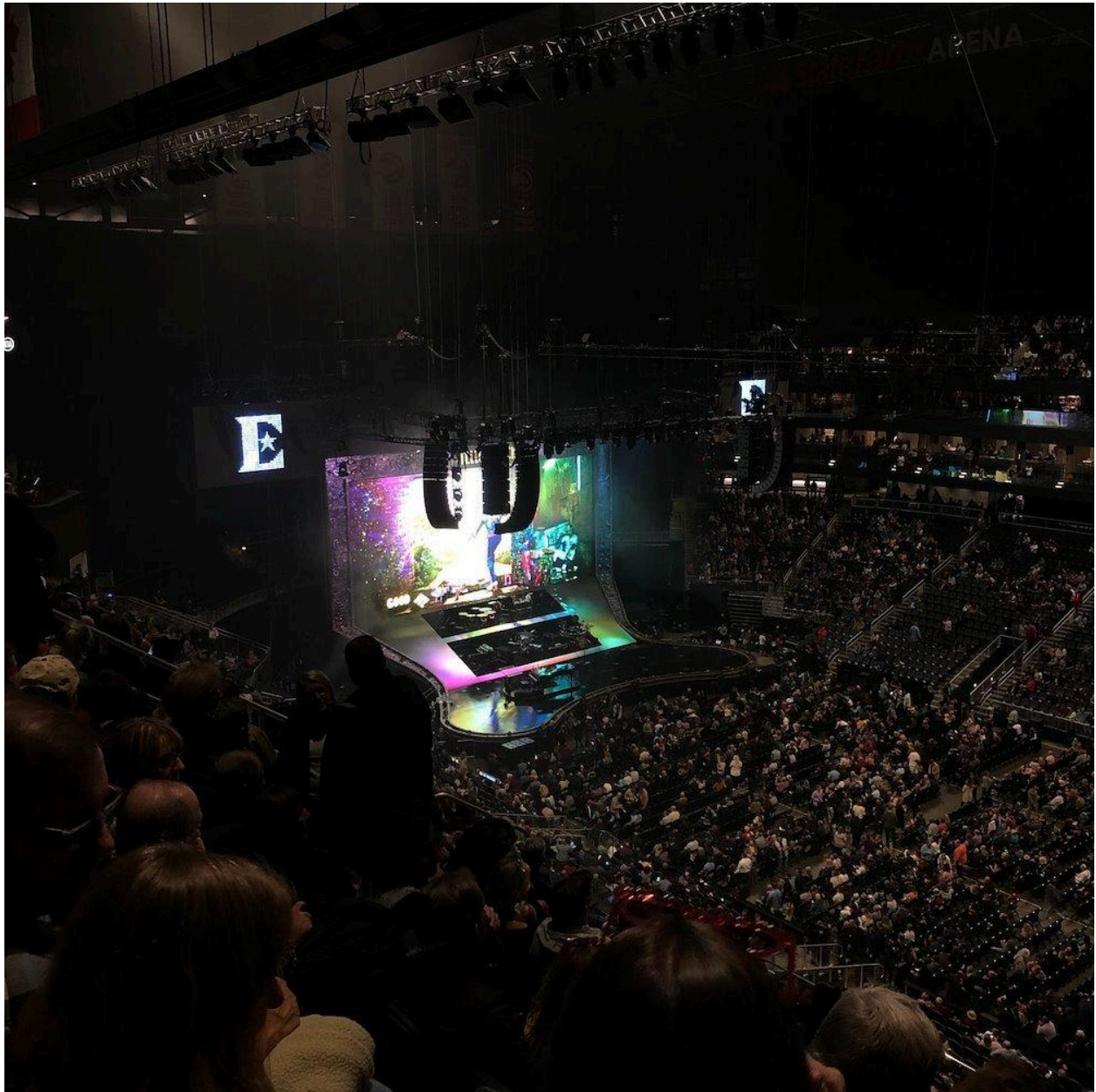
Crowd gathering to file into State Farm Arena for Sir Elton John's farewell concert. *(Photo source: Justin Hartsell.)*

With the show scheduled for 8 p.m., patrons were filling the seats with beverages in hand and munching on concessions that ranged anywhere from soft pretzels to made-to-order buffalo wings.

One fan excitedly looked over to her husband and said, “Ah, I’m so excited I can’t stand it!”

The stadium was filled with individuals who had dressed up as the music icon. Countless people had on rhinestone glasses, while others wore shiny, sequin sport jackets. Some individuals went as far as to fully emulate John’s previous wardrobe

choices on stage, such as the [all-sequin Dodgers baseball uniform and hat that John wore in his October 1975 shows at Dodgers Stadium in Los Angeles, California.](#)



The stage set-up inside the arena. (Photo source: Justin Hartsell.)

Then, shortly after 8 p.m., the arena went dark. The crowd started cheering loudly with excited screams and roaring applause. Suddenly, a spot-light came on immediately when John played the first note of his hit, "[Bennie and the Jets.](#)" He paused to draw out the crowd's excitement and the audience cheered wildly as he sat at the black [Yamaha](#)

[concert grand piano](#) with a bedazzled jacket full of shimmering sequins. There was one more strike of the keys before pausing, and then John began to play the hit single that was accompanied by the crowd singing along and anxiously reaching for their phones to take photos and videos.



Sir Elton performing on stage while computer graphics fill the stage and lights outline the stage's entirety. (Photo source: Justin Hartsell.)

The stage had a large digital screen outlined in bronze guild, as if to reconcile the technology of today with the feel of old performance halls with its decorative trim. The digital backdrop equalled the width of the entire stage and displayed live footage of John and his band members playing during the show. The backdrop also displayed computer graphics that brought album covers to life, allowed colors and graphics to fill the screen as songs were performed, showed decades of footage of John over the course of his life, and displayed pre-recorded dramas that helped narrate the song's story—such as when an actress portraying [Marilyn Monroe](#) is seen during "[Candle in the Wind](#)" struggling with depression and sobbing alone in her hotel room alongside cut scenes of her smiling and posing seductively for the paparazzi.

The entire stage itself was outlined in lights, and the accompanying band was surrounded by a continuous digital screen tilted at approximately 45-degrees that

extended out towards the front of the stage that was in sync with the primary backdrop's imagery. For instance, when John performed "[Rocket Man](#)," the backdrop showed Earth and Mars while the accompanying screens surrounding the band displayed a purple night sky for a seamless digital experience.

On both sides of the stage were two additional screens hanging from the arena's ceiling for those in the upper rows of the arena to have an up-close view of everything happening on stage—with cameras largely focusing on John while he was singing and then on his hands while playing the keys on the piano during instrumentals.



Sir Elton performing "Someone Saved My Life Tonight." (*Photo source: Justin Hartsell.*)

Shortly into the set, John spoke to the crowd and said, "Good evening, Atlanta!" The crowd roared with those three words, before John continued, "It's good to be home."

John went on to explain that Atlanta is such an important city to him because it is where he started the [Elton John Aids Foundation \(EJAF\)](#) 25 years ago, with him explaining

that Atlanta was inviting and supporting of him starting a foundation of a disease that people did not yet understand at that time.

“Eight or nine people died from AIDS last year in Atlanta, which is totally uncalled for in 2019, folks,” said John. “We do not have a cure or a vaccine yet, but we do have prescription drugs to stop the spreading of this disease.” John continued, “We need to get the cost of these drugs lowered so they get in the hands of the people who need it.”

[According to the EJAF website](#), the non-profit organization has raised \$400 million since its founding in an attempt “to challenge discrimination against people affected by the [AIDS] epidemic, prevent infections, provide treatment and services, and motivate governments to end AIDS.”

“The U.S. foundation focuses its efforts on programs in the United States, the Americas, and the Caribbean, while the U.K. foundation funds HIV-related work in Europe, Asia, and Africa,” [according to the EJAF website](#).

According to “[Hot 100](#)” published by “[Billboard](#),” [John has had nine number-one hits, twenty-seven “Top 10 Hits,” and 67 total songs](#) make it on the charts over the span of his career. Additionally, [John has had 48 albums](#) make it on the “[Billboard 200](#)” chart.

On into the show, John played “[The Bitch is Back](#)” from his 1974 album, “[Caribou](#).” During the song, the backdrop displayed a cast of [drag queens](#) and [transgender women](#) socializing with one another before all jumping into a pool and laughing as their cosmetics came off. This visual was a product of John’s LGBTQ advocacy and continuation to try and include those of the LGBTQ community to be accepted and part of the social narrative both here in the United States and internationally.

In response to how young people should understand their sexuality, John told “[Variety](#)” in a [2019 interview](#), “Don’t let anybody torture you for being gay or for your sexuality...Be proud of who you are.”

“There are so many wonderful diverse people in the world—straight people, gay people [and] transgender people,” said John. “We’re all God’s kids.”

“People who should know better in places of responsibility [and] attack gay people, transgender people...they claim to be close to God, [but] they couldn't be further away from God if they tried,” continued John.

[John married his husband, David Furnish, in Britain on Dec. 21, 2014. They now have two children, Zachary and Elijah.](#)

During his interview with Variety, John expressed, “It’s wonderful to be gay. I love being gay. I really do.” John continued, “And I think I wouldn’t have had the life I’ve had if I hadn’t been gay. And I’m very proud of that. I’m very proud that I can appreciate that.”



Elton John's new memoir, "ME." (Photo source: Amazon.com.)

In October of this year, John released his memoir, "[ME](#)." It is a personal account of his career and personal life from childhood to the present, including preparing for his farewell tour.

In it, he touches on embracing his current life. "I live and have lived an extraordinary life," writes John, "and I honestly wouldn't change it, even the parts I regret, because I am incredibly happy with how it has turned out." John continues, "It's not where I

expected to be at all—married to a man, a father of two, both things that seemed impossible to me not that long ago.”



One of Elton John's wardrobes worn during the performance. (Photo source: Justin Hartsell.)

John performed the first half of his show in a black suit, with a sparkling jacket being visible from as far as the upper sections of the arena as the spotlight shone down on him. With his initial outfit, he donned ruby, rhinestone glasses.

Halfway through the set, John departed from the stage as the band played the beginning portion of [“Funeral for a Friend/Love Lies Bleeding”](#) from the [“Goodbye Yellow Brick Road”](#) album. Upon returning to the stage, John had made a wardrobe change that consisted of a red and white piano jacket, resembling something found in a deck of cards, with a large silver medallion over the left side of his chest. His accompanying glasses were black rimmed with rhinestones and orange lenses.

Marc Richardson writes in a “Grailed” article, titled “[Rocketman: The Style of Elton John](#),” that John is “a peerless showman who helped pioneer the ‘glam rock’ subgenre” through his use of elaborate costumes on stage.

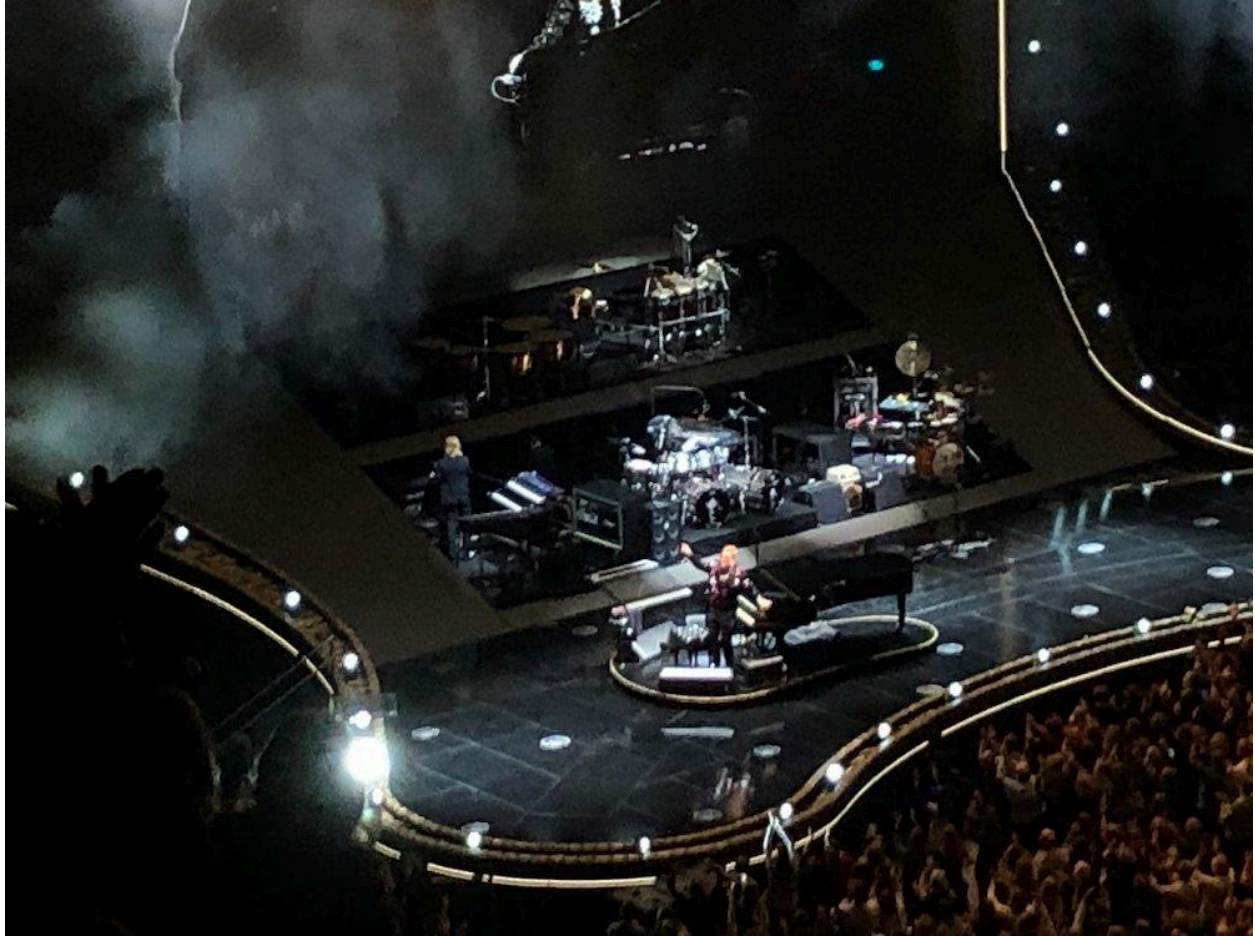
[Shante Honeycutt of “Billboard” writes](#) that John’s choice of style when it comes to wearing glasses are “an Elton John staple.” She then shares that John told her in an interview, “I’m proud of the part I played in moving eyewear from function to fashion,” with Honeycutt explaining that “his assortment of oversized, rhinestone glasses, while expressive, were actually an attempt to hide his ‘extreme shyness.’”

In reference to his back-to-back shows booked for State Farm Arena on Nov. 1 and 2 of this year, John told the Atlanta crowd on the first night, “Tomorrow night will probably be the last time I play in Atlanta.” The crowd roared with disappointment by booing the artist all across the arena when hearing the artist utter the statement.

John then explained, “I’ve had enough applause to last me a million lifetimes. I don’t need anymore...There’s no greater feeling than playing music and getting a response from another human being, and I will cherish it forever.” John continued, “Ten years ago, I would not have imagined stopping touring and performing, but I now have a family that I want to spend time with,” in which the crowd immediately started cheering and praising John’s decision.

In his memoir, John writes the following:

“But most of all, I want to spend time being...well, normal, or as normal as I can ever hope to be. Less time on the road means more time doing the school run, more Saturday afternoons taking the kids to Pizza Express, or round Daniel’s, the department store to Windsor—things the boys enjoy, things I would once never have thought of doing. I spent my whole life trying to run away from Reg Dwight [his birth name], because Reg Dwight taught me is that when I got too far from him, too removed from the normal person I once was, things went horribly wrong; I was more miserable than ever. I need—*everybody* needs—some connection to reality.”



Elton John waving to the crowd. (*Photo source: Justin Hartsell.*)

Towards the end of John's set, he once again walked off stage after constantly shouting "thank you's" in all directions of the arena, with frequent waving, pointing and bowing. After he walked off stage, the arena was consumed with the sound of a thunderous, cheering crowd as they clapped, whistled, shouted and screamed.

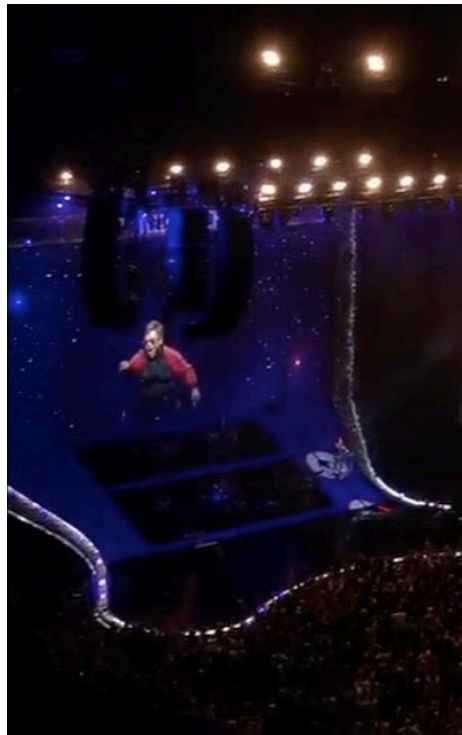
The stage remained lit in the presence of the roaring crowd in dim blue-lighting as fog from peripheral fog machines continued to gently loom over the base of the stage and the now-vacant grand piano.

Then, from the back center of the stage, a spotlight came on with John in his third and final wardrobe change for the show's encore. John stood facing the crowd in a silky, lizard-green robe, accompanied with deep red, oversized glasses. He returned to his piano to play "[Your Song](#)" followed by "[Goodbye Yellow Brick Road](#)," during which the platform supporting him and the piano began to glide horizontally from the left side of

the stage to the far right. The platform came to rest with John and his piano rotated to face the crowd as he finished the final notes of “Goodbye Yellow Brick Road.”

John then leaned back from his piano, and screamed, “Thank you,” towards the arena’s ceiling. He then stood up from the piano bench, untied his robe to reveal a black and red sweatsuit, and left the robe at his piano.

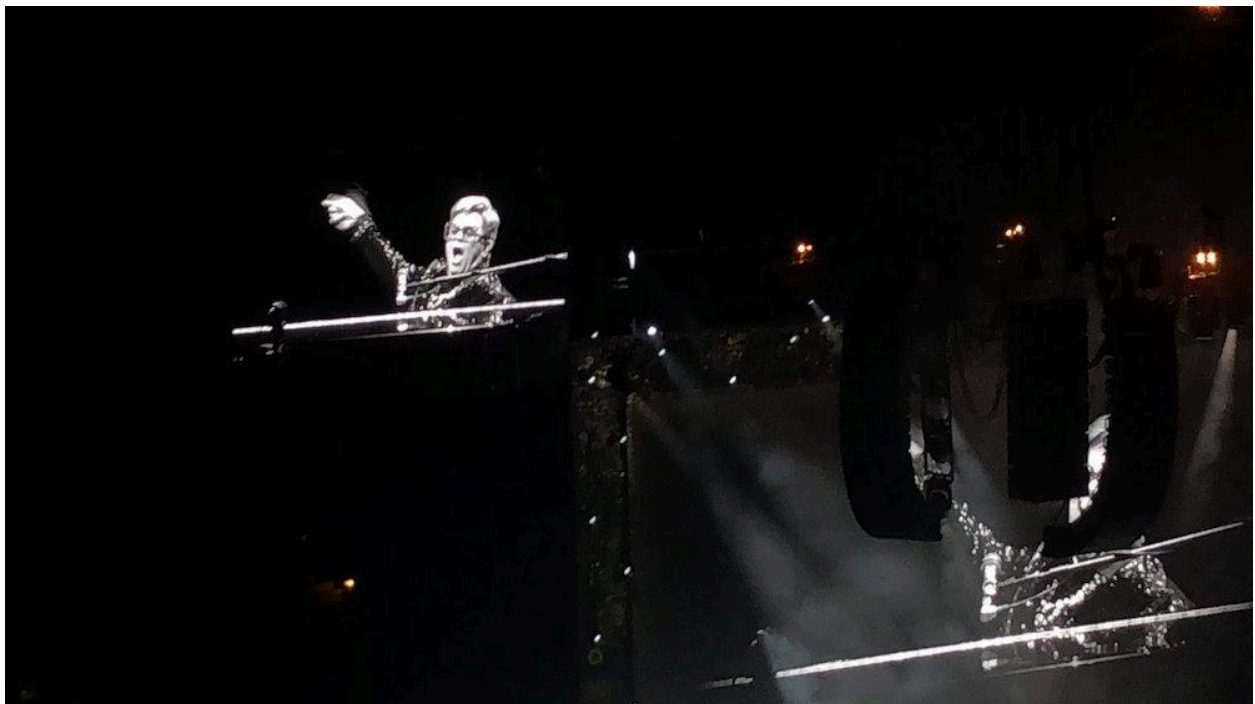
John was then escorted to a hidden platform on the stage that then ascended towards a backdrop of stars as synth and atmospheric pad music played from the stage, alluding to John being a rocket man in his song, “[Rocket Man](#).” As John ascended “into the stars,” he encouraged the crowd to cheer as loud as they could and give it all they had before he departed for the last time from the stage. The platform ascended John towards an exit hidden in the backdrop of stars, in which John did a final wave and thanking of the crowd before the spotlight shining on him went dark and only the graphic of the night sky remained.



Sir Elton bidding farewell to the Atlanta crowd. (Photo source: Justin Hartsell.)

The backdrop then transitioned the night sky into a view of Sir Elton John from behind walking in slow motion down a digitally-created yellow brick road wearing what he just had on in the show as he waved goodbye, before the screen then faded into white and the arena lights came on with credits rolling up on the screen of all who helped put the Farewell Yellow Brick Road tour together.

The musical legend's show had finally come to a close, and the crowd filed through the packed arena's exits with smiles across their faces—excitedly sharing with one another what the best parts of the show was for them. ◇



(Photo source: Justin Hartsell.)