

Mel's Top 100 Tracks

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Tracks are NOT in order of preference! They are sorted in the order in which they were picked.

1. *It Ain't Me Babe*, Bob Dylan (1975)
2. *It's A Raggy Waltz*, the Dave Brubeck Quartet (1963)
3. *I'm Looking Through You*, The Beatles (1996)
4. *Mulder And Scully*, Catatonia (1998)
5. *Handbags and Gladrags*, Stereophonics (2001)
6. *Local Boy In The Photograph*, Stereophonics (1997)
7. *You Really Got Me*, The Kinks (1964)
8. *Sweets For My Sweet*, The Searchers (1963)
9. *I Can't Let Go*, The Hollies (1966)
10. *Magdeline Laundry*, Mary Coughlin (1996)
11. *What Do Pretty Girls Do*, Kirsty MacColl (1989)
12. *Fairytale Of New York*, The Pogues with Kirsty MacColl (1987)
13. *I Don't Like Mondays*, Boomtown Rats (1979)
14. *Light My Fire*, The Doors (1967)
15. *Alone Again, Or, Love* (1967)
16. *White Rabbit*, Jefferson Airplane (1966)
17. *For What It's Worth*, Buffalo Springfield (1967)
18. *Ohio*, Crosby Stills Nash and Young (1970)
19. *Diamonds And Rust*, Joan Baez (1971)
20. *Going Back*, Dusty Springfield (1966)
21. *Nutbush City Limits*, Ike and Tina Turner (1973)
22. *Who Will Buy?* The Cast of Oliver (1968)
23. *Tonight*, Marni Nixon, Jimmy Bryant (1961)
24. *I Get A Kick Out Of You*, Gary Shearston (1974)
25. *Somewhere Over The Rainbow*, Judy Garland (1939)
26. *Theme For Young Lovers*, The Shadows (1964)
27. *On The Beach*, Cliff Richard (1964)
28. *Girl Of My Best Friend*, Elvis Presley (1960)
29. *Hurricane*, Bob Dylan (1976)
30. *Like A Hurricane*, Neil Young (1977)
31. *Telegraph Road*, Dire Straits (1982)
32. *I'm Going Home*, Ten Years After (1970)
33. *She's Not There*, The Zombies (1964)
34. *Gloria*, Them (1964)
35. *For Your Love*, The Yardbirds (1965)
36. *Tell Me What He Said*, Helen Shapiro (1962)
37. *Allentown Jail*, The Springfields (1962)
38. *I'll Never Find Another You*, The Seekers (1964)
39. *Barges*, Ralph McTell (1972)
40. *Mr Bojangles*, Nina Simone (1971)
41. *I Think It's Going To Rain Today*, Nina Simone (1969)
42. *Up The Junction*, Squeeze (1979)
43. *Always The Sun*, The Stranglers (1986)

44. *Start!*, The Jam (1980)
45. *Changing Man*, Paul Weller (1995)
46. *Stand By Me*, John Lennon, (1975)
47. *Maybe I'm Amazed*, Paul McCartney, (1970)
48. *Run Of The Mill*, George Harrison, (1970)
49. *Love you More Than I Can Say*, Bobby Vee, 1961
50. *Don't Ever Change*, The Crickets (1962)
51. *Maybe Baby*, Buddy Holly and the Crickets (1957)
52. *Life On Mars*, David Bowie, (1971)
53. *Bennie And The Jets*, Elton John (1973)
54. *Go Your Own Way*, Fleetwood Mac, (1977)
55. *Alternate Title*, The Monkees, (1967)
56. *Dancing Queen*, Abba (1976)
57. *Baby Jane*, Rod Stewart (1983)
58. *Please Mr Postman*, The Marvelettes (1961)
59. *He's A Rebel*, (not by) The Crystals (1962)
60. *She's Got You*, Patsy Cline (1962)
61. *It Might As Well Rain Until September*, Carole King (1962)
62. *Paper Sun*, Traffic (1967)
63. *Dear Mr Fantasy*, Traffic (1967)
64. *White Room*, Cream (1968)
65. *You Keep Me Hanging On*, Vanilla Fudge (1967)
66. *I Just Dropped In (To See What Condition My Condition Was In)*, Kenny Rogers and the First Edition (1967)
67. *Crying in the Rain*, Everly Brothers (1962)
68. *Leaving On A Jet Plane*, Peter Paul and Mary (1969)
69. *Your Wildest Dreams*, The Moody Blues (1986)
70. *Another Suitcase In Another Hall*, Madonna (1996)
71. *Skeet Surfin*, Val Kilmer (1984)
72. *Back in The USSR*, The Beatles (1968)
73. *I Get Around*, The Beach Boys (1964)
74. *Another Brick in the Wall (Part 2)*, Pink Floyd (1980)
75. *American Idiot*, Green Day (2004)
76. *Politik Kills*, Manu Chao (2007)
77. *Runaround Sue*, Dion and the Belmonts (1961)
78. *Summer in the City*, The Lovin' Spoonful (1966)
79. *I Heard It Through The Grapevine*, Marvin Gaye (1968)
80. *Kodachrome*, Paul Simon (1973)
81. *Hotel California*, The Eagles (1976)
82. *Dancing in the Dark*, Bruce Springsteen (1984)
83. *Handle With Care*, Traveling Wilburys (1988)
84. *Don't look Back in Anger*, Oasis (1996)
85. *Why Does It Always Rain On Me*, Travis (1999)
86. *Take Me Out*, Franz Ferdinand (2004)
87. *The Night They Drove Old Dixie Down*, Joan Baez (1971)
88. *Quitting Time*, The Roches (1979)
89. *Black Horse and the Cherry Tree*, K T Tunstall (2004)
90. *Honky Tonk Women*, Rolling Stones (1969)
91. *Baker Street*, Gerry Rafferty (1979)
92. *Crazy Man Michael*, Fairport Convention (1969)

- 93. *Brothers In Arms*, Dire Straits (1985)
- 94. *All Along The Watchtower*, Jimi Hendrix (1968)
- 95. *Like A Rolling Stone*, Bob Dylan (1965)
- 96. *Visions Of Johanna*, Bob Dylan (1966)
- 97. *Things Have Changed*, Bob Dylan (2000)
- 98. *Strawberry Fields Forever*, The Beatles (1967)
- 99. *Hello, Goodbye*, The Beatles (1967)
- 100. *The End*, The Beatles (1969)

Mel's Selection 1: 1-3

First sent 19.2.15

Here are three songs on the theme of "better than the original version".

1. *It Ain't Me Babe*, Bob Dylan (1975)

Composer: Bob Dylan

I'm left almost speechless by just about everything on Dylan's miraculous live reworking of his sweet acoustic 1964 farewell to Joan Baez. The original lets the girl down, but gently. The 1975 song has a new rhythm, a sensational electric guitar arrangement, and a lyrical savagery which must have influenced (or been influenced by?) Joan's immaculate rebuff the same year in *Diamonds and Rust*. What a conversation!

Not just an unpretty voice. Not just a great 20th Century poet. Not just a musician who wilfully earned a reputation for slapdash arrangements and recording techniques. He took his own classic and turned it into a masterpiece. It's these kind of bewildering contradictions which lead people to believe in divine inspiration. But Dylan makes it much more interesting than that.

This live recording comes from "The Bootleg Series, Vol. 5- Bob Dylan Live 1975 – The Rolling Thunder Revue"

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QxsWIG2xl9o>

Pete's comment on Mel's 1. *It Ain't Me Babe*

I've always liked the original, which (like so much earlier Dylan) is spare and trenchant. I agree that the fuller and more highly orchestrated electric accompaniment of this later reworking (as with so much of his stuff) is excellent and satisfying, but I would need to hear the piece many more times before I could like it as much as the original. On first hearing, it seemed a bit ... hurried, which I suppose is what you're saying. But I couldn't quite identify the depth of meaning in that haste that you do. However, that could be my loss.

Nick's comment on Mel's 1. *It Ain't Me Babe*

One of the many remarkable things about Bob Dylan is that he, along with a very small and select group of rivals, has produced the best cover versions of his own songs. I have the double "Rolling Thunder Review" CD and think it is extraordinary – one of a group of maybe 3 or 4 live rock recordings which are up there with studio recordings. So yes, Mel, though I think my choice of song may fall elsewhere ...

2. *It's A Raggy Waltz*, the Dave Brubeck Quartet (1963)

Composer: Dave Brubeck

I'd include the whole of Brubeck's ground-breaking 1961 "Time Further Out" album if there were space left for everything else I want to take to Mars. *It's a Raggy Waltz* was the first track on that extraordinary time signature-bending LP with its hip Miro abstract sleeve. But please listen to this Carnegie Hall live version which appeared years later as a bonus track on a CD reissue.

I suppose you need to know both versions. My comparison is intended to put two fingers up to those who wrote Brubeck off as a sterile experimentalist. Two years after the pop-like studio recording, *It's A Raggy Waltz* was being performed on stage as a fluid piece of jazz by a superb group of intuitive musicians. The difference is amazing.

"Time Further Out" is the most played record I've owned. But finding this bonus track reassures me I don't have to be ashamed that Dave Brubeck's is the only jazz I ever really loved, even if the intricate syncopation of 3/4 time or 7/8 and 9/4 rhythms proved a musical cul-de-sac. Incidentally, Nick, Brubeck identified *It's A Raggy Waltz* not as a rag or a waltz, but as 12-bar blues!

I can't find a downloadable version of this live recording of *It's A Raggy Waltz* (which is a bonus track on a "Time Further Out" CD reissue), though it's an MP3 file on the memory stick. Here, rather meaninglessly, is a link to the original studio recording so that you will at least know the tune I'm talking about.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JsGSxbAB3qk>

Pete's comment on Mel's 2. *It's a Raggy Waltz*

I'm fascinated to know you like this. There is some jazz that I find wonderful (watch for a later episode!), but I've never really listened carefully to this piece until now. Clearly I should listen again.

Nick's comment on Mel's 2. *It's A Raggy Waltz*

Well, I remember listening to quite a lot of Brubeck when I was at school, and remember thinking how good Paul Desmond was (though for sax players I think I preferred Stan Getz, and I owned and own an LP by Bud Shank, otherwise known as the flautist on *California Dreaming*). It's curious listening to this now – I don't recall this in particular, but would be surprised if I didn't hear the studio version 50 years ago. I enjoyed it this time round!

3. *I'm Looking Through You*, The Beatles (1996)

Composers: Lennon and McCartney

Sometimes The Beatles were just too perfect. The "Rubber Soul" version of *I'm Looking Through You* is less rhythmic, more controlled, more consistent and more "musical" than this earlier take in the Anthology Volume 2 collection. But the slower alternative recording gets louder and more raucous and compelling in the refrains. It has contrast, texture and energy. I don't doubt the discipline and musical maturity of the standard recording, but perfection isn't everything.

If you'd only ever heard "Rubber Soul" you'd presumably think it's a damned fine song with drive and excitement. But where's the urgency of that insistent lead guitar on "Anthology" that so brilliantly matches the frustration and bitterness in the lyrics? This is up to the standard of their singles. No wonder they drove one another mad and the Beatles to extinction in the Twickenham studios three years later as they desperately tried to retrieve the excitement of their earlier live performances. They'd already captured it in the "Rubber Soul" sessions and left it in a vault.

And of course, despite my “better than the original” theme, the alternative version **was** the original, though I had to wait 30 years to learn how good it was.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LQJ2ROrjbfs&list=RDLQJ2ROrjbfs&index=1>

Pete’s comment on Mel’s 3. *I’m Looking Through You*

I’d never knowingly heard the earlier version before. Fascinating! Shows how many (few) times I’ve played my *Anthology* album ... What you say about it all makes sense, and yet again I’d need to get to know it better before I could make a judgement. Either way, I’ve always been aware of the contradiction in so much of the Beatles’ work between the pretty melodies/harmonies and the harshness of the meaning, which was part of their magic. And I’ve always liked this one.

Nick’s comment on Mel’s 3. *I’m Looking Through You*

Good song off what I sometimes (but not always) think is their best LP. I didn’t know the recording, though. Excellent stuff, but I think I may be suggesting other Beatles songs ...

Being a committed nihilist I don't have much opportunity to be loyal to things, least of all to flag-waving nationalism. I don't even follow Welsh rugby much, a failing which regularly embarrasses me in my work. But something happened in Wales in the late Nineties which stirred even me – the sudden emergence of local bands on an international stage. Not routine pop, but rock music of the highest quality lyrically and musically.

4. Mulder And Scully, Catatonia (1998)

Composer: Cerys Matthews

I can't describe the sensation of wonder and exhilaration as I flew through Port Talbot on the M4 one day and suddenly realised I was listening to music in an accent I recognised. Catatonia lead singer Cerys Matthews was belting it out in pure Cerrdiff. The sound of the capital. Not North American or mid-Atlantic or Cockney punk. Ireland and Scotland have always had a distinctive music identity, but Wales only really had male voice choirs whose mutilations of everything from Mozart to Lennon-McCartney are regarded as close to the music of the spheres in these parts.

Cerys has a fantastic voice and she writes witty intelligent songs from the heart. I had to listen to the hit album "International Velvet" again several times before I picked *Mulder and Scully* over the similarly uplifting *Road Rage*. It could have been either. This one, focussing on *X-Files*-like strangeness of wanting and not wanting to be in a relationship, wins because of the wonderful lyrical counterbalance of opposite emotions line by line throughout.

And it's hard to beat a couplet like:

"And as for some happy ending / I'd rather stay single and thin."

She's vivacious and plain, down-to-earth and flaky. Love her!

www.youtube.com/watch?v=a6Y1AE_c8KM

Pete's comment on Mel's 4. Mulder And Scully

Clearly I've been missing something all these years. I never latched on to Catatonia at the time, and always tend to think of Cerys Matthews in connection with that charming duet she performed on TV with Tom Jones (*Baby It's Cold Outside*). My loss; this song is a gem. If there's more like this, I should be listening to it.

As so often in my reaction to music, my first thought is that the melody, vocal harmonies and chord structure are brilliant. Sometimes composers find themselves on a roll, and come up with something outstanding that matches up to the best that the form has to offer. This is a great example. But the content also works with the musical aspects: as you say, it articulates ambivalence beautifully, even to the point of ending on an unresolved chord – underlining the point it's making. Excellent choice.

Nick's comment on Mel's 4. Mulder And Scully

I didn't know this song. I've been sort-of aware of Catatonia, but much more of Cerys Matthews in her post-Catatonia persona [sic], when she comes over very well. Interesting song: I need to listen to it more. One little comment on first and second listening – I wish that they hadn't placed the lead guitar quite so far back while she's singing, because it sounds good but I'd prefer it if it wasn't playing quite so hard to get.

5. *Handbags and Gladbags*, Stereophonics (2001)

[First sent 1.8.25]

Composer: Mike D'abo

This is one of my latterday swaps. My original choice was the hypnotic anthem *Design For Life* by the right-on local band (formed nine miles from me in Blackwood) the Manic Street Preachers. My idea had been to complete a trio of groups from the great surge of Welsh rock in the 1990s.

But when *Design for Life* was dismissed by Pete as “cluttered” (he probably meant was “cacophonous”), I realised that it was the song’s aspiration that I admired. To my regret and shame I didn’t love it as I should have done, and couldn’t find anything from the Manics’ repertoire to replace it. The band had to go.

To maintain my Welsh loyalties I’ve doubled up on Stereophonics tracks with *Handbags and Gladbags*. This is a quality song which I’ve loved since first hearing it in the Sixties. It’s been recorded by a lot of people, and was a hit for Chis Farlowe and Rod Stewart. But Stereophonics lead singer Kelly Jones’ 2001 revival manages to be more convincing. His throaty vocal performance is actually rather gentle and expressive, so that the meaning of the song comes through more clearly than in consciously “soul” or pop versions.

This is probably because *Handbags and Gladbags* is not a nonsense song with lyrics about baking blackbirds in a pie, and it hasn’t got a lot to do with grandads either (though a lot of people on the internet who don’t listen to lyrics say curiously that it reminds them of a dead grandparent). It’s a sincere and cleverly constructed warning from a man to his girl about the worthlessness of her fashion fripperies, and a pretty good demolition of the fashion industry generally. Not a message that pop music is usually very good at.

The song is an interesting choice for a band with a more familiar heavy rock sound, and reveals something of Jones’ range as a singer. The recording is also beautifully enhanced by a well-controlled orchestral backing which moves from a wistful start to a thumping crescendo.

Handbags and Gladbags was written by Manfred Mann singer Mike D’Abo in 1967 but never recorded by the band, despite my firm conviction that I’d seen them perform it on “Top of the Pops”. It also apparently featured in early Manic Street Preachers performances, though they never recorded it.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=51GuG6N2qHE>

[This track was a late substitute for Mel’s original selection, so Nick did not have the chance to review or comment on it. Mel’s original choice at this point was *Design For Life* by The Manic Street Preachers.]

Pete’s comment on Mel’s 5. *Handbags and Gladbags*

Believe it or not, I had the Stereophonics’ version of *Handbags and Gladbags* shortlisted for my own top 100. I completely agree that it’s a fantastic song: such wisdom from such a relatively young composer, so imaginatively expressed. I wouldn’t have chosen Rod Stewart’s version, sung more for effect than for meaning, but might just have gone with the Chris Farlowe version. But now I don’t have to.

I’m delighted that you’ve picked it, because it’s provided you with the opportunity to talk up its virtues and refute the trite criticisms from people who have never listened to the lyrics properly. It’s a ringing condemnation of anyone who forgets (or is unaware of) the past, and is ignorant of the effort and sacrifice that brought us to the present day. The song demands gravitas in delivery, and Kelly Jones fully lived up to requirements. It was a song waiting for him to sing it.

I'm picking another Mike D'Abo song for my own selection, sung in that instance by him. Given that he was capable of composing *Handbags and Gladrag's*, it's surprising and disappointing that he apparently produced little else on a par with it.
Stunning.

6. *Local Boy In The Photograph*, Stereophonics (1997)

Composers: Kelly Jones, Stuart Cable, Richard Mark Jones

I have to celebrate Stereophonics' astonishing first album "Word Gets Around", recorded before they sounded like a supergroup.

This was a young band of guys on the dole – because there really were no jobs in Aberdare – who recorded a whole album of songs about people and events in their area. The opener *Local Boy in the Photograph* is about a boy who jumped in front of a train – at least it's about the rippling effect among the people who knew him when they heard about his death. Great tune, absorbing lyric by young people with guitars who started by entertaining their contemporaries at Cwmavon Social Club.

The flowering of Welsh rock had real cultural significance. I experienced something of the impact of this album when a lad in a charity I was working with left town to become a roadie with the band. Those left behind opened a community recording studio. Aspiration for people who previously has no hope. Inspiration for people like me.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7TxwSkXthzk>

Pete's comment on Mel's 6. *Local Boy In The Photograph*

I too think Kelly Jones has a superb voice. I've tended to feel over the years that the group's impact has been constrained because their music hasn't lived up to the quality of their performance. However, I have probably never heard their early stuff before, and I really like this piece. At the risk of saying the same kind of thing yet again, I enjoy the way the likeable melodic shape works in perfect accord with the message. Yes, a worthy contender.

Nick's comment on Mel's 6. *Local Boy In The Photograph*

I confess that I don't share your enthusiasm, Mel, for *Handbags And Gladrag's*, even in the great Farlowe version (though he will, I suspect, crop up at some stage in my list). I am more aware of the Stereophonics than Catatonia or the Manic Street Preachers, though this was mainly because *Have A Nice Day* was played over-frequently on MTV when I was in the gym at work. (Margaret's Choice from the Stereophonics' oeuvre would be *Graffiti On A Train*, even though she struggled at first to hear the lyrics – "Did he say 'Feet up on a train?'").

This is one I didn't know, and it's very powerful stuff. I agree that Kelly Jones is good, but sometimes he seems to me to be a bit self-parodic, as if he is his own tribute band: but not here.

One little observation on local colour. If I were moved to emulate you, Mel, you'd have Saxon, the Grimethorpe Colliery Band and Kate Rusby. Don't worry, I wouldn't do that to you (or me). Mind you, there are good acts from Sheffield (other than Tony bleedin' Christie still showing us the way to Amarillo).

I've written about six tracks and planned a definite six more, and I honestly still don't know what I'm doing!

Are these the 100 best songs I've ever heard? The tracks I've enjoyed most? The best performances? The songs I most like today, at this moment – because my appreciation, often unconstrained by a good memory, is changing all the time? Is it the 100 most evocative pieces which I would take to a desert island to remind me of what I've left behind? Or the music I would like other people to judge me by? (We've got to admit this is what Roy Plomley's contribution to civilisation is often about.)

Pete, you've introduced a further dimension, which I have to say was already on my mind: if you choose a song I like that relieves me of the need to choose it. Very reasonable, but it suggests that we are on the way to a definitive selection.

That's half a dozen or more different lists, even assuming I could limit any one of them to a mere 100. You sound as if you've chosen your top 115 already, Nick. So you must have solved this conundrum. But presumably I'm not required to make choices on the same basis. Or am I?

This is so hard. I'll just have to carry on winging it, batch by batch in the hope that I somehow cover the most important and achievable of these objectives...

So back to business. What three songs excited me most at the time when music was exciting me most. Not so difficult. I could add a few like I Want To Hold Your Hand and Can't Explain, The Who, to songs which had my teenage soul spellbound when I first heard them, but I think these three had the biggest and longest impact.

7. You Really Got Me, The Kinks (1964)

Composer: Ray Davies

Not Ray Davies' greatest song of course. But for its emotional shock on first release and its continuing power to rouse – even in advertising today – it's unbeatable. I hardly need to analyse it to make my point.

We all know Ray Davies deserves more credit as a songwriter. But little brother Dave is still working hard to earn credit for his brilliant razor-blade-to-loudspeaker-cone guitar distortion in the unmistakeable opening riff. Still really gets me.

The song is rough, raw and painful, perfectly matching its sound to the anguish of what we must presume is unbridled lust (but could conceivably be silly old love? no). My god is that powerful! After *You Really Got Me* pop music was not the same.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fTTsY-oz6Go>

Pete's comment on Mel's 7. You Really Got Me

I completely agree with all you say about this. It exploded into our lives, and retains an unshakeable place in the pantheon. Whilst it's certainly rough and raw, I've always felt that in common with many recordings from this period, it was much more subtle in construction and execution than it seemed at first sight.

I'll never forget being impressed when I first heard it to find that the solo attack of those first bars merged quickly into vocal harmonies, opening the whole thing out into something a lot more interesting than the beginning suggested. It was a reminder, if we needed one, that the people in these bands, contrary perhaps to popular perception, were often careful and meticulous musicians who knew exactly what they were doing. I'll have to cede this one to you, Mel, but the Kinks will certainly feature somewhere in my list.

Nick's comment on Mel's 7. *You Really Got Me*

I think I remember the huge impact this had when it was released (though there is always the risk of a later memory implant with these things). Of course it's not the best Kinks song – the only possible reaction to that observation is “so what?”.

There had been a sort of tidal effect in pop/rock – the best of the original rockers had huge amounts of energy, which became homogenised over the next few years into something much blander – compare Eddie Cochran with Johnny Tillotson, or the energy levels of Elvis (or dare one say Cliff Richard) in the mid-late 50s and the early 60s. Suddenly there was some real energy, which could be enthusiastic (e.g. much of the Hollies, of whom more anon) or risqué, as with the Kinks. The same sort of thing happened of course with punk (to which I predictably reacted somewhat less positively) – not accidental that the Jam covered *David Watts*.

As you both say, the impact of early Kinks had at least as much to do with Dave Davies as with Ray. I think Dave is often credited with inventing riffs based on power chords. Whether or not he was “first” isn't necessarily the point – it was the first time that we were aware of this sort of approach on a significant and sustained scale. And I liked and like the story of Dave butchering his amp to get the sound he wanted.

Great stuff. More Kinks to come from me at some point, doubtless.

8. *Sweets For My Sweet*, The Searchers (1963)

Composers: Doc Pomus, Mort Shuman

In my youthful ignorance I used to think that the Searchers were second only in the world to the Beatles. I owned several Searchers LPs, and they were all stamped with an extraordinary musicality, whatever the material. This characteristic is easiest to understand in the contrast between the Beatles' (of course far superior) version of *Twist and Shout* and the Searchers' unexpected discovery of its melody.

I still don't know how they did it. But it seems to be somewhere in that tinkling guitar sound. They had three number 1 hits in a row, loads more hits and some very high-quality B-sides with beautiful heart-wrenching slow ballads. And from all these I have to choose the first, *Sweets For My Sweet*, not because it's the greatest but because it had the greatest impact on me at the time.

The start isn't heart-stopping like *You Really Got Me*. It's jolting, as if I've come into a song that's already been playing. After that it's got everything – driving base, singing guitars, falsetto backing vocals, and the Pomus-Shuman pop melody. So good it's possible to overlook the silly lyric. It's all very simple, but utterly transfixing for the 15-year-old me.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1tnqnXJl9qE>

Pete's comment on Mel's 8. *Sweets For My Sweet*

I will always have great fondness for this, partly for the same reasons as you, Mel. The Searchers' sound was unique and likeable. I was never able to get as excited about them as, say, the Beatles or the Hollies because I always felt they had less to offer, which I think you acknowledge. But what they did contribute was irreplaceable, and I'll happily listen to many of their songs any day. I'm not sure that they'll be in my top hundred, but if my top hundred could be somehow stretched into another dimension, they definitely would be!

Nick's comment on Mel's 8. *Sweets For My Sweet*

I always rather liked the Searchers, but felt slightly guilty about it, as if I secretly liked the strawberry creams in the chocolate box. And to me this was and is a bit winsome. But I liked it

and still do, not as much as *Needles And Pins*, which seems to me to be the best thing they did, which appeared on my radar at the time.

A couple of little digressions – I heard someone say that they achieved the sound of a 12 string not by having a 12 string but by playing 2 guitars an octave apart – sounds a mite laborious if true. And *Needles and Pins* was, I'm sure you know, written by that well known cod-hippy-turned-Republican Sonny Bono, who was killed by arguing unsuccessfully with a Democrat tree while skiing (yes, Mel, the tree was skiing, Sonny was standing around idly).

9. *I Can't Let Go*, The Hollies (1966)

Composers: Taylor, Gorgoni

Was it going to be this or *I'm Alive*? Of course it's hard to pick the best of the Hollies, who produced so many stunning singles. Like the Searchers, they went on to write impressive songs themselves, but they built their reputation with the unique adaptations of other people's compositions. I don't have the vocabulary to explain it, but I'd describe it as using harmonies (and guitars in the case of the Searchers) to dramatically enhance basic well-chosen melodies. To me they just sound more tuneful than everyone else around apart from the Beatles.

I Can't Let Go and *I'm Alive* each stand out for me because their upbeat beginnings shift progressively through soaring, spine-tingling harmonies to melodious crescendos. They use the same trick of generating excitement and expectation with constantly rising notes which Abba later perfected with better financial results. The Hollies, or their producer, understood this magic a decade earlier.

I ought to like *I'm Alive* more because the exuberance of the production and the more satisfying ending seem to be so close to positive sentiments of the lyric. But the energy of *I Can't Let Go* is more exciting, and to me at least conveys a sense of agitation which is suitably urgent and emphatic if slightly less uplifting.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nN8KraEvsnc>

Pete's comment on Mel's 9. *I Can't Let Go*

Yes, for me the Hollies were one of the most important bands of the 1960s, and although they've certainly been acknowledged by the musical world, I sometimes feel their contribution has been underrated – both for the quality of their own songs, and more particularly for their unique sound. You're right about that sound; in an era abounding with four-piece bands with multiple harmonies, they still managed to stand out. Their big hits were meticulously constructed and often surprisingly intricate, and that ringing, high top line by Graham Nash was unmatched anywhere else.

And even if for arguably the wrong reasons (*The Air That I Breathe* and *He Ain't Heavy*, which have both been over-exposed to the point of extinction), Allan Clarke's voice has straddled the generations and become an indelible part of Britain's musical heritage. He deserves more credit than he seems to get.

I think *I Can't Let Go* is a worthy choice; I love so much about it, including for instance that point when the one of the verses launches into a solo bass line, followed by a build up to another of their multi-layered harmonic sequences. You could call it controlled exuberance. Yet if I were to choose between this and *I'm Alive*, I think I would choose *I'm Alive*, which I feel is a more rounded song: more cleverly constructed, more compact, more tuneful maybe, more emphatic somehow.

However, luckily my own Hollies choice is none of the above ... but that will have to wait for another instalment.

The performance of *I'm Alive* at the end of the video link wonderfully captures the raw excitement of a live performance in that era, even though the sound from a record has evidently been dubbed over it, and the environment looks slightly “staged”. Were the Hollies ever this young?

Nick's comment on Mel's 9. *I Can't Let Go*

Well, like both of you I always liked the Hollies. They released a double CD a few years ago, and that sounded like too much of a good thing, so I got a single CD, which just served to remind me of how much good stuff they produced. The progression from cover versions to original material is amazingly consistent with many such groups – the Stones with Chuck Berry and Muddy Waters, Fleetwood Mac with Elmore James, the Moody Blues with Bessie Banks' *Go Now*, the Animals, Them ... the list goes on.

I Can't Let Go is interesting partly because its emotional energy doesn't fall conveniently into any of the normal categories. It does illustrate one thing that I'd add to the points both of you have made (with which of course I entirely agree). Tony Hicks was a very good and distinctly underrated guitarist. The Hollies will appear in my list at some point, doubtless – but which song?

Having done the Welsh, here's the start of a celebration of incredible Irish popular music which is so rich that I can afford to put even Van Morrison on one side for the time being.

10. Magdeline Laundry, Mary Coughlin (1996)

Composer: Jonny Mulhern

We discovered Mary Coughlin along with Kirsty McColl from a very good friend who died of cancer in her thirties, and we've probably been more loyal to the singers than we have been to the memory of lovely Justine. And I'm breaking right through the 200 word barrier on this because there's a lot to say.

Mary Coughlin's style is almost impossible to pigeonhole, but the internet refers to her as a jazz and blues singer – which should put me right off. She sang classics from the Thirties and extraordinary songs written by her friends in Dublin. Her singing voice ranged from a quietly understated low husky tone to powerful drama. The songs are invariably tough, direct, demanding attention, and sometimes sexy, helped along by her deliciously broad Irish accent. Less obvious perhaps is the quality of the band which followed her in studio and live recordings and on tours. We marvelled at them all in Bristol.

I almost chose her extraordinary *Seduced*, about how women like to be picked up (as a kind of Desert-Island-Discs type memento of one of Sue's favourite songs). But it's rather uncomfortable listening for us shy men.

Instead I've gone for *Magdeline Laundry* which is just about the most devastating anti-Catholic treatise I've come across in any medium, James Joyce included. You probably know the real story about girls who got into trouble and worked as virtual slaves in Irish laundries run by nuns. This subtle Jonny Mulhern composition goes to heart of the hideous guilt and hypocrisy that has allowed Catholicism to retain its pernicious grip. Mary Coughlin bravely first recorded it 10 years before the film *Magdalene Sisters* about the scandal and before the significantly inferior and quite different Joni Mitchell song *Magdalene Laundries*.

Mary Coughlin was basically a down-to-earth pub singer picked up by a record company in the Eighties because of her extraordinary voice and given a free hand for a while. But she liked the minor pop star lifestyle too much and went off the rails. The company dropped her and she went back to a tiny Irish label and almost complete obscurity. She's had the odd revival since then, but while she was on top we loved almost everything she did.

This performance and instrumentation on the "Live In Galway" CD are too stunning to miss.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bUNJ8NFqOpc>

Pete's comment on Mel's 10. Magdeline Laundry

This is one of those difficult songs to comment on. You have a significant history with it, whereas I don't, so I came to the performer and the piece completely cold. What can I say? I found it striking and impressive, more on an intellectual level than for any arresting musicality. I am thoroughly in tune, as you know, with all the points you make about religious hypocrisy, and clearly she made them to very good effect. Knowing about this song and hearing your views on it contribute to my understanding of what makes you tick, which I think is part of the value of this whole process in its own right. I can easily see how, given your history with the song and the performer, this could claim a right to be included on your list.

Nick's comment on Mel's 10. Magdeline Laundry

I'm rather with Pete on this. I knew Mary Coughlan as a name (which must presumably mean I've heard stuff by her), but I couldn't have told you anything she'd done. This is gut-wrenching stuff – I think I find it a bit difficult to know how much of my reaction is to do with the song and how much with my views on the abysmal vileness of the Catholic Church. I'm really glad to have heard it, but am not sure how often I'll go back to it, though equally I'm sure I will go back!

11. *What Do Pretty Girls Do*, Kirsty MacColl (1989)

Composers: Kirsty MacColl and Pete Glenister

Some artists have defining albums at the summit of their creativity – “Sergeant Pepper”, “Bookends”, “Blonde On Blonde” etc. I'll add Kirsty MacColl's “Kite” to the list.

Kirsty MacColl was first an ordinary pop singer (if that description can encompass *There's A Guy Works Down The Fish Shop Thinks He's Elvis* alongside Billy Bragg's wonderful *A New England*). Then she did the almost faultless *Kite*. The tracks are so uniformly thoughtful, tuneful and compelling that even as I'm writing this I still don't know which one I'll choose.

Innocence wittily sends up the insincerity of relationships. *Fifteen Minutes* brilliantly demolishes the fakery of celebrity (and includes the most endearing whoop in pop music). *A Free World* pounds away remorselessly at cynical greed of the Eighties. Her version of Ray Davies' *Days* is yet another classic.

I've just this moment picked *What Do Pretty Girls Do*, which I know you'll love, Pete, for its sheer musicality. It doesn't sound too profound on first hearing. But the song mixes a slightly cruel levity with a real poignancy which I think stems from Kirsty's sense that the fate of the fading pop star may not be too far from her own door. A nice example of words and music in harmony.

Kite saved her from this fate for a while, although real life turned bleaker in the late Nineties. She was just going through the motions when we saw her at a free open air show in Cardiff. We hear that she died saving her son from a rogue speedboat driven by a Mexican millionaire who paid a lackey to take the blame. The Pretty Girl's accident could have made a verse in *A Free World*. It certainly made us sad.

www.youtube.com/watch?v=qcP91pQgDsg

Pete's comment on Mel's 11. *What Do Pretty Girls Do*

You are a hundred per cent right when you say I will like the sheer musicality of this. I do, enormously! Despite having been aware of Kirsty MacColl all these years, I've never really paid her much attention, and this track makes me realise what I've been missing. I will certainly listen to this song again, and will also investigate more of this album. I would like it just for what it sounds like, but when you pitch in the fact that it's actually saying something interesting, it becomes even more appealing. Thanks for this.

Nick's comment on Mel's 11. *What Do Pretty Girls Do*

Kirsty MacColl was wonderful in ways that I sometimes find difficult to pin down. She hasn't got the most distinctive of voices, yet there's no mistaking her. I know most of her obvious stuff, but hadn't encountered this song, so I'm grateful for the introduction. There's one thing I would add to both your comments – her band (which I imagine changed, though I don't know) was seriously good. And her material as here (and in *A New England*) is thoughtful and unfailingly interesting. Wonderful stuff. Bastard rich Mexican with his speedboat.

12. *Fairytale Of New York*, The Pogues with Kirsty MacColl (1987)

Composers: Jem Finer and Shane MacGowan

Yes I do like Kirsty MacColl this much. And this is my favourite “Christmas song” by a distance of about 13.8 billion light years.

Arguably it’s too well known to need analysis? Not for me. I can’t quite understand what it is that makes it so enduring as a seasonal standard. Perhaps the utterly irresistible chorus? The dollop of Irish sentimentality? The language the imbecilic BBC had to censor?

The real puzzle for me is in the musical and lyrical complexity (it’s two songs welded together, isn’t it?), The tumble-dryer of emotions it describes is hardly the stuff of commercial success. He’s in jail. He loves her. She’s ruined his life. He’s a drunk. She thinks he’s responsible for his own ruined dreams. But he’s still dreaming. Then: “Happy Christmas your arse. I pray God it’s our last”!

This is a heart-rending little tragedy rescued by the tune, its folksy Irishness and, of course, and the redeeming idea of Christmas. Sometimes I wonder whether MacGowan and the other Pogue really knew what they were putting together. Then I think, this is too perfect a picture to be an accident.

It’s so good it hurts every single time I play it.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=j9jbdgZidu8>

Pete’s comment on Mel’s 12. *Fairytale Of New York*

You’ve said all that needs saying about this. I too have always found it one of the most touching of Christmas records. Underlying what you’re saying, I think, is the fact that a compelling chorus like this one is a kind of musical redemption in its own right, regardless of what the words might be saying. So when you throw in the Christmas message as well, the whole thing becomes irresistible. Helen commented unprompted that this is one of her favourite Christmas songs too.

Nick’s comment on Mel’s 12. *Fairytale Of New York*

One of the many hardships of my life was that when I was going to the gym before work, the month before Christmas was rendered pretty insufferable by the festive dross on MTV – even worse than the non-festive dross the rest of the year. The exception, shining like a good deed in a naughty world, was this song, which I think is brilliant. Only one other thing to add to the threefold eulogy – our kids like it; in fact I don’t know anyone who doesn’t: I take it this shows that you don’t have to be anodyne to have broad appeal (though anodyne is probably easier and commoner than being able to pull off a stroke like this).

13. *I Don’t Like Mondays*, Boomtown Rats (1979)

Composer: Bob Geldof

Choosing *I Don’t Like Mondays* feels slightly naff after the subsequent backlash against his and Midge Ure’s heroic (I still think) efforts to get Live Aid off the ground. But it is a fabulous number one single, which clearly contains within itself the reason it is so and not otherwise.

It was written about a 16-year-old girl who killed a mere two people at her school to liven up a Monday. Other American students have gone on to so much more effective massacres and, when they survive, are still being asked to “Tell me why”. So we can’t question the song’s relevance.

It’s not punk rock of course. The previous number one *Rat Trap* was hardly that either. But it’s part of an important movement in pop to confront issues head on without

compromises to sensitivities and good taste. There were efforts to ban it in the States. Doesn't that say it all?

I don't think I'd enjoy his aggressive flea-ridden shambolic company much. But Saint Bob inspired me and the rest of the Checkpoint crew to stage our own Live Aid concert in Cwmbran Town Centre. He's the sort of hero we need and have far too few of.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-Kobdb37Cwc>

Nick's comment on Mel's 13. *I Don't Like Mondays*

Oh not again – I agree. A couple of additional comments. First, the video, which unusually I remember from Top of the Pops, is terrific – strange that a typically American story can be translated successfully to ... well, sort-of Ireland presumably. Secondly, Johnnie "Fingers" piano is fantastic. The tendency to dismiss the musicianship of punk and punk-related musicians is frequently unfair (the Blockheads are a classic case in point).

A final comment on *Do They Know It's Christmas* – the carpers seem to me to be akin to people who complain about the UK overseas budget: why are we giving money to these foreigners when there's so much need at home (yes, but in the next sentence you dismiss the needy at home as scroungers, thus exposing the fact that really you're a mean git who doesn't want to give anything to anyone). So the questions for the critics of *DTKIC* are a) would the world have been better without it? and b) what did you do as an alternative?

Pete's comment on Mel's 13. *I Don't Like Mondays*

While listening to this I found myself marvelling at its precision and sheer brio. It's remarkable how many outstanding works have been inspired by terrible deeds. No, the track wasn't punk, but it didn't need to be; by this time in its career this band had carved its own niche. It stood on its own terms.

Like you, I respected the Live Aid project, and in my case I actually **liked** *Do They Know It's Christmas*, which somehow managed to create a frisson for me against all odds; and I can't help admiring people like Geldof who exploit their fame for worthwhile causes. However – and I know this is probably just a weakness on my part – I have to say I also sometimes feel in a perverse way betrayed by those who produce music that I love, and then move on to some other aspirational (and non-musical) work. It seems to me to imply – wrongly, no doubt – that their music wasn't as important to them as I wanted it to be, and was really just a stepping stone on the way to somewhere else. There's a fine line between conveying something through music, and using music to convey something; and I always feel uneasy if that line seems to have been crossed.

Not that this applies to *I Don't Like Mondays*, by the way, but then I don't exactly "love" it anyway. But I do acknowledge its achievement.

A bunch of obvious choices from the US West Coast.

14. *Light My Fire*, The Doors (1967)

Composers: Jim Morrison, Ray Manzarek, John Densmore, (but mainly) Robby Krieger

I thought I might be disappointed when I went back to this track to check what I felt about it now. I shouldn't have worried. It's a good rock song with Morrison's typically energetic delivery, but transformed into a minor masterpiece by *Ray Manzarek's* lengthy and hypnotic keyboard solo.

Then out of this mesmerising improvisation comes the writer's glorious guitar work to lift the song again into Doors' signature otherworldliness. It's not "strange" because we're told it is (cf *People Are Strange* and *Strange Days*). And it's not strange because Morrison is hammering us with his demented poetry. The music does the job. So when the vocal comes back in, it's the doors of perception that have perhaps opened up a little, as well as the straight invitation to sex. Superb stuff.

Morrison was famous for outraging audiences with his trousers, which was pretty silly. But he got one over on Ed Sullivan by singing the line "couldn't get much higher" after the innocuous drug reference was ruled unacceptable for his live show. The Doors were banned from all future Sullivan shows – and went on to sell 100 million records. Ha!

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9iSXrZYhJt4>

Pete's comment on Mel's 14. *Light My fire*

You sum up the appeal of this song excellently. I couldn't have described it better. The solo IS mesmerising, and there's a kind of magic when the vocal comes back in, even though paradoxically it calms the atmosphere down, rather than elevating it.

I can't really think of much else that you haven't already said about it, so I'll add that I always had a secret liking for *Wintertime Love*, the song which (I think) followed it on the album. It's such an unlikely contrast with *Light My Fire* – a tuneful piece written in waltz time, apparently asking to be taken at face value as a simple love song, and working very effectively as such.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=y7-KZa61lpE>

Nick's comment on Mel's 14. *Light My Fire*

Well, the first generic comment on this batch of tracks is that I think you must have nicked one of the lists that I haven't yet written, because almost all these songs are either certainly or probably going to make my list, and for the reasons you give. How tedious – or, to be precise, predictable. Still, I'm sure I should make some comments, however otiose they may be. Maybe we need a protocol for dealing with such instances.

The Doors provided one of the great rock sounds of the '60s – well, of all time, really – and this is the track that epitomises it, and for the reasons you give. There is one thing that I was reminded of as I read and listened. You talk rightly about The Doors' otherworldliness, but in this song as in quite a lot of the other Doors tracks there's a pretty basic, this-worldly preoccupation with matters carnal. Is it the way the two come together that makes The Doors so distinctive? When the time comes I may pick a different Doors track just to prove that I am still occasionally capable of autonomous thought, but this is indispensable stuff.

15. *Alone Again, Or, Love* (1967)

Composer: Bryna MacLean

There's nothing very psychedelic about Love's greatest recording. But it's not a straightforward pop song either, with its oddly punctuated title, sparing strings and lovely echoing acoustic guitar providing the intro and a uniting theme throughout. And of course the shock of brass. The horns should sound of place but certainly don't.

It's easy to overlook the simply lyric which contrasts the hippy aspiration of free love with the reality of loneliness apart from a real partner. But that's where the triumphant horns come in with such confirmatory power.

I've just heard the Damned's version of the song for the first time and it's also damned good. But it's interesting that people who do covers can't escape Love's defining arrangement.

The "Forever Changes" album songs altogether are an amazing creative achievement. We saw Arthur Lee and a bunch of excellent Love-substitute musicians perform the whole album in Newport shortly before he died. An opportunity we're glad we didn't miss. You can also find a YouTube clip of a *Later* performance of *Alone Again, Or* in 2003 which brings back the experience.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cPbNpIG8x_s

Nick's comment on Mel's 15. *Alone Again, Or*

Ah, yes. I had the LP from which this came when we were students (I think that Stuart Laing had it, and I thought I had to have a copy). A while back I bought it on CD, but the original LP is still in the cupboard with the rest of the vinyl. This was remarkable, crazy stuff, not really like anything before or since – so it's not just the brass, but that it has a sort of Mexicanish sound to it at a time when the nearest pop got to any such thing was Herb bleedin' Alpert. Extraordinary.

I've seen somewhere or the other that Arthur Lee wasn't actually the lead singer on this track, but who cares?

Pete's comment on Mel's 15. *Alone Again, Or*

I'm tempted to include this in my own top 100, which is perhaps all that needs saying by me. Again, you've summed up its qualities excellently. I too love the acoustic guitar, the strings and the inspired mariachi section, and I warm to the contrast between the form and the content. It's one of those magical pieces that rise above anything their creators probably ever expected, and effortlessly slide into legend.

16. *White Rabbit*, Jefferson Airplane (1966)

Composer: Grace Slick

I play Jefferson Airplane all the time. Some of it's pretentious hippy twaddle. But there is so much energy in their uniquely abandoned recordings that I can forgive them a great deal. You're only spared wilder tracks from the experimental "After Bathing at Baxter's" album only because nothing is as wonderful as their earlier *White Rabbit*.

White Rabbit doesn't really need any interpretation, so I'll just explain why I'm enthralled by it. On one level it really is the ultimate anthem to mind changing drugs. On another it's an hilarious distortion of Charles Dodgson's classics, with multiple allusions to demonstrate that the great mathematician was after all more interested in getting off his head than photographing little girls.

But the performance is equally remarkable, with Grace Slick's compelling voice and the band building steadily from its gentle hypnotic beginning to the crescendo with almost no perceptible changes in volume and tempo.

And how can you not enjoy a climax which urges, “Remember what the Dormouse said: ‘Feed your head’.” I can’t imagine Grace Slick was serious.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pnJM_jC7j_4

Nick’s comment on Mel’s 16. *White Rabbit*

Ah. One of my little bits of I hope hidden one-upmanship when we were students was that my copy of “Surrealistic Pillow” included *White Rabbit* because it was a Canadian LP which my brother got for me, whereas your UK version had *Chauffeur Blues* – or have I remembered my guilt wrongly? Don’t worry if I have, I’ll find loads of other things to feel guilty about. Be that as it may, Jefferson Airplane were one of the truly wonderful groups, and this is the defining track.

Only one comment to add. Jack Casady and Jorma Kaukonen in particular were terrific instrumentalists. Casady is still immortalised in the Epiphone Jack Casady signature bass – I’ve never had a chance to play one, but hope to one day (not that my playing will ever get within a million miles of his). Jorma Kaukonen was of course allowed to strut his stuff on *Embryonic Journey*, a rather odd inclusion on “Surrealistic Pillow”, but a terrific piece of guitar playing and, as I always thought and still think, a really lovely piece of music. Have a look at this if you can be bothered – Jorma all scrubbed up, and I think Jack Casady likewise in the background. Blimey.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tBGDRoFDUPY>

Margaret and I went to San Francisco in 2003, and drove round the Bay. In (I think) Tiburon, there was a gallery with an exhibition of Grace Slick’s paintings which I religiously rushed into. Sorry, Grace – stick to the singing. Amazing voice, not so hot with the paint brush. And, even when singing, she ended up building this city on rock’n’roll. Ah well.

Pete’s comment on Mel’s 16. *White Rabbit*

In my meek and moderate way I think I probably found Jefferson Airplane too challenging in the day to feel that their music was something I could ever love ... but isn’t this song wonderful? The words are witty and teasing, whether you take them as an anthem to the drug culture or a satire on it (and on the book). It’s very clever, and Grace Slick’s delivery really is compelling, as you say.

The production is better than I remember it, too: very clean and precise. And what about that crescendo? It’s superb! What an exciting, emphatic piece. It needs to be played louder than I can conceive of playing it. I still don’t think I’m persuaded to have it in a top 100, but in some ways I wish I was someone who could!

17. *For What It’s Worth*, Buffalo Springfield (1967)

Composer: Stephen Stills

The lyrical intent of *For What It’s Worth* could hardly be further from *White Rabbit*. Yet they are united by more than their Los Angeles/San Francisco geography. The relatively liberal environment of Sixties California attracted and fostered alternative lifestyles – sex, drugs, rock and roll, and liberal politics. So no surprise that some of the best protest songs of the era comes from groups based there.

The plain lyric of *For What It’s Worth* draws the battle lines between the young and the authority of worn-out state and police power while a menacing twanging guitar echoes like a police siren throughout. The arresting chorus is a simple invocation to stop and think what’s going on. It’s not the poetry of *Blowing In The Wind* because Vietnam had made the situation more urgent by 1967. But a rousing marching theme all the same.

How I wish youngsters today could get behind these simple ideas of awareness, protest and resistance.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gp5JCrSXkJY>

Nick's comment on Mel's 17. *For What It's Worth*

Oh this is getting tedious. Yes, of course. This again is one of the defining songs and sounds. And all the qualities you describe are there, together with a sort of anxiety which I think is remarkable. Stills is often rather sneered at by comparison with his peers, but anyone who can produce something like this can't be all bad!

Pet's comment on Mel's 17. *For What It's Worth*

Those opening chords will always create a frisson for me. Over the years this song has been somewhat overused by documentary-makers as an automatic go-to for conjuring up the restless atmosphere of protest from that period, but this hasn't taken away any of its presence. It works because the music is just as arresting as the words; so I suppose it deserves the functional role it has inevitably been assigned. A worthy choice.

18. *Ohio*, Crosby Stills Nash and Young (1970)

Composer: Neil Young

The stropy Neil Young (ex Buffalo Springfield, like Stills) brought a new distinctive voice, musical fastidiousness and even more quality songwriting to Crosby Stills and Nash.

Ohio is a bitter, angry song written in the immediate wake of the almost unbelievable killings of students at Kent State University by the National Guard, which shook up liberal opinion in the country. It's driving guitars and repeated references to the four dead students are uncompromising and in your face. Young was keen to be heard. It's not his best song, but by my reckoning it's one of his most important. And like Stills' *For What It's Worth*, it's good solid enjoyable pop music too.

What I've always found remarkable is that *Ohio* is literally a call to arms and resistance to the President by the young. If someone publicly advocates violence against the state in the UK today in retaliation, say, for the thousands killed needlessly by soldiers in Afghanistan and Iraq they have to be locked up as terrorists. So not much progress in 45 years.

CSN (and Y) were great in "live" recordings too. The version of *Ohio* on "Four Way Street" is also worth a listen.

http://www.last.fm/music/Crosby,+Stills,+Nash+%26+Young/_/

Nick's comment on Mel's 18. *Ohio*

Not my favourite track, but you are quite right about its anger. It came out, incongruously, on the heels of *Teach Your Children*. I find it quite difficult to dissociate the song and my vivid memory of what happened – I saw a documentary about the events of the time on the telly probably around 1990, and they replayed a clip of the father of a student who had been shot, and I realised that a good 20 years after I had originally seen it, I remembered exactly what he said before the words came out. Powerful stuff about a monstrous outrage. But at least the Americans have stopped shooting each other and anybody else who strays into their gunshots, haven't they?

Pete's comment on Mel's 18. *Ohio*

Unlike *For What It's Worth*, I didn't know this song, so I'm pleased that you've alerted me to it. That said, I don't think it pulls off the feat of fusing its message with musical memorability to

the same extent, so I didn't warm to it initially. However, at least now I know about it, and if I knew it better, maybe it would strike more of the chords that it does for you.

Three girl singers and songs with utterly different takes on nostalgia, and utterly different types of impact ...

19. Diamonds And Rust, Joan Baez (1971)

Composer: Joan Baez

Bob Dylan is out on the road somewhere, presumably in between relationships which he has never had any idea how to manage, and he's lonely. So he calls up his old flame Baez whom he notoriously and publicly dumped in the mid-Sixties (even wrote seminal songs about – *It Ain't Me Babe* and *Visions of Johanna* for starters). And he probably says something like “Hey Babe, what about it?”

Joan's repost is this beautiful, tuneful, honest and moving composition about a man she once loved dearly. In many songs her voice is just a little too sweet. Not here. The clarity is piercing, like the song. Sometimes her compositions are a bit obvious. This one triumphs because it is both direct and poetic. I love the acoustic guitar and the full and ingenious but not overwhelming arrangement.

When a woman says, “speaking strictly for me we both could have died then and there,” we can be forgiven for suspecting hyperbole! Yet in the context of the evocative rising middle eight it seems to crystallise the recollection of a vivid, searingly real moment in their affair. Just look at how the “air” rhyme occurs four times in succession, the way Dylan so often bangs home his effects. It's that spine-tingling coincidence of form and content which makes good songs great.

Then she goes to heart of Dylan's mystique as a performer and presumably as a lover – a man who disguises the truth by both being good with words and at “keeping things bare”. She's giving him the brush off, which is a kind of justice. But any bitterness is so well controlled that this is a love song all the same.

Unsurpassed popular music.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1ST9TZBb9v8>

Nick's comment on Mel's 19. Diamonds And Rust

Well, another batch of gems. Comments ... well, sorry, but I agree again. Let me strive to say something a bit less anodyne.

Joan and I have a curious history (he boasted). My Dad, who was pretty staunchly anti-anything-not-classical, heard her when he went to a student's room presumably around 1962-3, and went out and bought both of her original Vanguard LPs. So I knew her from pretty early on: as you say, lovely voice, sometimes too beautiful for its own good (something that gets said of Ella Fitzgerald, incidentally), adequate guitar, material which was mostly completely new to me at the time.

And I really liked it, partly because I could pinch the songs and do them myself, however badly. But she became something else entirely, and is really absolutely at her best here – a hauntingly beautiful song about the shadow of a love which is not so much consigned to history as transmuted into something else, whether of value or not – if you look at the photos on your Facebook link, Mel, some of them certainly postdate the demise of the relationship the song is about, and I'd have thought probably postdate the song itself.

Guess what? We've seen her I think 3 times, twice quite recently in Sheffield. Always, but on the first of the Sheffield occasions in particular, she was absolutely splendid – she can still sing, and had a small group of good musicians providing appropriate support. Wonderful stuff.

Pete's comment on Mel's 19. *Diamonds And Rust*

Yes, *Diamonds And Rust* is incredibly familiar, and I've always quite liked it. What you say about the song is absolutely on the nail, and I'd like to add a further dimension to that. Its musical shape is very constrained; the song declares a melodic and harmonic pattern, and then simply repeats it numerous times. No musical development or diversion into a middle section. Am I stating the obvious? Anyway, the point is that musically, that simple shape reflects the content precisely. Looking back on the failed relationship, she's saying, "We've already been around that loop, and that's apparently all it was" – and behold, the melodic shape underpins the point. Clever.

You could say this is rather a remarkable achievement, except that I find the constrained shape slightly frustrating, which is possibly why I don't like the song more. But in fairness, it's an *interesting* melody, as you say, so perhaps I shouldn't be so intolerant. And I agree that the instrumentation and production are excellent.

I should add finally that I once received a phone call on a faintly similar theme to the one in question, so I very much warm to the sentiment.

20. *Going Back*, Dusty Springfield (1966)

Composers: Gerry Goffin, Carol King

You heard this repeatedly from my room at Merton Street, Nick, when I was far too young to have anything to go back to, and I'm still unaccountably moved by it.

I learned just now from Wikipedia that Crosby was sacked from the Byrds after he complained that their recording of *Going Back* was Brill Building fluff. Well, that rather turgid version may be. But Dusty sounds to me as if she means it.

This is Goffin and King yet again saying something simple and real. It's not just a nostalgic song, it's a song about what nostalgia means. More than that, while I'm not interested in remembering the lyric varieties of skipping ropes or sailing boats, I do want there to be a *universal* earlier life to refer back to (and sometimes to escape to perhaps). And the song captures this for me.

I'll admit that after the gentle piano intro it's a tad overpowered by the orchestra towards the end. But that's Dusty. She did loads of other fantastic songs but this is the one I always go back to.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-gr_eo7oMjI

[Stop press, August 2022: I was prepared to say that no one could come close to Dusty Springfield's version of Going Back. But I've just discovered, entirely by accident, Carol King's own recording and it's quite extraordinary. It's a kind of marvellous musical kitchen sink of a track, except that she's tossing in all the best crockery and silverware, plus lyrical adjustments that accommodate both Dusty and the Byrds. Take a listen.]

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AWzgbleoZYE>

Nick's comment on Mel's 20. *Going Back*

Well, we can all agree, I'm sure, that Carole King, with or without her aberrant spouse, is one of the indispensable figures in rock and/or pop. Similarly, Dusty's voice is one of the very best. Put them together ... and this is another of those haunting songs, so a perfect fusion of song and voice (where I agree the Byrds just sound anaemic). I think you're a bit generous about the ham-fisted backing, which I think on this, zillionth, listening, probably accounts for the song not standing as high in my estimation as yours, Mel.

It's one of the pernicious things about pop/rock of the late '60s and early '70s – too often superb female vocalists were swamped by excessive orchestration (Sandy Denny's *I'm a*

dreamer or Kiki Dee's *Amoureuse* are examples which spring to mind). I'm sure any feminist worth their salt would say this was male arrangers' revenge on talented women. It speaks volumes for Dusty that she doesn't drown. But then her voice was one of the greatest joys of the music of our youth and our ... er ... well, overgrown youth. Not her last appearance in the lists I'm sure.

Pete's comment on Mel's 20. *Going Back*

Let's all agree to agree about Carol King's extraordinary contribution to the musical canon. No argument from me. And this is one of her more poignant pieces, nicely capturing everything you cite in relation to nostalgia and beyond it. And Dusty delivers it perfectly. Incidentally, whilst I always liked Dusty right from the days of the Springfields, I feel I've discovered more and more of her subtlety as the years have passed.

Regarding the orchestration, I know what you mean about the way it ups the ante towards the end, but funnily enough I've always rather liked that. Not because it underpins the meaning or does anything specific; I just feel it adds a bit of interesting musical drama to this song.

Pete's postscript on the orchestration of *Amoureuse* (mentioned by Nick)

Generally speaking I agree with you, Nick, about the downside of over-embellishment, especially for instance in some of Sandy Denny's work. But I've always thought Kiki Dee's *Amoureuse* fantastic. I've never rated her voice especially highly as such, though I feel that given the right material she's a spirited and gifted performer. However, I liked this piece from the day I heard it, and at one point it was on my top hundred shortlist. It might even make a comeback.

My take is that the production team deliberately set out to achieve something pretty OTT, perhaps recognising that the sexual awakening theme could otherwise end up sounding trite. Unlike other lush but obvious string arrangements, this one is really carefully thought-out, varied and precise, attempting to echo and underpin the theme and give it drama and emphasis. It's almost a two-hander: Kiki on one hand, the backing band on the other. In most instances I would have to accept that one would consider such an outcome a bit of a failure, but here I feel that it against the odds it works. For me, anyway!

21. *Nutbush City Limits*, Ike and Tina Turner (1973)

Composers: Tina Turner, Ike Turner

Tina Turner was very good, but not great. She's fabulous here, though I'm not generally a big fan of black women in rock.

However, *Nutbush City Limits* is another of those driving rockers which get my blood racing. It's about the small town where Tina Turner grew up, though I never listened to the lyrics till today. It turns out to be a rather affectionate song about a rigid community where, whatever else, you go to church on Sunday. It's curiously fitting for this batch's nostalgia theme. But that's not what excites me.

The production is sensational. I don't even know what instruments I'm hearing. It starts with a memorable riff (Marc Bolan apparently) and a compulsive beat which was great to dance to. Yes, sorry. And then builds, weird sound on weird sound. I'm convinced that the beat gets faster as the song goes on. I have no firm evidence; it just feels like somethings which is going to take off! Glorious.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ALAWxatDoDo>

Nick's comment on Mel's 21. *Nutbush City Limits*

Like you, Mel, I've never heard half the lyrics or really absorbed any of them, so thank you for remedying this omission. They're really very acute, aren't they? Very evocative of an aspect of

the US. And the song's got that drive to it which comes of words and music being fused into one (though the fade at the end is shamefully lazy). As far as instrumentation goes, I'd have thought that the answer lies with Dr Moog – the “solo” if that's the word, sounds like a theremin, there's a synthesised keyboard in there, and I'm not completely sure that the horns aren't similarly electronic. Excellent stuff, which I wouldn't have thought of, so thanks.

What a rewarding exercise this is – thanks, Pete.

Pete's comment on Mel's 21. *Nutbush City Limits*

Well, why not? Tina Turner is yet another figure I enjoy and admire when I hear her, yet whom I wouldn't necessarily seek out or include in my list. I'm getting a sense of a pattern here, actually. I'm wondering if there are really *two* Pete Rowlands top hundreds – the one I admit to, and the other one, hidden even from me, that is populated by my unacknowledged and unconstrained choices. Almost certainly she's on that.

Incidentally, I too found the actual words of this song a revelation, so thank you for giving me that insight. They're intriguing and amusing. But yes, it's her voice and the production that really make this song something special, and it's a particularly good vehicle for her unique abilities.

Here are some songs from the shows.

22. Who Will Buy? The Cast of Oliver (1968)

Composer: Lionel Bart

My interest in stage musicals comes partly from my parents who were not averse to them, but more to my acquisition of a reel to reel tape recorder and the miserably limited options for pre-recorded tapes to play on it. I joined a record club and ended up meeting my monthly purchase obligations with clones of the soundtracks of "South Pacific", "Oklahoma", "The King and I", "Carousel", "The Sound of Music", almost anything which had American Jews in the composer credits. I used to think the melodies were unbeatable. Later I was besotted with the film version of "My Fair Lady" and bought the soundtrack album.

Despite that early enjoyment, none of those songs mean much to me today. Ok, still some nice tunes. Yet I subsequently discovered some gems from the shows which continue to enthral me, including this ludicrous over-the-top "Oliver" production number. It's patently sentimental twaddle, the actor playing Oliver is nauseatingly sweet, and the "dancing" is only one notch more sensible than the Ministry of Silly Walks.

Yet the song itself and the production of it are so gloriously upbeat and optimistic that I find it irresistible. The production throws in everything – from the solitary voice in the street through deep bass voices to counter the chirpy women and innocent child, to a fabulous round and a ridiculous marching band. And of course it's building all the way to a self-conscious tuneful cacophony. It's a triumph of musical manipulation and I'm a complete sucker for it. The honey-sweet tune and fabricated joy are so lovely.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RYpYehqcLgk>

Nick's comment on Mel's 22. Who Will Buy?

I think generally I have had an allergy to Lionel Bart for even longer than I have had an allergy to vibraphones. I think it's to do with what I've always seen as his unremitting exercises in mawkishness (Lionel Bart, that is, not Lionel Hampton). I base this of course on pure bigotry, since I have never seen or heard a Bart musical all the way through.

I have, of course, heard many of the songs from "Oliver!" and some of his other musicals, so it's not entirely a matter of bigotry. I can't say that this song is one that has played a part in my Bartophobia because I'm not conscious of ever having heard it before. It certainly illustrates some of the things I hold against him, particularly the tweeification of Dickens. You can scarcely accuse Bart of sentimentalising someone as good at sentimentality as Dickens, but Dickens at least balances it with something gritty. This is a pretty tough novel, certainly in parts, but in this clip the streets and everyone in them are immaculately clean and well dressed.

But then, musicals as a vehicle for social realism ... not really. And musically this is much more interesting than most of the songs I associate with Lionel Bart (even *Living Doll*). So, yes, I can see why it's in your list, even though it won't make mine.

Pete's comment on Mel's 22. Who Will Buy?

Yes, a wonderful production number, in which the film makers throw in every visual trick they can think of to complement the exuberance of the music. This version is silly for all the reasons you give, but it simply works, and pulls you along with it. Interestingly, the actual tune is cleverly wrought, in that it's basically in a minor key, but as the piece progresses the arrangement switches some chords from minor to major, brightening up the complexion of it

without really changing the melody. As you say, it's "tuneful manipulation" (see my rambling essay at the end of this set of selections), and like you, I'm a sucker for it. I wouldn't put this piece in my top hundred, partly because I simply didn't know it well enough and don't have a history with it, but I agree that it's great fun and has fantastic impact.

23. *Tonight*, Marni Nixon, Jimmy Bryant (1961)

Composers: Leonard Bernstein and Stephen Sondheim

By way of contrast with Lionel Bart's cheerful nonsense, this is fine music by a classical composer who late in the day changed what musicals could be. I haven't seen "*West Side Story*" on stage, so I can only judge by this dubbed performance from the classic film.

There are several other brilliant songs in the show worthy of inclusion in my list. But this one makes the hairs on the back of my head stand on end. The rising notes of the swirling tune seem to do a job on the lyric, transforming its simultaneous directness, banality and trivial romanticism into a duet with dramatic credibility. It must have helped that Bernstein and Sondheim were dealing with some powerful source material. But I still think the song is a rare achievement, as ever in the greats, unifying music, words, meaning and sentiment. And even if you don't buy the lyrics ... what a tune!

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=11x9V1OyKpg>

Nick's comment on Mel's 23. *Tonight*

I've seen the film on the telly, but have never seen "*West Side Story*" staged. In the mid-'80s here was a telly programme about recording it, with Kiri Te Kanawa and Jose Carreras in the lead roles, which generally served only to confirm that there is a crucial distinction between opera and even the most operatic of musicals (Frederika Von Stade is one of the few singers I know who can adjust her voice successfully to either genre. I own or have owned recordings of her singing beautifully in Mozart, Candeloube, Rogers and Hart, and Jerome Kern).

I had forgotten how powerful this is – unsurprising though that is given its pedigree. I suspect it works better in context than as an isolated song, just as three of your four choices here doubtless would (the exception is *I Get A Kick Out Of You* – see my comment below). Having said that, I was struck by the fact that the song as we could all sing it in our sleep lasts 2 minutes – surely not the influence of the 7 inch single again? It made me think I ought to see the whole musical again, preferably in the theatre.

Pete's comment on Mel's 23. *Tonight*

Yes, a wonderful song. It stands alone as a romantic statement, but gains even more from the culture clash context in which it comes. I've always liked it. I have to admit, on a separate point, that I found Natalie Wood incredibly attractive at the time, and this particular scene in the film played mercilessly to the romantic fantasist in me. If video recorders had existed then and I'd had access to one, I suspect I would have played the scene repeatedly. Again, I wouldn't have thought of this song as a candidate for my top hundred, but I can see why one might, and I completely agree the this whole musical is outstanding. I'm a great admirer of Bernstein.

Irrelevant aside: Carol once bought Bernstein a drink in a bar in Glasgow, while he was viewing the opera company's work on another of his pieces. (She also claimed to have bought Benjamin Britten a drink at Snape, though that may be apocryphal.)

Mel's reply: Benjamin Britten died of heart failure in 1976, thus saving the world from yet more ghastly oratorios. So it is possible that when Carol [Pete's sister] plied him with booze she was contributing to an heroic public service. Carol Rowlands, who is much more sadly missed than Britten, is better known as an opera singer than as a supplier of alcohol to famous composers.

24. *I Get A Kick Out Of You*, Gary Shearston (1974)

Composer: Cole Porter for the 1934 show “Anything Goes”

I suppose it's sacrilege to choose this one-hit Australian lack-of-wonder over magnificent Frank Sinatra versions. But I heard this one first, and it is so lacking in style compared with Sinatra's in-your-face interpretations that Gary Shearston's characterless delivery leaves the wonder of Cole Porter's lyric to speak for itself. But I also like his pop arrangement with the *My Sweet Lord* guitars and the solo violinist doing much of the work while Shearston lazily sings along in sync with the vocalist's bored persona.

There wouldn't be much else to say about the single if he hadn't omitted three of the best lines at the start:

“When I'm out on a quiet spree / Fighting vainly the old ennui / And I suddenly turn and see your fabulous face”

and had not ineptly added the name of his then girlfriend Kristiana Maria Konchevsky towards the end (the musical equivalent of an embarrassing tattoo).

But what a song. This is not a teenager swooning in June, but the view of a witty and knowing grown man with sophisticated adult pursuits hurting in the solar plexus, and hardly able to believe the effect this woman is having. (Shearston and Sinatra's both make it clear they know what that cocaine feels like.) I also love the hyperbole and quiet assurance of flying being “my idea of nothing to do” while the music is swirling him round.

Superb lyric and a very catchy tune that translates well into modern pop. Incidentally, I also rather like Harpers Bizarre's quirky version of *Anything Goes*. I suppose we should expect nothing less than brilliance from Cole Porter who wrote so many great songs. For me this is one of the most enjoyable.

[An earlier YouTube link took us to a rather silly but near-pornographic video of Pan's People dancing to Gary Shearston on “Top Of The Pops”. That was withdrawn for a while, though may well still be there if you hunt for it, but the link below leads to a more wholesome slide show of 7-inch record sleeves.]

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TkrucTzwIYE>

Pete's comment on Mel's 24. *I Get A Kick Out Of You*

Enough said. I hadn't listened to this recording for many years, but I loved it at the time, and I'm truly delighted that you've brought back into my life. I hereby declare that it is going into my own top hundred. Unequivocally. [Postscript: *It didn't.*] What a delight. As you say, the song itself is adult, and yet somehow beyond the sophistication it also conveys a kind of innocent wonder: what on earth is this woman *doing* to me? For some reason it almost brings tears to my eyes. As you say, it translates seamlessly to the pop idiom, and this arrangement is delightful: that soft twelve-string guitar sound, then the full orchestra when it's needed, and the delightful folksy violin break. Shearston sings it in a kind of deadpan Jake Thackray style, yet somehow for me this simply enhances the effect. The words speak for themselves, and his understated delivery ideally reflects the sophisticate spirit of the original.

By the way, I love your notion of an embarrassing tattoo. That said, I always rather liked the introduction of a specific person's name at that late point in the song. Disregarding the real story of who she was, to me it added a tiny extra element to the thing; it was like saying, “OK, let's put our cards on the table: THIS is the person I'm talking about, and I need to speak her name out loud.” Call me a romantic.

Thank you for the remarkable Pan's People pointer. Hm – you're absolutely right. Wow. But I also love the 45 rpm sleeves in the link, of which I still have many examples.

Nick's comment on Mel's 24. *I Get A Kick Out Of You*

Well, this is interesting. This must be one of the undisputed great songs of one of the undisputed great songwriters. It comes from "Anything Goes", which was the Crucible's splendid musical last Christmas (and features weirdly early in proceedings – sung by a woman incidentally, which means that male singers tend to make an unnecessary change to the glorious rhymes in "... flying too high with some guy in the sky ...").

I sort of understand your problem of version too, Mel. I guiltily like the Gary Shearston version, though he is obviously a bit of a tosser (add the substitution of "bird" for "gal", itself a substitute for "guy" to the accusations already levelled at him). That said, I am not generally a huge fan of Sinatra (thus I prefer Fred Astaire's understated version of *One For My Baby And One More For The Road* to Sinatra's, though it's blindingly obvious who has the better voice). I have the wonderful Ella singing *I Get A Kick Out Of You* on "Ella Fitzgerald sings the Cole Porter Songbook", but I think it doesn't do as much justice to the song as her versions of other songs do to them (*In The Still Of The Night*, for instance, or the obvious example of *Every Time We Say Goodbye*).

So I agree with your choice wholeheartedly on the basis that it's about the song not the singer, to misquote Mick'n'Keef. There used to be an unrecorded version of *I Get A Kick Out Of You* by Nick Andrew accompanying himself on guitar, but by popular demand that hasn't made an appearance for a very long time.

This choice triggers two other thoughts. The first is that I heard someone once say that with Cole Porter lyrics you always hear the urbane and witty voice of Cole Porter, whereas with Oscar Hammerstein you hear the voice of the character in the musical. Fair comment. The only trouble is that Cole Porter remains infinitely more interesting – and this is probably why the songs work just as well in isolation as in context.

The second is about bowdlerisation. There are two other versions of the second stanza I've heard, rewritten to avoid reference to cocaine – one is "Some like a bop-type refrain" (used by Ella), the other "... a whiff of Guerlain". The latter does at least scan, even if the name has to be mispronounced, but they are both feeble by comparison. Bowdlerisation was a recurrent problem for Porter. There's a similarly clumsy line at the end of the received version of *Begin The Beguine* – "Then we suddenly know what heaven we're in / When they begin the beguine". The original was "Then we suddenly know the sweet taste of sin". Clearly not the sort of sentiment to be permitted to sully the paradisaal moral rectitude prevailing in the US.

I once read a review by Anthony Burgess of a book of Porter's lyrics in which he claimed there was a suppressed lyric from *You're The Top* which went "You're the heat of a bridal suite in use/ You're the breasts of Venus/ You're King Kong's penis/ You're self-abuse", but sadly I suspect this was the boy Burgess enjoying himself (and "Venus" and "penus" is not exactly a rhyme made in heaven).

Pan's People: well, they didn't overwork the choreographer for this one, did they? I'd not realised till now that, while the cast of "Oliver!" were sponsored by the Ministry of Silly Walks, Pan's People were sponsored by the Ministry of Silly Underwear. Puts an entirely new slant on the Brazilian influence in *The girl from Ipanema*, doesn't it?

25. *Somewhere Over The Rainbow*, Judy Garland (1939)

Composers: *Harold Arlen* (music), *Edgar Harburg* (lyrics)

OK, it's sentimental hooey. Or is it? Its lyricist Edgar Harburg, a son of Russian immigrant Jews, also wrote the Depression documentary words for *Brother Can You Spare A Dime*, and was later blacklisted by the McCarthy crazies.

Somewhere Over The Rainbow is genuine about its yearning for a better life, and I love it because it respectably works both on a social and on a fantasy level without compromising either. Judy Garland may have sung songs better, but did she sing better songs? Anyway I don't much mind who does this one. It's tuneful, it's uplifting and it stands for itself.

Pete's comment on Mel's 25. *Somewhere Over The Rainbow*

Yes, it's a classic. What can I say? If I pined over Natalie Wood in my childhood, I'm sure I must have pined over this surprisingly youthful Judy Garland as well. As for the song, the notion behind it might well be sentimental, but it has seldom been expressed better, and Harold Arlen's melody is peerless. We had the piano music at home (I've no idea who bought it or why), and I often used to give it an ineffectual run-through. I still have it now. I'd need to think twice before putting this in my own top hundred, but in a way I don't need to – it's now written into my musical DNA. (Oops, that cliché again.)

Nick's comment on Mel's 25. *Somewhere Over The Rainbow*

We saw "The Wizard of Oz" a few years ago at the West Yorkshire Playhouse, and it was, I'm rather ashamed to admit, the first time I'd ever seen it in any medium or really known its narrative. I enjoyed the full musical much more than I'd ever enjoyed the songs, presumably because they make sense in their original context in a way they won't taken in isolation.

So I find myself rather in no-man's land on this. I spent almost my entire life regarding it as another exercise in mawkishness, and then belatedly came to realise that there was rather more to it than had met my eye. I can see its power, but find it difficult to suppress the lip-curling habit of an ill-informed lifetime. I think the power is beginning to win. Judy Garland – someone not kindly served by her popular image – probably deserves better.

Nick on music from the shows: Well, it never gets dull, does it? Curiously self-revealing all round, I guess (including, I suspect if you're both anything like me, in having to confront some of my own buried preferences – or bigotries? – and their roots).

One of the pleasures of living up here has been that the Crucible in Sheffield stages a musical rather than a panto every Christmas, so we have been to quite a few musicals in the last few years, and enjoyed most of them a lot. One of the reasons is that I don't see how anyone cannot be impressed by the brilliance of the cast and the musicians who work their arses off all evening while having – most of the time – to appear to be having effortless spontaneous fun.

Most of the story lines are on a scale from minimal to non-existent, but generally you end up saying "who cares?". Until the Crucible led me astray, most of my knowledge of musical came from my parents' records. An American gave them the recording of "Oklahoma!" which I can certainly remember listening to in the house we moved from when I was 6 (so LPs were still a novelty) and loving it. And they had a cheapo cover version of "My Fair Lady" which I can't date accurately, but I knew those songs backwards. And then ... not a lot.

If the Arts Theatre staged the classic musicals I didn't go to them, though I remember Gilbert and Sullivan and plays-with-lots-of-songs (i.e. musicals but not part of the canon). So now I am discovering them – the next theatrical thing we're going to is Opera North's effort at "Kiss Me Kate", which I have seen before in London and which I think is terrific.

Pete on songs from the shows: Ah, songs from the shows. This raises so many issues.

First, I'm disregarding a throw-away comment that you made after submitting these four – something about them being tongue in cheek? That's as may be, but I'm treating them as routine submissions regardless.

And how interesting to read your entertaining description of your history with musicals in your early years. If I ever knew about this, I had managed to forget. I can see it all – though I have to take issue if you are now going to dismiss the film soundtrack of "My Fair Lady". I think it's superb, and it never ceases to amaze me that Lerner and Loewe managed to assemble such an expansive array of memorable songs for a single work. It was more or less their Mascagni Moment (all he wrote of note was one work – "Cavalleria Rusticana" but arguably this was sublime).

Anyway, I think musicals are quite legitimate in this game, whether we think they're valuable in the scheme of things, or just consider them important to us on a personal level. I suspect one has to be especially willing to buy into the "pot boiler" factor, recognising the extra-manipulative nature of this particular genre, but I'm sometimes inclined to take the view, "I like this, and why shouldn't I?" So long as I can tease out some kind of explanation of why I rate a given piece above others, I'm content.

By way of a few examples, I've always found *You'll Never Walk Alone* uplifting, and still do, despite its use, mis-use and over-use over the last half-century. And it's Gerry & the Pacemakers' version that I will always consider definitive. You can't knock a good ballad. Likewise I have a soft spot for *Climb Every Mountain*. Richard Rogers had an amazing knack of delivering show stoppers worthy of the name. I won't discuss these now in case I end up putting them in my list; suffice to say that I have more to add.

Arguably in a different league is *Dancing Queen* from Gershwin's "Top Hat". I'll always remember the first time I watched this scene in the film and actually thought about it. You get what appears to be a light, inconsequential little ditty, but then the music swells into something much more sweeping and dramatic. There follows a repeated sequence of light and shade (also a characteristic of Puccini's music, as it happens), accompanied by some suitably ambitious dancing (though "Strictly" has since spoiled us by teaching us to expect even more). By the end I don't see how you can fail to be entranced. Anyway, to me it was a valuable lesson in the dramatic possibilities of music and the musical, and I've never forgotten it.

Not a candidate for my top hundred, but for the record, here's one of many links:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WOYzFKizikU>

Mel's reply to Pete: I should say nothing to disparage "My Fair Lady". You're right, it's superb.

Embarrassing music for a teenager in love:

26. Theme For Young Lovers, The Shadows (1964)

Composer: Bruce Welch

I'll preface my excuses by saying that a few years ago the Shadows had accumulated more song title credits in the *Guinness Book of Hit Singles* than any other artists. I doubt that this has changed. Their influence on popular music has also been enormous. I remember a time when everyone who had a guitar in his bedroom was trying to emulate Hank Marvin.

I still listen to their singles (1959 to about 1966 when they became entirely mainstream). As for favourites, I could have chosen the gloriously uplifting *Wonderful Land*, but *Theme for Young Lovers* is romantic tosh of the highest order – from the title itself to the soaring theme of the lead guitar and the soft heartbeats of the tom toms. Bruce Welch's tune seems to me to be both utterly simple and compelling.

When I want to remember what it's like to fall in love I just play this – several times over usually.

One thing that has always intrigued me is the very start which seems to stutter with what sounds like an extra note bunged in. The trick isn't repeated elsewhere on the record and I wonder whether it is an intended musical catch in the throat or an editing error. Perhaps one of you two musicos have an idea. Though I suspect you won't be hanging around long enough for that kind of analysis.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lGJSwYOyl1s>

Pete's comment on Mel's 26. Theme For Young Lovers

Yes, I agree that *Theme For Young Lovers* is a delightful record: such a pretty melody, so well worked through and compelling. And yes, romantic. I've always liked it. This track came relatively late in the Shadows' heyday, after they'd started using strings on some of their recordings, but happily (in my opinion) they didn't use any on this, so I've always felt the result is cleaner. They did adopt certain mid-range Fender "voices" on this track that I didn't especially care for in the day, which were another trademark of this late period in their evolution, but nowadays I don't see why I was so bothered about it. It simply sounds great. Dare I say it, I found listening to this uplifting, and I'm just replaying it to myself now as I type.

It was I think *Wonderful Land* where strings first made a conspicuous appearance in Shadows music, and in my purist youth I felt the group had somehow sold out by using them; yet bizarrely that was still one of the first records I ever bought. Go figure. I will definitely have a Shadows track in my own list, but it will almost certainly be *Apache* or another from that earlier phase in their career. But it was a delight to play and revisit this.

PS Yes, to me it does seem like a stutter. Odd, but how else can you explain it?

PPS In a bid to remind everybody that I too have actually been known to go to live concerts, I should say that I've seen the Shadows perform this live, and liked it then too.

Nick's comment on Mel's 26. Theme For Young Lovers

I sort-of remember this track, though by 1964 I think I regarded the Shads as old hat. I think by then even the Ventures, to whom I had graduated from the Shadows, had suffered a similar fate. First things first – that first note. Sounds like a mistake to me, which is odd – one of the things Cliff Richard said about Hank was that he never made a mistake. Blame the producer.

Otherwise, I think this is amiable enough, but it doesn't do a lot for me. And it doesn't much accord with my memories of falling in love, which I think have always tended to feel rather more

intense (Sauvage, moi? Mais oui). I think there are better Shadows tracks – *Apache* is probably still the one I'd go for if I was choosing one. Which I'm not. Probably. I still have a bit of a sentimental view that the original line-up (Marvin/Welch/Harris/Meehan) was the business – haven't a clue why really, except that they were what I first knew, mostly from my older brother's 1961 "The Shadows" LP, the cover photo for which included some impressive knitwear.

27. On The Beach, Cliff Richard (1964)

Composers: Bruce Welch, Hank Marvin, Cliff Richard

Yes, as threatened, here's one of the most bland, simple-minded and crassly derivative records of his enormously long career. But the song is innocent and its tune and energy are contagious. Actually this is the "token Cliff song" in this collection because it is so hard to choose anything from his huge Sixties repertoire that really sums him up and is still tolerable to listen to.

I've smooched to his slow "ballads", jumped about to the rockers, and recorded and played back a zillion times every A and B side from *Move It* to *I Could Easily Fall*. A couple of later singles were the result of a bit more thought, but Sixties Cliff was mostly pulp fiction for music-starved adolescents. I loved it, and can still bear to listen to quite a few of his songs, which were invariably *Billboard* imitations or straight covers of US hits.

On The Beach is a genial rocker written by Cliff and half the Shadows for one of his later and increasingly execrable films. I much prefer the shifting pace and moods of *The Day I Met Marie* (showing Hank Marvin's facility for quality songs). *It'll Be Me* is above average for a cover. *Please Don't Tease* is another rather good record, and I used to rate the slushy *The Young Ones* till I finally admitted to myself that the lyric makes no sense.

But choosing something "good" by Cliff Richard is missing the point. I want "representative". I want to celebrate what he was really like. (And if you think this admission is embarrassing, just watch it performed in the film clip from *Wonderful Life!*)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6zFg6R2nlqo>

Pete's comment on Mel's 27. On The Beach

I'm tempted to make some facile remark about not feeling I have to apologise for liking Cliff Richard – but of course I don't like everything he's done, and if I compare him with other more important acts, I can't deny that much of his music will inevitably come out wanting. What I can say is that his music was important to me in my early life; and I would argue that he represents a genuine if confined contribution to the overall musical canon. He ploughed his own furrow; he was tough-minded, highly professional and often very astute in the musical choices he made. His music was often derivative, but at his best would argue that it was unequalled.

And you make some very good choices in your piece, Mel. For instance, I think *Please Don't Tease* is a wonderful song, emblematic of its period and evocative of an era where that kind of music actually seemed edgy. I've also always had great fondness for *It'll Be Me*, along with others such as *Gee Whiz It's You* and *Living Doll*. And I think *The Day I Met Marie* is truly remarkable.

In recent years I've realised that I also have a fondness for *Don't Talk To Him*, despite the fact that it features the same Shadows guitar tonality that I used to be uneasy about in *Theme For Young Lovers*. Go figure again. As it happens, it's another rare example of a song Cliff had a hand in writing. If you attach any significance to the lyric, surprisingly it describes possessiveness and self-doubt: familiar topics in song, but not from the voice of Cliff Richard. I particularly like the very basic but vigorous drumming on this track – almost a textbook lesson in how to accompany a piece like this.

I have to admit I also have a secret fondness for a wide range of his more musically questionable pieces (e.g. *The Next Time*, *I'm Looking Out The Window*, *When The Girl In Your*

Arms). They continue to be evocative of that early phase in my life, and I can still happily listen to them any time and enjoy them.

As for *The Young Ones*, although I can understand your wariness about the lyrics, Mel, that will never stop me finding this song irresistibly, nostalgically compelling. Orchestra and all! It holds a special place in my affections, even though I know in my heart that it doesn't really deserve it. Likewise *Summer Holiday*, which is self-evidently much more facile on more levels.

So, finally, to *On The Beach*. Well, curiously I doubt if I would have singled out this particular song for special mention. I'd regard it as a "late" work in the context of Cliff's heyday, and lacking the distinctiveness and bite of his earlier stuff. But it's a pleasantly familiar sing-along, and another piece of the indelible fabric of my past. (Indelible fabric? Um...)

PS Did I mention we're off to see Cliff live in a couple of weeks' time? No, not through some misplaced ardour; it just happens that one of Helen's closest women friends is a major fan, and we've accompanied her to see him several times in the past ten years. Extraordinary to think someone from so far back in our musical past can still fill concert halls, and (hopefully) give a good account of himself. I'll keep you posted ...

[Postscript: Cliff was in excellent form that night in 2015 – as indeed he was when we went to a further concert he gave in 2023 at the impressive age of 83.]

PPS Sorry to drag my omnipresent sister into this again, but she became good friends with a choreographer called Terry Gilbert who appeared in dance sequences in both "Young Ones" and "Summer Holiday". I think he found Cliff a natural dancer and very easy to work with.

Nick's comment on Mel's 27. *On The Beach*

I'm in rather the same territory here as with the Shads (or the Drifters as I remember them being called). I have vivid proto-youthful memories of Cliff Richard, including the early singles. I have even quoted *Move It* from time to time when confronted by people who think that by my time of life I should be enjoying music of a staidness to match my immense age: "They say it's gonna die but please let's face it / They just don't know what's gonna replace it".

I remember going to see "The Young Ones" and the impressively politically incorrect "Summer Holiday", but not "Wonderful Life". I'm afraid I regard this as more typical than worthwhile – rather in the same category as *Bachelor Boy*, which, if it wasn't about cigarettes, was clearly the sort of song to get your penthouse suite raided a decade or five later.

Lest you think I am simply being bigoted about Cliffeee, I'd say that the very early stuff is lively and that of the later stuff *We Don't Talk Any More* ain't bad. But his voice wasn't ever up to much, and there's an awful, awful, awful lot of dross which is ... what's the word? ... awful.

28. *Girl Of My Best Friend*, Elvis Presley (1960)

Composers: Sam Bobrick and Beverly Ross

My third offence in this group may imply an equivalence between Elvis and Cliff. Elvis should be so lucky: when I was a teenager he was always second.

I chose this from the many Elvis options knowing it's not as good as the early Sun stuff. Yet it's a great pop song that tells a simple, rather touching story with a nice tune and a typically moody performance. More importantly, it demonstrates for me the extraordinary capacity of music to release an uncontrolled torrent of memories. Please bear with me.

As a teenager I used to go on many long cycle rides with one of my best mates Dave Williamson (Maidenhead Grammar School and St Johns, Cambridge) invariably with other friends and sometimes with his sister Kate for whom I had a long innocent longing. (My first teenage date, and decisively my last with Kate, was an ill-chosen *Carry On* at the cinema.) One day the three of us cycled far into rural Buckinghamshire to visit one of their cousins, in whose record collection we discovered this hitherto unknown Elvis track which had been released two or three years earlier. We instantly recognised something superior to the stuff he was currently producing.

The memory is poignant because, although Barb [wife at the time] and I stayed in touch with Dave for a while in the early Seventies, we couldn't get on with his wife and we drifted apart. Years later a mutual friend met Dave's then estranged wife by chance on Paddington Station and she told him that Dave had been killed in a car crash. I've tried and failed to find out whether this is true or the malicious tale of a wronged wife. So Dave has become the Schrodinger's cat of schooldays friendship – simultaneously both dead and alive**. He may even have influenced subconsciously the name I gave my son.

And this song brings all that back!

The B-side was the intriguing *Mess of Blues* which isn't bad either, and sheer genius compared with Presley's later crap.

**A while after I wrote this, some nifty research by my daughter-in-law Sharon established that Dave Williamson did indeed die in a London hospital back in the 1980s following a car crash.

Girl Of My Best Friend: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tMItrUTYPZI>

Mess Of Blues: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hJgQF_Xaxhk

Nick's comments on Mel's 28. *Girl Of My Best Friend*

Ah. Hello, good evening, and welcome to embarrassment. Your reminiscence is sad, Mel. Mine is just very unworthy. I came to know Margaret's significant other, subsequently husband, after our relationship became more enthusiastic than decorous, but I regarded him as a seriously good friend. Astute too – so did he know and turn a blind eye, or was he less astute than I believed him to be? When matters became unavoidable, he was understandably not best pleased by the turn of events. And now he's got bowel cancer, and as far as I know I don't – "This shows ye aren't above, ye justicers".

This is an over-elaborate way of saying that this is a song which, 16 or so years after its release, came to have a bit of spurious significance to me, because I used to sing it (but only in private – even I'm not quite that crass). But so much for taking our clothes off in public. Never a good idea.

Elvis went through many phases, and this seems to me to belong to his fine-not-bad-but-remember-what-he-had-done phase: not in the same league as *Heartbreak Hotel* and various others of that vintage, but infinitely better than the grosser stuff from his later years. This is tuneful, well crafted, well executed, but ... can you imagine it as part of the soundtrack to "Jailhouse Rock"? "GI Blues", yes, but "Jailhouse Rock"?

As far as the later stuff goes, it always intrigues me how, when he'd been a, if not the, trend-setter, his recordings lifted arrangements apparently without shame – as witness what I said about *Love Letters*. Even so, I think that *Suspicious Minds*, despite the note-for-note lifting, is good. It might make ... ooh, the 99th slot in my lineup, but Hugh knows.

Pete's comments on Mel's 28. *Girl of My Best Friend*

Your tale of the Williamsons is remarkable and poignant. I actually feel I remember Dave vaguely – more an aura than his actual appearance. Can this be right? Anyway, you're absolutely right about the power of music to evoke past feelings and events. I experience this constantly.

I do think *Girl Of My Best Friend* is a good song in its own right, nicely carried off by Elvis. I note on doing a bit of research that both the writers are apparently still alive, which is insignificant but nice to know! The theme is one often used in music and drama, but particularly nicely tackled here. And you weren't obliged to choose something from his Sun years; the idea is to pick what we like. Thank you for doing that!

The Long Ones.

29. Hurricane, Bob Dylan (1976)

Composer: Bob Dylan

Dylan didn't stop writing protest songs in the Sixties. This is his angriest and arguably the most powerful. Beside *Hurricane*, most of the 1960s protests sound almost twee, though *The Lonesome Death of Hattie Carroll* is admittedly pretty tough. And despite its total lack of poetic imagery, this is by my reckoning one of Dylan's greatest recordings.

This complex and detailed story of the racist police framing a black boxer for murder is told with uncanny lucidity. Dylan's use of rhyme (and occasional lack of it) does a superb job punctuating the issues, and again and again creating memorable lines like,

"If you're black you might as well not shown up on the street/ Less you wanna draw the heat."

His trademark use of repeated rhymes in four successive lines also sporadically comes into its own here, rhythmically beating out the scenes he's portraying. It all seems random and diffuse at first, but this is a carefully crafted piece of writing aimed at keeping our attention and raising our hackles.

And sure enough the music and Dylan's voice also convey his personal fury at the injustice: a blistering performance that seems to speed up as it goes along, with the violin sawing away incessantly.

In spite of Dylan's very public campaign, the song didn't get boxer Rubin Carter released from jail – he was retried and reconvicted and had to wait another 10 years till the arguments of police racism convinced a court that he may have been framed. Dylan got into trouble with a local newspaper which continued to insist on Carter's guilt and portrayed his poetic licence with some of the details of the story as tampering with the evidence. Intriguing stuff.

And yes, it's dreadfully painful to choose *Hurricane* apparently to the exclusion of all of the other (often equally long) Dylan greats which I love so much – *Visions Of Johanna*, *Like A Rolling Stone*, *Ballad Of A Thin Man*, *Desolation Row*, *Girl From The North Country* etc. More of some of these later perhaps. But what about a Bob Dylan Top One Hundred?!

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bpZvg_FjL3Q

Nick's comment on Mel's 29. Hurricane

Thanks, Mel. I had forgotten how much I always liked this track. It's terrific. Every now and again, Dylan has produced a song which shows what a good storyteller he is (*Lily*, *Rosemary And The Jack Of Hearts* is another favourite of mine), and this is a fascinating example. To use an overused cliché, it works cinematically, cutting from scene to scene, and that links perfectly with the sharpness of the use of words and rhyme on which your comments are spot on.

It's odd that the acerbity that he frequently directs at (ex-)lovers is here directed at the police, the law and racism more widely. It's actually more acute than many of the earlier "protest" songs which I guess appealed to me more as a 16 year old than they do now – *Masters Of War* – well, fine, but do I know more about the vileness of the industrial military complex after listening to it than before?

This song is much more sharply focused and, actually, informative. Where that will leave me when it comes to trying to capture that important bit of my roots in earnest adolescent Dylanry I don't know. (Incidentally, *The Lonesome Death Of Hattie Carroll* was my post-pubescent favourite – not the right word, but I hope you know what I mean).

The post-“Rolling Thunder” sound is terrific. I can still remember the excitement when I first heard it – it seems to have had the effect of producing a huge creative surge in Dylan, whether in producing new material or recasting old. As far as this particular song goes, I can still remember the chord sequence – not difficult, because they’re entirely straightforward. But they are part of the extraordinary drive the song has – as, incidentally, is the fact that it speeds up, so that the end is markedly faster than the beginning.

Pete’s comment on Mel’s 29. *Hurricane*

I must offer a vote of thanks for your highly informative description of this piece, and also for Nick’s long, informed and enthusiastic response. I accept everything you say about it – it’s observant, clever, angry, erudite and beautifully delivered. Although I’d heard it sundry times before, I’d never listened to it so carefully until now, so I feel I’ve learned something, and that’s exactly what this game is about.

Incidentally, I remember thinking when this piece was new that it seemed to underline a welcome return to the more vehement “country” vocal style of Dylan’s most successful 1960s work. I suspect that I felt more shocked by the “new” voice he adopted for *Lay Lady Lay* than anyone did when he went electric. The *Hurricane* phase marked a return to his edgier approach, and his revived vocal style seemed to sum that up.

That said, I’m wondering if I could ever include such an angry piece in my own top hundred, even when delivered with such panache. But that says a lot more about me and my approach to music than it does about the music itself. I like exuberant, sad, reflective, philosophical, observant, dramatic, ironical, resigned, sceptical, amorous ... and perhaps above all, *musical* – but I can’t actually envisage having anything quite so *angry* anywhere in my list. But maybe I’m forgetting something.

Clearly you and Nick both do have great fondness for this kind of piece, which I suppose points up a difference between us. I can admire it without wanting to embrace it.

30. *Like A Hurricane*, Neil Young (1977)

Composer: Neil Young and Taylor Phelps

This guy’s hard to pin down. His voice is thin and weedy, his lyrics are quite interesting but rarely as compelling as on *Like a Hurricane* or *Ohio* (my choice No 18; with Crosby Stills and Nash) and he’s got a not very likeable obsessive personality which means he’s constantly fallen out with collaborators. Yet he’s a singer songwriter hero, and here I am picking two of his songs for my hundred.

One of his great strengths is writing good simple tunes. Like this one. *Like a Hurricane*, though, falls again into the category of music-which-matches-the-words – for me personally anyway, because the track does blow me away. No matter how much I’ve played it over the years I’ve always felt carried along and away by its insistent drive and power.

It’s a simple idea: a woman who’s a bit too much for him to handle (though the words are a little impenetrable in places). I can’t tell whether the guitar work is technically clever, and there always seems a risk that its soaring, screaming, distorted notes are going to run indulgently out of control. But they don’t. The rest of the band hold it tightly together, and the rather pedestrian drumming probably helps. And the result? If you want to know what agonised yearning sounds like, I think it’s Neil Young’s guitar. I find it astonishing.

This track is apparently a favourite with fans of his electric (as opposed to acoustic) music. But there’s an utterly different rendering using a pump organ on *Unplugged* which shows it’s a pretty good song even without the guitars.

www.youtube.com/watch?v=6-WMbP1RcC4

Nick’s comment on Mel’s 30. *Like A Hurricane*

Oh dear, another favourite of mine. I dithered about choosing this rather than *Helpless* but a sort of sentimental attachment to helplessness won out narrowly. This is glorious stuff, for all the reasons you give. Depending on how the totting up goes, this may still make my hundred. So I agree entirely with what you've said. As far as the technical cleverness or otherwise of the guitar goes, I think he's quite intriguing. He doesn't feature in lists of guitar heroes (not that I study them), but, like his voice, it's just the thing for the songs. Nuff said, lest I do pick it and end up with nothing to say (no change there, really).

Pete's comment on Mel's 30. *Like A Hurricane*

I like this! It's one of those songs that have floated peripherally in and out of my awareness over the years, but to which I've paid little attention. It's been a real pleasure to listen carefully to it all the way through. Yes, a good tune as you say, and good melodic structure, with words that match up to it; and also a marvellous extended guitar solo. I like the way you sum that up. If I had to choose between this and *Helpless*, I think I'd choose this, so you've contributed something to my world view by selecting it and confirming that for me.

31. *Telegraph Road*, Dire Straits (1982)

Composers: Mark Knopfler

Another story in music to transport me. Mark Knopfler is one of those rare musicians who can write a good tune and a powerful lyric and play an instrument more than competently (inspired, he says, by Hank Marvin).

Telegraph Road is a remarkable tour de force, telling the story simultaneously of economic development and its adverse consequences in the form of urban failure and unemployment. The lyric, inspired by a road in Detroit, spans centuries and ranges from the remote to the personal. And the breadth of vision is beautifully realised in the evolving moods and tones of the music from the peaceful start to the driving crescendo.

The other Dire Straits track I could have easily have chosen is the haunting *Brothers In Arms* with its subtle treatment of freedom fighters/terrorists. But Sue insists it's *Telegraph Road* – partly on the strength of the performance that captivated us both in Cardiff. Yes, occasionally we go to concerts.

The video with the YouTube track is similar to my interpretation of the song's themes, though the recording is obviously nothing like as political as the video.

<https://vimeo.com/22096238>

Pete's comment on Mel's 31. *Telegraph Road*

Another impressive piece. It makes the points that you describe very effectively – though as you say, not as strongly as the marvellous slideshow on Vimeo, which is breathtakingly clever and pointed. Back to Mark Knopfler, I must agree about his tunefulness (as you would expect), which even comes out in an angry piece like this. I particularly like the guitar solo passage around six minutes into the song – reminiscent in its sweeping magisterial quality of *Local Hero*, which I've always liked enormously.

Incidentally, I have a photographer friend who has been repeatedly drawn back to Detroit to celebrate (if that's the right word) the encroaching decrepitude of the environment there, and the seeming incapability of anyone – central or local government or industry – to do anything to remedy it. They can't even afford to complete the demolition of long abandoned buildings, so the wider area (beyond the modernised downtown) has become a sort of permanent monument to urban failure, and is highly unlikely to be changed for the better in this generation or probably the next.

Nick's comment on Mel's 31. *Telegraph Road*

Dire Straits will certainly feature at some point in my list, but which of their oeuvre remains unresolved. We saw them twice – the first time at what I always think of as the Hammersmith Odeon in 1982, the second at Woburn Abbey in about 1991 or 92. I thought they were superb the first time, because they did a succession of tight songs brilliantly; the second time, the songs were padded out with an awful lot of noodling around, some but not all perfectly good, but not in the right context.

This shows that in the right context Mark Knopfler can work powerfully on an extended scale – this maintains its momentum in a way that a 10 minute version of *Sultans of Swing* couldn't. Excellent stuff.

Mark Knopfler is gracious to acknowledge Hank B Marvin's influence – even as crap a guitarist as me would say that Hank was the original guiding light. Be that as it may, Knopfler is infinitely the better guitarist.

32. *I'm Going Home, Ten Years After* (1970)

Composer: Alvin Lee

Woodstock is my favourite film and this has always been my favourite performance from it. Till today I knew nothing about Ten Years After. So I can only offer this extraordinary live soundtrack item to listen to. I've never heard their original album version, which could be rubbish! (Incidentally, it seems their band name comes from the fact that they started in 1966, 10 years after Presley's *Heartbreak Hotel*, which suggests the possibility of an alternative dating system to replace the AD nonsense.)

You won't be surprised that it's not the lyrics that appeal to me in this case. But I've just read on Wikipedia that this Woodstock performance was what made the band famous, so I'm obviously not alone in being bowled over by its power.

Its rhythm and blues sound has led me to believe this was an old blues song that they had revived. But I have also just discovered that it was composed by Alvin Lee, the lead guitarist who almost single-handedly makes the performance what he is.

(*I'm Going Home* is included in this selection not because of the riveting story-telling which is common to the other 3 songs but because of its length – 12 minutes. If this fills you with dread you could find something else to do while it's playing on your headphones. Alternatively you could sit back as I do and let it flow over you.)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2YB7qyn5MVs>

Nick's comment on Mel's 32. *I'm Going Home*

I can feel you both going "Not again ...". I saw Ten Years After in Leeds in 1969, and bought an LP, "Ssssh", on the strength of it. If I'm more honest than I was prepared to be at the time, I secretly thought the LP was something of an anti-climax and they were much better live. This seems to me to be one of the lessons of going to live music – there are live acts not worth listening to at home, and recorded acts not worth seeing live. At the time I obviously hadn't learnt that. But I was so much older then.

Records of live acts are a curious halfway house – good live recordings obviously have the capacity to capture something of the atmosphere of the actual event, but, on the other hand, good live recordings are pretty few and far between (even so, I know of at least one I intend to mug you with at some point). Woodstock is generally one of the glorious examples which fall the good side of the line. Whether the likes of Richie Havens make my list is another of the things that remains to be seen.

Any way. What I liked about Alvin Lee's playing in 1969 was that, unlike a lot of the dexterous guitarists of the time, he produced cascading lines of ridiculously fast notes that had shape and

direction. I can still see why I thought so, but I found this less compelling than I used to. There is here an interesting comparison with the music's inferred roots. The bluesmen who were claimed as the inspiration for a generation of guitarists such as Alvin Lee were actually very tight and disciplined in their approach – listen to any of the three Kings (B B, Freddie or Albert – no relation as far as I know).

So what Alvin Lee did, apart from having the good taste to use a B B King style Gibson, was in effect to do freestyle improvisation on a theme. That I think has a bearing on the issue of composition: this is something of a pastiche of blues and rock songs (*Baby Please Don't Go*, *Blues Suede Shoes*, *Whole Lotta Shakin'* and some indeterminate Howling Wolf get in there, as I imagine do others). But the originals serve as no more (or less) than a take-off pad.

What do I make of it? Good fun, exciting ... but it doesn't live in my head as my 100 do. Be that as it may, I'm still really pleased to have retraced that bit of my musical history

Pete's comment on Mel's 32. *I'm Going Home*

I'm enthused to find that *you're* enthused by this, especially given that for once you're not drawn by the lyrics! It's certainly full of spirit and vehemence. I think one would have to have embraced it over a long period, as you obviously have, to want it in a list of favourites, but I can't deny that it's everything you say it is.

Sixties blue-rock classics

33. *She's Not There*, The Zombies (1964)

Composer: Rod Argent

Had to be, didn't it? The only Zombies contender remotely close is *Time of the Season*. But that hasn't got the energy of *She's Not There*, and the lyric is really a reprise of their excellent version of *Summertime* on the "Zombies Begin Here" album.

There's little need to point to *She's Not There's* exceptional qualities – Blunstone's voice, the electric piano, Argent's bit of improvisation, the harmonies and the rising excitement. Bizarrely described as "jazz" by some critics today. The lyric is apparently inspired by a girlfriend who dumped Rod Argent shortly before their intended wedding. So heartfelt, one would imagine.

I take some pride in my foresight in buying their first album on the strength of this modest UK hit – only my second LP, acquired with cash from a summer holiday job recycling damaged toiletries at the Brylcreem factory in Maidenhead (which allowed me to give hair products and deodorant to all the girls I knew). Then "Odessey And Oracle" in 1968 when most people, including the Zombies themselves, had almost forgotten who the Zombies were. And today, when all right-thinking people rate the song and the group.

Now that the song is a recognised "classic" exploited by films and an horrific TV ad which turns out to be about perfume, there's the risk that it will pall through over-exposure. But that's not for me happened yet – I still sit up in excitement wherever I hear it. Santana's fabulous performance could also have made the 100, but I can't have the same song twice, can I?

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vL1fQohd8i4>

Pete's comment on Mel's 33. *She's Not There*

This is one of my favourite songs of all time, and a clear candidate for "my desert island eight". As you say, the energy is fantastic, but so is the precision – the careful harmonies and the intricate Argent solo; and of course Blunstone's peerless voice.

The switch at the end of each verse from a minor to a major chord is particularly striking for me. Usually music tends to go the other way when it's trying to make a rather negative statement like this, but here we have the opposite: an emphatically positive statement of a despondent thought – "She's not there!" It's an expression of finality compressed into a single optimistic chord. Intriguing and rather clever.

You did indeed have great foresight in buying their album so early on. Incidentally, I still benefit from owning (and treasuring!) the double-album version of the "Oracle and Odessey" vinyl disc that you gave me when you bought it again as part of a set – along with the original album cover.

Nick's comment on Mel's 33. *She's Not There*

I agree entirely that this has to be there, and that it wins by a short head from *Time Of The Season*. This is quite distinctively a Zombies sound – compare and contrast the sub-Beatlesness of *I Love You* (which I still think is great, derivative or not). And, as we have said more times than I care to remember, it's an extraordinary and timeless sound.

All good musicians, of course, but really Colin Blunstone's voice is the true wonder. And it still is – I imagine we're not the only couple of the three to have seen him and Rod Argent on Jules Holland, rather strangely calling themselves the Zombies but performing as a duo. We decided on the strength of that to go to see them in Leeds. I can't imagine *She's Not There* not making

my list (unless I sort of fiddle the books by nominating another track because this is somehow already there).

34. Gloria, Them (1964)

Composer: Van Morrison

Oh yes I do have a few pang of guilt choosing one of Van Morrison's earliest songs from such a long and illustrious career.

Of course I've never seen him live but I have seen him in absolutely breathtaking performances on *Later*, and there are some great tracks on "Astral Weeks" (thanks for alerting me, Nick) and the "Greatest Hits" album. But nothing excites me quite as much as this blast of a song.

Right from the first note I'm carried along by the simple guitar riff and insistent beat. Then Morrison comes in with his extraordinary sounding voice and the song builds and builds. Apparently it's only three chords, but the brilliance is in the way the vocals, the instruments and the drums (possibly two sets) work together to keep adding changes in mood and tempo to the simple theme – and obviously in the memorable spelling out of "GLORIA".

I've never bothered to study the lyrics because we know in our bones what they're about. But a quick read suggests they're even more loaded with teenage erotic energy than I'd imagined. We hear that the five foot four tall Gloria (one of my favourite heights as it happens) "comes around" nudge nudge, even before we know "she comes around here just about midnight". Not exactly subtle, but neat. A Gloria-ous celebration of sex.

It appears that this amazing record was only a B-side, in combination with the also excellent *Baby Please Don't Go*. Hey didn't we have it good in the Sixties.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WkaMVLHxzWE>

(I've just read a review by someone who says *Gloria* is the greatest music ever written, including Beethoven's Ninth. So I don't particularly feel my own enthusiastic appreciation is particularly over the top.)

Nick's comment on Mel's 34. Gloria

This again is a song which I liked when it came out and which I have liked consistently since. Them, or at least Van Morrison (I think that session men provided the backing, whence the pub-quiz fact that the riff on *Here Comes The Night* is one Jimmy Page). Them are (wonderful grammar there) typical in terms of musical roots. They came out of the same interest in rhythm and blues as the Stones, the Yardbirds, Manfred Mann, Fleetwood Mac and so on. More of the Yardbirds in a moment (and, I imagine, of the Stones at some point in this process).

Manfred Mann moved pretty promptly into self-composed R'n'B-ish material like *5-4-3-2-1*, and Fleetwood Mac remained rooted for some time in Elmore James until the move (or blasphemy to some) to *Albatross*, *Man Of The World* and the like. Them seem to me to have produced something distinctive pretty fast. *Gloria* shows its roots in R'n'B, (wasn't it originally the B side of *Baby Please Don't Go*?). But no one could think it emerged from Chicago or anywhere other than the UK.

And it is pretty naughty, isn't it? Unless of course that's my dirty mind and Van and Gloria just liked a quick game of whist at midnight. Great stuff – not the one I'll choose, but great. And I've seen him perform it more than once, and it's terrific live.

Pete's comment on Mel's 34. Gloria

I too have a real fondness for this, though I wouldn't put it in my top hundred. It's full of Van Morrison's extraordinary energy, and is remarkably compelling. You're quite right that there are only three chords, and in a sense there's actually only one significant chord – the chord of the key that it's in, to which the words are mostly sung. The other two chords are kind of "passing" chords. They're certainly there, but they're repeatedly skipped over in the riff – taking you back again to the key chord. This contributes to the tight, relentless feel. Incidentally *Baby Please Don't Go* uses a similar sort of technique. Maybe chords were on ration in Ireland?

35. For Your Love, The Yardbirds (1965)

Composer: Graham Gouldman

I love the moody ethereal quality and rhythm changes on this. The odd piano sound is a harpsichord because the studio apparently didn't have an organ or piano. Whether or not that's true, the keyboard and bongos make an arresting start to a highly original record.

It's full of catchy tricks – a chiming background vocal, voices piling on one another, a steady increase in pace before returning to the harpsichord and building up again. As so often with my favourites, I think it's the energy of the song that ultimately makes it for me.

And the lyrics? Well it just goes to show how strong the tune (by Graham Gouldman of 10CC and several Hollies hits), the performance and the production really are!

It's always amused me that Eric Clapton played on it but left the Yardbirds to join John Mayall because this record wasn't bluesy enough for his tastes – making way for Jeff Beck. Artistes, eh?

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Z2LSSgQMc2E>

Pete's comment on Mel's 35. For Your love

I've always thought this song quite amazing. Whatever prompted the decision to use a harpsichord, it's used to excellent effect, giving the song a haunting effect that has seldom been equalled. And what about that very different central passage? Not only does the harpsichord disappear, but as you say, the rhythm and mood of the piece change altogether as it turns into something much more raunchy. And then you get that frisson as the harpsichord chimes in again. Wow. And yes, the vocal lines build up on themselves to a wonderful crescendo. I agree with everything you say about it.

By the way, as indicated previously, I've always been a great admirer of Graham Gouldman, whom I once (briefly) met when photographing some people who were photographing the cover of a 10cc album. Very obscure! Can't say our conversation extended further than "Hi", and "See you later" (I'm still waiting). He wrote *Look Through Any Window* for the Hollies, which I've always loved, and also some memorable songs for 10cc (*I'm Not In Love*, *Mandy*, *Dreadlock Holiday*).

Nick's comment on Mel's 35. For Your love

I knew and liked the Yardbirds from before this track – they were another of the R'n'B stalwarts of the early to mid Sixties. I remember seeing them on an ITV programme from maybe 1965 – this was the programme on which I first saw people such as Sonny Boy Williamson, Champion Jack Dupree and others who you will know and love.

As I said above, the move away from a sort-of purist version of R'n'B was made at different rates by different bands, but most if not all of them made it – *Pretty Flamingo* was the answer to a question on Popemaster this morning (oops – have I got something wrong?).

Like you, Mel, I have always liked this track, and like you I can see that this owes a not insignificant amount to the enduring contribution of Graham Gouldman. As for the boy Clapton, I think his behaviour was characterised at the time by flitting from group to group and changing his appearance, sometimes almost beyond recognition, at the same time: I'm sure any amateur or even professional psychiatrist could have a field day there. Most groups changed quite a lot,

and the ostensible reason for the departures and arrivals often seem pretty implausible. Safest conclusion – it happens.

Nick's general comment: What a wonderful set of songs.

Three girls who gave me pleasure, all cerebral.

36. Tell Me What He Said, Helen Shapiro (1962)

Composer: Jeff Barry

This composer has some credits – massive hits for the Crystals, Ronettes, Ike and Tina, Manfred Mann, Shangrilas, Rickie Valance, Lesley Gore, Olivia Newton John, Bette Midler, The Beach Boys and on and on. (Jeff Barry also apparently turned up as a session musician on *Brown-Eyed Girl*.) Knowing this now, I can't be surprised that *Tell Me What He Said* is such a brilliant pop song.

The simple context of the lyric provides an irresistible relevance and immediacy for its teenage audience. (I was 14 when I heard it first.) All the musical and production ingredients of a hit are there, and I don't mind in the least being manipulated when the craftsmanship is this good.

Slow quiet opening before it suddenly bursts into life, a throbbing beat, a pause to create tension, and then more driving drums, plus a great tune and a helplessly simple and singable chorus. The arrangement packs in everything else you can think of in 1962, including nice snatches of saxophone, sparing piano, angelic backing singers, and strings to fill in just in case there is a microsecond with nothing happening.

And of course the 15-year-old Helen Shapiro's remarkably powerful and husky voice – destined for a career in jazz. I remember people in my family being scandalised that a girl of her age should be making pop records. And I guess that added to her appeal. All four of her first four singles are wonderful for similar reasons – the other classics are *Walking Back To Happiness*, *Don't Treat Me Like A Child* and *You Don't Know*. But I reckon this is the best, thanks to the drums and the thumping beat. It still gives me the kick it did 60-odd years ago.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=atKob4aBvqk>

Nick's comment on Mel's 36. Tell Me What He Said

I have probably already revealed the bee in my bonnet that women singers are too often not given the material which their talent warrants, and Helen Shapiro is a very good example: a really remarkable voice, too often given material which wasn't up to scratch. I never much liked her at the time, and still can't bring myself to enjoy *Walking Back To Happiness* in particular.

Be that as it may, I rate her voice ever more highly as I decline into a state in which the words of *Don't Treat Me Like A Child* may have a relevance not intended at the time. I have to admit that I'd sort of forgotten this song, which is much stronger than most of her material. I really enjoyed it – can't say it made my heart soar, but it's good stuff in a slightly period-piecey way.

Incidentally, if my memory hasn't completely failed me, Helen Shapiro appeared as the female lead (Craig Douglas was, I think, the male lead) in a film called "It's trad, Dad" at about this time. I seem to recall the predictable performances from the likes of Chris Barber and Acker Bilk lumped in with other acts of whom the one that stuck in my mind was Gene McDaniels. As a film it was doubtless crap, but it's be interesting to see it now as a sort of record of the times

Pete's comment on Mel's 36. Tell Me What He Said

Well, oddly this track was previously my least favourite of all Helen Shapiro's big hits – but that doesn't mean I disliked it. It's just that it's in a minor key – something that often makes pop songs "problematic" for me (but not always, as will be evident from some of my future submissions). Anyway, you've prompted me to listen to it more carefully than ever before, and I really enjoyed it. Everything you say about the arrangement and tune are spot on.

I have to admit Helen Shapiro's voice is not one of my favourite types – low and a little heavy for my taste – so I always felt I had a love-hate relationship with her music. I suspect she may have been more effective in the more jazzy material she worked on later, which is not so well known (to me, anyway). Still, this piece is an indelible part of my childhood, and nothing can take away from that. And I find it charming that you like it.

By the way, her birthday (28 September) is the same as Helen's (my Helen's), though Helen Shapiro was born a significant number of years earlier.

37. Allentown Jail, The Springfields (1962)

Composer: Irving Gordon

from the "Silver Threads and Golden Needles" album

I was a fan of the Springfields well before *Island of Dreams* gave them a big hit. *Allentown Jail* was an old country song that first appeared as an album track predating that by a couple of years, though I discovered it rather later.

It sometimes surprises me that I'm still moved by this wodge of sentiment, but it's really a rather a lovely tuneful song, curiously for our anarchic times, about fidelity. But Tom Springfield subsequently turned out to be an effective record producer, and I'd be surprised if this doesn't benefit from his influence. There's an awful lot going on with a lively guitar intro, strings, some great harmony singing, a striking key change, brass, and odd bits that sound to me like the Beatles before the Beatles. It's nicely delivered by the three Springfields pretending to be Americans as they always did.

But when Dusty comes in on her own briefly with "I'll Dance For You Mister ..." etc. she sends shivers down my spine. How could she not have become a huge star?

The sound on YouTube is rather thin and has the verisimilitude of scratch noises. My copy extracted from the vinyl is somewhat better.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AELeiOtft8M>

Pete's comment on Mel's 37. Allentown Jail

Here's what I loved: *Island Of Dreams* and *Bambino*, both of which I knew backwards. Also *Say I Won't Be There*. I will always associate *Island Of Dreams* with the tape recorder belonging to another boy in my corridor at my boarding school. It had a much more resonant bass than mine, and I felt terrible envy! Somehow the resonance seemed especially evident on that track, perhaps because I liked it so much.

I thought even then, and still think now, that the unique blend of the two men's voices and Dusty's distinctive, strident tones gave the Springfields a unique sound, which they used to really good effect. And I can quite see how Dusty stood out in those solo lines. So it was great to be introduced all these years later to a Springfields song that I didn't know of and had never heard. I think I can see why you like it. Tuneful, yes; nice sentiments. Why not?

Nick's comment on Mel's 37. Allentown Jail

I don't remember this, though I can remember going into one of the record shops in Cambridge (Peaks, otherwise a furniture shop at the near end of King Street, since you ask) and listening to *Island Of Dreams* in one of those booths we frequented at the time. I'm afraid this one doesn't do it for me, despite the presence of the magical Dusty. The song sounds to me like any one of a number of others, and I find the arrangement overwhelms everything – close harmony *and* guitars *and* strings *and* horns? Come off it. All rather jarring to my ears. But I don't suppose we have heard the last of Dusty in this exercise ...

38. *I'll Never Find Another You*, The Seekers (1964)

Composer: Tom Springfield

Did you know that I was a closet Seekers fan? I bought their albums in more innocent times. But this first hit single written by Dusty Springfield's brother is the best of all for me. I can't say I'd want to stand up for half of the half-baked sentiments in the lyric, but the other half are warm and cuddly enough.

It's the tune and the performance with the signature full acoustic sound which I find uplifting. The four voices of the group members seem to work so well together. And then there's Judith Durham. Pause for inhalation.

My intensive research for this piece has involved me studying her successive performances over the course of 50 years. Her voice was always absolutely lovely – pure and unaffected. What's surprised me is that it had hardly deteriorated at all right up to the Seekers 50th Anniversary concert in 2014 – not withstanding a debilitating brain haemorrhage only a year earlier.

An even bigger surprise is to find that the very lovely Judith seemed to grow ever more gorgeous over the years. (Just making the point that it's not necessarily the music alone that does it for me!)

You should perhaps close your eyes for the start of the self-consciously staged video of the alleged recording session.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=javNxy2D2WY>

[I was more than momentarily saddened when I heard that Judith Durham had died in 2022.]

Nick's comment on Mel's 38. *I'll Never Find Another You*

Ah, what a strange thing individual taste is. First things first. Judith Durham – do you remember Bill Oddie's song to Julie Andrews on "I'm sorry I'll read that again"? The talking bit in the middle (which sadly I can still quote all the way through) included the lines "you're more voluptuous than Twiggy, more primitive than Katie Boyle, sexier than Raymond Baxter". Now why did mention of Judith Durham bring that to my mind? But then I don't fantasise about the Singing Nun any more. Or ever, to be honest.

The Seekers seem to me to be a sort of musical equivalent of painting by numbers. Everything is correct and in the right place, but it has no verve to it. So the song is well matched to their abilities, but for me unlike you, Mel, this is not the greatest compliment I have paid in my life.

Incidentally, an oddity about the YouTube clip. This purports to be a live take. So where have they hidden the drummer? Or was he or she so hideous that our eyes were spared the sight lest we ran screaming from the room?

I'll duck for cover now.

Mel's reply to Nick: I can't really account for liking Judith Durham so much either. As for the ludicrous and cringeworthy YouTube clip, this was a good reason for not choosing the track. Yet I did ...

Pete's comment on Mel's 38. *I'll Never Find Another You*

Well, I liked the Seekers. They picked up where the Springfields left off, but with differences. Their unique feature was their "full voice" harmonies: all four surprisingly resonant voices on different notes, including (unusually) a sung bass line. You picked this aspect out yourself, Mel, and I completely agree about it. All this, plus the acoustic guitars and double bass, and Judith Durham's clear, distinctive tones – and some really memorable songs, notably from Mr Springfield. I never saw it as singing by numbers because it was done so fulsomely.

As an aside, my father used to refer to Judith Durham in his antique way as “a poppet”, which I gradually divined meant that he really fancied her – though of course he would never have dreamed of expressing (or perhaps even thinking) that thought in that rather naked way. As it happens, I didn’t fancy her quite so fulsomely myself, but on revisiting that fake recording session, I realise that she was even more beautiful than I remembered. And her voice was unique.

And what about *Georgy Girl*, which Tom Springfield also wrote? I’ve always been a secret admirer. Also, Judith could play the piano. I still have a reel-to-reel tape recording made directly from TV of her playing a rag on a “special”.

Your choice, and *World Of Our Own*, are yet more songs that I’ve been know to sing in harmony with the women in my life over the years, which is another reason why they hold a special place for me.

Three songs which overawe me with what I can only describe as their "humanity".

39. Barges, Ralph McTell (1972)

Composer: Ralph McTell

From the album "Not Till Tomorrow"

I don't cry, but this beautifully realised picture of summer childhood make me feel I might every time I hear it. The music flows unobtrusively like the canal where the boy Ralph and his younger brother are fishing. But the lyrics are brilliantly perceptive crystals of snatched memory.

The boys are "made shy by their laughter". They watch the lock keeper, "waiting for smiles from the man" and my eyes water just writing this. This resonant line comes back for the song's denouement when the smiles now belong to the grown up McTell as he recalls the scene, and the music builds like the flood of water from the lock and the boats are released to "sail to the sun". Aren't the summers we remember as children always sunny? This is a real poem with music – and it's a brilliant song.

A review somewhere describes the song as "complete nostalgia", which it is. But I put the emphasis on "complete" in the sense of perfection rather than "nostalgia" – ie without its misplaced implications of sentimentality. And to me it's very much more than that, because this is a song which perfectly communicates something almost indescribable about the nature of childhood.

I find this extraordinary because I am incurably nostalgic and sometimes I write poetry about it. But I can't imagine coming anywhere near what Ralph McTell does here.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BrGF63tlzEo>

Nick's comment on Mel's 39. Barges

I'm afraid this doesn't do it for me. I've never much liked (or for that matter disliked) Ralph McTell, who seems to me generally to be the king of bland, and this seems to me to be no exception. I would categorise this as pure sentimentality – the images which you find moving, Mel, strike me as clichéd. Sorry, but this happens – I remember really upsetting a research student who was working on Herman Melville by saying I gave up on about page 2 of *Moby Dick*, which I though was literally unreadable.

This is pleasant (unlike *Moby Dick*), well crafted (which *Moby Dick* may be for all I know or care), but to me ultimately not much more than candy floss (which I wouldn't accuse *Moby Dick* of, not least because the image of a candy floss whale is too terrifying – teeth across the world rot and fall out at the very thought). More than candy floss, but not much more – and even candy floss has a stick in the middle to provide a bit of substance and maybe even flavour.

Doubtless this says more about what a miserable git I am than about Ralph McTell's artistry. The management wishes to apologise for the miserable-gitness. Normal service will be resumed as soon as possible. Only that will just be more miserable-gitness.

Pete's comment on Mel's 39. Barges

As discussed when I submitted my Ralph McTell choice, *Let Me Down Easy*, I've always been a big fan of his, and I recognise many of the qualities that you cite in Barges – the insights, the expressive lyrics, and the tight way in which he is able to bind lyrics to music. Several of his songs on the "Easy" album have the same powerful emotional effect on me that you describe for this song. Strangely, *Barges* doesn't (so far) match up to them for me, but that may be because I don't know it, which means it's not part of my history. I suspect this is often the reason why songs that deeply affect one of us have missed the mark in this game with the other two.

Trying to be objective, I can see that the words are evocative, and although I hear what Nick's saying about some of the sentiments being clichéd, maybe I have a higher tolerance level! But I'm not sure that the tune and structure have the intrinsic, instantly appealing magic of some of McTell's greatest songs. You're right that they blend excellently with the words, but perhaps for me that's not enough.

However, that said, I can imagine that if I listened to this often enough it could inveigle its way into my subconscious, and start to take on some of the qualities you find in it. Meanwhile, maybe it's enough that we're talking about the same performer, and agreeing about the principle of his achievement – just on different grounds. He's one of the few performers who can quickly bring tears to my eyes.

40. *Mr Bojangles*, Nina Simone (1971)

Composer: Jerry Jeff Walker

Mr Bojangles has been recorded over the last half century by dozens of performers – including acts as disparate as Sammy Davis Junior, John Denver, Elton John, Whitney Houston, Robbie Williams and Bob Dylan. Which suggests there's something very special about it. I can't remember whose version I heard first back in the Sixties, though I know I loved it immediately. Then when I heard Nina Simone's version a decade or so back I felt I'd found the definitive performance.

The story of its composition is allegedly close to the story in the lyrics. Folk Singer Jerry Jeff Walker (yes who?) was in jail for drunkenness with a bunch of people including an old guy who held them all spellbound with stories of his life and entertained them with a dance. (Well jails in New Orleans must be different from the ones in Gwent.) He'd apparently adopted the name Bojangles after a Thirties entertainer to keep his real name from the police.

So it's a slightly intriguing and rather unusual story song. More than that, there's magnificent artistry and depth in the way that each verse discloses a little more about the man's background and the personality which is captivating the writer and their fellow cellmates. We are given at first a picture of a blatantly **undignified** little figure. But we are rather amazingly drawn increasingly into real respect for his experience and his dignity.

It's all done so subtly by deftly building up touches of detail. We're told, for instance, that it's the writer who's down and out, so we don't get a sense that Mr Bojangles is the tramp (though he clearly is as well). We are shown successively his energy and vitality, his humour and then his humanity in the snippet about grieving for his dog. So finally when Bojangles says "I drinks a bit" we're laughing with him not at him. Dare I say we have come to love him as well as respect him? The writer clearly has.

A pop song where almost every single word counts? Is it possible?

Meanwhile the tune is delightfully catchy and memorable, and beautifully matched to each word of the lyric – dancing along through the verses and slowing achingly for the chorus as Bojangles is called on to dance for his cellmates. Nina Simone's rich, clear, expressive voice is just perfect for it. Double-tracked in places I think for extra depth. The arrangement is also for the most part wonderfully restrained, even when the strings come in threatening to wreck everything. The pauses neatly punctuate the changes of tone and add a sense of anticipation. I'm disappointed by the jaunty out-of-character ending, but I get the point.

It's a really remarkable song that feels to me as if it's part of a different genre from the boy-loves-girl-leaves-boy-gets-girl-back standard of so much popular culture. A song that will cure my misanthropy in an instant every time. Moving and utterly beautiful. Very high on my current list of favourites.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eAW3y5l6Dm4>

Nick's comment on Mel's 40. *Mr Bojangles*

Nina Simone always feels like someone who got away (from me, that is). I have been intrigued, impressed and moved by her music over the years, but for no discernible reason have never owned anything by her. So thanks for reminding me that I really ought to do something about this state of affairs.

I have rather the same feeling that I should have paid more attention to *Mr Bojangles*, only I do have a solitary recording, by the Nitty Gritty Dirt Band (a serviceable enough piece of Americana, I'd say). The song is precisely as you describe it. It has always seemed to me to have a strange mythic quality, though the words achieve their power just through pretty simple narrative.

Nina Simone is entirely up to the job of bringing out this and its other qualities. It's terrific for all the reasons you give. I'd add that I really like the guitar – the one through the right hand earphone – and bass, but can do without the twee keyboard (I think it must be a keyboard – not Nina Simone's piano) through the left hand earphone, and the strings seem to me to be superfluous. The ending is perfunctory and not really in keeping with the rest of the song. But then, as a candyflossphobe, I would say that, wouldn't I? It's superb stuff.

Pete's comment on Mel's 40. *Mr Bojangles*

Now here's a song I find myself agreeing with you about. A nicely expressed piece, excellently rendered with great feeling by Nina Simone. It sounds very pretty, with its nice strong bass and the vocal harmonies that you mentioned, and I have to say I even like the strings. I think judicious string arrangements are entirely legitimate in pop pieces like this, even though in my youth I would have shot myself for saying so. Like all of us, I suspect, I've often heard this song being performed, though perhaps discounted it and not even listened to it properly in the past. Now that I have, I can see its merits, and I think this is an excellent version to have discovered it with.

41. *I Think It's Going To Rain Today*, Nina Simone (1969)

Composer: Randy Newman

I really wanted Randy Newman in my collection because he's such a great songwriter. But his versions of his own songs are just a bit too raw for easy listening when I'm cast away on Mars. The next best thing turns out to be the best thing – Nina Simone's pared down but rather more musical performance. And even this gets pretty raw at the end.

Randy Newman is a man after my own heart who makes ironic and satirical statements which he thinks show up humanity for what it is. And then gets into trouble because some people are irony-lite and others don't think you should say some things at all, even ironically. His glorious anti-prejudice song *Short People*, which is not in my list (yet), is to me the best example (though I have to admit to being prejudiced against short men, so I'm not the best judge).

It's difficult to mistake the irony of *I Think It's Going To Rain Today*. It doesn't seem to describe a single experience, but to provide a series of vivid snapshots each representing some aspect of man's incapacity to show humanity to man. What I find strange is that the song on the face of it ought to make me feel bitter and angry (the way Dylan's *Hurricane* does). Instead I come away feeling uplifted by Newman's own humanity and the rightness of the sentiment.

This is obviously in the music as well as the lyric, but I'm not clever enough to see how the effect is created. Anyway, a pretty brilliant composition, almost perfectly performed, which definitely satisfies my criteria for "songs of humanity".

Nick's comment on Mel's 41. *I Think It's Going To Rain Today*

Well, I'd never till now realised that Nina Simone was like a bus – you wait for ages and then two come along together. But it's a very impressive bus. And Randy Newman is all the things you say (he'll certainly be in my list somewhere), only I don't find him too raw. Maybe it's a rare positive manifestation of my insensitivity that I can handle the rawness, just as some people at rock concerts stand next to the stack while I cower at the back while my ears bleed in protest at the sound level.

To me, Newman's version of this song suffers from a different characteristic: it is so slow that it doesn't have the momentum it needs (and the strings are ... here I go again). These thoughts triggered me looking at lots of the versions on YouTube – Dusty Springfield for once disappointing, Peter Gabriel rather good, Judy Collins nowhere. I couldn't bring myself to listen to Neil Diamond. This version's the best of the bunch, but still leaves me with a strange quest-for-the-holy-grail sense that there should be one even better (I have the same problem in trumps with *Nature Boy* – a song in search of a performance). Be that as it may, this is really powerful stuff, a superb performance of an extraordinary song.

Pete's comment on Mel's 41. *I Think It's Going To Rain Today*

The YouTube link that you provided for this didn't work when I tried it. There was a message saying that it had been blocked by the copyright owner. Sadly, I couldn't find any other version by Nina Simone, so I listened to two different versions by Randy Newman instead.

Interestingly, both were extremely heavy on string arrangements, which in both cases I found striking and effective. Although you're right of course in emphasising the irony in Newman's lyrics, I thought this particular song came over as unexpectedly heartfelt in both the versions I listened to. It's a surprising song in the sense that it seems to say so much even though it says comparatively little. And in what there is, I see almost as much resignation as irony. Either way, I agree that the ultimate effect is uplifting – which is by no means the usual effect of his songs, even when they're admirable on other grounds. An interesting and striking choice.

Preamble: *I doubt there will be any UK punk music in my 100. But that's mainly because the punk bands I admire went on to do even greater things. Of course in 1978 I loathed it all, as any privileged 30-year-old was expected to by the 17-year-old proponents. Later I came to appreciate punk as one of the few genuine musical revolutions of the past 60 years.*

The Sex Pistols had the effrontery to choose a name that meant "penis", only to get it emblazoned on front pages unrelentingly for several months. Sex Pistols 1, Establishment 0. They were more a social than a musical phenomenon, and if it wasn't for the documentary industry we'd probably never hear the glorious God Save The Queen any more.

Punk existed well before the celebrated TV "fuck"s made us aware. Then it seemed to be gone again in a flash as the music industry quickly milked and emasculated the challenge. But it's amazing to discover just how many chart hits groups such as The Clash, The Jam, Squeeze and The Stranglers clocked up as their raw anti-establishment rants became gradually more subtle and musically sophisticated.

The quality of so much of what emerged through this evolution is also remarkable. Here are a few of the brilliant songs which could have made my 100 but probably won't simply because there's no room: Should I Stay Or Should I Go, Rock The Casbah (Clash), That's Entertainment, News of the World, Going Underground, Town Called Malice (Jam), No More Heroes, Walk On By – an inspired version of the Bacharach-David song (Stranglers).

So to show they were not all three-chord wonders, this selection represents what seems to me the among very best pop music by artists who started out attracting our opprobrium as punks. You won't be surprised from me at the preponderance of thoughtful lyrics to go with the musicianship.

42. Up The Junction, Squeeze (1979)

Composers: Chris Difford, Glenn Tilbrook

One of the few records in my 100 which I don't actually own. But what a joy I've been missing.

The song retains the social commentary and directness of punk. But it transforms it into a respectful yet regretful slice of London life – a young couple who almost but not quite overcome their lack of financial and family prospects.

The lyrics are familiar, loving, witty, satirical, full of trivial domestic detail and surprisingly overlaid with snippets of characterisation for both of the lead characters. We know that this fiction is more emblematic than real. Yet I still find it oddly moving, probably because the couple make a real effort to build their doomed family after its inauspicious start.

You've got to be clever to write a successful pop song without a chorus. This one makes it with its absorbing narrative and a relentless musical drive which defies any such distraction. A chorus would have ruined it. The bit which I rightly or wrongly call the "middle eight" also keeps the story bowling along, propelling it with a new burst of energy. This is one of that small group of inspired songs which tell a story and hold our attention right up to the end (cf *Ode To Billie Joe* and *Hurricane* to mention two others from our selections).

Even more striking is the insistent verse structure – the lyric consists entirely, I think, of couplets which end in half rhymes. I don't think even Dylan's verse play can rival this consistency.

I don't find the tune especially distinguished and I don't need to. I'm following the story. But the intro and outro music are bold and uplifting, as if they are celebrating something. Which, with irony, they are. This is very well crafted and absorbing songwriting – not really what we expect in the charts or from a punk band.

I like the YouTube video for this too – nonchalantly filmed in a kitchen with a couple of girls making coffee for the band, which of course includes a ridiculously young looking Jools Holland. Like the song, it's an affected throwaway, which of course it really isn't.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RQciegmLPAo>

Pete's comment on Mel's 42. *Up The Junction*

As I indicated briefly when I saw that you'd chosen this song, I was delighted to have been given leave to enjoy something that I'd previously thought mawkish, and liked only with a sense of guilt. It now gives me nothing but unalloyed pleasure. It's wonderful!

You've said almost everything that I could say about it, and eloquently too. The odd rhyming convention always intrigued me, and that repetition of the same melodic sequence was mesmerising. I would only take issue with you on the comment that the tune isn't especially distinguished. Perhaps not, but it's somehow irresistible, and it takes a special kind of magic to come up with something like that.

The "developmental" section, when it finally comes, simply helps convey the fact that the story has moved on. And incidentally, when the main tune resumes, it rather cheekily throws in some new harmonisation on some of the main chords – a further clue that things have changed. And I completely agree with you about the uplifting intro and outro.

I now think this piece is truly a gem, and your selection of it represents one of those moments that have thoroughly vindicated this entire process. Thank you!

Nick's comment on Mel's 42. *Up The Junction*

Squeeze seemed even at the time to be a cut above most of the groups of the time. I remember liking *Cool For Cats* when it came out as well as *Up The Junction*. I've never heard enough of them to know how deep their quality goes.

Glenn Tilbrook and Chris Difford were doing the rounds of the more modest venues a few years ago (and probably still are), but somehow we never coincided with them. They released a single not long ago, but it sounded rather unexcitingly like a retread of *Pulling Mussels From The Shell*, which didn't strike me as being as good as many of their early songs at the time. But this is a good piece of work for the reasons you give.

There seems to me to be an interesting contrast with Madness – there is something arch about Madness's view of supposed urban reality, and this has no glamour. I think that may be part of the point about the lack of melody or conventional structure: it sounds ordinary, the sort of music that a band might play in the kitchen (well, not really, but ...).

Odd seeing Jules (Holland) in the video looking like a callow trainee for the part of the mature Jules. And heart-warming to see that the role of women is to provide the hunter-gatherers with caffeine.

43. *Always The Sun*, The Stranglers (1986)

Composers: Hugh Cornwell, Jean Jacques Burnel, Dave Greenfield, Jet Black (ie The Stranglers)

What a marvellously tuneful song. A tuneful punk band? Surely there's a mistake. Nope, it's the same bunch that had rather good punk hits with *Something Better Change* and *No More Heroes* eight years earlier.

On the face of it *Always The Sun* is a well-produced, pleasingly melodic run-of-the-mill pop song. It was only a minor hit single, and I'd be hard-pushed if you asked me what's so special about it. You probably prefer *Golden Brown*, unless you're offended by suggestions of its racial stereotyping. But I've always found lyrics of this song far more challenging and intriguing.

The verses are a catalogue of life's unfairnesses, and it's no bad thing to highlight how people are kept in their place by society's inequity. But is the chorus "There's always the sun" really a cheerful reminder that things aren't so bad, as the video implies? Or is it just ironic? I think this interpretation fits the rebellious spirit of the band rather better. In which case the song takes on a rather tougher edge. It's been suggested that the title also refers to the newspaper, which kind of twists the knife.

Whatever; it's a thoughtful, driving, musical song with some lovely harmonies and some very pleasing guitar work, and I never tire of hearing it.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Um9kd-mhhK4>

Nick's comment on Mel's 43. *Always The Sun*

The Stranglers were never my favourite at the time, but I could see the appeal of their insistent heavy duty cod-aggressive brand of punkish rock. So I always liked *No More Heroes* much more than *Golden Brown* (not the highest accolade I have ever awarded, in all honesty).

I don't remember hearing this, which probably says something about my inattention at the time. So coming to it to all intents and purposes fresh – or as fresh as a 68 year old curmudgeon can – what do I say? I enjoyed it. I take it that the lyric is, as you suggest, intended to be ironical, whether it refers to the bigotry-peddling rag or not. I doubt that I will rush back to it, but I will happily listen to it when and if our paths cross.

Pete's comment on Mel's 43. *Always The Sun*

I have less to say about this. Yes, it's likeably tuneful, and a contradiction when you realise it's coming from a punk band. But then, punk had been and gone by this stage anyway. It is indeed well produced, and is anything but punk in terms of its rich arrangement and full sound. I can see why you would find it uplifting. I do think *Golden Brown* is more memorable, but that doesn't detract from the brio of this piece.

44. *Start!*, The Jam (1980)

Composer: Paul Weller

There are so many fantastic Jam tracks, but this is the only one I heard on its first release – and it struck me like a thunderbolt.

The fact that there are only three band members helps to account for the raw, pared down sound. Paul Weller's willingness to steal from other songs explains its Beatles-like familiarity. (After George Harrison's experience with *My Sweet Lord* we might have expected him to be more litigious in defence of *Taxman*.)

My take on the song is that it's about a fleeting, consensual but almost brutal sexual encounter, and the act itself becomes a desperate image for our need for human contact and communication.

That's what the direct, uncompromising lyric, the piercing staccato *Taxman* chords and throbbing bass say to me. I may just have a dirty mind, but as such it's another one of those

magnificent songs whose words, music and performance are perfectly synchronized to convey the message. (Weller's says the song was inspired by Orwell and is about equality. But what does he know?)

It's not punk music. But the tone and message of punk have become an element in a more complete artistic creation. Jam's best.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fdSqP6gfDU>

Pete's comment on Mel's 44. Start!

Way hey! Thank you for making me play this again. I haven't listened to it so attentively for years. I'd always been struck by the debt it owed to Harrison's *Taxman*, but I don't think I'd taken the trouble to appreciate just how far that debt went. *Taxman* is there all the way through it; the references are quite unrepentant. Yet this isn't a lift, it's a new song. Harrison couldn't have sued Paul Weller because the tune and the harmonies aren't the same – it's just the arrangement and feel that make the connection. Seemingly those things can't be copyrighted.

Your take on the meaning is interesting. Why not? Or it could be exactly as Paul Weller says. In a way it doesn't matter. To me, the importance of this song at the time was the fact that it proclaimed that punk had moved forward to another place. Not only did this piece restate and validate the musical continuum that included the Beatles in it; it was also making a larger point about the fact that music is usually more satisfying when it's tuneful and meticulous.

Doubtless you could point to examples of pure punk that also had those attributes, but they were often disguised. This record said explicitly that it was legitimate for the new wave to offer music that was careful, considered and just plain *nice* – and was unapologetically musical in the traditional sense, as well as being challenging and full of impact.

Incidentally, I felt disappointed in the day that Paul Weller's bid to restore the sounds of the Sixties to the musical mainstream didn't actually work. Instead, we had the New Romantics, who admittedly produced some gems, but who (to me anyway) kept the gutsy sound of The Jam and their like at bay for years.

Agreed – Jam's best.

Nick's comment on Mel's 44. Start!

The Jam were quite clearly a cut above the other punk bands at the time, and this still seems to be the case nearly 40 years on (good grief). You're quite right about the Beatles-inflected sound, aided I think by the use of a Rickenbacker guitar. The first time I ever saw one was around Lennon or Harrison's neck, I think, and they have a very ballsy sound compared to the relative mellowness of Stratocasters as favoured by the Shadows. Much more in keeping with the toughness of the lyrics.

Incidentally, Bruce Foxton is playing what looks (in the video) like a Gibson semi-acoustic bass, which is another throwback to the mod era (the real mod era, that is, not the one that allows Weller to be termed the Modfather, when he is clearly chronologically the Modson).

I clearly share your dirty mind, but I think the "human contact and communication" is pretty minimal and bleak. It seems to me to be rather in the territory of an article I read probably 15 if not 20 years ago about a drink-all-you-want-for-£10 night club in Rotherham, where a young woman said she liked to go and get pissed because at least that way she knew she'd get a shag.

45. *Changing Man*, Paul Weller (1995)

Composer: Paul Weller

It's fitting that my demonstration of how punk musicians can transmogrify into something rich and strange is my favourite Paul Weller track *The Changing Man* which is about ... well just this really.

This track, 20 years after Jam started, still has energy and edginess like the punk band. But railing against society has been replaced by an intelligently introspective lyric which seems to explore the uncomfortable territory between confidence and self doubt.

Weller's voice if anything is better than ever, and the production, apart from the extraneous electronic whistles, is tight and hard-hitting. He brought out a couple of great albums around this time characterised by thoughtful and sensitive and dare I say "soulful" self-written songs. (He may have done good stuff too with his post-Jam group Style Council, but I have doubts. Anyway, you wouldn't have caught me listening to a band with a trendy name like that in the 80s.)

I don't rate Paul Weller highly for his originality. He is an inveterate borrower who seems able to incorporate his sources into his songs to make something distinctively his own. We know that this sounds like a lot of sixties tracks, including late Beatles. But I still get a kick from the guitar solo. And when you can't get new Beatles compositions, I'm happy with efforts from the Rutles, Oasis and Paul Weller.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WJqgPy5r9dE>

Nick's comment on Mel's 45, *Changing Man*

I struggle a bit with Paul Weller for reasons I don't understand. I can see entirely that your comments are justified, half of my immediate family are enthusiasts, and yet I've never got there myself. We went to see him 3 years or so ago, and I still couldn't get it, though that was to a considerable extent because it was so loud that I was struggling to hear what any of the songs were, let alone hear what they were doing musically. Still less what the words were. Margaret, one of the enthusiasts, agreed about the excessive volume, so that at least wasn't just prejudice – maybe.

He seems to have moved on from a Rick to a Gibson ES335 or the like, this being the weapon of choice of many of the blues greats. The song seems to me to be a decent enough piece of work, and I have enjoyed listening to it more intensively than I have before, but I'm afraid that neither he nor this song is likely to enter my pantheon.

Pete's comment on Mel's 45, *Changing Man*

Again, this is an instance when all I can say is I agree with everything you say. If we couldn't have the Beatles, why not have this? It's a punchy, musically articulate blast of good things. I hadn't heard it for years, and didn't even remember it very well, so I'm delighted to have it brought back to my consciousness.

PS I've just sneaked a look at Nick's comments, and have to echo his sentiment that for many years I never entirely "got" Paul Weller or The Jam, despite what I've said above. However, this song seems to contain ample evidence of what there is/was to "get".

I still don't know how to handle the inclusion of my favourite Beatles tracks in the 100 without creating an entire "Beatles compilation tape". But here's one trick to help get round the problem – three impressive solo acts from the 1970s.

46. *Stand By Me*, John Lennon, 1975

Composers: Ben E King, Jerry Leiber, Mike Stoller

If you Google "Lennon, Old Grey Whistle Test" this is what you get – as far as I can see, the best thing the programme ever broadcast. A "live" recording, recorded in a New York studio and shipped to the UK because Lennon was such a threat to Western civilisation at the time that he couldn't leave the States.

Early post-Beatles tracks might have suggested that the old rock 'n' roller just wanted to wail and scream on tape, or at least expose his soul in visceral songs like *Mother*. With *Stand By Me* he brilliantly brings two musical strands together: glorious early sixties R&B and a vocal treatment torn by pain and desperation.

I won't apologise for choosing this version rather than the supreme Ben E King original. The reason is in the performance which was captured by *Whistle Test*. On the album "Rock 'n' Roll" the *Stand By Me* track has the same arrangement, but it's a little more restrained. On *Whistle Test* Lennon's guts are all over the studio floor. Watching the tape on its first broadcast was one of the most unforgettable moments in my TV-viewing experience. The singing is shrill, pleading, insistent, and a not an entirely appealing sound. I still find it heart-wrenching.

There's plenty to agonise about. John had just come down from a destructive two-year bender with Harry Nilsson. Young Julian back in England was feeling abandoned by his dad (John was long dead before Julian could be reconciled with Yoko, but I like to think that, despite John's habitual cruelty to those he loved, he really is missing Julian when he says "hello" on the tape). And John was trying to repair his relationship with Yoko after a lengthy affair with May Pang.

Don't be distracted by the cynical rock-star face at the microphone, or the jokey "hi" to the folks back home or the badly edited video. *Stand By Me* isn't just a song. It's the literal, direct, real life appeal of a drowning man to his estranged wife – captured on film and tape. This is "*Help, Part 2*". Extraordinary.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=H32-BFSJOYc>

Nick's comment on Mel's 46. *Stand By Me*

The great meets the great. I think it's virtually impossible to hear it without having Ben E King's original sloshing round in one's head, and the sloshing is compounded of course by knowing as much as we do about Lennon during and post-Beatles. Of course it's terrific as an example of an archetypal pop (I'd say soul, but I would, wouldn't I?) song and of one of the great rock voices.

So if it goes without saying that I find this moving and powerful, what can I usefully add? Well, maybe a couple of things. First, there's always the danger that biographical detail of the sort you provide, Mel, pollutes one's judgement of the merits of a song or performance. So if we didn't know what we know, would this feel like the work of a drowning man rather than a smartarse? By definition I can't answer that, but I think so – Lennon has always had the capacity to sing in a way that catches a sense of vulnerability and loss, and I think that comes through powerfully here.

The second thing that struck me is the strange way this is recorded – we see bits of the supporting instrumentalists, but not enough to identify them or even be sure how many there are. In one sense that doesn't matter, because it's understated with good reason. I can't remember a recording which gave such prominence to the rhythm guitar, but then Lennon was a very good rhythm guitarist (as he said of himself in the Rolling Stone interviews). But there's something very rum in focusing so strongly not just on the singer but on his face, especially when the windows to his soul are obscured by dark glasses.

Be that as it may, it's terrific. I didn't know it, thanks for adding the experience. I think in the last analysis I'd stick to Ben E King, but happily outside the world of 100 greatest we can have our cake and eat it.

Pete's comment on Mel's 46. *Stand By Me*

I'd never heard this version by Lennon, let alone seen the video of it. Your description of it and of your reasons for choosing it are priceless. I couldn't add anything. I agree that the original Ben E King version is superb, but this performance brings different things out of it. It's a "hard listen", though it's mitigated by the apparent levity in the presentation. I don't think I could have something like this in my own top hundred, for the same reason that I wouldn't include Nick's Jacques Brel number (probably too much naked angst!), but I can certainly feel impressed by it, and pleased that you've alerted me to it.

47. *Maybe I'm Amazed*, Paul McCartney, 1970

Composer: Paul McCartney

I've not been someone who hides his anti-McCartney prejudice. Paul McCartney's worst crime perhaps is no more than not being John Lennon. His second worst is that he seems to think he is. Someone so without depth that you want to tip him upside-down and shake him till something remotely interesting drops out of his mouth.

That said, he was a great songwriter in his time, and for a long time was a pretty good live pop performer. *Maybe I'm Amazed* is McCartney's best post-Beatles song, and arguably one of his all-time best.

The album original feels a little stilted, no doubt because of the constraints imposed by McCartney rather cleverly playing all the instruments himself. This means that you get a whole series of McCartney solos which are enjoyable for their simple musicality rather than their virtuosity. There are a couple of nice guitar breaks, the rising piano notes sound great, and the mechanical-sounding clucking of the accompanying guitar adds to the interest.

The track has pace, and builds repeatedly to exciting crescendos. But it's the lyric which really carries it off. For once he sounds as if he really means what he's singing: he does too – it's a thankyou for Linda's support during the Beatles break up. The title *Maybe I'm Amazed* itself is a wonderful lyrical invention. It has a neat alliterative power and conveys the meaning perfectly. You get the sense that once that was in place the rest of the song was going to write itself provided he kept up the sincerity.

One somewhat dismal reflection on this is that McCartney wrote and recorded it while he was still a Beatle. It sounds like a Beatles song. It very nearly is a Beatles song. And afterwards he never wrote anything better. Downhill all the way? Not quite. But McCartney has lived in his own shadow ever since and the shadow has increasingly tended to occlude the cheery but rather uninteresting performer who has gone on regardless for more than 40 more years.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=c_zBdoSGZGk

Pete's comment on Mel's 47. *Maybe I'm Amazed*

I bought the McCartney album on which *Maybe I'm Amazed* first appeared, and perhaps for that reason I've always had mixed feelings about it. I knew even at the time that this song stood head and shoulders above anything else on the album, but my response was probably still coloured by the awareness that the album as a whole failed to come anywhere near the tightness and precision of the Beatles' output.

Basically, McCartney was flexing his muscles – doing as he liked while there was no one around (i.e. no other Beatles and no George Martin) to tell him to do any different. Playing all the instruments was bound to expose weaknesses; and even where it didn't, the outcome lacked the spark that usually comes when a bunch of musicians work together.

So your piano-and-chorus-only version was a revelation in itself, and reminded me what an extraordinary song it is. McCartney succeeds in conveying a strange kind of desperation, even though paradoxically he is celebrating a positive relationship. Heady stuff.

All that you say about it applies. Yet curiously, after listening to it I felt an urge to go back to a fully orchestrated version, so I listened again to the original recording from the album. And I have to say I really enjoyed that too. The continuity is better, and in my opinion the bass, guitars and even simple percussion actually do contribute something worthwhile to the whole. And remarkably, in both versions McCartney achieves that same vocal desperation.

Spine-tingling.

Nick's comment on Mel's 47. *Maybe I'm Amazed*

Here's another way in which my mind has been polluted over the years. I suppose even before the terminal rifts I saw myself as of the Lennon camp rather than the McCartney one, and that was compounded by the Rolling Stone interviews. So I have found it easier to stack up his crimes against humanity, like *Mull of Kintyre* or *The Frog Chorus*, or his attempt to relabel songs as by McCartney and Lennon, than I have found it to recognise his worth and significance.

I don't think he ever had a particularly distinctive voice (he consistently sounds over-strained on the Beatles' early rockers) and what's left of his voice now acts as a parodic reminder of that. But ... I am also conscious that this is an excessively one-eyed view, something I'll attempt to rectify when I pluck up the courage to tackle the Beatles in this process.

I entirely agree with your comments about this song, but I can feel my heels trying to dig themselves in. Why (apart from the admitted prejudice)? Well, the over-straining on unnecessary top notes (e.g. about a minute in) is here. To me they're matched by the over-strident blue notes from the piano about 54 seconds in. I'll keep trying to be gooder in future. I'm glad I've sat and listened to this properly. But he is bloody irritating all the same, isn't he?

Mel's late reply to Nick, and a partial redemption for Paul McCartney, September 2022: I didn't realise that Nick and I had been so closely allied on our views of John Lennon's lesser song-writing partner. It was good to hear. But hear comes a qualification.

For 50 years my repudiation of McCartney has been consistent and intractable for reasons vociferously outlined above. Then I caught a comment which took me by surprise in one of the generally dire eightieth birthday celebration films this year. It seemed to offer a sound reason for recognising his stature as a great lyricist. (We all know he could on occasion bang out a good tune.)

It runs thus, with my interpolations: McCartney commonly wrote very simple lyrics which, because they are so lacking in any depth or *specific* meaning, are sometimes able to achieve a curious universality. The comment I heard was referring to the extraordinary telling opening lines of *Saw Her Standing There* – "She was just seventeen. You know what I mean". Yes, what a chauvinist giveaway.

The apparently trivial *Silly Love Songs* was also quoted, so I listened to it again and found that this might actually be the case. Then I reflected on one of my all-time Beatles favourites, *Hello Goodbye*, which for me is burning with meaning precisely because it's so universal. This probably also explains why so many people like the vacuous *The Long And Winding Road*, though I don't.

The excuse doesn't always apply, as *Maxwell's Silver Hammer* painfully attests. So I won't eat half a century of dismissive words. But I will chew on them a little. Pity Nick's no longer around to discuss the point.

48. *Run Of The Mill*, George Harrison, 1970

Composer: George Harrison

It wasn't easy choosing a post-Beatles track by George Harrison. Not because his work wasn't good enough, but because "All Things Must Pass" contains so much superb music.

My Sweet Lord is good but too overtly religious and worn rather thin by now. *What is Life?* is a highly enjoyable driving, restless song. *If Not For You* is a sweet love song with tremendous tune (credited to Harrison and Dylan on "All Things Must Pass", but mysteriously only to Dylan on his own version of the song).

I went to some trouble to have the organist acquire the sheet music to *Isn't It A Pity* so he could play as an antidote to hymns at my wedding. The lyric about the way we cause one another pain is laudable, but the opportunity also to say "isn't it a pity I have to get married" was hard to resist! Sadly, although the sentiment and tune are great, the plodding pace of the song make it a bit of a dirge and not Top 100 material.

I've always loved *Run of the Mill* for its sparkling guitar intro, lovely flowing melody, and uplifting middle eight, but used to feel it was a bit lightweight. One problem up to now has been that I've consistently heard the opening line as "Everyone has Joyce" (some woman notorious for her loose morals presumably?).

But I settled on it today as my pick from the album as a result of some intensive listening and a little background reading. It is apparently regarded as a love song to the Beatles on their break up. It's actually quite a wise song about standing aside from a crazy irresolvable argument: "Everyone has choice when to and not to raise their voices."

The lyric is typically thoughtful, but enlivened by intriguing word play and compelling half rhymes such as "As the days stand up on end/ You've got me wondering how I lost your friendship," and, "Only you'll arrive/ At your own made end/ With no one but yourself to be offended." It's very good. Even better than I once thought.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KpHLM11CYCo>

Pete's comment on Mel's 48. *Run Of The Mill*

Ah. I was thinking of choosing this song for my own top hundred! (I'm still not sure what the rules are about duplication ...) I've always thought it absolutely superb – lyrically, musically and in terms of production. It's an example of what made George Harrison such a brilliant composer.

Believe it or not, it has always made me think of you! I suppose it must be because you pointed out to me (in Luton, I imagine) why you thought it was such a superb song. I never forgot that because I entirely agreed with you. I didn't know until now about the Beatles reference, though I've always taken it to have a very wide range of possible meanings. I still think it works just as well as a love song – or rather, as a somewhat bleak comment on a collapsing relationship. And yes, very clever word play in the lyric – which, however, doesn't suffer from any sense of being a *jeu d'esprit*; it still comes over to me as a piece of sincere comment.

Something you yourself pointed out to me 45 years ago (no, I don't remember all our conversations, honest guv) was the way the song itself runs on in an unusual and inexorable way. There's no pause between verses or between verse and middle section, just a continuous "run of the mill" – which, however, finally winds down to a very definite and satisfying musical resolution.

For the above reasons, for me the song will always be partly wrapped up in strange and blurred memories of my life in the early 1970s. Yet I've also brought it (and the whole album)

forward into my present life. Helen will tell you it's one of her favourite albums, which is pretty remarkable, given that I only introduced her to it a few years ago. It's certainly one of mine, and it's still often played.

I dig love ...

Nick's comment on Mel's 48. *Run Of The Mill*

I suppose George had the virtue of being a relatively non-partisan Beatle, and he can't be blamed for being Margaret's favourite Beatle. And I think "All Things Must Pass" is excellent, as is a lot of his work. Brian Matthew played a lot (all?) of the BBC's Beatles recording a few years back, and George was featured on a seriously good version of one of Buddy Holly's songs – *Words Of Love* or one in that style. And his contribution to the Travelling Wilburys is terrific. So I've always had him down as one of the good guys throughout his career, but have never paid songs like this as much attention as I should, mainly because of the reactions you describe, Mel, that the ones that get most attention have a way of palling.

This is a good song, as you say. Only a couple of things to add, really. First, having described him as "relatively non-partisan", if it is indeed about the Beatles' break-up, which seems probable, then it is pretty scathing about Paul McCartney. The second think is that the band sounds terrific. Exactly who plays what seems frustratingly opaque, but it sounds great.

Three hit records from the States with interesting interconnections

49. Love you More Than I Can Say, Bobby Vee, 1961

Composers: Sonny Curtis, Jerry Allison

You can pick almost any singer from the US called Bobby, Ricky or Johnny in the period from 1959 to 1963 and their records will sound quite like this. Classic music of our youth or insipid mass produced crap? The sound is too important to ignore all of it though.

There are some particular reasons for choosing this UK hit by Bobby Vee, even if it is not quite as redolent as some other classic teen love songs by Jonny Tillotson, Ricky Nelson, Johnny Burnett, Bobby Darren, to name a few of the likely-to-be-discarded possibilities for my 100.

When I was craving for any pre-recorded pop music to play on my reel to reel tape deck a Bobby Vee album was almost all I could find. *Run To Him* and *Take Good Care Of My Baby* still make me prick up my ears and sing along. Then there's the connection with Buddy Holly and the Hollywood cliché of the performer who can't make it on stage tonight (in this case because he's unfortunately been killed in a plane crash) so the stand-in becomes an overnight success. It ought not to be true, but intriguingly it nearly is. A small anorak detail which also helps to make Bobby Vee stand out for me is the name of a guitarist playing with him on a few early gigs, a certain Robert Zimmerman (unimportant except for the endless connectedness it illustrates).

And yes this record has immaculate credentials – song-writing by the Crickets and production by Holly's own producer Norman Petty, proving it's probably who rather than what you know.

Most importantly for me though, this song has a really has a lovely lilting melody which I have never tired of. Tune not lyric. There, I said it! (Leo Sayer also had a big hit with it nearly 20 years later as the internet endlessly and distractingly insists, so it clearly has longevity). If you can forget the ubiquitous strings, the somewhat understated arrangement and performance are pretty good too. A soft electric piano stands in for the more usual guitars in the instrumental solo, and Vee's double tracked vocal works wonderfully.

This is a teeny pop for simpler more innocent times – when you could get away with incorporating a backing group's "woh oh oh yeah yeah" chant in the main lyric, and still have a song which communicates hope and longing to a narcissistic teenager!

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qGJiMKUK3Kk>

Pete's comment on Mel's 49. Love You More Than I Can Say

I might as well admit that I was a sucker for this kind of song. I liked several other Bobby Vee songs, and also enjoyed the classics by people like Bobby Darin, Ricky Nelson, Bobby Rydell, Frankie Avalon and Neil Sedaka. (I didn't like them all to the same extent, but some of these, I might as well warn you, will be appearing in my own list.)

Music like this, as you more or less say yourself, was a kind of "last gasp" of the benignly tuneful school of fifties pop, often overlayed by professional arrangers with extravagantly whimsical musical arrangements (notably strings, but here also piano). Yes, such songs often delivered a pre-packaged "Brill" version of teenage yearning and angst – but they still managed to make these things sound important, and sometimes they hit real nerves.

And the songs themselves, especially those by Carole King and Gerry Goffin, were often underrated marvels of their kind. I realise this one was not written by them, but it could have

been. And it has that Bobby Vee trademark of selected bars sung in two-part harmony. Songs like this may have been formulaic, and may often have been created on a production line, but in my book some of them were little works of genius.

As we moved into the sixties and the Mersey Sound eclipsed this kind of thing, I was ambivalent. I loved the new sound, and the fact that the people making it were using their own instruments, and often writing about things that were important to *them*. I was all too ready to be the modern intellectual, scorning those factory hits of the late fifties and early sixties. Yet at the same time I still hankered after the old Bobby Vees and Neil Sedakas! Their music had acquired a sort of instant nostalgia value, harking back to the simpler world of an already lost childhood that I realised I couldn't regain. So I'm pleased that I'm now old enough to own up to liking the best them for their own sake.

And this one is a worthy representative choice.

Nick's comment on Mel's 49. *Love You More Than I Can Say*

I immediately recalled this when I saw the list, but hadn't given it a thought, let alone consciously heard it, for goodness knows how long. *Take Good Care Of My Baby* and *The Night Has A Thousand Eyes* seem to be the choices on the occasions when Bobby Vee is allowed out to play. I had never greatly registered the Crickets association (beyond the tale of Vee's stepping into the breach when Buddy Holly died), and, as you know, agree totally about Holly. Jerry Allison is, in my view, one of *the* drummers – as a session man he also recorded as J. J. Allison – dunno if that expands his discography significantly, but there you are.

This song is pretty typical of the better stuff of our pubescence, I guess. The emotions seem appropriately confused – pledges of absolute devotion to a girl to whom he may be “just another guy”. Be that as it may, I warm to it. I suppose there's a bit of a contradiction in this. If – if – we accept the narrative that pop/rock had become effete, over-commercialised and conformist before the Mersey sound grabbed it by the scruff of the neck and thrust some energy back into it, then we should abhor this song and its ilk. But the narrative is of course glib and one-eyed.

When we went to New York last year, I even took a photo of the entrance to the Brill Building for no reason of visual merit, but because it stood for things which according to that narrative I should abhor. Only I don't. Like most phenomena in pop, it produced a lot of crap (including, according to him, Roger McGuinn's *Going To A Beach Ball*, a cod-surfin' song which became a no. 4 hit in Australia for a then unknown band called the Bee Gees) and some gems, the Goffin and King output providing an impressive proportion of the obvious examples.

I enjoyed listening to this again. It's hard, and maybe unnecessary, to avoid hearing this particular song as post- and sub-Holly material. I don't know that for me it does a huge amount more than that. But it still feels ... well, nice. On repeated listening I found myself wondering where they found a monodexter pianist session musician, but if my ears don't deceive me a left hand is allowed in briefly at the end of the song, so there is no evidence of amputation after all.

50. *Don't Ever Change*, The Crickets (1962)

Composers: Gerry Goffin and Carole King

(Well just look who wrote this song!)

Buddy Holly was as close as you get to a genius in pop music – writer, singer musician, production innovator. But he might not have gone so far without the Crickets to back him and write with him in his early days. As I hope I've just shown, Crickets guitarist Sonny Curtis was a fair songwriter in his own right and the group together had a tight vocal style that serves them well on this hit without Holly.

I was taken by the arrangement, the tight harmonies, and especially the lyrics of this track from the moment I first heard it – and it is simple enough to absorb in a single hearing. The sentiment is one I still heartily endorse – it's not the makeup that counts, it's the make up of the girl. Of course when I was 15 I was sure that the only type of girl I was

ever going to get was one who didn't doll herself up, so there was an element of self-interest in my original appreciation.

I used to be intrigued by the prominence and intricacy of the drumming on the record, and I was about to write that I suspect that Jerry Allison was a pretty proficient percussionist. A quick check now to confirm my instincts reveals that he was also a top session drummer behind a host of stars including Eddie Cochran and Paul McCartney.

Funny how you pick up on quality without being aware of what or how. This is a fine pop record with more to it than a catchy Carole King tune and a shrewd Gerry Goffin lyric.

And just to bang the point home, it's interesting to compare this with the Beatles' brilliant harmonies (though admittedly turgid musicianship) on their BBC recording of the song. To me the song's a neglected minor classic.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yFRirLor8n8>

Pete's comment on Mel's 50. *Don't Ever Change*

I'd be tempted to include this one in my own top 100. Right from the time I first heard it, I was amazed at what a convincing job the Crickets had made of relaunching themselves *sans* Buddy Holly.

The song of course has impeccable writing credentials, but on top of that, the voices are so strong and confident. They don't seem like retiring background singers accustomed to giving someone else the lead; they sound as if they've been doing this kind of thing all their lives. It was only a pity for them that they had led with their strongest suit, and never really achieved the heights of this song again.

You've neatly brought out many of the strengths of the song, but arguably its greatness comes down the indefinable magic that marks out skill from mediocrity – the harmonies, the piano, the chromatic chord sequences – the entire package. I agree with you, it's a fine pop record, and in fact a classic of its kind. I've sometimes felt that if the artiste had had a bigger name than the Crickets (yes, they were well known, but at the end of the day they seen as a backing group) it might have become recognised more quickly and widely for what it is (in my book, anyway).

Oh, and yes, I like the sentiment behind it too.

Nick's comment on Mel's 50. *Don't Ever Change*

We're still in the territory of post/sub-Holly material. I remember this song quite fondly, for reasons for which I have no explanation (another of the many inexplicable joys of music). I hadn't realised it was a Goffin and King song, but can't see it as one of their finest (even at the time I thought that the notion that jeans were inappropriate on the Lord's day was ever so slightly prissy). I think it's the sort of song that I find myself liking despite rather than because of qualities that I can identify.

I too listened to the Beatles' version. Interesting – an edgier sound (maybe partly a matter of recording, but not only). But I found myself missing the piano part, which George is sort-of doing on the guitar. Going back to the Crickets after the Beatles made me more aware of how dependent the backing is on the tight drumming of Jerry Allison and the rather jaunty piano of ... someone else.

Being a prat, I thought I'd go off in pursuit of the pianist. Briefly more interesting than one might suppose. A website – http://www.rockin50s.com/crickets_recordings/INDEX.htm – purports to record Jerry Allison's recollection of the personnel in what was, one infers, a rather flexible group. That gives the names as Jerry Naylor with Cliff Crawford and Glen Campbell (complete, one hopes, with rhinestones) singing harmony; "guitar – [Tommy] Allsup; drums – [Jerry] Allison; piano – Ernie Freeman". But then another website says the piano is Glen D Hardin, so who knows (or cares that much)? The harmonies are of course the thing, whether it's the Beatles or the Crickets.

51. *Maybe Baby*, Buddy Holly and the Crickets (1957)

Composers: Buddy Holly, Norman Petty

1957? Just one year after *Heartbreak Hotel*. What were they thinking about? It's as if pop music was born fully formed almost before anyone knew how to record it.

It was really tough choosing one classic Holly track which would say it all, especially as you'd already bagged *Peggy Sue*, Nick. As it happens the songs I have come to enjoy hearing most are the ones Holly's ghost recorded after his death, *Reminiscing* (1962) and *Brown Eyed Handsome Man* (1963). That's because an older cousin had already thoroughly steeped me in his brilliance, and the latter-day singles seemed somehow fresher.

But I knew I would have to go back to the early originals for my 100 and when I heard this on the radio recently it occurred to me that *Maybe Baby* is possibly his most extraordinary triumph. I can't think of anything from the time which was remotely similar. It's not rock 'n' roll and it's definitely no sloppy love ballad.

Only a year after Buddy Holly's recording career started this subtle, assured and accomplished record bursts into life with what sounds to my untutored ears like a sophisticated musical arrangement which leaves records by other 1950s rockers in the shade. It features the definitive format of a "beat combo" and familiar backing vocals. But the full and intricate backing, the steady pounding beat punctuated by the dexterous lyrical alliteration, and the moody downbeat tune are years ahead of their time. And he co-wrote it before the term singer-songwriter even existed.

He created plenty of other amazingly original records in his short career. But 60 years on few of them are still as distinctive as this, and I'm even more in awe of it now than when I was a young Crickets fan.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fEHNFxXkILM>

Pete's comment on Mel's 51. *Maybe Baby*

I think *Brown Eyed Handsome Man* was the first Buddy Holly song I was properly aware of – and back in the day I found it rather jarringly percussive. It gave me a false impression of what most of Buddy Holly's music was really like.

I'd been aware of him before that, but remarkably I actually felt (without knowing his music at all) that he belonged to an earlier generation. A friend's older sister had an album of his (amazing to think performers were already making albums back then), and I simply couldn't relate to the blurred cover colour photo of this thin, geeky-looking guy with thick-rimmed glasses. A year or two later, *Brown Eyed Handsome Man* showed me a very different Buddy Holly, but it still took me years more to dip back into his big hits and catch up on what I'd been missing all that time.

Maybe Baby is a good choice because it delves back to his earlier days, and as you say, demonstrates how he arrived from Mars apparently fully-formed, delivering a type of music that had never been heard before. I entirely agree that he had a profound impact on subsequent music – in much the same way as the Everly Brothers. No wonder the Beatles were so influenced by both acts.

A worthy choice.

Nick's comment on Mel's 51. *Maybe Baby*

Compare and contrast, as they say. Here we are back in the Pantheon without a doubt. I didn't know that I had squatter's rights on *Peggy Sue*, but when I chose it I was torn between several tracks, including this one, and I think it stands out for the reasons you give.

Rock and pop tend towards overstatement – lurve is absolute and all-consuming until it's smashed to smithereens at which point life is not worth living (I know there are exceptions, but

...). Here the premise is I suppose somewhere around the territory of *Love you more than I can say* – in the words of whichever Mersey poet it was in the Ode to a Motorway Petrol Pump Attendant “I longed for your soft verges/ But you gave me the hard shoulder”. Here, though, the idea has a level of ambiguity and uncertainty which is unusual and remarkable, particularly given its date.

And the “moody downbeat tune” has exactly those qualities despite being very straightforward in terms of its chord sequence. How was it done? That I suppose is Buddy Holly’s genius. You’re right too, Mel, about the beat combo (oh yes), with one caveat. If you listen to the bass line, can you imagine how it could be made more minimal without being removed entirely? Joe Mauldin used a double bass, of course, but then so did Bill Black when he backed Elvis, and his bass lines are an awful lot more interesting than this. Truly wonderful stuff, dreary bass or not.

Another of my little digressions: *I don’t think we should let the death of Leonard Cohen go without comment. To me, he has been one of the giants. I have always admired his music, though I think I paid it too little attention for too long. The “music to slash your wrists to” epithet seemed less than precise, because it has always had an uplifting quality to it. I have come to value it more in the last few years, perhaps for two reasons beyond living through the callowness of middle age. First the recent(ish) performances, of which we saw one, were astounding; secondly, he was still producing good material – I don’t know whether this applies to the album released three weeks or whatever before his death, but it certainly has been true of albums in the last small handful of years. Thank you and goodbye, Leonard.*

And you may or may not have noticed that the less great but still remarkable Mose Allison followed suit. We really are losing too many of the good guys this year. All in all, it’s pretty abysmal, isn’t it?

Here are three songs by towering performers of the 1970s, all of whom coincidentally had hits with different personas in the 1960s. They've each stood the test of time for me, even though 40 years ago they felt embarrassingly lightweight after the heady days of psychedelia.

52. *Life On Mars*, David Bowie, (1971)

Composer: David Bowie

My understanding of David Bowie poems/lyrics (not that I have credentials in this area) is that they tend to be random lines assembled from attention grabbing phrases previously scribbled in mental or physical notebooks. This song is full of them. Dylan did it, so it's a respectable approach, and I still do it! But this doesn't necessarily guarantee a coherent message.

That's not what you'd imagine, though, from the dedicated Bowie fans who analyse everything to extinction and publish their definitive interpretations on line. *Life on Mars* seems to have something to do with our confusion between reality and fantasy – so nothing new there. I'm attracted more to the concept of life beyond the earth because it raises so many questions.

But I read one highly imaginative account which says the song is all about the entertainment industry, and life on Mars refers to Orson Welles' notorious radio broadcast. And if it can mean that it really can mean anything. So I'm not one of those who says that if he was still alive Bowie should have a Nobel Prize for Literature!

His death this year didn't affect me like the death of John Lennon. But I do think he should be appreciated as a great songwriter who produced some really wonderful singles (it was hard to choose just one), and who like Madonna but more creatively and challengingly had a very clever knack for reinventing his persona as a performer time after time).

I also specially like *Starman*, *Ashes To Ashes* and *The Jean Genie*. And I can happily listen to a greatest hits collection all through. *Life on Mars* achieves its place in my 100 with its expansiveness, the build up from the gently presented routine details of a girl's life to the crescendo of the apparently transcendent, nearly-universal title line. There's an interesting arrangement, some nice piano and guitar touches, double-tracking to give depth to Bowie's voice, and a "Beatles ending" – one which can't be properly confined within the bounds of the song. Someone knew what they were doing.

It even withstood over-exposure for me on the highly watchable science fiction/crime series of the same name. As a song it might be complete nonsense. But I don't think it is, and I'd love it anyway.

(I must add, in case you challenge me for more inconsistency, when Bowie writes nonsense lyrics he has something in mind other than just creating a sound to impress the weak of intellect. Queen's overblown and over-praised *Bohemian Rhapsody* has much less respectable provenance and is different load of old nonsense altogether.)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AZKcl4-tcuo>

Nick's comment on Mel's 52. *Life On Mars*

I have never been quite sure what to make of David Bowie. I think that over the years he showed an extraordinary capacity to come up with interesting sounds, constantly remaking himself in the process. But somehow it always seemed to me to be less than the sum of its parts. *Electric*

Blue might serve as a case in point: really interesting sound, but that's about as far as I'd go. *Life On Mars* is a more interesting song, but, put to the point for the first time, I'd have to say it leaves me ... well, tepid rather than cold.

The first thing to say is that I think the lyrics contain some striking images, but I can't make them add up to anything very significant, let alone coherent. That is of itself of course not a fatal failing, as you point out, Mel. But I infer, though I can't really say why, that there is a pretension to significance here which has very limited substance.

Musically I have rather the same reaction – yes I like the guitar, but I really can, as you will have gathered from previous comments, do without swooping strings in more or less all rock/pop, and here it seems to me that musically we are given everything including the kitchen sink.

All in all, in the last analysis too much of an OK thing. It doesn't begin to make me want to run screaming from the room as *Bohemian Rhapsody* does, but it doesn't do a fat lot for me beyond being ... well, quite interesting, I suppose.

Pete's comment on Mel's 52. *Life On Mars*

You and Nick have both written a lot of very wise words about this song, leaving me little to add. I've always liked it, and I think it's a good one for anybody's list. Getting down to the detail, I seem to enjoy it more than you, Nick, and indeed almost as much as you, Mel. I don't know what the lyrics mean, but the arrangement and musicianship are excellent and the SOUND of it is superb (I greatly enjoyed listening to the high-quality YouTube rendering just now).

I've always felt David Bowie to be a formidable and complex talent, somehow standing outside the mainstream even when he appeared to be defining it. I have to confess that I have a real soft spot for *Space Oddity*, and another of my all-time favourites of his (and Queen's) is *Under Pressure*.

On the subject of Queen, I seem to be much more positive in my feelings about them than either of you. They were what they were, and I liked them for it – even *Bohemian Rhapsody*. It may be a load of overblown nonsense (I don't mind accepting that), but in a way what annoys me about it is more the reverence with which it now seems to be regarded than what it actually was. Musically and production-wise it's extraordinary, and I've always felt a frisson when contemplating those haunting lines "Life had just begun / But now I've gone and thrown it all away". Not terribly elegantly expressed, but as an inveterate drama-watcher from an early age I really responded to that sentiment (even if there's no plausible context for it in the song), and I still do.

53. *Bennie And The Jets*, Elton John (1973)

[First sent 1.8.25]

Composers: Elton John, Bernie Taupin

Bennie And The Jets is another of my latter-day swaps, and there are particular reasons for bringing it in as one of my replacements, although I originally rejected it for its familiarity and went for the obscure *The Ballad of Danny Bailey* (1904-1934) – which both Nick and Pete rightly dismissed as at best undistinguished.

In the heady days of running the printing and publishing co-operative Cwmbran Community Press, Sue and I worked hard and partied hard. And *Bennie And The Jets* was always a song that got us turning up the volume at parties with our volunteering friends, and sometimes even dancing. So it's redolent of the most enjoyable days of my working life.

The explanation for that enjoyment is simple. It has a great thudding beat hammered out by John's distinctively indelicate piano playing, a steady clapping accompaniment, and engagingly crass simulated live sound with its false start and audience applause. It's difficult not to dance to it. To add to the fun, this is Bernie Taupin writing a song about an outrageously androgynous singer who might as well be Elton John himself in performance.

Taupin seems to have distanced himself from this by suggesting it's about a futuristic band with a woman singer, but we're not that easily fooled.

It's not great rock music, and not even one of Taupin's best lyric. But Elton John sells it well both with his exuberant vocals and the pulverisation of his keyboard. The auditorium echo adds energy to the sound, even though we know it's synthetic, and by the end the insistent rhythm has become hypnotic and contagious. Huge fun.

While *Bennie And The Jets* doesn't have quite the instant excitement trigger it once had, it still gets my feet tapping.

I'm not an ardent Elton John fan. But the song is a reminder for me of a whole album of fine pop songs which had to feature somehow in my Top 100. The four-sided 17-track "Goodbye Yellow Brick Road" LP has hardly a single duffer and is one of the most gloriously uplifting and consistently enjoyable albums I've owned. All of it, with no side 4 *Revolution Number Nine* to drive you away. (I'm really sorry to have been so rude about people who quite understandably find that repellent!)

To emphasise the point, "Goodbye Yellow Brick Road" features the glorious title song, the thoughtful but latterly contaminated *Candle in The Wind*, the rocking *Saturday Night's Alright For Fighting* and superbly produced tracks such as *Jamaica Jerk Off* and *Sweet Painted Lady* among a plethora of others with intriguing lyrics. It's Elton John and Bernie Taupin at the height of their powers, and before Elton went out of his way to make a theatrical and real life fool of himself. Nothing deep, but super tuneful singalong stuff with enough in the lyrics to make them worth listening to.

And above all it's a reminder of some very good times.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qT-vsQ41LxM&list=RDqT-vsQ41LxM&start_radio=1

[This track was a late substitute for Mel's original selection, so Nick did not have the chance to review or comment on it. Mel's original choice at this point was The Ballad of Danny Bailey (1904-1934) also by Elton John.]

Pete's comment on Mel's 53. *Bennie And The Jets*

Wonderful! A well-judged substitution of this Elton John track for the your original choice. I'd already commented that I'd always liked *Benny and the Jets*, so now I can elaborate.

In fact I've had a soft spot for Elton John's music all through the years, and I share most of your thoughts about him. When he was really on song, he was matchless. I still savour some of his early stuff – even the over-exposed *Your Song*, though initially I preferred the gospel-style *Border Song*. And I still like later stuff such as *Candle in the Wind* (with the proviso that you mention).

Benny and the Jets is unusual in that it feels like an up-tempo number, yet it's actually surprisingly slow. But that steady, insistent beat is irresistible. Like you, Mel, I forgive it all the artifice. It just works, and still gets the blood fizzing.

My favourite passage – the bit I always wait for – is the instrumental break in the middle. There's something magical about the melody he plays and the flourish with which he plays it. It isn't part of the tune itself; it's a little diversion, and a subliminal comment on the rest of the piece (though I don't know what it's saying!). His piano playing in the break demonstrates a striking jazzy deftness that isn't always evident in his usual solid accompaniments, and (despite Nick's doubts) seems to contradict those who claim he wasn't much of a pianist.

Nick's comment on Mel's 53. (Adapted from his comments on *The Ballad Of Danny Bailey*)

Now it can be told. Part of Margaret's dowry when we got together was *Goodbye Yellow Brick Road*, which I have never played in the third of a century in question. Afraid I won't be starting now.

I have mixed feelings about Elton John's piano playing too – I can never quite make up my mind whether, at least at its best, it's driving, or whether he should be reported to the Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Pianos. Overall, what shall I say? I'd sooner listen to this than *Revolution Number 9*.

54. *Go Your Own Way*, Fleetwood Mac, (1977)

Composer: Lindsey Buckingham

I know I don't know much about guitarists: after Hendrix, Clapton, Marvin, Thompson, Weedon I'm hard-pressed to name any. But Lindsey Buckingham rarely failed to impress me. He looks like a virtuoso, though I don't know whether he is. But he has the power to thrill me anyway, and this song includes his most thrilling solo. (OK Nick, I know you're going to tell us that Peter Green is another real guitarist and that you saw him play live!)

I used to think that it was a bit naff to like the super-rich, drug-addled, divorce-ridden Fleetwood Mac – and wasn't "Rumours" just a bit too popular to admit to admiring it? (It turns out that 45,000,000 sales make it the sixth best selling US record ever.) Yet thanks to having no fewer than three exceptional song-writers, the band packed the album with superbly crafted accessible pop music. *You Make Loving Fun*, and *Songbird* (Christine McVie with a heartfelt solo piano accompaniment) plus Stevie Nicks' lovely *Rhiannon* from earlier wouldn't have been out of place in my list.

One of the things which make the "Rumours" songs so captivating is that the band not only wrote and performed them, they also *lived* them. The record is a kind of documentary about their disastrous real-life relationships which should have utterly destroyed them all. (I've read that they only realised they were writing about one another when the record came out, but that makes them sound either rather naïve or too stoned to have noticed what was going on.)

Even so, I find myself curiously moved by the appalling havoc which they wrought on one another and the way they could continue for years to play with fellow members who'd stolen their spouses/sex partners.

Out of the mess of the *Rumours* sessions came incredible tracks like *Go Your Own Way* – Buckingham's taunt to Stevie Nicks which eventually led to her going her own way. It's one of those songs I'd love for the sound, even if they were singing "Ba ba black sheep". There's tension from the start with the edgy guitars and thudding drums, and this is soon punctuated by the emphatic vocal harmonies. Then it builds and builds with ever greater urgency to finish with a guitar break to end all guitar breaks. (It's probably lots of guitars, so it can't technically be a "solo".) The music seems to end squealing and shrieking in anguish. Awfully fitting, and so bloody exciting to listen too.

Unrepeatable. So, once it's playing, I listen to it repeatedly, perhaps more than any other single track.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6ul-cZyuYq4>

RIP Lindsey.

Nick's comment on Mel's 54. *Go Your Own Way*

And to think that I have the brass neck to accuse others of self-parody: I promise to excise all references to performance for ever. Or until the next time, whichever is the shorter.

No, I didn't see Fleetwood Mac in their pomp, or at any other point in their long life. But yes, I do think Peter Green was an extraordinary guitarist, and I also think there was a terrible falling off between Fleetwood Mac's Elmore James tribute band efforts (and, lest I be accused of being

a purist as well as obsessed with performance, *Albatross*, *Man Of The World* and *Oh Well*) and the very assured pop of *Rumours*.

That said, I think *Rumours* is a singularly accomplished example of smart pop. Lindsey Buckingham seems to me to be a very decent guitarist, Christine McVie has a wonderful voice, and the eponymous pair are a terrific basis for any pop/rock/blues. Stevie Nicks seems erratic. Like you, Mel, I find it hard to believe that they didn't know what was going on – after all, Christine McVie said that *You Make Loving Fun* was written about, if I remember rightly, one of the band's electricians, not John McVie, and it rather beggars belief that she didn't know who she was shagging, however stoned she was, or, that if she was that stoned she could have written the song.

As for the guitar solo, I think it's not just double tracking, it's more than one sort of guitar – at a guess a Gibson and a Fender – changing at around 3m15s. I don't actually think it's Lindsey Buckingham's best piece of guitar playing technically, but it serves the purpose you describe. Nice stuff, always happy to play it when Margaret and I are sitting around of an evening, but I don't play it when I'm on my own.

Pete's comment on Mel's 54. *Go Your Own Way*

Another absolute winner. I love the urgency of this, the arresting guitar sound, and the strange rhythm that seems to keep tripping up on itself and can feel very hard to follow. It deserves to be famous, and is surely a worthy entry in anyone's favourites list. I always thought it extraordinary the way the original bluesy English group gradually metamorphosed into this American, mainstream group, producing irresistible music that was completely unlike what they were doing when they started.

As for the interesting back stories that the two of you have provided, there's not much I can add – though they do again raise that nagging question of how much (if at all) one's knowledge of the composer or performer of a piece should influence one's response to it. Two opposite extremes both seem to have some validity: the piece illuminates the intentions and achievements of the creator/s; or the identity of the creator/s is completely irrelevant, and the success is all in the hearing. This may raise its head again in future selections of mine.

Guilty pleasures from three decades. I feel I need even more space than usual to persuade you that I'm not completely losing it with these three choices!

55. Alternate Title, The Monkees, (1967)

Composer: Micky Dolenz

I can't believe I was already 18 when the Monkees came on TV. My friends and I evidently weren't too grown up to find the programme's stupidity and irreverence gloriously refreshing. (My 8-year-old sister liked it too.) And if the Beatles weren't going to repeat *A Hard Day's Night* this was a passable substitute when I got home from school to switch on the telly.

The other bonus from this fictional band, who weren't allowed to play on their own records until their third LP, was that they initially got to sing some very good pop songs, including *I'm a Believer*, *A Little Bit Me A Little Bit You*, *Last Train To Clarksville* and *I'm Not Your Stepping Stone* – even if Dolenz, Nesmith, Tork and Jones had little to do with them.

Then they poured Coke over their hated (but rather clever) musical director and went to war with the entertainment machine which had created them. The show was cancelled soon afterwards but not before Micky Dolenz got to perform this self-written curiosity. It's a song describing a party thrown for the virtual-group by the Beatles, to whom it owes a great deal in its fragmentary jigsaw construction.

I know it's only a bit of pop. But I love it for its preposterously chaotic shifting moods and styles, and equally because it seems to encapsulate the surreal rebellious act of trying to break out of the buttoned-down imaginary world of the Prefab Four to become a "real group". Dolenz' frustrated shouting in the chorus makes little logical sense on its own. But in contrast to the sedate party it's always sounded to me like the heart-felt cry of someone who wants creative freedom and to be allowed to be himself. The words are actually get quite dark – "Why don't you hate who I hate, Kill who I kill to be free?" Not quite the standard image of the zany loveable ex-Circus Boy.

The song title itself is famously the result of the record company telling an obdurate Dolenz to find an alternative to the original "Randy Scouse Git". And, purely by chance I suspect, *Alternate Title* fits the message of the song beautifully.

It turns out that the moguls who thought they knew best did really know best about hit records. The group weren't brilliant performers or, apart from occasional bright flashes, particularly good songwriters. But they did eventually get the freedom to be themselves. I can take heart from that and heartily enjoy this song celebrating the struggle.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zcRFToXjQO8>

Pete's preface: Thanks for your latest three choices, Mel, all of which I greatly enjoyed hearing again. I truly don't think you should worry that these titles are not profound. Profundity in music comes from more places than just the apparent message. (I have to say that, given many of my own choices!) I would argue that it also lies in the way the piece affects you on an instinctive plane.

Pete's comment on Mel's 55. Alternate Title

For the same reasons you cite, in the day I always reacted to Monkees music with guilty pleasure. I didn't want to enjoy their music, but the fact is that I knew it was great pop. In later

years, having dismissed concerns about my street cred, I came to realise that some of those songs were classics – notably the ones you cite (*I'm A Believer*, *Last Train To Clarksville* and *A Little Bit Me, A Little Bit You*).

When the lads took matters into their own hands and started writing and producing their own music, their output took a rapid downhill turn, and never recovered. But *Alternate Title* was the exception – a bit of inspiration from Micky Dolenz. The witty juxtaposition of tuneful verse and frenzied chorus always impressed me, and your exposition of its meaning and origin have usefully filled some gaps.

That said, I have to say can't actually imagine picking this song from their repertoire for my own top hundred. But I'd be quite willing to have, say, *I'm a Believer*. Maybe I will ...

PS You mention "Circus Boy". In my younger childhood we used to watch Dolenz regularly in that programme. Did you? I remember that his stage name then was Micky Braddock. Noah Beery played his uncle (the clown); later he surfaced as Rocky in the memorable "Rockford Files".

Nick's comment on Mel's 55. *Alternate Title*

Well, it sounds very familiar when I listen to it. Familiar, but not particularly gripping, though I can see that your description is to the point. I agree entirely with what you say about the Monkees and the silly telly programme. They certainly had good songwriters behind them (you didn't mention *Daydream Believer*, which I'd add to your list).

I quite enjoyed listening to this as a throwback, but it won't get anywhere near my list. I think that at the time I thought that the two melodies are individually underwhelming, and that they don't somehow become transformed into a musical butterfly by superimposition. I think I am still of that mind.

Just to confirm my reputation on performance, I saw Michael Nesmith live in 2012 at the Royal Northern College of Music. Oh yes. He was very amiable and decent musically (the best musician he was involved with, Red Rhodes on pedal steel, is an ex-mostly-unheard-of-musician). But of course Nesmith was performing his own songs, which generally postdate the Monkees. In fact I have a Nesmith LP: nothing to pollute the 100 greatest there, but enjoyable stuff.

56. *Dancing Queen*, Abba (1976)

Composers: Benny Andersson, Björn Ulvaeus and Stig Anderson

I'm going to step right out of character and go with the majority on this one. The greatest hit worldwide by one of the biggest selling music acts ever, still selling in huge numbers, and according to one survey the song that most people in the UK want to dance to.

There are so many things about this record to explain its success. It's just so joyous. It seems to be about a young girl going out dancing. But you could read the lyric to say that it's about the exhilaration anyone might feel when they're dancing – *as if we were seventeen too*. That might be simply my take on the lyric, a lucky chance, or a very clever trick.

A song about feeling great on the dance floor that makes people feel great on the dance floor.

Then unpacking the goods shows how clever Abba could be. Someone rattles a piano keyboard and we're straight into the beating heart of the music. A glorious soaring tune endlessly rising and constantly punctuated by the piano. A contrasting and equally tuneful middle section. Fantastic vocal harmonies. Key changes. Strings strategically echoing the tune and the mood. The thoughtfully located and beautifully decorated musical kitchen sink.

Above all its tone is unrelentingly uplifting. And I always feel uplifted by it, even without actually dancing. Abba may not be everyone's cup of tea. But however you look at it, this is pop music genius.

They did loads of other great stuff in a career that lasted longer than the Beatles, and lived through the breakups of two marriages (The video of *Knowing Me, Knowing You* which seems to depict this is quite moving.) One of the singers turns out to be the daughter of a seriously unpleasant Nazi, and another was mistaken for me by my son when he was a toddler. So they have some depth as well as volume.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xFrGuyw1V8s>

Pete's comment on Mel's 56. *Dancing Queen*

Well, I think none of us is going to object to the idea of Abba as a fundamental contributor to the musical canon of the twentieth century. I'm certainly not, anyway. I think they were amazing, and although their music was unremarkable in some ways, in others it was stunningly original. They ploughed their own furrow to amazingly good effect. And you're right to draw attention to the detail. Their arrangements were meticulously worked out, and surprisingly complex.

I found it hard to pick an Abba song for my own top 100, though I think in the end I chose *Waterloo* for its sheer verve (and for its tunefulness and harmonies). But many of the songs are wonderful, and *Dancing Queen* is certainly up there with the best.

Nick's comment on Mel's 56. *Dancing Queen*

Abba are obviously supremely reliable purveyors of skilfully crafted pop. This particular song seems to me to slightly atypical. Many of their songs seem to consist of jaunty tunes interestingly at odds with distinctly unjaunty lyrics. But not this one, which I suppose makes it rather less interesting to the miserable git in me than some of their other songs (like *Knowing Me Knowing You*).

I own no Abba records, though I did accompany Margaret to the cinema to see *Mama Mia* (in mitigation I didn't know in advance that Pierce Brosnan was going to pretend to sing). I guess that I can see many things to admire in Abba's music, but it doesn't really animate me (though there's what to me is a fascinating version of *Money Money Money* by Richard Thompson).

I don't think I have ever danced to this song, but that doesn't distinguish it from almost all music on the face of the planet. I don't think I'd describe this as exhilarating because ultimately it seems so carefully contrived – as of course most music (even allegedly improvised jazz) is. But the art is often in hiding – or at least disguising – the art, isn't it?

57. *Baby Jane*, Rod Stewart (1983)

Composers: Rod Stewart and Jay Davis

Well I promised a Rod Stewart track, and this is one I can live with very happily. We may not like the persona, but he has amazing longevity – he's apparently still banging out hit records.

Baby Jane is no *Maggie May* performance, and I ought to hate the 1980s synthetisers and drum machines. I can easily pick holes in the lyric too, including the awful filler line where Stewart says he's said everything he has to say before going on to say much more. This UK number one came five years after *Do Ya Think I'm Sexy?* (which I think is a tasteless joke rather than the incredible ego-trip most people take it for). So the credibility he once had is long gone.

Under these circumstances the positives have got to be pretty good for me to pick the song. Obviously he has a fantastic voice, whether or not he uses it to best effect. And this

track, for me, has an irresistibly catchy and uplifting chorus, which is totally at one with the optimism of its words (if not the underlying theme of the song).

Now the lyric: I guess I'm going to be a small minority when I say I've always thought that Rod Stewart is a sensitive man who bares his soul in his lyrics. In *Baby Jane* (who I've always assumed is Britt Eckland, though he's had so many young blonds that I suppose it hardly matters) the egotist has met his match with a woman whose success he has helped to create, and he's suffering for it. There's a grim honesty in the line "I know secrets about you" – Stewart is lashing out with threats at the woman he still loves who is in the act of dumping him. That's an unusual conflict for a pop music to grasp.

What's more, if he's this direct about the dying relationship, he's unlikely to believe the optimistic story he's telling himself to get through the break up. The apparently bland poppy chorus about finding a love that will last forever is a sham which we pop-pickers are happy to buy into.

This doesn't mean I find the song either moving or profound. But there's more subtlety than we might expect, and it intrigues me that Stewart should casually reveal so much of himself in his lyric. I warm to his predicament as a result, even though it's a bit unpleasant and completely outside my experience.

None of this speculation and analysis would mean anything if *Baby Jane* didn't have such a great sound. There's a heavy driving beat, a cleverly orchestrated barrage of synthesized instruments, an obligatory sax solo, and a real urgency in Stewart's raw high-pitched voice. I don't enjoy every note, but I'll forgive the misdeeds for the energy and optimism of the overall effect.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dxl2r6GuL2w>

Pete's comment on Mel's 57. *Baby Jane*

This is a good example of a song that our game has prompted me to revisit. I've heard it many times before and thought little about it, so it's been interesting to listen to it properly, and hear the meaning in it that you describe. It does of course also SOUND great, as you say, so it has plenty going for it.

If I were picking a Rod Stewart song for myself, I would go for the obvious – *Maggie May*. I've always thought it extraordinarily observant and deftly expressed and arranged. But in case I do pick it, I won't go any further at this point. *Baby Jane* is all the things you say, and a nice rock number, and it's interesting to know that you picked it.

Nick's comment on Mel's 57. *Baby Jane*

Hmm. Well, since I am by my own previous admission one of the thickos who can't see the joke, tasteless or otherwise, in *Do Ya Think I'm Sexy*. I'm probably by definition unqualified to comment on this. But what the hell.

First things first, I like the sax. But I don't much go for the rest of the synth-pop sound. So that's a score-draw, which leaves the quest for a result to the singer and the song.

I have already said that as a singer, I think Rod Stewart is generally not a model of sensitivity to his material but is capable of great things, hence my choice of *Maggie May* (I like a lot of the other stuff on "Every Picture Tells A Story" too). So where do I stand on this song? On balance, somewhere in the middle, so still a score-draw. If you ignore the silliness of the video, this is a respectable distance from Stewart's posturing worst, and I think he does a decent job of singing the song.

So the key is how good the song is. Well, to me there's no reconciliation of the microscopic contradictions of in effect saying "I've got plenty of mileage on the clock, but I thought we were the real thing, only we're not, you cow, I'll get my own back, but the next one will be the real thing". The demise of a relationship is of course a turbulent process, but does this reflect it? Not for me. But what do you expect of someone who sings "Someone like you makes it hard to live

without somebody else” with no trace of what it means (though I actually quite like Stewart singing *Reason to believe* for all that)?

All in all then a score-draw: an amiable enough song, but this pop-picker doesn’t buy into this particular sham. Now other shams are of course an entirely different matter.

A bunch of tracks to show that despite all evidence to the contrary I'm not irrevocably prejudiced against women and black performers, Motown or even C&W music

58. Please Mr Postman, The Marvelettes (1961)

Composers: Georgia Dobbins, William Garrett, Freddie Gorman, Brian Holland, and Robert Bateman. (*Yes of course, Holland of Holland, Dozier, Holland*)

Let's get one thing straight. This is not the best version of this song. (Neither incidentally is the insipid Carpenters recording.) The Beatles have the edge for energy and what's always sounded to me to be a reasonable facsimile of the real pain of anticipated loss. But we can only have so many Beatles recordings in our hundreds.

It was the Beatles of course who led me back to the not dissimilar original Marvelettes version. And it's not at all bad. The same heavy beat, strong agonised vocals, background chanting, hand clapping, changes in pace. Everything to make exciting classic pop.

Considering it's just an ordinary song with an improbable lyric that involves berating the postman for not bringing the required mail, I've also found the sentiment and delivery (or non-delivery?) strangely moving. I can still feel the ache of rejection I've seldom experienced in real life, and I'll happily listen endlessly to either version. This one was a landmark single in its day too – the first Motown record to reach No 1 in the States, and a not insignificant influence on the world's greatest band.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=425GpjTSlS4>

Pete's comment on Mel's 58. Please Mr Postman

Highly intriguing! I just played the Marvelettes' version, followed by the Beatles' version. Same song; same rhythm, pace and lyrics; and yet teasingly different: exactly as you describe them. I agree that the Beatles' version is better. The drive and the urgent delivery put it in a class apart. Still, the inspiration came from the Marvelettes, and they make a good job of it. I didn't really know their version, having only heard it once or twice over the years, so it isn't in my canon of Influential Pieces, but I can see how you would be fond of it if it were part of your past.

Nick's comment on Mel's 58. Please Mr Postman

Not much to add to what you two have said. Terrific stuff. I'd sooner listen to the Beatles doing it, to a small extent simply because the recording is better (the backing singers were obviously in a telephone kiosk somewhere fairly remote, and the arrangement is pretty straightforward by subsequent Motown standards). This record is a classic example of the way in which black music, often but not always blues or soul, provided the material and often more to the British bands of the time or a bit later (if you're fully paid up saddos, you might recall my comments on *Just One Look*).

Only a couple of additions. Georgia Dobbins was one of the Marvelettes: given what one understands of the sexism at Motown, the writing credit is a pleasant surprise. Second point – there are three labels shown on YouTube, one with all 5 writers' names, one with 3 and one with 4. The one with 3 shows Dobbins, Garrett and Brianbert. The latter sounds like a compound of Brian and Robert, thus accounting for Holland and Bateman, but what of Freddie Gorman? And the version with 4 has Dobbins, Garrett, Holland and something I can't read, but not I think Gorman or Bateman.

The Marvelettes photos similarly seem to show three and four women. I'd have said there were two rather than three backing voices, but with no great confidence owing to the telephone kiosk effect (or TKE in the trade). All a bit rum, if entirely trivial.

59. *He's A Rebel*, (not by) The Crystals (1962)

Composer: Gene Pitney

There are a host of YouTube versions of Phil Spector's production of this song. But none of them are by the Crystals! The nasty ruthless murdering weirdo got an unknown girl group to make a rush recording of this Pitney song while the Crystals were on the road performing – so that he could give the Crystals a hit with *He's A Rebel* ahead of a girl singer on another label.

Not that I knew any of that when I came across it under the blankets with Radio Luxemburg. It's not that great a song, though I still love it. It's included here because it got me excited by its bravado back then. I couldn't personally associate myself with anything so rebellious, so this was pop music opening up an utterly new world to an innocent 14-year-old. Powerful stuff.

Subsequent singles by the Crystals (and Ronettes, etc etc) never had the same effect on me, partly I suspect because they were buried in Spector's trademark wall of sound. *He's A Rebel* is a bit more restrained, and the obligatory sax is happily able to make its presence felt.

Spector's recording techniques were always dubious, up to an including the time when he got his hands on the Beatles. But by comparison the original sound on this early single is actually rather too thin.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=G_SXJ18EkNw

Pete's comment on Mel's 59. *He's A Rebel*

So – another song by the talented Gene Pitney. I really like it (how could I not?), though again it doesn't happen to be in my personal canon. That role is reserved, I'm afraid, for *Da Doo Ron Ron*, which despite its silly name, I find utterly hypnotic. I believe it was recorded by the "real" Crystals, though don't quote me.

I really liked all the American black girl groups of the 1960s, though I probably didn't think much about this at the time. You've just spurred me to revisit their work, and I've had a brilliant session. I seldom saw any of these bands on TV in the day, so I never had a clear idea of what they looked like. What a pretty lead singer the Shirelles had! (Shirley Owens?) And what a confident performer Ronnie Spector was.

I latched on to the Crystals later than the Shirelles and the Ronettes, so in my young mind (wrongly, it seems) I gave the two latter groups credit for getting there first. Although the Shirelles' version of *Will you Love me Tomorrow?* might seem simplistic compared with Carole King's, I think it has integrity and a really distinctive edge to it. And what about *Be My Baby* by the Ronettes? I think it's completely fantastic! Maybe I'll pick it for one of my choices. I don't mind the fact that one can detect the emergence of Spector's wall of sound in some of this; here it was new and exciting.

And then of course there was Diana Ross, who somehow outlived all this and moved on to a different place. In the day she was part of this same movement, and I still think some of the Supremes' early stuff was superb – *Baby Love* and *You Can't Hurry Love* in particular.

Nick's comment on Mel's 59, *He's A Rebel*

I thought this was terrific when it came out. It still sounds good, and I remember liking the sax solo, which now sounds pretty much like playing by numbers. Looking at the pictures on Google, there seems a remarkable uncertainty about whether the Crystals numbered 3, 4 or 5. Rather corroborates the point about the recording being made while the alleged Crystals were elsewhere – the name was pretty obviously a flag of convenience attached to a recording for commercial reasons. This song wasn't my favourite of the genre at the time (I think that was *Da*

Doo Ron Ron – I was doubtless lured by the sheer poetry of the title); I couldn't begin to say where my choice would fall now.

It's striking that Gene Pitney is suddenly making repeat appearances as a songwriter, and curious to reflect how both songs have been miles away from the maudlin stuff he performed himself. Mind you, his notion of a "rebel" seems pretty domesticated.

60. *She's Got You*, Patsy Cline (1962)

Composer: Hank Cochran

My god this was a difficult choice. The obvious track is the superb *Crazy*. Or there's *Walking After Midnight* which captures so perfectly Patsy Cline's distinctive yodels. Or *Two Cigarettes In An Ashtray*, which sounds as if it might be silly but almost achieves the impossibility of being a credible C&W song.

It was the paucity of pre-recorded reel to reel tapes which got me hooked on Patsy Cline. A slim collection of her hits was a freebie I picked out blind just to take up my record club allowance. And an enduring love affair started – not that I would have wanted to know the hard drinking itinerant performer who died in a plane crash when I was 15.

I've chosen *She's Got You*, which lacks the intensity of *Crazy* but seems to find its emotional power in the utter simplicity of its conceit: she's got my man, I've got a pile of stuff full of memories; I'm not going to tell you directly that I'm sad – that's bloody obvious.

On the surface it sounds like many other ballads of its time – Brenda Lee churned them out with varying degrees of effectiveness. But this has the extraordinary voice of Patsy Cline. The signature warble in her voice is a little less obvious here than on other songs. But the strength and clarity of her delivery lifts the track into a league of its own.

I remain intrigued by your intuition, Nick, that record producers exercised their sexism by attempting to drown out female singers in the Sixties. I don't believe Patsy Cline was exposed to less prejudice, but the arranger here does a very fine job keeping extraneous sounds to a minimum in order to maintain the prominence of her unique voice (apart from the omnipresent backing group of course). I love the tinkling piano in the background which beautifully underpins the vocal without intruding on it.

The only duff note for me is the reference to a "class ring" which hints that the jilted lover may be a post-graduation teenager, and not the grown up Cline clearly was, experiencing real-life pain. (I can nearly rationalise this discomfort away with thought that she could have been given the ring years earlier, and this was a very longstanding relationship. But no, it's a flaw in the lyric.)

Nevertheless, this is very classy stuff, and shows that great songs can be even greater songs when performed by the right people – even country and western singers!

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MWCUh6tf7PA>

Pete's comment on Mel's 60, *She's Got You*

Well, this is a turn-up: but given that you've openly admitted this is a country and western song, I can hardly berate you for choosing it after lambasting the genre. Nor should I; it's an impressive piece, and I can see why you like it so much. Your description of it is perceptive, and says almost all that could be said.

Strangely, Patsy Cline was one of those performers who almost completely passed me by at the time, even though I was very much aware of other contemporary stuff. Maybe she seemed a bit too grown-up for me; you've got that issue on the nail. I've heard her songs on the radio from time to time, but never really listened closely until now, so thank you for getting me to do so.

Funnily enough, as a defender of C&W (which I see as just part of a continuum of music), I couldn't help noticing various well-tried devices in this piece – notably the ringing vibraphone, which for me evokes Jim Reeves. Parenthetically, I always liked his *He'll Have To Go*, but gradually started to realise that all his other music just sounded like poorer versions of the same thing. But Patsy Cline's sincerity beams out through it all. I can easily imagine Brenda Lee doing this song, but Cline brings something else to it.

Nick's comment on Mel's 60, *She's Got You*

Patsy Cline nearly made my very first selection as one of the early influences on my life in pop, though this particular song doesn't strictly fall into the category of those which were mediated through my older brother rather than directly from Radio Luxembourg. To me it's simply a matter of her voice, which is one of the great sounds. There is a handful of brilliant songs by her, of which this is clearly one – I dither about whether this, *I Fall To Pieces* or *Crazy* would be my choice. Hank Cochran's credit is an indication that we are firmly in the C&W territory described by Hank Wangford, who was very good at bringing out its unintentionally self-parodic nature, as "industrial strength misery", but this of course sounds like the real thing.

I remember once seeing half of a well-reviewed biopic about her (I guess it was "Sweet Dreams", mentioned by Wikipedia) which depicted her life as, if memory serves, "industrial strength misery". Certainly the few cheery songs I know by her are as nothing compared to the miserable ones. Sort of the female Roy Orbison – *I Fall To Pieces* and *Crying* are a matching pair, aren't they?

The piano sounds like it must be the stalwart Floyd Cramer, and the backing singers sound like the Jordanaires: the Nashville cabal, of whom Elvis Presley was just the most famous.

61. *It Might As Well Rain Until September*, Carole King (1962)

Composers: Gerry Goffin and Carole King

It feels rather offensive to cite *It Might As Well Rain Until September* as my favourite record by the superstar who gave us "Tapestry". It's quite obviously not her best song or best performance. And the awful quality of original recording always sounded as if they'd assembled the orchestra in a stair well at the Brill Building rather than a real recording studio.

I can't argue that the lyric has any particular appeal, or that it has any special association for me. But I'm choosing it after trawling endlessly through Carole King's stunning second and third albums, where I was unable to pick a single track which on its own would do justice to her talent.

But the selection is not entirely me being bloody minded. *It Might As Well Rain Until September* was one of the first singles I bought – and one which I played endlessly until I blew up my grandfather's radio. (I had illicitly attached the pickup to a random point in the amplifier circuit in order to get up to 11 with the volume control. Not the wisest approach with a valve radio running off mains power.) I can't remember now why I loved it so much. It is a Goffin-King song of course, and that goes a long way. Maybe it was the oddly remote sound of it which seems inexcusable technically, even for the early Sixties.

I was always somewhat bewildered by the lyric. The references to what young Americans do on the beach had me more confused than admiring. And the significance of kids being packed off to summer camp hadn't dawned on me at the time.

The record has also seemed a bit of a curiosity in that in the UK Carole King came out of the blue, had a smash hit, and just as suddenly disappeared for a decade. She was obviously great all along, so what stopped one of the greatest songwriters who was still making records, from resurfacing as a performer until 1971? It seems crass to say she was

waiting for the unhappy end to her marriage to release her full creativity, but perhaps that was it.

So I'd like to celebrate *It Might As Well Until September* for putting down a marker. An undistinguished piece of Americana with a great tune and a music-from-the-bottom-of-a-bucket sound by some sexist producer who couldn't in the long run drown out Carole King's amazing talent.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GbKEogJETAo>

Pete's comment on Mel's 61, *It Might As Well Rain Until September*

Aaarrggh! You've beaten me to it on this one. It was already slated for my list. What am I to do?

I agree with you that it's difficult to pick a stand-out number from Carole King's amazing later repertoire, though to me she is so different on this track that it might as well be another performer. Having researched it myself and found it was originally destined for Bobby Vee, I can confirm that his version is nowhere near as memorable as hers. It doesn't have those distinctive strings, for instance – either bowed or pizzicato.

My first exposure to the track, which I never forgot, was when it was played on Juke Box Jury, and David Jacobs made the point that Carole King's voice was "triple-tracked" – something that he clearly considered remarkable. Well, it was, though for a lot of the time it felt as if all three Carole Kings were singing the same melody line, not in harmony. However, the voices do perceptibly diverge into harmony from time to time, but very subtly. It's another aspect that's missing from the Bobby Vee version.

Curiously, in the day I never thought of the song as being poorly recorded, though I can now see that it was. However, I do wonder if the folklore explanation is true. It's said that King only ever intended it as a demo, so no master tape was created or kept – but can you really believe a demo would have been recorded with triple tracking and a full string orchestra? Something seems a bit odd about that.

Anyway, when Carole King decided not to follow this up (not for ten years, anyway), it became even more distinctive, somehow – almost like a taunt over what other recordings of herself she might have made during those song-writing years.

It's simply indispensable.

Nick's comment on Mel's 61, *It Might As Well Rain Until September*

I know it's blasphemous, but I never liked this greatly at the time, and I think my admiration of it now in reality owes more than a little to the reflected glories of her subsequent work. I don't think I liked her voice greatly (seems weird with hindsight), the violins didn't work for me, and there is again that tin can sound. I think I knew how good Goffin and King were even then, but I find it impossible to divorce my reaction to this from my knowledge of what came subsequently.

I wasn't quick enough onto the button when the song finished, and got the first bit of *Bobby's Girl* by Susan Maughan, likewise 1962. Bloody hell – maybe it's salutary to have a reminder of what the competition was at the time.

62. Paper Sun, Traffic (1967)**Composers:** Steve Winwood and Jim Capaldi

That clinches it. I've been agonising since before we started this game over whether I'd take *Paper Sun* or *Dear Mr Fantasy* to my desert planet, and I've just decided it's got to be both Traffic tracks. One obstacle to making a choice has been uncertainty about what *Paper Sun* is actually about. Is it the same type of Sixties gibberish as *Bohemian Rhapsody* and *A Whiter Shade Of Pale*, or does it mean something?

It's unlikely that the accompanying video will provide illumination. But it means something to some people on the internet – something different to every one of them in fact. Apparently a “paper sun” is a life lived in a fantasy world, a holiday romance, denunciation of the Sun's paparazzi, a resident's permit for a Chinese person taking their child into the US (a paper son – get it?) and the prevailing drug-inspired psycho-gibberish.

With that sorted I can enjoy it for what it is, a great tuneful pop song with energy, an intriguing but meaningless lyric, the statutory hippy sitar (Dave Mason), and the musical prowess of one of the few “supergroups” who lived up to their name at a time when any new formation was reputed to be super. Of course Steve Winwood could probably make the Tory Party Manifesto sound cool.

I'm not making great claims for the song because Traffic went on, briefly, to much better things (and worse if you count *Hole in My Shoe*). But this was the Summer of Love, when everything sounded new and exciting. (Well not Engelbert or Vince Hill, but Traffic were sharing the charts with the Beatles, Cream, Pink Floyd, Aretha Franklin, The Hollies, my favourite Monkees track, and, sorry Nick, Scott McKenzie's *San Francisco*). And all the while I was zipping about the lanes of East Berkshire at 35mph in brilliant sunshine on a governed GPO Bantam 125.

Freedom doesn't get much hipper than that. (It does actually. But I was too intoxicated with life, nature and songs like this to mind.)

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-cp_3NEWTzU

Pete's comment on Mel's 62. Paper Sun

I always liked all the Traffic songs that you've mentioned, including (I have to confess) *Hole In My Shoe*, which I felt – and still feel – had a kind of magic to it. It was psychedelia taken to a new level. I also really liked *No Face, No Name, No Number*. I even liked *Here We Go Round The Mulberry Bush*. To me their work perfectly caught the inventive, exciting, slightly off-the-wall feel of music in the late 1960s.

Initially I felt slightly resentful towards Traffic for “stealing” Steve Winwood from the Spencer Davis Group, as I saw it. I loved the latter group's gutsy rock feel, which I thought his voice perfectly complemented, and found the sound of Traffic a bit more muddled and diffuse. However, I've come to appreciate them more and more over the years, and *Paper Sun* is, as you say, an marvellously tuneful and energetic pop song. I find it charming and reassuring that you're so fond of it.

Thanks, by the way, for researching the possible meanings – an effort that will stand me in good stead when I listen to it in future, even if only to dismiss the idea that it has any meaning at all!

Nick's comment on Mel's 62. Paper Sun

I'm sure I've heard this plenty of times over the years, but this is the first time I've sat and listened to it rather than have it as a background to something else since goodness knows when. I actually enjoyed it more than I expected to. This is of course potentially damning with faint

praise, but I don't mean it that harshly. It feels irretrievably stuck in a time-warp – not intrinsically a bad thing, but sometimes a complicating factor in trying to listen to something objectively (whatever that might mean).

Traffic were an interesting band. Steve Winwood is of course marvellous. Jim Capaldi was a decent if rather ham-fisted drummer. Chris Wood seems interesting, but the normal internet sources are fairly oblique about him I take it that he is responsible for the bass here, which I really like, but I can't see anything that actually says so. Dave Mason – see below.

So thanks for including this. I enjoyed it, though I don't know that I'll be rushing back to it.

63. *Dear Mr Fantasy*, Traffic (1967)

Composers: Steve Winwood, Chris Wood and Jim Capaldi

When I bought the Traffic album “Mr Fantasy”, probably on the strength of *Paper Sun* which isn't on it, I was a bit nonplussed. It included some serious rubbish, some great bluesy rock and some jamming which I really wasn't used to. At first I thought *Dear Mr Fantasy* was probably a good track, but that I wasn't listening to it right.

Fifty years later I think I'm listening to it correctly and it's bloody marvellous. I'll wait to be told how good Dave Mason is as a guitarist. He sounds good to me. The song itself has stood up to various re-recordings and cover versions, so I can't be alone in appreciating its sheer power and energy. Lyrically it's hardly inspiring – let's have some fantasy, sings Stevie. He was probably envisioning that this would be drug-induced. But the great thing about *good* psychedelic rock is that one apparently gets much the same effect from the music without the expense of the chemicals.

I find the guitar playing utterly gripping. The bass initially cuts across the rather shrill vocal. Then the extended solo comes in, always measured and controlled, and building steadily to an exhilarating climax. When I compare this kind of improvisation with prog rock from the Seventies which my next door neighbour Mike makes me listen to sometimes I'm filled with wonder that rock music could go so far downhill so fast.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vxVlN-LzIks>

Nick's comment on Mel's 63. *Dear Mr Fantasy*

Curiously I have no very strong memories of this, though I remember the title and must have listened to it rather a lot 50 years ago. So it doesn't have the same nostalgic qualities as *Paper Sun*, for better or worse (or even a bit of both). Overall, I think my reaction is rather the same as it was to *Paper Sun*.

Dave Mason. Hmm. I assume that, in the absence of any information to the contrary, he plays all the guitars bits here (though I recall Steve Winwood playing guitar at the time, and there is so much multiple tracking going on that he could be doing something). The guitars seem to me to be a bit of a combination of every style prevailing at the time, all to my way of thinking perfectly OK rather than enthralling. Again, I enjoyed it but won't hold my breath till I hear it again.

Pete's comment on Mel's 63. *Dear Mr Fantasy*

I haven't read Nick's comments on this yet (I thought I should deliver my own first), but for my part I agree with your suspicion that Dave Mason's guitar is superb. Indeed, this whole song turns out to be much more “gutsy” (see my comments above) than I remembered it being, which tells me I really ought to revise my entire opinion of the band. They were a proper rock group after all; I just didn't notice.

Mel's reply to Pete: I suspect that the reason you hadn't noticed that Traffic's style was so gutsy is that their singles were so utterly different from most of the tracks which went on

their albums. It's as if they wanted to tempt record buyers into buying LPs they might not enjoy.

64. *White Room*, Cream (1968)

Composer: Pete Brown and Jack Bruce

I've surprised myself with this one. Cream were always going to be in the 100. But my favourite used to be *Badge* with George Harrison and his wonderful but all too brief guitar solo. *I Feel Free*, *Sunshine of Your Love* and *Strange Brew* are also surely definitive tracks. But it seems my tastes have changed to embrace something more subtle.

White Room obviously has an interesting "poet's" lyric by Pete Brown. Striking images flash out from the music even before you know how they fit together. You don't need much more than shadows running from themselves and restless diesels to get a sense of the singer's mood. Good stuff.

But that's not what has drawn me back to the song. It's such a strange mixture of sounds – a stagey, grandiose opening, then warm and intimate, then mysterious, and an ending with brilliant improvisation from all three members of the supergroup which defined the term "supergroup". There is such assurance and control all around a simple basic song: this is consummate rock music. A classic.

The single version here fades out at the end, but my favourite is the one on the "Goodbye Cream" album (which doesn't seem to have made it on to YouTube) with more of the freeform Clapton and Bruce.

I thought I'd check what others have made of Pete Brown's lyric about his girlfriend going off on a train and making him so sad that his white room seems dark. Far be it from me to say that Americans are suggestible, but a lot of them apparently think it's about the Vietnam War. Obvious really: white room = White House. And there are shadows in the jungle. Not many restless diesels though.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=V5BF1V1pbTs>

Nick's comment on Mel's 64. *White Room*

Ah, Cream. At their best, very very good; at their worst three virtuosi doing their own thing with precious little regard for what the other two were doing. Here they clearly are working brilliantly. And I would concur with your mention of other wonderful Cream tracks.

Curiously, I never owned one of their LPs, for various reasons. My younger brother had "Disraeli Gears" and "Wheels Of Fire" so I could hear them at home; Stuart Laing used to play them a lot as I recall, so we heard them in term time, and Mary didn't like them. And thus gaps in our record collections occur.

Listening to it now, it seems a curious mixture of exceptional musicianship and rather self-conscious artiness. It sounds rather dated; like you, I'm generally not distraught to be wafted back to the late Sixties, but I wouldn't describe the music as timeless. But I do have a fair number of Eric Clapton albums around the place. Which will make the cut?

I can't not include some reference to my live music experiences. I never saw Cream, but I did see Ginger Baker's Airforce, who were a weird mixture of shambolic organisation, under-rehearsal and terrific musicianship. I remember at one point there was a pause when someone was obviously meant to play a solo, Baker shouted "flute" and there was a superb flute solo, probably, I realise only now, played by Chris Wood, formerly of Traffic.

Pete's comment on Mel's 64. *White Room*

I echo your comments about other songs you might have picked by this group, and I think (for the reasons you suggest) that *Badge* would have been my first choice if I'd included a song by

them. However, I can also see why you have chosen this piece. Yes, the lyric really is poetic, and yes also, the sound is varied and compelling.

My feeling about Cream has always been that there was a curious musical tension in their work. The songs were designed to deliver impact and instrumental virtuosity, yet there was also a strong melodic and harmonic thread. It was almost as if their tuneful instinct was fighting all the time with their desire to hit you between the eyes with their dexterity.

The result was that in some songs, to my mind, the underlying musicality and lyricism were sometimes contradicted by the supergroup “wrapper” around them. I don’t know if this is an inevitable by-product of the notion of putting together big personalities in this type of musical context, but I can’t help wondering. Yet at other times (as in *Badge*, for instance), the two components fed off each other to brilliant effect, and *White Room* is probably another good example.

65. You Keep Me Hanging On, Vanilla Fudge (1967)

Composers: Holland, Dozier, Holland

What have the Supremes ever done to me except entertain me? Well there was that line in one of their songs, “Mamma passed away making home-made jam” which justifies any amount of spoofing.

I don’t think Vanilla Fudge were a very good band. They only had one idea and this is probably as good as it got. I wouldn’t have wanted to listen to all the other psychedelic reworkings of Sixties hits to confirm this, and the original 7 minutes and 20 seconds version of this from their album isn’t much fun either.

But I loved this irreverent, over-the-top single version the moment I heard it. Almost certainly part of the enjoyment is the way it cuts across the quite inappropriate upbeat light-heartedness of the Supremes’ track. Get a grip, Diana, this is a song of misery and desperation. You shouldn’t need Vanilla Fudge to point that out.

As well wringing the last bit of meaning from what is already a very good pop song, Vanilla Fudge have made this a great piece of exciting, flamboyant rock music. I don’t have to explain much about it: it is what it is. Arresting opening, great build up, thundering end. It gets my blood racing every time I hear it.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vQr-U41OJOw>

Nick’s comment on Mel’s 65. You Keep Me Hanging On

I agree to a point about Diana Ross – I don’t greatly like her voice, which has a trebly edge and a rather simpering tone. But then she, with or without the Supremes, did some of the great Motown stuff, so what the hell. I can see Vanilla Fudge as an antidote to qualities that I don’t greatly like in the Ross/Supremes oeuvre, but it’s a bit too much like being hit by a ten ton truck for me to warm to it. Yes, the song is of misery and desperation, but steady on there.

Actually there is a point lurking here which quite intrigues me. Rock music is full of songs which are supposedly about anguish but sound like a walk in the park – does that make them all poor? Compare the versions of *Crying* by Roy Orbison and Don McLean – the more intense is McLean’s, the (infinitely) better is Orbison’s, partly because he was of course one of the greats (which McLean wasn’t), but partly because he conveys the misery with a lighter touch – more powerful for the relatively less fraught delivery.

I can see there’s a sort-of argument for Vanilla Fudge as the point where psychedelia and proto-heavy-metal converge, but when it comes to listening, I’d sooner have something else. Incidentally, I had a friend at the OU who had a Beck Bogert and Appice LP – even with Jeff Beck to sugar the pill, it was hard to take the remaining half of Vanilla Fudge.

Pete’s comment on Mel’s 65. You Keep Me Hanging On

I smiled to myself as I listened to this. I completely understand why you like it, and how it provides a new insight into the Diana Ross song, and I agree that it reinvents the piece as an effective pop song. However, I can't entirely go along with your dismissal of the Supremes' recording. I've always found its upbeat tempo and pounded-out lyric urgent and compelling. I think it delivers its message quite effectively for those who like the genre. You just have to buy into the Motown ethos, which I was happy to do. However, you do say it was "already a very good pop song", so I take comfort from that.

66. *I Just Dropped In (To See What Condition My Condition Was In)*, Kenny Rogers and the First Edition (1967)

Composer: Mickey Newbury

Enough psychedelia for one day? Never enough. But try this apparently accidental send-up for size.

I'd barely heard this song since the Sixties, but a recent chance encounter made my ears prick up. I thought it was an above average hoot at the time of psychedeliamania, but when I checked back today I realised that Kenny Rogers of the First Edition is the same Kenny Rogers who pushed my own soul into a big black hole with the execrable *Ruby (Don't Take Your Love To Town)*. You know, the one that deals so sensitively with the plight of the disabled Korean War veteran with the adulterous wife. Suddenly it became irresistible.

I Just Dropped In has a gloriously silly lyric (oddly by another serious C&W singer it seems) which would not be out of place on a Bonzo Dog album, plus a catchily simple tune, an energetic performance, a nice guitar break, and psychedelic paraphernalia at the start and end which must have sounded outdated as early as 1968.

Wikipedia pathetically offers the suggestion that the lyric was intended as a warning about the dangers of LSD. More likely a warning against taking song lyrics seriously.

The competence of the performance is emphasised by the fact that one of the backing musicians was another C&W idol, Glen Campbell – whose guitar playing was so highly regarded at the time that some people tried to keep him as a session man rather than foster his solo career.

It stands on its own for me as really amusing and enjoyable bit of irreverent pop. I didn't expect many people would share this view till I discovered it had been given a second lease of life in the film *The Big Lebowski* a few years back. Then I couldn't resist checking whether Kenny Rogers had dared to include this on any of his inevitable C&W greatest hits albums. He did early on. But it disappears from later releases, presumably amid howls of uncomprehending horror from his redneck fans.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-o-7fg8oAO4>

Pete's comment on Mel's 66. *I Just Dropped In*

Wow! I'd heard this in the past, but not for a long time, and found myself immediately laughing out loud. What a wonderfully deadpan parody of high psychedelia. But hang on – are you saying the irony was accidental? Were they serious? On reflection, it's quite hard to tell. Anyway, it's impeccably delivered, and for me it offers a remarkable new insight into Kenny Rogers. One realises on listening to this how it is that creative people can range over a wide range of material in their early days before they finally settle on the styles and themes that come to define them.

Nick's comment on Mel's 66. *I Just Dropped In*

Blimey, I'd more or less forgotten this. And I'm not entirely surprised. It's pretty dreadful – not unenjoyable, but dreadful. Kenny Rogers is about the least convincing singer of psychedelia you could find, and the band just sounds like rent-a-tune.

I sort of assumed the First Edition was just a label attached to a scratch group of session men, but no. According to Wikipedia they had their roots in the New Christie Minstrels (a rent-a-tune mob from a slightly earlier period). I assume that the use in “The Great Lebowski” (which I’ve never seen) is not untinged with irony, or is that wishful thinking? I’d sooner listen to this than to *Ruby* (*you can do anything you like with your love because Mavis is about to pop round from next door*) but it’s a closer call than it has any right to be.

Let's get my penchant for sentimentality and nostalgia, especially sentimental nostalgia, right out into the open. Here are four songs which confirm me as a helpless romantic with a heart of pink blancmange.

67. *Crying in the Rain*, Everly Brothers (1962)

Composers: Howard Greenfield and Carole King

OK, not quite the Everlys at the peak of their powers. But this is terrific song with a tune by someone we're all familiar with. It's melodic, with a single simple attention-grabbing idea, and perfectly executed.

To my ears the Everly Brothers' astonishing sound when they sang together was seldom better than this. Plenty of others have recorded *Crying in the Rain*, including Ms King herself, of course. But this distinctive silky smooth version is the benchmark against which all others should be measured.

I don't think my critical faculties have been harmed by the circumstances in which I first heard the song – a pathetic 15-year-old learning of love and loss not from experience but from Radio Luxemburg by night. But nostalgia for those times has helped to keep its wonders alive for me through the years.

Interesting factlet from Wikipedia: Goffin and King swapped Brill Building writing partners for a day in a moment of whimsey, and this was the result with Howard Greenfield. He and Carole King never wrote together again.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=V_6qQEyCSv8

Pete's comment on Mel's 67. *Crying in the Rain*

The Everlys can do no wrong as far as I'm concerned. I'm sure I've banged on before about their pivotal role in establishing two-part harmony in pop music, but that's no reason not to celebrate it again. Their beautifully matched voices were ideally suited to it, and they became the ultimate proponents. Others rivals like the UK-based Brook Brothers and Allison's came and went, but the Everlys kept going, building up fantastic repertoire, and securing their importance forever in the pop music firmament.

Carole King's gift for her special kind of melody and harmony was unsurpassed, and Howard Greenfield made a good stand-in as lyricist for Gerry Goffin. In his day job he wrote the words for nearly all Neil Sedaka's hits (and much else besides).

In terms of detail, I love the ringing guitar chords in the accompaniment to this song, and musically it's rather interesting. It's one of those pieces that are broadly speaking written in a major key, yet in which each verse ends with a descent into the relative minor key. But then at the end, after what are apparently the final minor chords, we're gifted with a nice positive lift up to the major key in a concluding flourish. I don't know whether this is profound enough to have a view about, but perhaps the message is, "Yes, I'm sad, but guess what – I'm actually *enjoying* it."

Nick's comment on Mel's 67. *Crying in the Rain*

It has to be said that the Everly Brothers were much better at the maudlin than the upbeat – *Bird Dog*, no further comment needed. Even so, they were well capable of going too far – *Ebony Eyes* should be consigned to the sound track for the inner circle of hell.

Crying In The Rain is of course rather later than their heyday, but they were still wonderful at being lachrymose (I wonder if they ever toured with Roy Orbison and if so whether anyone was drowned). I always really liked this song, though I think I felt slightly guilty about doing so because it is pretty wet even by the Everlys' standards.

Not much to add to what Mel said. Except maybe something about the backing. There seems to be no information about the musicians involved. Chet Atkins certainly played on quite a lot of their stuff, and it might be him playing the guitar parts. The drummer reminds me of Jerry Allison, but I have nothing to base that on, though he was playing sessions by then. The bass player – well perhaps he was recovering from a hangover so his mum came to stand in for him: it's quite extraordinarily rudimentary.

68. *Leaving On A Jet Plane*, Peter Paul and Mary (1969)

Composer: John Denver

There are plenty of reasons, in addition to this lovely song, for wanting to celebrate Peter Paul and Mary. They were in the vanguard of the US folk music breakthrough in the early Sixties with great recordings of Pete Seeger compositions such as *Where Have All The Flowers Gone*. They helped to bring Dylan to prominence with their sweet version of *Blowin' In The Wind*. They were also visible in the civil rights movement, recording songs of protest and solidarity, and performing at demonstrations.

It doesn't matter that Peter Paul and Mary were a commercial construction, designed as carefully as any modern boy band, who didn't do "real" folk music: musically they were bloody good, and this track is fine evidence of that.

While I don't usually know the difference between people singing in harmony and people just singing the same words, this is quintessentially harmonious. The three voices, sometimes synchronising, sometimes in echo, are just enthralling together. Add to this, the convention-defying rarity of a female, Mary Travers, being the dominant voice supported by two men singing and humming delicately and softly in the background and providing the simplest instrumentation, and we've got a beautifully constructed little masterpiece with a big sound.

But why choose a composition of John Denver's of all people? Well, although I am almost ashamed to admit it, he wasn't a bad song writer, even if the sight of his teeth made him intolerable on TV. *Leaving on a Jet Plane* is prime-cut sentimentality, and it really does a job on me. This is despite the odious stuff about coming back and wearing a wedding ring.

The rest of the simple lyric seems to be about parting from a loved one. But what I get from it is a desperate yearning and loneliness which is the consequence not the immediate experience of saying goodbye. And I think that's what gives it real emotional punch. My reaction may have something to do with Peter Paul and Mary's carefully modulated performance, which knows exactly when to be soft and gentle and when to grab one by the testicles. Denver's own version is pretty enough, but it highlights how far Peter Paul and Mary went to put feeling into the lyric.

This was a big hit all over the world in the late Sixties, so I am not alone to have been taken in by its cunning sentimentality. I can't regret that – I still love it!

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=21quSocDaKo>

Nick's comment on Mel's 68. *Leaving On A Jet Plane*

I think I was first aware of Peter Paul and Mary when they did *Blowin' In The Wind*. My recollection is that I rather hankered after being in a group like that, as well as rather than instead of the Bogchains, mostly because I wanted to do more singing. But also I suspect so that I could claim some political conscience which might not be immediately apparent from a crap version of *Route 66*.

I was also somewhat smitten by Mary Travers. She came across as much feistier than most women singers I was aware of at the time (a girlfriend from the appropriate period met Cilla Black, and said she was a real cow – not the same thing).

I don't remember this song from student days, though we must have heard it. Be that as it may, it became very familiar in this and the John Denver version over that sort of period. I preferred Peter Paul and Mary to the simpering Denver, though I have been known to envy him his Guild 12 string.

As Mel intimates, the song is a masterpiece of cant – he's played around but that doesn't mean a thing, she's got to hold him like she'll never let him go though he's half way out of the door, when he comes back he'll wear her wedding ring but who knows what he'll have been up to between now and then, and so forth.

That said, I have always rather liked it, and still do. Peter Paul and Mary manage to find more emotion in the song than one suspects is really there. And it's rather understated – not something one would say about much pop or rock. I don't think the bass player is the same one as on *Crying in the rain*. Or if it is, he or she must have had several lessons in the intervening years.

Peter Yarrow seems to have weathered conviction for paedophilia rather more readily than the Gary Glitters of the world. There's an unenlightening study to be undertaken of the subject of paedophilia in rock of the '60s and '70s – assuming it hasn't been done already: the Lovin' Spoonful singing *Younger Girl*, Gary Puckett and the Union Gap singing *Young Girl*, the picture on the cover of Blind Faith's solitary album and so forth.

Mary Travers ended up a dreadful mess. The last time I saw a picture of her, she was unrecognisable – pretty large (probably steroids to treat her leukaemia), wheel-chair bound, and with tubes for oxygen in her nostrils. Very sad. Not to say increasingly rather close to home (though I've avoided the three things I mentioned ... except for the oxygen tubes while I was in hospital).

Pete's comment on Mel's 68. *Leaving On A Jet Plane*

Now here's a coincidence. *Crying In The Rain* ends with a surprise jump up from a minor chord to a major one. *Leaving On A Jet Plane* ends with a different device, but one that's equally striking. In this case the song is written in a major key, but unusually, every verse of this song ends on the dominant chord (that's an unresolved chord waiting for a final flourish), including the last verse. So we're left in a musically unresolved state, which is exactly what the song is about.

On your recommendation I've listened to the song probably more carefully than ever before, and realised there are things I particularly like about it – the nicely executed double bass, for instance. I also like the lyrics; in fact back in the day I was quite taken with John Denver for a while. Somehow I seemed to grow out of him, but he did have an ability to turn a melody and a lyric.

However, various things about this song have never quite worked for me. The vocal harmonies by the two guys (nicely produced, I must say) swirl in and out in a way that I've always found unsatisfying. Is it a harmony song or not? I've always felt musically dissatisfied by that uncertainty. And the way each verse ends on a dominant chord (see above) is also frustrating to my ear, though intellectually I understand the rationale. Meanwhile, I do take your point that Mary Travers puts in a very subtle performance (more so than I'd noticed before), but the sad fact for me is that I've never really warmed to her particular vocal timbre.

Some of my reservations are down to my specific musical taste, and not really a reflection on the accomplishment of the song. I think you've made a good case for liking it, and I'm glad that you do. And I feel I know it so well that it will always be part of my life anyway, whatever I think of it!

69: *Your Wildest Dreams*, The Moody Blues (1986)

Composer: Justin Hayward

Do I still like the Moody Blues enough to include one of their songs? After all the ribbing I got from you two about buying Moody Blues albums this wasn't easy. Unlike some other acts which are so good that picking a favourite is hard, the Moodies were so consistently not-quite-as-good-as-I-wanted-them-to-be that it was agonising trying to find a track I could make a reasonable case for.

Nights in White Satin is a very good song, but it's worn thin with over-exposure. There are two lesser known songs on the imaginative space-travel themed album "To Our Children's Children's Children" – *Out and In* and *Watching and Waiting* – which I always go back to. They've got nice tunes and lyric ideas which I find interesting, but I can't claim they're great songs.

I actually started to write a justification for *Ride My See-Saw*, the track which until recently I got the biggest kick from, and then for the virtues of the musically superior *Forever Afternoon Tuesday*. Justin Hayward is a writer of fine tuneful songs, although his lyrics can let him down. Here he destroys an attractive contemplative mood with the fatuous mention of a "fairylane of love". The fade-out into the bland sounds of the London Symphony Orchestra (who are only there to promote stereo music) is another let-down.

There's one other problem with anything from the *Days of Future Past* album, Pete, because you have implacably held the view, despite my protests, that the record inspired my "Weekend" poem. Even if you can forget this slur, I can't! I could have offered the melodic *The Story In Your Eyes*, the rocking *I'm Just A Singer (In A Rock and Roll Band)*, or *Question*, a quality hit single. But not quite.

Then YouTube came to my rescue with a chance reminder of *Your Wildest Dreams*, a big US hit from the 1980s which I heard and enjoyed for the first time long after I'd stopped buying their original albums. Great tune, simple universal lyric (wondering whether his first girlfriend ever thinks about him), and a distinctive pulsing musical arrangement with guitars to the fore – admittedly after a long, silly and unnecessary intro with an ethereal choir. Good solid pop, I'd say.

What really clinched it for me, though, is the accompanying award-winning video from a time before music videos became pornography. You might easily dismiss its sentimentality with derision. But I think the film of *Your Wildest Dreams* is tremendous. It's so much richer than the clichés it plays with. And its nifty and subtle cutting does a needle-sharp job telling a story that for once closely follows the song, and makes a run-of-the-mill lyric come delightfully alive, even poignant.

The lonely housewife with kids and a boring husband she's reluctantly settled for is remembering – and reimagining – her youth when Ford Cortinas came in black and white, teenagers danced in the street like they did in *The Young Ones*, and her boyfriend Justin Hayward was about to leave her to become a rock and roll star. Back in her present, and rather touchingly, she just fails to meet up with him again at a Moody Blues concert. Certainly not on a par with the utterly brilliant video for the Beatles' *Free as a Bird*, which it predates. But it spills over with sparkling little allusions and jokes, including the contribution of a youthful Moody Blues tribute band, and is reminiscent of the later film in scope and inventiveness.

I urge you to break the rules and pay close attention to the video while listening to the song. The ways they work on one another for emotional effect is unfamiliarly clever.

Looking back at 1986 looking back at 1963. Yes I know I'm an old softie. But don't let anyone tell you that nostalgia's not what it used to be!

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kmmPFrkuPq0>

And here's the lovely *Forever Afternoon Tuesday* (or *Tuesday Afternoon*), warts and all.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GEMuAnFH_lm

Pete's comment on Mel's 69. *Your Wildest Dreams*

How can I attempt to sum up the position of the Moody Blues in our lives? You've made a good start, and in the course of it provided a useful manual of what to look out for when we get round to deciding we really need to revisit the band in a big way.

I vaguely remember opining that you must have based "Weekend" on their work, but I'd honestly forgotten this was such a bone of contention between us – or that you had so vehemently disputed it at the time. Why in that case was I so adamant about it? I sometimes feel I don't like the person I once was!

As for my objections to the Moody Blues, I suspect now that they were exaggerated as a kind of token of things that unsettled me in many types of music. In other words, I made them an unjustified target for alleged offences that they never even committed. Justin Hayward *was* a good tunesmith; you're right. And I rather like his voice, though I probably didn't admit that to myself in the day.

If I could condense my reservations about them into a single word, here it is: Mellotron. There. You knew that was coming. I simply didn't like what to me was a very overbearing and rather artificial sound, and unfortunately for me, the Moodys well and truly made it their own. Even more unfortunately, it probably made me undervalue songs that I would have liked if it hadn't been present. Rather ironically, you dismiss the orchestral interpolation at the end of *Tuesday*, but I *liked* it, and would have preferred to hear it throughout the song in place of the Mellotron.

In retrospect, now that the sound is so indelibly linked with the Moodys, I actually don't mind it so much. I think I feared that it would invade other music and proliferate through the pop world, but in fact it didn't. Little did I know then that I'd find so many other things in later years that I liked even less (rave, grunge, excess of rap ... I could go on). Yes, call me narrow-minded! My point is that the impact on me of Mellotron now seems quite mild by comparison.

So there you are. My complaints about this band were excessive and unfair. I now freely admit it. That doesn't make their music great, but you very reasonably acknowledge their shortcomings yourself, so I don't need to add anything. They were significant, and there was plenty to like about them.

And so, finally, to *Your Wildest Dreams*. What a nice song – and what a fabulous video! I was happy to break the rules, and watched it with rapt attention. It's great. I realise now that I must have seen it long ago, but I'd forgotten how clever and powerful it was. How on earth did they do it? I really like the song itself (Mellotron-free, I think, but that's neither here nor there), and since we're talking about dominant chords, this song really luxuriates in the dominant, which recurs through the song, each time serving as a rich and enticing precursor to an assertive "home" chord. I suppose there's a musical irony here in that ultimately we don't have resolution (not in the video, anyway), although the music tells us we do.

Thank you for injecting this song back into my life, and also reminding me of the video, and at the same time directing me back to the superior delights of the outstanding "Free as a Bird" video.

Nick's comment on Mel's 69. *Your Wildest Dreams*

Well, to think we have got to soixante-neuf before the Moody Blues appeared. I hadn't expected you to feel so hesitant about your choice, Mel, and feel duly chastened by the realisation that you even listened to my expressions of unenthusiasm for them.

I have never consciously encountered this song before (or if I have, I've forgotten). It's ... well, I don't mean this to sound dismissive, but "pleasant" is the word I want to use, so can I say pleasant-but-not-in-a-dismissive-way? The tune is catchy in a fairly undemanding way, the singing and harmonies are very amiable.

The idea on which the song is based is fine, but the lyrics are really impressively dependent on clichés. Now that is pretty much inherent in popular music (how many times have we heard "dance" rhymed with "romance"?) but it doesn't stop me from the odd forlorn hope of something a bit more thought-provoking. I have listened to it very happily and would do so again – but wouldn't seek it out.

I enjoyed the video, but I must admit that I was mostly struck by the cars and vans (not literally, mind). I still react as I did when I saw a Morris Marina driving up the M1 a year or more ago – something wrong here: not a spot of rust, and the bloody thing hasn't broken down. Surely one of the cars should have been at the side of the road with an AA man getting the necessary tools out of the sidecar attached to his BSA M21. And if the Moody Blues used a Bedford van, they presumably set off 3 days before a gig, not in case of breakdown but because Bedfords were monumentally slow.

Mel's reply to Pete and Nick: I'm flattered, after so much opprobrium was poured on the Moody Blues when I was buying their records, that you have both taken so much trouble and so many words to update your appreciation and lack of it. Thank you. The rules of the game don't specify that everything we like has to be good! I do, however, take exception to Nick's disparaging remarks about Bedford vans. If I'd been in Luton a year or so earlier I would have been fitting brake pipes on the very van in this magnificent video.

70: *Another Suitcase In Another Hall*, Madonna (1996)

Composers: Andrew Lloyd-Webber, Tim Rice

Madonna better than Barbara Dickson, Elaine Paige and Sarah Brightman? You bet. *Evita* is the only opera I was ever prepared to give digital space to in my record collection! Then came Alan Parker's brilliant film version of the original concept album and stage show, with Madonna morphing into the role of Evita in a way that no one could have imagined.

I get a strong impression that as a human being, Madonna is particularly unattractive. But as an entertainer she is a remarkable phenomenon and I can't help admiring her chameleon career. So it's great that I've found a way of shoe-horning her into my 100 without bringing in the popular tosh that she has consistently recorded as a pop singer.

Another Suitcase In Another Hall is a lovely song, easily ranking alongside *Don't Cry For Me Argentine*, thanks to Tim Rice's ever-inventive lyrics and one of the tiny handful of original melodies that Lloyd-Webber's been able to write. But Madonna is rare among its many performers in being able to bring out simultaneously both the resilience and the vulnerability of the character in the song. (Confusingly, it wasn't actually Evita who sang it on the original recording.)

Sorry if I'm trying to sound like someone who understands opera. But the reason I think this is so good is that Madonna learned to change her singing style completely for her role in the film. So what we get is a pop singer who routinely adopts a different persona for all her records acting as an opera singer acting as a hapless, vulnerable whore acting tough. The result, for me anyway, is a version of an extremely pretty song which is genuinely sad and moving for once.

Sentimental? Portrayals of good-hearted whores probably have to be. Good on you, Madonna, for pulling it off perfectly. And did I mention that wonderful saxophone?

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VAZ76v6xg8A>

Pete's comment on Mel's 70. *Another Suitcase In Another Hall*

Ah. This was a surprise. Personally I've always liked Barbara Dickson's voice enormously, and been very fond of her version of this song. I love the warmth and the rich polyphony of the sound she makes (oh god, more Rowlands crap), so I'd always felt resentful of the Madonna version. Now that you've prompted me to reconsider it, I have to say it's really good! The arrangement of this version is simultaneously faithful to the original and yet also an elaboration on it. What's not to like?

I've always admired Tim Rice's lyrics, and so far I've resisted engaging with Nick's complaints about Lloyd Webber's music. I have to say I've never had a problem enjoying his early work. I think he had a great gift for melody and "presence", and these things come to the fore in "Evita". Also in "Jesus Christ", which I think is a wonderful work.

As an aside, when "Evita" had just been released I saw Tim Rice and Andrew Lloyd Webber on a TV chat show in which they actually performed *Another Suitcase* themselves (or maybe just a verse of it) at a piano, singing in harmony. I immediately liked the song, and wasn't disappointed when I heard the real thing.

As you point out, in the original work this song was performed by a character who was a previous paramour of Juan Peron, and who had been thrown aside in favour of Eva Duarte. It was an honest statement of loss. For the film, I believe Madonna insisted that the Eva character should be allowed to sing it – partly because it's a pretty song and she wanted it for herself, and partly in pursuit of her desire to portray Eva more sympathetically than she'd appeared in the original.

In other words, the reallocation of the song to Eva amounted to a 180 degree change in its significance; instead of being piece written against her character, it was one supporting her. I can't imagine that Lloyd Webber and Rice were very happy about this, but presumably they bit their tongues in order to get the film made.

All that being said, I must admit Madonna sings the number with great sincerity, and I now like this version of the song, which is something I never expected to be saying. So again, thank you for that.

Nick's comment on Mel's 70. *Another Suitcase In Another Hall*

A confession. I carry around more Lloyd Webber baggage than is good for me. And the baggage ain't good. Best summarised perhaps by the letter in the Guardian which simply read, "Henry Purcell. Sir Edward Elgar, Lord Lloyd Webber. I rest my case." The peer's success has given a healthy boost to theatre incomes: the manager of the Alhambra in Bradford once told me that he could afford to schedule a week of *Godot* because he'd booked a fortnight of whichever of the various Lloyd Webber extravaganzas it was and that would subsidise the relatively empty house for Beckett.

Nevertheless, Lloyd Webber's dominance of the London stage is pretty irksome. Above all, he's a total prick as far as I can see. Not just a Tory, but one who bitched when he was whipped to turn out to vote during the Cameron years because he wasn't there as a party cypher but in recognition of his brilliance. Not just someone who bought a lot of Pre-Raphaelite art (which generally he's welcome to as far as I'm concerned), but did so by using every tax wheeze going to minimise what he paid for them. (I believe you get a huge subsidy if you agree to let the public see the paintings for up to ten minutes between 3 and 4am on Christmas Day. There might be a tiny bit of exaggeration there, but what the hell. As *Spitting Image* memorably had it, "a fart who composes a lot".)

But I wouldn't dream of holding that against his music, oh dear me no. Ah, the music. I can see Lloyd Webber's stuff has an obvious appeal, but much of it has always seemed to me to be pretty derivative and overblown. I have already confessed elsewhere to not having seen *Evita*, so my comments are even more a matter of naked prejudice than usual. Listening to it out of context is rather difficult – "Something is happening but you don't know what it is, do you, Mr Jones?".

It seems to be about the end of a relationship, and I get the staircase and the bar, but where is she then in the video clip – in a queue outside a doctor's, at some sort of agency – models or actors? Well, I dunno.

So I'll retire from trying to work out what's going on and just consider the song. It sounds fine, but no better or worse than any one of umpteen ballads. The lyrics out of context are a long way from the best break-up lyrics I've encountered. Madonna's voice – not my favourite, never has been, a not very congenial nasal quality. Sax? Well if you mean the tenor, I think it's decent, but it sounds to me like there's a soprano almost doing something interesting too briefly behind it.

Overall – well, I think there's a problem, not helped by the aforementioned baggage, of trying to get into a snippet of something that you are not already thoroughly engaged with ... and failing. But thanks for not choosing *Don't Cry For Me Argentina*!

Has anyone ever mentioned that surfing music is a ludicrous concept?

71. *Skeet Surfin*, Val Kilmer (1984)

Composers: Brian Wilson, Mike Love, Chuck Berry, David Zucher, Jerry Zucher, Jim Abrahams

This is basically a plug for and memento of my favourite comedy film “Top Secret”, which I never tire of watching. It was a somewhat neglected follow-up to Zucher-Abrahams’ joke-a-moment “Airplane”. *Skeet Surfin* is played over the film’s opening credits sequence which was shot on sunless Cornish beaches. Val Kilmer plays rock star Nick Rivers and sings the song.

As a Beach Boys parody it packs in loads of their original West Coast pap with a joke in almost every line of the lyrics. But to me the triumph of the song’s creative imagination is to combine surfing with clay pigeon shooting (“skeet shooting” if you’re American) to come up with the invention of an almost convincingly absurd teenage craze.

You have to listen closely to catch the words. But you can get a sense of the film’s anarchy in lines like “... totally bitching / Ridin’ waves and blatin’ pigeons”.

If you’re wondering, the rest of “Top Secret” has no connection whatever with the surfing and features a WW2 resistance movement fighting an oppressive 1980s Soviet state with such manic assurance that sometimes you think they must have been contemporary.

You may pity me for my juvenile tastes. But this song is also a token of cross-generational solidarity. I only realised how culturally important it’s become when one of my grandsons turned up for dinner one day wearing a *Skeet Surfin*’ tee-shirt. Respect.

I make no apologies – except this one.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=af9N7UhTMA8>

Nick’s comment on Mel’s 71. *Skeet Surfin*’

Well, it will come as little surprise to you when I say that I didn’t know this, or the film it comes from. It’s good fun, and as you say there is a rather in-crowdish pleasure (and some surprise) at how many of the references to the Beachboys I got. (Jan and Dean actually put out the single of *Fun Fun Fun*, but it’s the track on my brother’s Beachboys LP which I remember.)

Harnessing the surfing – sorry, surfin’ – fad to the American obsession with guns is a clever idea. I’m not sure that I want to listen to it a vast number of times, though. I think this is probably part of the problem with parodies. I remember Bill Oddy doing them in the Footlights, and Pete Atkin did loads under the same auspices subsequently.

My favourite surfin’ spoof is probably the Bonzos’ *King Of Scurf*, presumably the output of the late Neil Innes, but I haven’t listened for that for, I should think, a good 40 years. *Skeet Surfin*’ is good fun, but not entirely memorable divorced from the film, I suspect.

Pete’s comment on Mel’s 71. *Skeet Surfin*’

I’d never heard of this song until I played it, and I honestly don’t know what to think of it now that I’ve listened to it. It’s a good pastiche of the Beach Boys; but then given its origins, it should be. It’s witty, as you say, and it’s clever. I suspect that actually liking it requires it to have been part of one’s past, and in my case it isn’t, so I just had to listen open-mouthed.

Parenthetically, pastiches can often be surprisingly effective in throwing light on whatever it is they’re imitating or satirising – not just underlining the more questionable aspects, but also accentuating the good. The whole Rutles album is evidence enough of that. It’s like learning

more about your native tongue by studying a foreign language. This one sums up the Beach Boys sound as well as any authentic track would.

I must say I laughed at the video behind it – the idea of shooting whilst on a surf board. I wonder how many incidental deaths would be notched up if that were ever done in reality. Strangely, I wasn't aware of the inappropriate weather as I watched it, but I suppose I wasn't looking for it, and the poor quality of the video slightly masked it. But it is just as you say.

72. *Back in The USSR*, The Beatles (1968)

Composers: Lennon, McCartney

Grudgingly I have to concede that the Beatles' wittiest song was one written by the treacherous McCartney. Not the Beatles' greatest of course. But a great rocker, with joke-filled lyrics that warm my heart and make me smile whenever I hear them. It's better of course than the Beach Boys and Chuck Berry songs it's sending up, and wiser by far than the idiots who criticised it as un-American.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nS5_EQgbuLc

Pete's comment on Mel's 72. *Back In The USSR*

Strangely, although I suppose I acknowledged the hat-doffing to the Beach Boys when I first heard *Back In The USSR* in the 1960s, listening to the track over the years has never once brought the band to the front of my mind. The song immediately acquired its own Beatles-inspired integrity for me, and has kept it ever since. I *am* aware when I listen to it of the fact that it's drawing on a whole toolbox of doo-wop / barber's shop / bubblegum motifs, but you've given me a new perspective by underlining its most obvious influence.

Anyway, I agree with all that you say about it. I've always loved the driving impact of the song, which combines wonderfully with the ironic lyric. Something I've always thought clever is that although the words are satirical, there's a kind of fondness about them as well: enough of it to avoid alienating those of the Eastern audience who could actually understand them. The whole thing is a wonderful *jeu d'esprit*, carried off with immense panache. Amazingly, they made it the first track on the album, and it fully deserved the honour.

Nick's comment on Mel's 72. *Back In The USSR*

As you intimate, it is sometimes necessary to allow that the generally pretty obnoxious McCartney was very talented, most obviously as a bass player. When he could stop being twee and accept that he wasn't really much of a rock'n'roller, he was capable of being very good. This song wouldn't be my first choice to illustrate this. I haven't listened to this either for rather a long time (but it's less than 40 years).

Back In The USA seems to me to have little other than the indispensable Chuck Berry sound to commend it. He seems to be going through the motions lyrically, presumably in pursuit of success. So it's ripe for a piss-take, and this is a good one. I thought the whole point is that it is un-American, while contriving not to be exactly pro-USSR, which is quite neat. But basically, I just really enjoyed listening to it again, and will happily do so more repetitively than I will in the case of *Skeet Surfin'*.

73. *I Get Around*, The Beach Boys (1964)

[First sent 1.8.25]

Composers: Brian Wilson and Mike Love

I'm not especially a fan, though a few of the Beach Boys' early songs exude contagious fun, and *I Get Around* has to be the best of them. I realise that later on Brian Wilson got

cleverer and more sophisticated musically. But I gradually lost interest, and never forgave his group for beating the Beatles into second place in the World's Top Bands section of the 1966 New Musical Express poll.

I Get Around is a thoroughly enjoyable slice of 1960s pop. And without actually mentioning surfing it unmistakably fits the surf music theme I've tried to establish with *Skeet Surfin'* and *Back In The USSR*. Those songs are both tributes to the absurdly popular synthetic genre which the Beach Boys latched onto and made famous, despite the fact that few American live anywhere near an ocean and the group members themselves had no taste for water sports.

The Beach Boys claim the song was about their reaction to new-found fame. But I remember cruising aimlessly with my cousins in the summer of 1970 in upper New York state, and the words of *I Get Around* seem a remarkably authentic version of the way American teenagers were passing their time when school was out. The lines "I'm getting bugged driving up and down the same old strip. I gotta find a new place where the kids are hip" are an especially delicious image for a kind of indulgent, self-inflicted boredom. I can still today be heard exuberantly quoting them whenever I find myself repeatedly driving the same route with ever-declining interest.

But of course the power of the record lies in its musicality. There's the harmonies, falsettos, changes of pace, hand claps, guitar breaks, "wah wa ooh"s, contagious chorus and contrasting verses, and an outro that leaves you wanting more. And it's pushed along at pace by the driving beat.

There is so just so much going on and yet it all seems to fit seamlessly together. This is presumably one reason why song writer and arranger Brian Wilson has a reputation as a genius. I'm not sure about that, but it's great pop music, and certainly innovative at the time. I still enjoy it enormously.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BchXkabxn4A>

[This track was a late substitute for Mel's original selection, so Nick did not have the chance to review or comment on it. Mel's original choice at this point was *Surfin' USA* also by *The Beach Boys*. Nick's response to this was that, although he wouldn't be choosing a Beach Boys song himself, *I Get Around* would be the one if he did.]

Pete's comment on Mel's 73. *I Get Around*

Right, so now I get to comment on the Beach Boys themselves. I think I probably share your doubts about the extent of their achievement, which I feel has tended to be greatly exaggerated over the years. I'm probably more of a fan than you, but your decision to choose one of their tracks for this exercise (and to throw in two partial imitations) tells me you do have a real fondness for them.

So where do I think they sit in the canon? (Or should that be shotgun?) I think they did some extraordinary things in their music, led of course by the remarkable Brian Wilson; but they did it in a relatively narrow "envelope" of experimentation. They probably drew out the beautiful sounds of the barber's shop harmony style as far as they would go, but that was it. Beatles they were not. The Americans understandably wanted them to be; and all these years later, that aspiration still seems to colour any critical appreciation of them.

But for all that, they were an indelible part of the soundtrack of our teens, and I really liked them – everything from *I Get Around* to *Good Vibrations*, which I admit has always fascinated me, and the astonishing *God Only Knows*, with its mysterious chord progressions.

I Get Around was in fact the song that introduced the Beach Boys to me, and showed me that vocal harmony didn't just mean the Everlys or the Beatles; there were also other ways in which could be used to amazing effect in mainstream pop. I really liked it, and played it often back in the day. It's been almost done to death now by over-repetition, but it's still an enjoyable reminder of what the Beach Boys were about.

For once I can pitch in that I've actually seen this band live; it was in Wembley in 2012 when they were doing their anniversary tour, complete with all band members then still alive. I thought they were superb.

Nick's comment on Mel's 73. (adapted from his response to *Surfin' USA*)

And so to the real synthetic thing. I have mixed feelings about the Beachboys, even leaving to one side the questions of their vile background – and foreground, where Brian Wilson, to all intents and purposes the Beachboys incarnate, can't use the group name. Why? Well the early stuff is, with some exceptions, ingenuous but fatuous, and too much of the good later stuff tends to be overwrought for my tastes. What I have always liked is the clever harmonies in *I Get Around* and *Sloop John B* (briefly, otherwise awful) and other such songs. I think I once bought a Beachboys CD for next to nothing, and played it once.

I am sure I'll hear a lot of Beachboys before I go to that great beach in the sky, and *I Get Around* is the song I would probably go for (but it ain't goin' to happen, he said in pidgin surfese).

Three tracks on political themes.

74. Another Brick in the Wall (Part 2), Pink Floyd (1980)

Composer: Roger Walters

The great Pink Floyd and a great political theme – our country's systematic abuse of education. (Yeah, I can say this with all my privilege.)

As life-squandering institutions go, I guess I'll always reserve my strongest outrage for the prison system. But the way we fail our citizens in school in many ways is more wasteful since it embraces almost everyone.

Pink Floyd touch on one aspect of the national scandal with this damning take on education as an unsuccessful tool of social programming. There's something shocking in hearing kids singing that they don't need education – and doing so ungrammatically too. But this is no more shocking than witnessing non-academic kids literally climbing walls in a segregated demountable block while the teacher chatted to me about the impossibility of engaging with them once they were 14 or so. They really didn't want no education.

Another Brick in the Wall also characterises the callous disrespect for children by older members of society (though, unlike the song, I blame my generation rather than the teachers themselves). How are the kids going to respect our conservative hideaways if we don't respect their rebellion. The system's a bloody mess (see also my blog) and the chorus of *Another Brick* works for me as shorthand for the failure to make education either worthwhile or relevant for huge numbers of people. Even though the words of the song do hurt, I applaud their ambiguous underlying truth.

I happen to think the music is fabulous too. Pink Floyd's playing seemed to rise to the occasion when they had something interesting to say – as in their famous exploration of madness on the wonderful "Dark Side of the Moon". On *Another Brick In The Wall* there's the menacing progress of automata in the unrelenting plodding beat (throughout the album too). And against that the soaring guitars underline the pathetic ineffectiveness of the teacher and the worthless drudgery of his pupils.

Very good stuff indeed.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=34ZmKbe5oG4>

Pete's comment on Mel's 74. Another Brick In The Wall

I've always found this track powerful, but it's interesting to hear you dissect exactly what's being said. I'd always taken it that the chant about needing no education implied, "We don't need no education *of the kind we're getting*;" it hadn't occurred to me to read it as a sweeping condemnation of the education system in general.

This piece certainly takes a resounding swipe at the wrong kind of teaching; but my own education was inestimably valuable in terms of developing my confidence to reason and challenge (as I assume yours and Nick's were too). So one can't apply your complaint about "callous disrespect" universally.

These days, some older people are certainly inclined to treat kids as an alien species, but that's partly because they feel threatened by them. I suppose it depends where you're looking.

As an aside, young people themselves have lately been buying into this "distancing" effect: hence for instance the rise in "young adult fiction" – a categorisation that didn't exist in our day – and hence also the very existence of BBC3, where "youth content" is unapologetically ghettoised. In the case of publishers, the cynical might suppose the YA category was created in

order to sell more books. With BBC3, which is not even broadcast on terrestrial channels any more [2022: *It was subsequently restored*], I suspect it was created as a panic measure to stem the loss of younger viewers who felt alienated by the supposedly middle-class, middle-of-the-road values of the mainstream TV channels for the reasons you cite. In both cases, though, the outcome is that the divide between generations is reinforced: which I feel is disappointing.

Back to Pink Floyd, I don't know enough of their music to have a view on the quality of this piece in relation to the rest of their output, but I suspect this will be one of the things they're remembered for – in large part for its haunting sound and production.

Nick's comment on Mel's 74. *Another Brick In The Wall*

Well, we have crossed swords on education before, and I suppose I have to repeat that it is unsurprising if it rather gets up the nose of someone whose family were and are involved in education and who has a daughter who is currently busy with "thought control", however much you may seek to gloss things with a statement like "I blame my generation rather than the teachers themselves", which withstands any effort at analysis that I am capable of making. But this doesn't seem to me to be the place to pursue these arguments.

So ... the song. I rather like some of the early Pink Floyd stuff, but found them increasingly uninteresting as time passed. I thought when *Another Brick In The Wall* came out, and still do, that this is OK in a musically predictable and lyrically facile way.

Mel's reply (September 2022): I suppose I had my soapbox perched slightly higher than was justified in support of Pink Floyd. *Brick In The Wall* probably isn't condemning all education, and neither am I of course. And teachers are as much a victim of the system as the kids. But I won't relent on my insistence that adults in general, not just older people, have little sense of or interest in treating young people with the respect that they or their rebellion deserve. Having said that, this is about the only subject over which Nick and I seriously fell out, and I doubt that I could ever have placated him.

75. *American Idiot*, Green Day (2004)

Composers: Green Day (Billie Joe Armstrong, Mike Dirnt, Tre Cool)

American punk rock isn't a natural choice for me. But Green Day are one of David's favourite bands and over the years he has gently turned me on to their seriously irreverent music. So *American Idiot* is to a significant degree a tribute to his musical interests and the times he has spent sharing them with me. (David is also a big U2 fan, but that's produced no such conversion.) It wouldn't be here, though, if it wasn't also rather good.

The song may sound like ordinary shouty punk at first hearing. But it's better than that, as is most of the varied but consistently raw and angry "American Idiot" album. Green Day are proficient musicians who have been selling records for over thirty years, and I am always impressed by bands with only three members which still can make a big sound – Cream and the Jam also come to mind.

Here I like the driving beat of the drums, the catchy tune, the instrumental break in the middle, and of course the title. It's about the media in the US and its composition was stimulated by the paranoia and hysteria prompted by TV coverage of the Iraq war which made idiots of the public. Of course we now know there was much worse to come.

The band don't pull many punches and the YouTube version here has three silly sound cuts to expunge mildly rude words. The song is definitely not simple-minded Sex Pistols-style bad-mouthing. While you may not be persuaded if I suggest that punk lyrics can be subtle, the line "all across the alien nation" is an elegant idea-compacting pun which I regret not thinking of myself.

American Idiot apparently got to No 5 in the UK charts. It must have been one of the less obvious hits of 2004. But the video is an energetic tour-de-force, and probably helped with that.

Other American performers who have cheered me with career-threatening resistance to war-mongering in a country insane enough to swap French fries for freedom fries are Crosby, Stills and Nash and, amazingly, the country band the Dixie Chicks who had a hit with the marvellously defiant *Not Ready to Make Nice* after receiving death threats for opposing the Iraq war. This is so good that it's hovering just outside my 100.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ee_uujKuJMI

Nick's comment on Mel's 75. *American idiot*

Green Day are no more than a name to me, and this is the first time I have paid one of their songs more than passing attention. As far as power trios go, I can see what you mean. There are some truly awful ones – I had a friend in the '70s who intermittently inflicted West Bruce and Laing and Beck Bogart and Appice on me. There have of course been good ones (The Who were to all intents and purposes in the same boat) but I am not sure there's anything magical in the number 3.

Any way, this song. I quite like it. It's about as subtle as an air raid, but then if we weed out all the raucous bits of rock music we'll end up with Val Doonican and Petula Clarke (mmm, that's nice Max). I think you've commented on the one bit of the lyric which is clever, but it serves the purpose. The striking thing about it is, as it was with the best of UK punk (and I agree with you about the Sex Pistols), the energy. It's much easier to take the energy when, as here or in the Jam songs that I like, it has a degree of melodiousness to it.

Pete's comment on Mel's 75. *American idiot*

Well, I'd never heard of this band, but I have to say that against expectation I enjoyed the song. However, I probably liked it for the wrong reasons (in your terms). Once I'd delved beyond the raucous delivery and apparent anger, I realised it was a remarkably tuneful piece with a structure and melody that were quite appealing. If you strip away the aggressive delivery and cynical lyrics, it would almost work as bubblegum music – and I don't mean that as an outright condemnation; I sincerely find pieces like *Sugar Sugar* surprisingly haunting.

I'm glad you like this, and I'm impressed that it's arrived in your top 100. I too enjoy the energy of something like this. But I have mixed feelings about what music like this is actually saying. Back in the day, I disliked punk in general because it was so destructive – not only of received wisdom about the world, but also of the musical forms it harnessed.

I always felt that it was like a pared-down version of the Mersey Sound, delivered with a kind of contempt for its own musicality that contradicted its very existence. Arguably the best punk wasn't really punk at all, and this piece falls into that category, since it respects the musical form it uses. But that leaves it as a kind of puzzle.

76. *Politik Kills*, Manu Chao (2007)

Composer: Jose Manuel Chao

I stumbled on Manu Chao on "Later" where he played the manic techno-punk *Rainin In Paradise*, and I instantly bought *La Radiolina*, the album he was promoting. There I found *Politik Kills*, a compulsive oddity of Euro-alternative reggae-rock. OK I'm inventing the names of the musical genre because I'm not used to anything quite like them. In fact there's very little here that's normal.

Chao himself is Franco-Spanish, and he records in his two home languages plus a kind of English, as you'll see here, and apparently another half dozen or so. He's a versatile

musician and songwriter of the left, who takes up political causes and musical styles the way capitalists seize property. On the Continent he's something of a solo star who insists on equal pay for himself and his large exuberant group of backing musicians.

The hypnotic *Politik Kills* is one of his quieter songs, so in this case you can clearly hear an example of the politics that permeate his repertoire. The message here is very simplistic, and its delivery in broken English borders on the simple-minded. But I don't think the man is an uneducated foreigner who believes that "politik" is the English word "politics". The song is probably not even addressed primarily to an English audience.

"Politik" is a German word, and Swedish and, I think, *almost* Dutch and Polish and French, and English, and so on. To me this haunting little song plays in childlike simplicity with a basic and, as far as much of the world is concerned, universal reality. It's as the title says.

The accompanying video bangs home the point with some irony by featuring a former child soldier (ie a perpetrator) in the war-damaged streets of the Liberian capital Monrovia.

I doubt that this is great music. But I am very happy to listen to rock music which says powerful things so engagingly.

(Apologies, by the way, for the background sounds at the start of the video and throughout, which are not on my CD version. I think they are taken from an 11-minute long edit which I have spared you.)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KVo-biHAtNY>

If you've got this far, why not listen to the contrasting frenzy of *Rainin In Paradise* – a song played with extraordinary energy about a catalogue of war-ravaged African locations, which I could easily have chosen instead. The extraneous noises here actually are on the CD: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AewP_ZelObo

Nick's comment on Mel's 76. *Politik Kills*

I didn't know Manu Chao or this song till now – if I saw him on "Later" I have managed to forget it. I think this is very good for the reasons you give. It's curiously simple as you say, but its power, what I imagine you mean by "hypnotic", seems to me to be incantatory, gaining power by repetition. I find it quite difficult to be sure how far the power comes from the evocative visuals, but who cares?

OK, this may well be preaching to the converted, but there's not a lot I can do about that – having said which, I'm sure I can dredge up examples of music which I dislike despite sympathising with the sentiments, and there are certainly examples of music which I have to admit to liking despite repellent (most often and obviously sexist) lyrics.

Pete's comment on Mel's 76. *Politik Kills*

Right. Um. I'm not sure what to say about this. You've summed up what it is and where it came from very effectively, and I don't have much to add. Haunting sound; disturbing video; and for me, an interesting education in a kind of music I've never really given much attention. But if I wanted something like this in my top 100, it would be for the sound rather than the relentlessly repetitive message. "Mesmerising" is a word that comes to mind, but perhaps in a somewhat unsubtle form.

Nick's postscript to this batch: Er ... well. "Rock is fundamentally a radical medium," you say, Mel. If only. Too often I'd say that rock is radical just as the petrochemical industry is fundamentally committed to the highest environmental standards. I know what you mean (I think/hope) but there's rather a lot of toing and froing to go through to get to a sustainable standpoint, I'd say.

Three contrasting songs I love from America in the Sixties

77. Runaround Sue, Dion and the Belmonts (1961)

Composers: Dion DiMucci and Ernie Maresca

Let's get one thing straight: I liked this song long before I loved *anyone* called Sue! I seldom frequented fairgrounds as a youth, but when I did expose myself to their rather weird form of entertainment there was a good chance that *Runaround Sue* would be somewhere out there pummelling the darkness.

This Sue's behaviour is definitely more transgressive than that of the characterless females who routinely let down the fawning male teenagers in songs of the time. Sue's been out with every single boy in town, and this was pretty shocking back then. It immediately put me on alert. Listening to *Runaround Sue* at the fair on Maidenhead's North Town Moor wasn't quite like being James Dean. But I couldn't help feeling a frisson of rebellious excitement.

This is emphatically a single to get your blood racing. The track has a fantastic beat, high-speed raucous vocal delivery, and musical production that throws in everything from contagious clapping and a doo-wop chorus to tempo changes and a deliciously dirty saxophone. Dion sounds at times like a tough Italian-American street kid from the Bronx, perhaps because he really was.

You have to hand it to the American music industry. They didn't half make trivia engaging. (Talking of trivia, here's a Wikipedia-sourced fact you probably already know but I didn't: Dion couldn't afford the \$36 fare for the plane ride that killed Buddy Holly et al, and he stayed on the ground to pursue his career into old age.)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ID-jsdohGZs>

Nick's comment on Mel's 77. Runaround Sue

This is great stuff. I remember driving back with Margaret late-ish from some tedious do at Bradford and this came on the radio. It simply sent our spirits soaring. Classic doo-wop from the typical New York stable which produced so many.

But Dion had a bit more about him than some, which may account for his longevity (incidentally there is of course a Motown link – he did the original recording of *Abraham Martin and John*, later covered by one Marvin Gaye). All the things you say, Mel.

As a tangential comment, the prissy "Sue goes out with other guys" contrasts laughably to the attitude in Dion's next single *The Wanderer* – "I love 'em and I kiss 'em, they don't even know my name". There is something of an analogue to Runaround Sue's attitude in *You Don't Own Me* by Lesley Gore, but that was a pretty rare phenomenon at the time.

I think I've encountered your bit of trivia before, Mel. Have you heard the one that says that Eddie Cochran's guitar was pulled from the crash which killed him by a police cadet called Dave Dee, who subsequently went on to commit grosser musical acts?

Pete's comment on Mel's 77. Runaround Sue

I suppose I should throw in the musical bit by observing that this is a 1-6-4-5 classic. That's a chord pattern that is found in literally thousands of songs (for instance, *Hey Baby*, to pluck one out of the air at random), but repetition doesn't diminish its power. It wouldn't be so popular if it wasn't so effective. If anything, the inexorability of the sequence underlines the inevitability of the message.

Another musical observation: to me the song marks an interesting intersection of two styles – doo-wop, as Nick points out, and Brill. It harnesses the simplicity of both (Brill musicians weren't necessarily simplistic of course, I hasten to add), and uses them for an unexpectedly spirited piece with a rather unsettling message.

Not that I was particularly unsettled by it back in the day; I liked the song mainly for the sound of it, and didn't pay too much attention to the content. Oops. But as you say, Mel, it has fantastic impact and an impressive range of detail in it. It's a piece that hides its numerous merits behind its apparently simple structure.

78. *Summer in the City*, The Lovin' Spoonful (1966)

Composers: John Sebastian, Mark Sebastian, Steve Boone

I don't know whether John Sebastian is a particularly nice bloke, though that's the way he always comes across to me. The good humour and positivity of two other songs I get excited about, *Do You Believe in Magic?* and *You Didn't Have To Be So Nice*, are rather heart-warming, as is his slot in the "Woodstock" documentary where he sings about being a father and surprisingly carries the young hippy audience with him.

Summer In The City manages the same uplifting mood with its contrast between daytime in the grim city streets and the (relatively) cool fun-packed nights. But it has a lot more drive and excitement, and is much better produced than the earlier hits.

John Sebastian is a fine writer of two-and-a-half minute pop songs. But *Summer In the City* rises above the rest with the energy of the lyrics, which so economically bring the city to life with its vivid rapid-fire pictures. It's not entirely clear whether it is the people or the sidewalk which are "hotter than a matchhead", but either way the image conveys something both brittle and explosive. And the driving insistence of quadruple rhymes is entirely appropriate to the scene (OK not quite quadruple, because "city" is repeated).

That would count for little if the record didn't also sound great. There's a thumping start and arresting changes of tempo throughout. The sound effects of the street could easily feel out of place, but I really don't think they are. The street noises give way to a massively extended organ note recalling a very long motor horn blast, which neatly adds edge and tension as the musically raw description of daytime switches to the much less abrasive presentation of the nightlife. It's hardly profound or unique, but it's a neat idea that works well.

Thanks go to you Nick for alerting me to these joys via your greatest hits album back in Cambridge. Without that ringing daily in my ears I may not have paid the Lovin' Spoonful the attention they deserved.

And by the way, when I was in New York in 1970 this was *exactly* what it felt like.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lwZdDyH9LLc>

Pete's comment on Mel's 78. *Summer in the City*

Once again, Mel, you've said most of what I would have wanted to say about this. The song was on my own short list, but I'll avoid the double repetition of picking it myself. However, I can at least echo your thoughts about the wonderful way it evokes the hot city streets so economically with words, music and effects. And I love the two bars of solo keyboard that come up between verses, leading into the explosive prelude to the following verse: an wonderful example of musical tension and release.

I also agree that this song has rather more drive and impact than the band's other hits. I always felt it was almost like a song from a different band. It was definitely my favourite piece of theirs.

For some reason I've always linked it in my mind with *Matthew and Son* by Cat Stevens, even though I realise the two pieces are quite different. I suppose they both contain vivid images of people going about their daily lives, and both make their comment with musicality and great verve.

Nick's comment on Mel's 78. *Summer in the City*

As I said in my last lot, this seems to me to be the standout track by The Lovin' Spoonful. As you say, it evokes New York, or hot American cities (Chicago most recently for me) powerfully – not that I think a geriatric like me counts as a cat looking for a kitty, whether in Chicago or steamy downtown Penistone.

Generally The Lovin' Spoonful managed to pull the trick of singing songs which in other hands might have sounded twee without doing so. Even when they were playing cod-blues or "jug band music" it was definitely along the lines of letting the good times roll. So they could get away with a lot – they were decent musicians, which doubtless helped. The sound here is curiously different from anything else I know by them – much harder edged. Maybe that is why it gets in here (and might still just make it to my list).

John Sebastian's persona was always easy-going congeniality. Whether this is so in "reality" who knows – there were certainly tensions in The Lovin' Spoonful which led to their demise. There's a video of them singing *You're A Big Boy Now* in which Zal Yanovsky can't be bothered to hide his contempt for what's going on. I saw it on BBC4 but can't locate it on YouTube. But John Sebastian is still around, as witness various performances on YouTube.

79. *I Heard It Through The Grapevine*, Marvin Gaye (1968)

Composers: Norman Whitfield, Barrett Strong

Few songs in the last 70 years have had such instantly recognisable and inviting opening bars. The single opening drum beat, the steady thump of the electric piano, then briefly the urgent tambourine. You know this is going to be good. Then it turns out to be brilliant.

Until a few years back, for many years after the awful jeans ad, I couldn't listen to *I Heard It Through The Grapevine* without cringing. I don't mind a man taking off his jeans in public if he wants to. But not to this great song thanks. Those images are faded now and I can reinstate this as one of my top favourites from the Sixties.

I don't have the musical vocabulary to properly describe why I think this is one of the great triumphs of American pop. I'll leave that to you musicians. But it's so haunting and relentless that it nearly hurts. Added to that there's a beautifully simple universal theme of love and rejection, and a gorgeously crafted lyric. And an immaculate vocal performance of course. Boy this is good.

I don't know much about Marvin Gaye's music, except that it's widely regarded. Did he do anything better than this?

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hajBdDM2qdg>

Nick's comment on Mel's 79. *I Heard It Through The Grapevine*

Back in the days when my back was in the statutory number of parts, this was my 38th choice, and it seems to me to be self-evidently one of the great bits of pop-or-rock-or-soul-or-all-of-the-above. I don't have anything much to add to what I said then. But I agree with all that you say, other than to say that I didn't blame Marvin Gaye for the jeans ad.

I think I was first aware of him via the Stones' version of *Can I Get A Witness*, and at around the same time by *Hitchhike*, which was memorable for a not exactly subtle dance which was doing the rounds about when we were doing O Levels. Not that I was distracted for a millisecond.

In my view this is the best thing he did by an impressive distance, but I still enjoy some of the duets he did with Tammi Terrell and others, and *What's Goin' On* (the single and the album) and *Let's Get It On* are worth listening to.

Pete's comment on Mel's 79. *I Heard It Through The Grapevine*

Something that has struck me for the first time now that I've revisited this piece is that it introduces a slightly different thought towards the end, when the singer acknowledges that he shouldn't believe everything he hears, and actually invites his partner to comment on what she's accused of. Well well.

Anyway, I've always thought this a truly wonderful piece, and completely agree about the spellbinding opening. Another point that struck me on hearing it again is that although it's written in a classic Motown rhythm, complete with typical Motown drum riffs at key points, it somehow transcends that relatively narrow medium, taking on a dynamic of its own – tense, mysterious, anguished. It's a matchless classic.

I too have always enjoyed Marvin Gaye's duets with women singers. *It Takes Two* with Kim Weston has become a modern standard, and despite its massive over-exposure I still love it. I also like the Tammi Terrell duets. Extraordinary that Gaye was paired successively with two black girl singers who died ridiculously prematurely.

Here are four more great rock songs from America, this time post-Sixties.

80. Kodachrome, Paul Simon (1973)

Composer: Paul Simon

Now for some seriously subversive music, banned by the BBC for using the name of trademarked products...

I think we'd agree that Paul Simon is one of the great songwriters of the pop era. He delivers fine tunes, has an extraordinary ear for the rhythmic impact of his music, and writes thoughtful, penetrating, sometimes quasi-poetic lyrics (though he sometimes confounds this by writing jokes).

For me, one outstanding theme of the lyrics is the importance of the creative imagination (a feeling I share, sometimes with a similar sense of desperation) and two songs in particular seem to tackle the subject with insight, joy and contagious energy: *Cecilia* and *Kodachrome*.

In *Cecilia* he's making love to the goddess of music, takes a break from her and comes back to find she's gone. Best song ever about writers' block? And a hugely enjoyable track in its own right.

In *Kodachrome*, though, Simon is simply celebrating the glories of creativity, with the twist of course that Kodachrome film was known to cheat by enhancing reality and making everything look sunnier than it really was. Nice premise! As in *Cecilia*, Simon seems to be in a state of panic about the possibility of losing his creativity (sorry Paul, that came later), and the urgency of the music with its wonderfully accelerating pace reflects this perfectly.

It's also a great rocking song, featuring Paul Simon's characteristic attention to musicianship, a sound that has the crispness of a packet of Walker's, and an irresistible rhythm. He's written better poetry, created better sounds elsewhere, but I can't put this one down.

Here's *Kodachrome*: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qrRRhoS3Kfk>

And since I mentioned *Cecilia*: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=a5_QV97eYqM

Pete's comment on Mel's 80. Kodachrome

Brilliant! I've always liked this track enormously, so I'm delighted that you share my enjoyment of it. It's a wonderful, exuberant pop song, and in my experience is always uplifting. I find it impossible to play the album without smiling as this track launches you into it.

Two aspects stand out in my memory. One is the indignation I felt that the BBC had banned it – something I worked out on my own (by its absence!), and only found confirmed many years later. How childish, I always thought. I distinctly remember once staring at our big Bush radio in Gosforth, listening to something else by Paul Simon and wishing it could be this. I actually felt resentful on his behalf.

The other thing I remember is how much I liked the use of two-part harmony, and indeed the almost self-consciously "pop-like" structure and instrumentation of the whole piece. Paul Simon used harmony quite sparingly after splitting with Garfunkel, and being a harmony freak, I was always cheered when he reminded us that he hadn't abandoned it altogether, or decided to eschew its pleasures on principle.

Ah, and the message. He speaks for all of us! And so evocatively. "If you took all the girls I knew when I was single" – what an extraordinary and playful notion. I enjoy the way his lyrics have tended over the years to evoke mundane objects and places (cars, trains, streets, buildings) as starting points for imaginative and even mystical reflection. You say his lyrics sometimes

embody jokes, and I suppose that's true, but I've always taken them as playful pieces of encouragement to us to pay attention. To me his poetry is often sublime.

Nick's comment on Mel's 80. *Kodachrome*

Well, here's a rum do. I'm not sure that it was actually the first time I heard it (unlikely) but the first time it struck me what a seriously good song this was is when one of my wives and I visited you and your sole wife, Mel. It is a terrific song and brilliantly performed. I can't add much to your (plural) comments, save maybe one thing. Isn't part of the point that the music and in particular the accompaniment are self-consciously retro in a rather OTT way, and thus a perfect reflection of the theme of the song? The names of the session men are at best no more than names to me, but they do a superb job.

81. *Hotel California*, The Eagles (1976)

Composers: Don Felder, Don Henley and Glenn Frey

I never thought a lot of the Eagles. They're too much on the side of easy listening, with niceish tunes and nondescript themes. Naturally, their big country and western fan following also made me suspicious!

But *Hotel California* rises far above the rest. I'm not going to claim it to be great art. However the image of California as a hotel that's an inescapable heaven and hell is pretty compulsive, partly because we're extremely likely to have a view of the US state that confirms the vision.

The construction of the lyric adds interest because it's packed into a little story which twists about from scenes that are obvious, accessible and recognisable to incidents and sensations that are more personal, obscure and dark. I think this provides opportunities for fresh discoveries in the story and must help to account for the song's huge popularity and longevity, even when we may know the words back to front. Certainly, there's a wide range of unnecessarily complicated interpretations online.

There's quite a bit of subtlety here too, with scene-setting scents, sounds and visual imagery which are unusually detailed for a pop song, and which help to intensify the experience of those of us who listen to lyrics.

But it wouldn't have made my top 100 on the strength of the lyrics alone. *Hotel California* has in my modest estimation the greatest guitar outro of any rock song ever recorded. OK, I'm not actually in a position to judge its technical prowess. But it's an exceptional tour-de-force echoing and elaborating on the 50 seconds instrumental intro – which together seem to emphasise the inescapability theme. Anyway, I like it an awful lot. For me it's consistently uplifting and thrilling.

It's interesting that years ago DJs used to fade out the end because they thought the six-and-a-half-minute record went on too long. Today I don't think they dare to.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BciS5krYL80>

Pete's comment on Mel's 81. *Hotel California*

This is amazing. I too had neglected the Eagles, thinking they were too obvious and even populist, yet I always rather liked the sound they created ... but without taking too much notice of it. And so they became part of the fabric of all our lives.

You've given me a welcome excuse to listen to them again, and more carefully, and it's been worth the effort. The lyrics of this song are intriguing even when they're ambiguous and opaque, and overall they're pretty unsettling. As for that line about checking out but not leaving, it's priceless.

I've just been reminding myself of what else this band gave us, and there are a surprising number of enduring songs in their output – *Lying Eyes*, *Take It Easy* and *Take it To The Limit*, for instance, to name but a few. You say none of these matches *Hotel California*, and I won't argue with that, but the band were certainly good at putting a tune together. Maybe if they'd come ten years sooner I would have accepted them more naturally as part of my musical heritage, and been more appreciative.

I agree with you that the outro is compelling. The chord sequence is a classic, and invites something dramatic, and they take maximum advantage.

Nick's comment on Mel's 81. *Hotel California*

I wouldn't go as far as either of you in my enthusiasm either for the Eagles or for this track (which I think is quite clearly their best – not that I can claim to know enough of the oeuvre to make this a particularly authoritative statement).

It's obviously a good song, well crafted and performed. That said, it always leaves me rather cold – no, more tepid. Listening to it again (and again) doesn't really change that reaction. It's fine, but ... reminds me why I prefer Jackson Browne's (original) version of *Take It Easy* to the Eagles'. One thing I would absolutely not deny is what a good guitarist Joe Walsh is. One of the little frustrations of this exercise is that, while it would never make my top 100, his *Life's Been Good* never fails to entertain me.

Incidentally, am I the only one to remember that one of the songs performed by the band in the pub we went to after seeing the Zombies in Shepherds Bush was ... *Hotel California*?

Mel's reply September 2022: There was a band? As I've said, it's a matter of wonder and awe that Nick could not only remember every gig he ever attended, but also the running order and the colour of the lead guitar. Here's the evidence.

82. *Dancing in the Dark*, Bruce Springsteen (1984)

Composer: Bruce Springsteen

I seem to recall that I was unfairly snotty about *Thunder Road* when you presented it to us back in 2017, Nick. I've listened to that since and can appreciate its greatness more now than I did then. (One of the enduring features of this game for me is that it keep awakening and reawakening me to greatness.) It is probably musically superior to my Springsteen choice here, and its teeth-clenching desperation make it in some respects more powerful.

It's also, rather strikingly, the natural conclusion to the spirit of *Dancing In The Dark*, which describes the intense frustration of a life going nowhere that just has to end in the great escape with his woman down *Thunder Road*.

Dancing In The Dark is much more self-consciously a pop song designed for mass appeal, with a catchy tune, a memorable chorus, and the kind of performance which justifiably made Springsteen a star. Above all it has a title which sounds rather romantic and which the kids can happily latch on to while unaware of the bleakness of the image.

I loved it long before I thought about its distinctly unromantic meaning. But it's so well done that, in a way, I knew all along. The whole feel is edgy and urgent. "This gun's for hire" is terrifically evocative, and under the surface we see tinder about to burst into flame, potential grasping to be realised. It's lyrically and musically unrelenting.

Part of the power of the song is that it *isn't* realised. There's no resolution. We're left holding the grenade with the pin out. I wouldn't want to over-dramatise, but I get that. Not because I necessarily share the feeling, but because Springsteen's performance communicates it. He's good.

And if you don't buy any of my rationalising, it's a thoroughly enjoyable high-energy rocker. Might one in earlier times even have felt like dancing to it?

No, I'm not going to finish without mentioning young Courteney Cox pulled from the audience and dancing with Springsteen on stage while the saxophone plays out the end of what could have been a rather naff video but for the music.

(Some context, Nick: Courteney Cox is an American actress who first came to fame in a long-running comedy series called *Friends* about an endearing bunch of underachieving young people who always seemed to be unaware that they were living in an apartment block in New York City which they couldn't possibly have afforded. I know you can't stand US sitcoms, but you should have watched it!)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=129kuDCQtHs>

Pete's comment on Mel's 82 *Dancing in the Dark*

I'm ashamed to admit (if I haven't already) that Bruce Springsteen languished on the periphery of my musical consciousness for most of my life. Nick's choice of *Thunder Road* was a wake-up call to pay attention, and now you've reinforced it by choosing this.

I've always been aware of *Dancing in the Dark*, of course, and quite liked it in a passive way. But you can't always hear all the words of material like this (understatement of the era), and I never bothered to discover them. I was an overgrown version of the undiscerning kids you talk about. Now that I have, I appreciate all the more what this is about, and I can see exactly why you like it. It's everything you say: edgy, urgent, and also frustrated. Yet the music itself is kind of triumphant, and almost a contradiction of the bleak underlying message – as much music is.

But I prefer *Thunder Road* – not just because it has a faintly positive “happy” ending, but also because it's a wonderful fable, and it has a kind of exuberant definitiveness about it, both musically and lyrically.

By the way, was Bruce Springsteen ever as young as he is in your selected video? It's a reminder of *anno domini*.

Nick's comment on Mel's 82 *Dancing in the Dark*

Oh, all right, I have seen the boy perform this song. But my strongest memory of it is actually from 1986. We went on holiday to Menorca and nipped into a bar for a pre-prandial. There was a DJ playing predictable music to an empty dance floor. He put this on and the floor was instantly full, only to empty the moment it was finished.

The song may have been a fairly obvious attempt by Springsteen to increase his popularity with a larger, clubbier audience, but the song is curiously and typically at odds with poppiness – “I want to change my hair, my clothes, my face”??? After all, “this gun's for hire” could be interpreted foolishly as machismo, but this is just typically sombre. As for *Thunder Road* having a happy ending, Pete, look at where the album goes – it's a desperate effort which ends up with them “wounded and not even dead” [note the “not even”] in Jungland.

Ah, the E Street Band. Sadly, Max Weinberg limits his normally brilliant drumming to a predictable disconess here, but he and the band as a whole have been terrific. Nils Lofgren had taken over from Steve Van Zandt by this stage, and is there in the video, typically looking a prat but playing brilliantly (if more or less inaudibly in this instance). It also serves to remind me that Clarence Clemons died while we were on holiday in Snowdonia.

Thanks for the footnote about the popular actress, Mel: I knew that it was all faked and that she was a plant, but had forgotten who she was. I'm sure I will have forgotten again in a couple of days' time.

83. *Handle With Care*, Traveling Wilburys (1988)

Composers: Traveling Wilburys

Here's a song from an album which in its entirety today gives me as much simple pleasure as any I have access to.

Half the tracks would be worthy representatives of the whole. And I particularly wanted to include *End of the Line* – a great song which, with very little imagination, you could take to be about a very positive approach to ageing. As such it provides a suitable tribute to Roy Orbison, George Harrison and Tom Petty, the three Wilburys who are already dead. That song is also a little more of a collective performance.

However, it's hard to get away from the fact that *Handle With Care* is the best all-round song, performance and production on either of the two Wilbury albums. So Harrison, who wrote it, again gets his nose into my top 100, as does the immaculate Roy Orbison who I couldn't quite squeeze in elsewhere. Producer Jeff Lynne, who I didn't rate much with the ELO song you invited me to listen to in 2015, Pete, is also a worthy contributor here.

Naturally, it's difficult to separate the music from one's open-mouth wonder at the mere existence of a group which, with Dylan, Orbison and Harrison, includes the greatest lyricist and the greatest vocalist in our generation of popular music – and a Beatle!

The group members themselves also seem have been surprised. And more to the point, it's their pleasure at the spontaneity of the experience which cements this as one of the more extraordinary musical collaborations of rock. If you haven't seen it before, and even if you just want to be reminded of the joy, you could do worse than take a look at the short documentary "The True History of the Traveling Wilburys".

And on this rare occasion I'm not going to pick my chosen track apart. My guess is that you both already like it for what it is.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1o4s1KVJaVA>

Nick's comment on Mel's 83: *Handle With Care*

The Travelling Wilburys (I suppose I have to tolerate the single "l" in "Travelling" but won't repeat it) always feel to me like a rather guilty pleasure. Not that I can see why it should be guilty. And I have seen the documentary and was duly impressed.

This track is probably the best example of them really working together, and that is a simple joy (of a slightly different order from that of seeing Roy Orbison surely wearing a wig and singing "I've still got some love to give"). It is just a delight, as are a number of the songs individually and the whole album as an entity. The second album is nothing like as good.

Pete's comment on Mel's 83: *Handle With Care*

All I can really do here is echo what you've already said. I bought this album as a CD when it came out (I also bought the follow-up album), and I've always thought it wonderful for the reasons you cite. It was fantastic to hear Roy Orbison again, sad that his heart wasn't up to all that renewed activity in the end. And amazing to reflect that all those potentially massive egos were able to work harmoniously together. The songs were mostly good, and the production was excellent (thanks to Jeff Lynne, as you say).

I won't try to do what you didn't – pick the song apart – but I must draw attention to one particularly interesting oddity in its chord structure. It starts with two verses, then goes into the middle section. Those two verses are musically exactly the same, but with one exception. The first time round, the verse ends on the tonic chord (the "home" chord of the key that it's in). The second time, it ends on the dominant chord – the one that leaves you dangling. This is perfectly logical, and leads you naturally into the middle section; but the way the first verse ends always strikes me as a surprise. Musically it's a complete statement, which isn't necessarily what you expect.

So there you go. The same thing happens again later in the song.

It wouldn't be right for all my choices to be from the Sixties. Here are three songs from the Brit Pop era to show I'm able to follow trends and stay abreast of changes in popular music taste. Who am I kidding?! The horrific truth is that they are all more than 16 years old, and one was in the charts a quarter of a century ago. Even so, they're chosen to show that great British bands didn't go away with the arrival of the Sex Pistols.

84. Don't look Back in Anger, Oasis (1996)**Composer:** Noel Gallagher

I thought I understood this song, and admired Gallagher for it. Then I checked on Wikipedia. The best lines,

"I'm gonna start a revolution from my bed
'Cause you said the brains I had went to me head,"

were apparently lifted from a tape recording John Lennon was making for his autobiography. The web site reveals that the song was written on drugs, and Noel Gallagher claims he doesn't know what it means.

With those trivial caveats, I'll stick my neck out a little and say that irrespective of the hype and posturing back in the Nineties (and one seriously nasty band member) this is a very good group. "What's the Story Morning Glory" is a landmark album, and *Don't Look Back In Anger* is one of the great songs of the Brit Pop era. While we may be inclined to laud originality and decry rip offs from *Imagine* and the Beatles Songbook, this is not plagiarism. It's part conscious homage and part re-creation early in the age of sampling. Oasis hardly ever actually sound like the Beatles anyway, despite the conscious influences.

This song has a wonderfully catchy tune, and a musical arrangement which manages impressively to fly from solo piano and muted guitars, through jangling cacophony, to the kind of soaring melodic guitar work that always lifts my spirits, and back to a gentle controlled ending. It's all hung together by unusually exuberant and prominent drums.

They didn't knock this one out in a few minutes.

As for what the song means, here's my take – which isn't especially inconsistent with Noel Gallagher's muddled non-explanations. This is the young creative artist making a break for it, kicking off the constraints of the mundane (the imaginary "Sally" of the song) to be what he wants to be. What makes this lyric for me is generosity of the escape. Unusually for a break-up, there are no recriminations from either Sally or the songwriter.

A marvellous assertion of creative independence. You may pretend not to know what you were talking about, Gallagher, but it's not that obscure. And good for you.

Like most songs which are subsequently commandeered by the public, *Don't Look Back In Anger* seems rather demeaned by its later association with the Manchester Arena bombing. It's not the anthem of a defiant city. It's about another much more optimistic point in the history of our times.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=r8OipmKFDDeM>

Pete's comment on Mel's 84. Don't Look Back In Anger

Well! I think this song is great, and I'm delighted to find it on your list. That steady build-up to the anthemic chorus is executed flawlessly. It really does soar. I know such songs can be criticised for being manipulative and even shallow, but this one simply works. If Oasis had created nothing else, this would seal their achievement. It's one of those songs that have an

indefinable magic dust scattered over them. However hard you try to pull them apart in search of it, you can't really find it. You just know it's there.

Anyway, I agree with all you say about the arrangement and instrumentation, which includes Noel Gallagher's nicely effective guitar solo; and yes, the drumming is marvellously fulsome. As you suggest, the whole thing is carefully and meticulously worked out, which no doubt contributes to its success.

As for the meaning, thank you for your take, which seems completely plausible to me. I think it's more or less what I'd subliminally assumed, but I have to say I've never worked it through so methodically.

And finally, yes, the song has a proper conclusion, which is reflected in the way there isn't a run-out; it actually has a reflective ending, musically as well as thematically. Did I mention that back in the day I bought the album on CD?

An aside: disappointingly, Helen "took against" Oasis back in the 1990s, and has never recanted. Mainly she didn't like Liam Gallagher's louche stage presence and nasal intonation. I do see her point, but sadly she doesn't see mine, and any attempt I've made to talk the band up over the years has met with failure. So it's marvellous to find myself among people who appreciate them as much as I do. Not that I'll ever compare them to the Beatles or anybody else in that league; but for a while, their liking for that group delivered some memorable work.

Nick's comment on Mel's 84. *Don't Look Back In Anger*

Prologue: Sorry for the delay. No excuses other than my usual crapness. Any way ... You will be relieved to know that, as a result of my old fartishness, I have seen none of these three bands live on stage. Mind you, I have doubtless told you that I have played guitar with Noel Gallagher. (This, dear reader, is an example of how something which is factually correct can be entirely misleading: he was one side of a guitar shop playing a Gibson, I was the other side playing what was in the process of becoming my Martin. I obviously have a future as a Tory politician – or is this too near the truth for them?).

And so to business: I think I'm in tricky territory here. Oasis were the band of choice for Rob for a fair time – when he graduated we gave him a guitar strap like the one used by Noel Gallagher (not that Rob's likely to be in any great doubt about my opinion of Oasis).

I have always thought that at their medium-to-best they were a very decent band, but there's a limit to how much they animate me. This is clearly right at the top of my mental hit parade of their songs, and I enjoyed listening to it again, as I will continue to do. But I can't imagine it replacing the usual geriatric choices in my 100 greatest.

I agree about the influence of the Beatles. This is not some sort of cod-tribute band, but the influence is clear, and that seems fair enough to anyone but the zealots who go on about cultural appropriation (without which there'd be precious little "culture", whatever that might be).

85. *Why Does It Always Rain On Me*, Travis (1999)

Composer: Fran Healey

There's something thoughtful and mature about the lyrics of young Fran Healey, lead singer with Travis, and this song typifies them. It's hard to put my finger on what this is. "Is it because I lied when I was seventeen?" is the most striking line of *Why Does It Always Rain On Me*, though on its own it sounds a bit naff. (Perhaps that's the way to write a hit song.) Yet it gains credibility and interest in the context of the rest of the song.

Anyway, I didn't come here to praise the words. *Why Does It Always Rain On Me* has an absolutely fantastic lilting tune, and I love it for that. The introspective lyric is, for once, just a bonus.

I have a deep sense of grievance that within a year of this release Travis were totally eclipsed by the only occasionally interesting Coldplay, at a time when every group in the country had suddenly started to sound the same. Travis from the outset made better

records, but a serious injury to a band member seems to have put them out of action at the time they needed to be making an impact. Not quite a Zombies-like lost opportunity, but another example of the way chance sticks its oar and boot into the doorway of musical history.

Incidentally, the really naff thing about this song is the stupid video. Don't bother.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PXatLOWjr-k>

Pete's comment on Mel's 85. *Why Does It Always Rain On Me?*

I've always rather liked this song, and like you I remember thinking when it came out that this band was going to do some interesting things. For a while it did, but then it lost momentum and never really delivered on the promise. I didn't know why until reading your appraisal, so thanks for the new information.

Back to the song itself, I've always liked the clean guitar arrangement, with those ringing chords accompanying the verse lines. And of course the memorable line about being seventeen remains an irresistible draw. Yes, it has a joyous, uplifting melody that always gives me a frisson of pleasure when I hear the introduction. What a pity they never got round to doing a lot more of this.

Nick's comment on Mel's 85. *Why Does It Always Rain On Me?*

I have of course heard this almost as many times as I've had hot dinners in the last whatever. I have always felt perfectly happy to listen to it and rather like it and them in other incarnations. This is the most attention I have ever paid it, and I'm not entirely sure that's a kindness.

I think I prefer retaining my sense of it being amiable pop to having to recognise that, listened to closely, it doesn't amount to that much and does have a certain tendency towards the naff end of the spectrum (in truth scarcely an end of the spectrum in pop/rock, when it dominates a very large proportion of the totality).

While on the subject of naffness, I think the car is a Vauxhall Firenza, a rubbish coupe version of the rubbish Viva. I saw a road test of it once, which included asking why it was called Firenza. Was it, the tester asked, some sort of gesture towards Florence, as if Alfa Romeo decided to call one of their coupes the Liverpoop?

86. *Take Me Out*, Franz Ferdinand (2004)

Composers: Alexander Kapranos, Nicholas McCarthy, Paul Thompson, Robert Hardy

I've always loved this song partly for the ingenious elaboration of the double entendre "take me out" – dating, and taking a shot at someone. I now discover that Franz Ferdinand themselves claim it's about an actual murder – of the very Archduke himself.

Forget that; it's someone at a dancehall demanding to be taken home by a potential lover, and there's nothing in the lyric to contradict this. It wouldn't be right to abandon an image as powerful as that of a sexual target being caught in the crosshairs of a gun.

Not to worry. My reason for choosing *Take Me Out* is that it's a great catchy rocker. I find it fascinating how much tension and excitement can be generated simply by changes in pace. And like others in my 100, it's the thumping driving beat which hooks me.

It's urgent, edgy and fun, if just a bit too long. And absolutely has to be played very loud. I don't tire of it. There are some other excellent tracks on the *Franz Ferdinand* debut album. It's so refreshing to know that good, solid rock is, or was quite recently, still alive among all the marketable dross. Oh yes, and credit to Geraint for occasionally alerting me to music which, from my ivory tower, would otherwise go unnoticed.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GhCXAiNz9Jo>

Nick's comment on Mel's 86. *Take Me Out*

I think my listening to this has been equivalently casual, but my reaction to listening to it with more attention is distinctly different. This is a very decent piece of rock. Propulsive beats and guitar riffs are far from a guarantee of success in rock, which is littered with them. But this really does seem to me to have a driving energy about it which I respond to (if not by rolling back the carpet and leaping about as if demented – well, not any more whatever the occasion to be honest).

It's very well done – I particularly like the rather retro drumming and the descending bass line behind the words "I won't be leaving here ..." You're right that it slightly outstays its welcome, and it's a shame that they don't make recurrent use of the music used in the first 55 seconds, but it's good stuff.

Pete's comment on Mel's 86. *Take Me Out*

Interesting. I'd never consciously listened to anything by this band before, so hearing it was instructive. I agree that it's exuberant and full of impact, and for me it certainly has far more appeal than almost anything I've ever heard by Coldplay. So we're on the same hymn sheet so far.

The message also has a teasing ambiguity, as you say. But I found the minor-key nature of the song a bit downbeat. It almost contradicts the emphatic delivery. There are ways and ways of using minor keys; such songs can have major-key climaxes scattered through them, but this one doesn't. But that's just my immediate reaction to something new. When you know the song well, I've no doubt it grows on you. Anyway, thanks for educating me in something I knew nothing about.

Incidentally, you've given me licence here to sound off a bit further against Coldplay, who I think have always been greatly overrated. The frequent and predictably unpredictable swerves in the melody lines of their songs have become indelible trademarks, and at the same time (for me, anyway) unfortunate clichés. Worse, that melodic style has influenced countless other songwriters and performers since Coldplay came along, condemning a lot of pop music to that same irritating "look at me" emphasis on what I assume is meant to produce surprise, but for me just provokes annoyance!

Three records by women which have particularly excited me over the years – the records, not the women.

87. *The Night They Drove Old Dixie Down*, Joan Baez (1971)

Composer: Robbie Robertson

I'm clearly supposed to opt for the original version of this song on the Band's highly regarded "The Band", which gets quoted as one of the greatest albums of the Sixties. Instead I'm going for a sweet-sounding top ten hit by a performer I've already picked for her immaculate *Diamonds and Rust*.

Many years after its release I eventually bought the Band's album to see what I was missing. I found their own *The Night They Drove Old Dixie Down* to be a whining, lumbering dirge drowned in instrumental cacophony. I hate it. They're lauded for the "tightness" of the music, but most tracks sound like an absolute shambles, as tight as a clown's trousers.

It's not the music or production that raise this record to the top. This is an astonishingly good lyric. For a long time I even assumed that this powerful depiction of one of the most terrible episodes in the American Civil War was based on a song written at the time. I still find the simple restrained first-person anguish and helplessness unusually affecting for a pop song.

Admittedly it's not Joan Baez' greatest record. The track sounds great, but it's far too upbeat for the lyric, especially when the choir comes in. I've tried alternatives, though, including a version by the marvellous Johnny Cash who on this occasion manages to strip all meaning from the words. At least I can enjoy the highly catchy tune and Joan Baez's mellifluous voice while savouring the lyric.

There are two more features of this great song which make it worthy of attention.

One is a rather wonderful densely-packed farming and Biblical pun that has always raised my spirits in the lines "You can't raise the cane back up When it's in the feed." – linking the vernacular of the song's desolate subsistence farmer Virgil Caine to god's vengeance for the murder of Abel, via a figure of speech for violent disturbance. (YouTube hopelessly misses the point by rendering the lines "You can't raise the Caine back up When he's in defeat.")

I've also now learned that the composer Robbie Robertson and the Band have been seriously criticised in the States for allegedly espousing the Confederate cause with the song, and therefore supporting slavery! Robertson is a Canadian who naturally rejects the idea he was taking sides in a 160-year-old foreign war. Self-evidently this is a song about humanity, not slogans. The antagonism he has provoked is a timely reminder of the pernicious stupidity of identity politics when it confronts art – thus justifying this fine song also taking a symbolic role in my 100.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LFA5JgwdEy4>

Pete's comment on Mel's 87. *The Night They Drove Old Dixie Down*

Of the three songs in this batch, I find the Joan Baez piece the hardest to enthuse about, but perhaps that's partly because I like the other two so much. Or perhaps it's because the song is so familiar. I enjoyed listening to it again, but I suspect that you have to think yourself into the right frame of mind to be properly moved by the words. I do take the point about what they're

saying, but despite listening to it several times, I couldn't get to the place where I felt I was supposed to be at an emotional level. As they say, that's just me.

What I did notice was the excellent quality of the production. Is this a remix? I can't see it stated anywhere. And of course Joan Baez sings it nicely. I have to say I also rather enjoyed the still picture show! I know I keep telling you two not to look at the YouTube videos that come with these songs, but this one is rather well put together. The inclusion of photographs compresses time, making that war feel surprisingly recent, and not just part of history.

88. *Quitting Time*, The Roches (1979)

Composer: Margaret Roche

It's almost impossible to pick a track which either characterises or does full justice to this extraordinary group of three sisters. There's wit, humour, drama, gravitas, introspection. And all wrapped up in a style which gets summarised as "barbershop singing for girls". But that hardly begins to describe it.

Quitting Time is one of my favourites because of the huge sound which the three of them manage to achieve together, because it's got a great tune, and because of the out-of-the-ordinary subject matter (the vacuous future awaiting a well-heeled businessman when he retires). The latter alone might hint at the Roches' originality. Other songs on the ineffable *The Roches* album cover topics like pleading for a job in a diner, sitting on a commuter train next to a fat guy, going to Ireland, multiple affairs with married men, and their proclivity for having children out of wedlock. It's really worth a listen.

One of the things which comes out strongly in *Quitting Time* is the way their three very different voices work together. They become so much more than the sum of the parts. Pete, you will understand the technicalities of the harmonies. To my untrained ear this is one of the most beautiful sounds I've come across in a lifetime of listening to pop music – liquid, mellifluous, so full and deep it seems to swallow me the way Vaughan Williams also does.

I was introduced to the Roches by my pot-smoking volunteers at Cwmbran Community Press. And yes the Roches' songs, this one in particular, do sound even better lying on your back on the floor stoned: ethereal, transcendental! Back in the real world and at their best the Roches simply blow my head off. Funny cigarettes are superfluous.

There's a disappointingly muddy sound on the substandard YouTube audio, but I hope you can like it despite that.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bJA-CYDmK-g>

Pete's comment on Mel's 88. *Quitting Time*

Wonderful! Why didn't I appreciate the Roches when they were around? After playing your chosen song I played three of their others, and I suspect I will be looking for more. I was vaguely aware of them from years ago, but I don't think I've ever paid them any attention until now. More fool me.

Wonderful harmonies (as you rightly say), nice clean performances, and clever, engaging lyrics. Dare I say it, I'm seeing them as "McGarrigles meet Dory Previn". It's a tricky balancing act to deliver a musically sophisticated performance with conviction when irony lies at the heart of the message, yet they seem to carry it off effortlessly. I don't know what else to say really, except thanks for directing me back to them.

89. *Black Horse and the Cherry Tree*, K T Tunstall (2004)

Composer: KT Tunstall

I'm citing the fantastic live version of *Black Horse And The Cherry Tree* from "Later" which turned me on to K T Tunstall – also before she started wearing lipstick on stage and trying to look like a pop star. I think this was her first TV performance, though her control and assurance hardly suggest this.

The power of the acoustic loop in building up the insistent rhythm is terrific. It's not just a gimmick or a tool for a one-person band. It's an original instrument in its own right, and good on Tunstall for bringing it to light.

The looper pedal attracts attention. But this is also a striking song which has an accessible message delivered in the form of a fable with unfamiliar symbols. We don't hear this sort of thing very often beyond Dylan. Good tune too; and then there's her voice, which is particularly effective on this "live" recording.

Listen with the video and with the sound turned up. It's riveting: "Later" is rarely better than this.

That's more than enough fine qualities to qualify the track for the 100. But I could have chosen any one of several songs on her highly impressive first album, including the one you've already picked, Pete. It's just a shame that this great flowering of originality doesn't seem to have been maintained as K T Tunstall's stardom developed.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FGT0A2Hz-uk>

Pete's comment on Mel's 89. *Black Horse And The Cherry Tree*

Again, wonderful! This particular performance really was ground-breaking. I believe KT Tunstall got the slot on "Later" relatively late in the day, which makes her polished delivery even more impressive. She carried off the complex technical challenge to perfection. Some looper songs can seem a bit repetitive (for obvious reasons). I find this sometimes with Ed Sheeran. But she managed to make the song surprisingly varied, despite its repeating chord pattern.

As you say, the song is interesting in its own right, with strange symbolism and also an unusual verse structure (you have to wait a long time for the rhymes). But the layered arrangement makes it even more effective, and her voice is superb. I've always thought there are echoes of Lulu's slightly rasping voice here (in a good way).

As you mentioned, I've already picked another song from the album on which this one ended up (*The Other Side Of The World*). I think the whole album is excellent, with not a bad track on it. It's a shame that she's never been able to regain the heights of creativity she achieved with it. We bought the follow-up album, but we hardly ever play it, and we went to see her live at Shepherd's Bush (I thought I would just slot that one in), but nothing has matched up to what she did here. Perhaps that's all the more reason to celebrate it.

Five pretty extraordinary and contrasting British recordings. As we approach the 100 limit these are tracks which for various reasons I was desperate to squeeze in while there is still space. The last six places from 95 to 100 were allocated long ago.

90. Honky Tonk Women, Rolling Stones (1969)

Composers: Mick Jagger and Keith Richards

Single

It's now clear that my 100 will include no Who, no Bob Marley, no Tamla Motown, no Roy Orbison and no Spike Jones and his City Slickers. Unforgiveable omissions, perhaps. But my goal is to identify the 100 tracks I will play forever after being marooned on Mars, so there must be at least one outstanding recording from each artist that I'm prepared to listen to indefinitely.

So can the Stones achieve that benchmark? Only just. Sorry Nick.

I thought virtually all the Stones singles up to about 1969 were pretty wonderful at the time, with only occasional landmarks for a while after that, tailing away quickly later. But individually I can mostly live without them and find more absorbing or more exciting tracks elsewhere. To avoid missing the Stones completely from the 100, I narrowed my choice down to *Honky Tonk Women* and *Brown Sugar*. Then I lost interest in *Brown Sugar*, not entirely because it might be uncomfortably racist.

Honky Tonk Women was their last number 1 hit in the UK, and I remember dancing to it with gay abandon in 1970. (I rarely danced with gay abandon at all after that.)

Like most Stones singles, it has an intriguing intro (here the cow bell, then the drums preceding the guitar), a good hook, and calculated excitement. In this case there's a genuine evolution from the relatively gentle start to something of a crescendo, and a very strong beat which was always essential for my uncertain feet.

Great pop with a lyric which has always struck me with its overriding inauthenticity!

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=urqALFo-dX4>

Pete's comment on Mel's 90: *Honky Tonk Women*

Brilliant! I've always found this track mesmerising, and remarkably, it's mostly for exactly the reasons that you cite. I love that teasing introduction: cowbell, percussion, guitar, then irresistible beat. And of course each verse builds up the anticipation as it moves towards the infectious chorus, with its added ingredient of vocal harmonies.

Interestingly, on listening to it carefully just now I was struck by the way the instrumental break has two guitars playing different improvisational "licks" at the same time, rather than one of them simply playing chords. And the saxophone adds a third simultaneous improvisation. The jangling complexity ought to sound disorganised, but to me it works perfectly, and if anything underpins the edginess of the theme.

Like you, I also had a liking for *Brown Sugar*, that other late hit from the Stones' prime years, and thought it a shame when I realised the lyrics had such an unsettling edge.

Both songs still sometimes remind me uncomfortably of a pub on a Birmingham housing estate where my group of BRS management trainees often used to go for lunch in 1971. I knew all the other trainees, of course, but failed to find an accepted place in their company, and sometimes felt I'd moved backwards from the camaraderie of our university experience to the competitive free-for-all of the school playground. Not a happy time – but at least the music from the jukebox was a delight.

91. *Baker Street*, Gerry Rafferty (1979)

Composer: Gerry Rafferty

Single from the album *City to City*

OK, I've spent 40 years spellbound by the saxophone on this track. As if that's the only thing worth mentioning. But *Baker Street* has got to be one of the all-time greatest rock singles – whose other fine qualities have been neglected by me and probably many others because the sax is so overwhelmingly atmospheric.

It's not that these solos are a distraction from what's going elsewhere on the record, they are a perfect dramatic complement to it. It's hard to take it all in. The track starts with percussion and a wistful woodwind sound from the organ. No attention-grabbing guitar. Nothing fancy till it slides into the riveting saxophone riff.

When Rafferty's vocal starts it's sombre and low key. This is a powerful lyric about isolation and the drifter's empty life in the city and longing to be back home that totally fits the musical tone. When the sax comes searing back it's to provide a musical contrast to the quiet downbeat vocal, but simultaneously an intense sense of the painful yearning we've been hearing about.

I only have to listen to a few bars to be reminded of what it feels like to be alone in the busy streets of a strange city, and I imagine it's a sensation common to very many of us. From what I've read, the way this was worked out in the studio was probably partly serendipity. But my god it's got a punch.

After the riff, the lyric seems to describe meeting someone else in the same predicament and there's some casual conversation that means nothing and everything – though it could just be Rafferty looking back in on himself. And all the while there's this wonderfully intricate musical arrangement in the background which is beyond my wit to untangle.

Then suddenly mid-verse the mood changes – he is going home, and in comes an absolutely fabulous upbeat guitar “solo” to take us there. There are just a few more bars from the melancholy sax to modulate the optimism as the track fades out. This is very clever stuff.

There's a live version on YouTube where the guitar is replaced by much more of the achingly lovely saxophone which now seems to dominate everything. Great, but... That's missing much of the point of the song, which on the record becomes so much more positive towards the end, so that we no longer need to feel the pain. To be true to the song, the guitar absolutely has to replace the saxophone.

I knew it was great. I could feel it. But I didn't know why till I listened harder. Now I can see the accomplishment for what it is. How sad that Rafferty ultimately became a victim of the lonely boozing of the song and died prematurely of alcoholism. Perhaps he never really made it home.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Fo6aKnRnBxM>

Pete's comment on Mel's 91: *Baker Street*

How could I have forgotten about this? It should always have been on my own top 100 list. It's sensational! There's always a risk that “songs of two parts” might sound disjointed, but in this case the transitions between the reflective vocal sections and the explosive saxophone interpolations seem somehow natural and inevitable. Everything simply works, right from the promise of those opening chords with the slightly offbeat bursts on the percussion. It's simply stunning.

Your gloss on the meaning is excellent, and I can't add anything to it. I agree that the images are vivid. Somehow, the lyrics manage to evoke a sense of displacement amid city life with remarkably few words.

Oh, and I completely agree with you about the guitar solo. It's essential! Listening just now, I was struck by the way the arrival of the guitar provides a kind of double-climax effect. The last sung verse bursts into that soaring guitar section ... and then that section itself erupts into a final triumphant outing for the saxophone. It's only a shame that this last solo fades so quickly.

Two bits of trivia. One is that in my head (or even out loud), I've always supplied a harmony part for some of Gerry Rafferty's lines – for instance “forget about everything”. My part is just an obvious musical third above the real one. This has become so much a part of my experience of the song that the record almost sounds naked without it.

The other bit of trivia is that while I was living in a shared flat in Battersea in the late 1970s one of my flatmates, a rather glamorous lady whom I won't name, was going out with Ralph Ravenscroft, the saxophonist on Baker Street. She referred to him as “Rafe”, and it was some time before I realised he was the Rafe who featured on this track.

92. Crazy Man Michael, Fairport Convention (1969)

Composers: Dave Swarbrick, Richard Thompson
from the Album “Liege and Lief”

I liked just about everything Fairport Convention did – through several dramatic changes in direction and personnel – up to the point in the early seventies when violinist Dave Swarbrick commandeered the band and effectively took the “rock” out of the British “folk rock” which they'd pretty well invented.

So it's difficult to pick one track from the early period that excites me more than others or is a standout for its musical qualities. I find *A Sailor's Life* on “Unhalfbricking” to be grippingly hypnotic, the sound of *Come All Ye* on “Liege and Lief” is amazing, unique, and *Farewell Farewell* ensures we'd remember Sandy Denny's incredible voice after she was gone – from the band and from us all. Two of us have already chosen her immaculate *Who Knows Where The Time Goes*.

But here's a track which has grown on me over the years, rather surprisingly because its mystical lyric is so weird. It features more of Sandy Denny's impeccable voice, and the band playing as tightly and evocatively as they ever did. There's more complexity here than I know how to describe, though the restrained use of the violin is undoubtedly intrinsic to its otherworldly feel.

It starts as a simple folksy tune, that moves into a central instrumental section which astonished even the musicians themselves – making sounds which had never been heard before, they believed. I'm with them.

Then there's the lyric. It must have been trawled from some previous age when people believed in magical transmutations, curses and the terrors hiding in the natural world. Nope, these are the twisted ideas of Nick's guitarist godfather Richard Thompson.

Michael meets a raven who tells him that he will be responsible for killing his own lover. Michael is enraged by the idea and kills the bird which is instantly transformed into his now dead girlfriend. Michael goes mad when he realises what he's done. Ludicrous. But not so distant from the misery of some schizophrenics – and not as easy to dismiss as we might expect.

I for one find the song extremely powerful (and I've only just the moment managed, with the schizophrenia analogy, to rationalise why it strangely seems close to real life). Without the perfect music which sets it up we'd find it easier to dismiss the tale as tosh. But, no, I want to understand and perhaps even believe what Sandy Denny is telling me.

Until very recently Fairport Convention were still playing in their own zillionth incarnation. But how I miss the “real” Fairport from 1969.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_iCpevmITMc

Pete’s comment on Mel’s 92. *Crazy Man Michael*

I seem to remember that back in the day, I pirated this album from someone (probably you, Mel), so I came to know it quite well; but I haven’t heard this track for decades. Being reacquainted with it now reminds me of Fairport’s clean, clear sound and Sandy Denny’s wonderful voice – innocent-seeming, and yet at the same time threaded through with nuance.

I agree that the apparently absurd theme is all too real if you view it in the light of schizophrenic experiences. It certainly resists any temptation to dismiss it as merely fanciful. And Sandy Denny delivers it with suitable conviction. It’s altogether haunting.

Do I like it? I suppose I like it for the qualities I’ve mentioned, but to me Fairport was already being pulled towards traditional folk by this point, and this minor-key lament is not my favourite kind of music.

That said, some of the tracks on “Unhalfbricking”, which actually sound quite similar to this in terms of instruments and arrangement, are among my favourites of all time (in fact I don’t know why one of them isn’t on my own list). In addition to *Who Knows Where The Time Goes*, I would cite three of the Dylan songs – his angry *Percy’s Song* (wonderfully arranged), his whimsically translated *Si Tu Dois Partir*, and the up-tempo *Million Dollar Bash*.

93. *Brothers In Arms*, Dire Straits (1985)

Composer: Mark Knofler

Single from the album “*Brothers In Arms*”

From the moment I first heard this I was in awe. And I still am. It’s not really what seems to be the revolutionary sentiment of the lyric that draws me (though it’s stirring enough), or the musicianship (which I can’t fault). It’s the atmosphere the record creates.

I guess the response will differ from person to person. But the recording maintains for me an extraordinary tension between danger and resignation. From the sound of distant thunder against the wistful mellotron(?) of the opening, through the contrast in the opening lines between safety in the lowlands and isolation in the mountains, to the disturbed serenity of the gorgeous guitar solo at the end.

Knofler, who could write better lyrics than this, has said this was his tribute to the soldiers of the Falklands War. But apart from extolling the comradeship of the brothers in arms, the words and sound are more suggestive of the anguish and despair of a civil war. Falkland soldiers were highly trained for survival, unlike the brothers of the song who are prepared to die – for one another and perhaps for a cause. That’s what the apartheid government in South Africa thought, anyway, when they banned the record, making this the only occasion when I was likely to agree with them.

If Knofler didn’t know what his own song was about, we must assume the extraordinary edgy beauty of the record is some kind of subconscious accident. I’ll argue that the music rather wonderfully sets out to reconcile the agonies and losses of warfare with the consolations of mutual dependency and readiness for sacrifice to a cause. The result is a record that aches with yearning for the peace spelled out in the closing lines: “We’re fools to make war on our brothers in arms.”

This track lasts over seven minutes. But it never seems that long to me when I’m bound up in its almost ethereal sounds

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Wu4oy1IRTh8>

Pete's comment on Mel's 93. *Brothers In Arms*

If we're talking about haunting, that word sums up this piece, doesn't it? Gentle melody, inspired lead guitar, convincing enough lyric. It does everything you say, and I can see why it's so admired. I had no idea, in fact, that it had been taken up as a kind of anthem by people in the military, but I can see why.

I'm a long-standing fan of Mark Knopfler. His guitar lifts the McGarrigles' up-tempo *Love Over And Over*, which is one of my own top 100, and my list also includes a duet with Emmylou Harris (*Beyond My Wildest Dreams*). I have even been tempted to include his *Going Home* (the theme from "Local Hero"), where there's no lyric and the eloquence is all in the music and the arrangement.

I don't know *Brothers in Arms* well, so it would be dishonest to say I'm suddenly converted to it, but I'm glad you've pointed me back to it and reminded me why it's so effective.

94. *All Along The Watchtower*, Jimi Hendrix (1968)

Composer: Dylan

From the album "John Wesley Hardin"

I've already echoed everything Nick said when he picked this, and then added my interpretation of the business meeting between the Joker and the Thief which Dylan endows with curious mythical qualities.

I rather like the reported criticism that Dylan knew when he was writing the song that he could get away with anything. So he's happy to tell a story with only a beginning and an end and with a title that means nothing and is a physical impossibility anyway – because you can't go "along" something whose main characteristic is that it goes upwards.

A business meeting switches to a desolate winter scene with a wildcat, wind howling and mysterious riders approaching. This lyric goes nowhere. What a shambles! And yet it contains several of Dylan's most evocative images and turns of phrase which seem superficially so redolent with meaning. It's mood music of a kind we're unfamiliar with in rock.

And I'm left reaching for meaning where there is none, except that this is precisely what Dylan is saying in the lines "There are many here among us who feel that life is but a joke". Nailed it!

Then Hendrix comes along with a (for once) tightly focused guitar to turn something which has begun to sound biblical into an outright apocalypse. To me it's unspeakably exciting, and certainly rates among my five favourite tracks of all time.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TLV4_xaYynY

Pete's comment on Mel's 94. *All Along The Watchtower*

Well! Seldom has this game prompted me into such minute examination of lyrics. And how rewarding this one has proved, if only in its elusiveness! What can it mean, if anything?

My immediate reaction on studying the words was that it must be about Dylan's struggles with his management and record company ... or about such struggles in general, shall we say? Which turns out to be a widely held view. But how does that square with the atmospheric final verse? Ah – isn't that just a way of transferring the conflict into the realms of myth? Maybe.

But I must share a passing thought. There's a set of four lines after the "life is but a joke" line that read: "But, uh, but you and I, we've been through that \ And this is not our fate \ So let us stop talkin' falsely now \ The hour's getting late, hey."

I suddenly found myself thinking that the narrator could be stepping back from the “business” conflict at this point and talking about a personal relationship: which in a sense makes the whole lyric partly about that.

Implausible, maybe, but it’s interesting! I’ve always liked poems that are slightly ambiguous: not poems that don’t know what they mean or mean nothing, but those that pose challenges and offer possibilities. This is one of those. And I also like poems that zoom between the specific and the universal.

Ah, and what about Jimi Hendrix? Well, his version is seminal, isn’t it? The strange thing, of course, is that his type of guitar playing was revolutionary back then, but now seems less so because so much in the same vein has followed over the years. Anyway, it’s amazing – and the stereo effect is also unusual, with the guitar drifting from one side to the other. And the percussion is nicely detailed and emphatic.

Finally, I’ve never been especially troubled by the “along the watchtower” image. To me it’s just an impudent piece of shorthand. Despite its literal illogicality, it still conjures up vivid picture: a fortified perimeter wall with towers scattered along it. I know that’s not what the words actually say, but it’s what I see!

Whilst this is not in my top ten (or indeed top hundred), I can see exactly why it’s in yours. It’s a stunning piece of work, and I’m delighted that it’s set me on such a rewarding exploratory path.

Get ready for three “all-time greatest” tracks already chosen by Nick – two by Dylan and a Beatles masterpiece you’ll find in my final batch – by way of demonstrating that great minds... etc. I’ve probably put more thought into writing about this batch than I did for any of the previous 27. There’s always more to discover in Dylan, and this game really makes me listen. And the more I listen the more I’m thrilled for the first time.

95. *Like A Rolling Stone*, Bob Dylan (1965)

Composer: Bob Dylan

Single and from “Highway 61 Revisited”

I’ve already shown my hand by declaring this as probably the greatest rock single of all time (comments on Nick’s selection 55 – see below), providing an almost perfect marriage of words, music and performance.

That piece of reverence didn’t also point out that I’m not alone. *Like A Rolling Stone* has for the past 50 years ranked top or close to the top of rock music polls to name the greatest rock single. The original handwritten lyrics have sold for \$2m, a popular music record.

What I also surprisingly omitted was any attempt to interpret the lyric, which has been variously described by Dylan himself as hatred, revenge and vomit. We weren’t used to such venom when the record came out. It shocked me. The song appears to be addressed to a woman vilified by Dylan because she once derided down-and-outs but has fallen on hard times herself. I’ve occasionally wondered if she was real and what part she might have played in Dylan’s life. But I think I’ve worked it out now.

Wikipedia speculates widely about women and men he’d known, and in doing so convinces me that this isn’t about any individual but a state of mind – primarily his disdainful response to the way fans were reacting to his early forays into electric music. At the same time, so many references and images seem to refer to Dylan’s life before he was famous that this has also got to be about real lived experience.

In *Like A Rolling Stone* he seemed to discover a new song-writing mission and a more honest voice than when the “spokesman for a generation” status was imposed on him by devotees of the early protest songs. Whatever we may think of the acoustic Dylan today, those self-conscious political lyrics were inspired by Woodie Guthrie and their tunes were sometimes unapologetically stolen. *Like A Rolling Stone* in contrast is simply a new kind of song.

As for the negativity and venom, there is perhaps a contrasting theme: where becoming a rolling stone is not about reaching the bottom at all, but a route (admittedly a tough one) to a kind of freedom – which resonates in lines such as “When you ain’t got nothing you’ve got nothing to lose.”

I didn’t appreciate all this back in 1965 when I was trying to square the brutal lyric with the excitement at the song’s extraordinary sound and power. But the liberation is actually multi-layered – for Dylan himself escaping his folk-hero label, for the previously unheard-of six-minute pop single, for the charts of endless moon-in-June love songs, for the impact of this new music on the Beatles (five months before the release of their earth-changing “Rubber Soul”), and for me too in discovering in due course that I could relish pop music and also be a grown up.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IwOfCgkyEjo>

Reprise: Mel's comment on Nick's 55. *Like A Rolling Stone* in 1998: I feel a sense of disloyalty when I declare in my enthusiasm that this is the greatest rock single of all time. The accolade should naturally go to a Beatles track, but it's Dylan's.

A full analysis of the amazing record would be tedious. But let's start with the intro. I still get a tingle of excitement when I hear the three unpretentious drum beats that get it started. Just a throwaway in contrast with, say, the elaborate attention-grabbing intros which characterise many Beatles singles, and I presume mainly just a signal to the rest of the band. Yet instantly recognisable.

I don't quite know how the backing can be so compelling because on one level it just mimics the drone of Dylan's voice. Yet its subtle variations keep everything going for duration of what was one of the longest singles up to that time.

And you won't be surprised by my contention that the music is driven by the lyric. That's not special pleading; I think the musicians are brilliant for being so unobtrusively inventive in their syncopations while Dylan rants. The subject matter and tone was quite shocking in its time, but actually seems to have gained in credibility and status in the context of all the rock songs which have entertained us in the intervening 53 years. It's helped that we now know Dylan himself better than we did in 1965, but that doesn't explain its power.

I think that lies in the relentlessness of the poetry which keeps coming back to the blood-raw challenge of the chorus. It's these ingenious quadruple rhymes which hammer away at us, alternating with the playful and sometimes unexpected multisyllabic rhymes. Where else in the entire history of verse have we previously seen "juiced in it" rhymed with "get used to it". Add to that the vivid pictures and constant changes in pace. A couple of lines can contain 25 syllables, but the "feel" rhyme words go on forever.

And yes, of course it's poetry, but perhaps not poetry as we know it Jim. (If you accept the classification of rapping as a form of poetry, as we should, it puts Dylan years ahead of his time.) He seems so completely in command of the material, so fluent and authoritative, that there can't be any comeback to this ultimate retaliatory putdown.

"The perfect marriage of words, music and performance that we all yearn for? Pretty close!

Pete's comments on Mel's selection 95, *Like a Rolling Stone*

Mel, your two evaluations of *Like a Rolling Stone* seem to sum up most of what needs to be said about it. They're intriguing and informative, and I've learned a lot from them. I particularly agree that the poetry in the song is stunning for its imaginativeness and originality. It's rare for any artist to bring so much that is fresh and new to any medium.

As I've confessed before in this process, I came late to Dylan (in the late 1960s, to be precise). I lunged into his work via his then-contemporary Greatest Hits album (which I bought), and also through "Blonde on Blonde" (which I pirated), and then in a way I lunged out of his work again, although I vaguely monitored what he got up to later in his career. Therefore I don't suppose I'll ever be sufficiently immersed in his output to be able to pronounce on it with anything remotely like the authority you and Nick bring. So I'll simply give you my own reactions to this piece.

I've always loved the backing to this track, partly for the same reasons you give; and I particularly agree with you about the magic of that unmistakable opening musical phrase. It's perfect. But if your comparison with the Beatles' "elaborate attention-grabbing intros" implies a criticism of them, I have to take issue. Their approach also had its place, and they made a particularly good job of it.

Anyway, back to Dylan, the music of his band (Band?) had a wonderful, arguably unique quality. It sounded rough-edged and almost improvised, yet in reality it was considered and discreet. He didn't just go electric, he did it in a highly distinctive way. You'd never mistake anyone else's electric sound for his.

As for the lyric, of course it's priceless: clever, pithy and aphoristic. And I love the vehemence of Dylan's delivery: the indignation, the contempt. Back in the day I assumed, like many critics, that this piece was a rant at a former woman friend who had fallen from grace, though I never thought to tie it to a real-life individual. I could also see that it might be a

reaction to fans' accusations of betrayal, and an expression of his general disenchantment with the privileged poseurs he'd found himself rubbing shoulders with as he rose to fame.

You've now shown me it could have meant even more than this, but I'm happy to consider that the obvious interpretations remain valid as well. I always felt this track was "essential Dylan", and I'm pleased to know that I'm not alone.

96. *Visions Of Johanna*, Bob Dylan (1966)

Composer: Bob Dylan

Single from the album "Blonde On Blonde"

Here's another one that Nick beat me in choosing. But I'm not letting this one go either. If *Like A Rolling Stone* is the greatest rock single, *Visions of Johanna* is a pinnacle of modern song-writing.

Can I be more reverent in my tribute than when I commented on Nick's choice of this track (see below)? There I effused about the way Dylan in the first half of the song paints a painfully vivid scene of his night with Louise while he's thinking of Joan Baez. But what about the more "difficult" dazzling imagistic poetry in the second half?

Having so perfectly nailed the desolate loneliness of being in bed with a woman who isn't the one he loves, Dylan provides line after line of witty, cynical and apparently disconnected pictures that amount to a kind of bizarre dream sequence. Yet each of these scenes seems to be an image of some other lonely vacuity mirroring the room with Louise: the emptiness of the museums, Mona Lisa's smile, the jelly-faced women (a brilliant snapshot of middle-aged under the influence of illicit substances?), the rich tourist with his jewels and binoculars, the peddler, the fiddler who acknowledges that debts have been repaid (presumably Dylan himself again) and so on.

It's nearly as grim as the *dramatis personae* of *Desolation Row*, which takes some beating. But in case we miss the subliminal message among these mesmerising characters, the lyric is constantly coming back to Louise and the wretched hotel room. They are one and the same.

It all sounds so random, and it bloody isn't! I'll say it again: show me any other song like *Visions Of Johanna*.

Here's the haunting original album recording which Nick missed at first:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AwuCF5lYqEE>

Reprise: Mel's comment on Nick's 57. *Visions Of Johanna*

You might well want to grab Dylan by the lapel and tell him if he's so unhappy not being with Johanna Baez he ought not to have dumped her and landed up in bed with another woman. But then we wouldn't have what for me is probably his greatest achievement.

I'm delighted you chose this one from "Blonde On Blonde" (yes, probably the pinnacle album), Nick. But I'll chide you mildly for saying that the choice wasn't obvious. This is the right one, no argument! It's the best, and unusually for me I refuse to find a single thing wrong with it.

It's a pity YouTube don't seem to have the album version which seems definitive – haunting harmonica, hypnotic military drumming, eerie background organ, and sparing flashes of light in the darkness from what you call the "spiky guitar". And a bass guitar – which I normally won't even be aware of – thudding away like a heartbeat.

As you say, it's a song about atmosphere, and I wouldn't change a word of your elegant description of the mood. But I might add a few of my own – emptiness, helplessness, loss. This is what it's like to be lonely alone with another person. It's not hard to imagine it, but to

transfer a sense of that desolation so perfectly to a piece of music is almost beyond what we have a right to expect from the genre. I bet that's what the Nobel Committee were getting at.

It's obvious that we can't glean a literal meaning from every line. But I've listened to the words closely for many years and now feel there's probably quite a lot of straightforward scene-painting in the first half of the song. (Dylan is played by a number of different characters, so it really is just him, Louise and the girls below in the street.) Then increasingly towards the end he's lifting fine-sounding snippets from his notebook, primarily for the mental images they create. I don't care if I'm wrong about this because it all fits so beautifully, meaning or none.

I'll admit that the often-quoted line "The ghost of electricity howls in the lines of her face" (the evidence for some, as if were needed, that Dylan is "a poet") was once just something evocative and meaningless to me. Then one day I realised he is simply describing the appearance of someone in a darkened room whose face is caught in light from the street. Thus the pleasure of understanding and discovering something brilliantly expressed were added to my existing thrill from the language. As with a painting which you look at intensely or come back to over a period of time, the effect is cumulative. Nothing you have seen before goes away, and there's always more to see.

I've seen the lyrics described as "mercurial", and I think that nails it – shiny, glistening words, sliding frictionlessly over one another. Louise's skin is like veneer, and so is the language with its musical accompaniment. I almost don't need to mention the hypnotic effect of the quadruple rhymes again (septuple in one place!).

Show me another song like it!

Pete's comments on Mel's selection 96, *Visions of Johanna*

Mel, again you've said almost all that I can imagine needs to be said about this song. All I can do really is pitch in a few morsels to pick over.

Yes, it's a song of two halves. And yes, in my book the second half finds Dylan reflecting almost randomly on things he finds strange, shallow or distasteful. It's what you might do when half asleep or unable to fall sleep. He's told us where he is and why he's miserable; now he's showing us the kind of thoughts that are jangling in his head.

The backing is remarkable, as you both commented. I get the sense that the musicians want to take flight, but constantly have to remind themselves that they're there to enhance Dylan's performance, not grab the limelight from him. So there's a kind of suppressed wildness about the outcome: it's spiky and percussive, but always contained, and that reflects the tension in the message. It's very clever.

In sum, to me this is a cry of anguish in which the anguish is implied rather than stated ... except that every verse brings us back relentlessly to the visions of Johanna, with all the bleakness that they imply.

97. *Things Have Changed*, Bob Dylan (2000)

Composer: Bob Dylan

Single from the film "The Wonder Boys"

This isn't one of Dylan's very greatest songs – it's just great.

I love it for a number of reasons. It's late in his career. By the mid-1990s the public, if they thought about him at all, had probably relegated Dylan to an album artist hanging on from yesteryear. Yet this and the amazing 1997 album "Time Out Of Mind" showed the world he was still going strong. *Things Have Changed* won awards, including a 2001 Academy Award for best original song. With good reason.

Its sound, for Dylan at least, is refreshingly exuberant. It bowls along to a jolly tune, and his vocal delivery is atypically expressive with changes of pace, elongated vowels and

emphatic pauses that underline a lyric full of witty lines and (literally in one case) gallows humour.

At its heart is a grim critique of humanity which, of course, is just what I need from a song! I'm pretty sure that Dylan is thinking of his own demise in "I'm well dressed, waiting on the last train" and the memorable "Don't get up gentlemen I'm only passing through". There's biblical imagery too which he probably would have intended seriously back in the 1970s when he was on his Christian thing, but which now serves the purpose of invoking a general over-the-top doomfulness.

On top of all that, the song comes with a clever teasing video which I've worked out has to be built with images of Dylan superimposed on scenes from the film "The Wonder Boys" which he wrote the song for and alludes to throughout (not that I've ever seen it).

However, it's the chorus which I feel delivers the real emotional punch. Hard to explain, but perhaps this comes from the juxtaposition of the strange outside world of crazy people and the striking evocation of spiritual pain in "locked in tight" and "out of range". (If that's what he thought in 2000, how was he feeling by the end of 2001?!)

Added to that is the powerful irony of "I used to care but things have changed". This is a song by a man who despite the numbing reality obviously does still care and apparently feels the pain. Otherwise how could he have described the human condition so despairingly.

You've said a couple of times, Pete, that you don't like your popular music to be bleak and negative. So you may not be easily persuaded to enjoy this or either of the other two choices here. But perhaps you can admire and wonder at this extraordinary song-writing talent – and its capacity to have an emotional impact on souls less positive in outlook than yours! Why not Google the full lyrics so you don't miss any of it?

When it comes down to it, *Things Have Changed* is quite a long track, all about basically the same thing. But what a wonderfully subtle song, with so much variety in tone and content – and carrying so much with which to hit you between the eyes.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=L9EKqQWPjyo>

Pete's comments on Mel's selection 97, *Things Have Changed*

I have to admire the process of analysis by which you reach the conclusion that Dylan must care about the world, otherwise he wouldn't have gone to so much trouble to say he doesn't. The truth behind that paradox irrefutable, and yet in a way it also reveals a strange deficit in the range of thought that language is capable of voicing. Simplifying this, you can't say, "I have nothing to say," because you've just said something. Go figure.

I can see that this song contains wealth of ideas about the state of the world, yet if you look behind the jaunty delivery, they seem to be coming from a man who didn't really think he had another twenty years ahead of him. Twenty years ago I was *young*! This really does seem like a lament about ageing as well as a critique of the world as Dylan now finds it.

Do I think it's a great song? No, but then you prefaced your comment by making the point that you don't either. I agree that it's a refreshing demonstration that Dylan still had plenty to offer the world at the time, but I don't see it as in the same league as your other two choices.

As for your observation that I tend to avoid bleakness and negativity, I think (hope?) I've argued in the past that negative thoughts can be expressed very effectively in a positive form; and I think both *Like a Rolling Stone* and *Visions of Johanna* meet that expectation. One is angry, the other is sad, but they both have a kind of exuberance about them. I could listen to them repeatedly. I could listen to this song again too, so I'm not writing it off – just maintaining a sense of balance.

Thank you, in sum, for making me listen to three Bob Dylan songs that I've greatly enjoyed, and for reminding me of a few reasons why he is rightly revered. You might wonder why

there is no Dylan in my own music choices to date, and I'm probably now wondering that myself.

98. *Strawberry Fields Forever*, The Beatles (1967)**Composers:** Lennon McCartney

Single

I was never for a moment persuaded by the conspiracy theorists who insisted that this song ended with John saying "I buried Paul". I thought it was "I'm very bored". But it turned out to be the less edifying "Cranberry Sauce".

That's an appropriate outro for a song of such remarkable complexity and apparent banality. My contention for many years after 1967 that this was the greatest song of all time was of course based on the fact that we had never before heard anything on a record – musically or lyrically – that sounded remotely like this. In retrospect, a suitably adjusted appreciation would perhaps say this is the most *original* record pop music has produced.

It also remains riveting and entrancing to listen to, irrespective of all the innovations which have followed it, and it's definitely a great as well as important track. The recent death of Jacques Brel (see Nick's number 44) reminds me that there's more than one way to express inexpressible mental turmoil. For my tastes Lennon nails it brilliantly by hiding feelings in understated ordinariness against a musical backdrop that feels like hallucination or breakdown. Brel in contrast hides nothing but is uncomfortable to the point of embarrassment to listen to.

So I've never been very interested in connections with the grounds of a children's home where Lennon played as a child. "Strawberry Fields" was just a fantastically fortuitous phrase to represent his desperation to escape the reality of his mental confusion. Lennon's genius was to make so much out of a mere place name. (I don't know how the rivalry played out, but my bet is that it was Lennon who inspired McCartney to write the clever and tuneful *Penny Lane* and not the other way round.)

At the time that Nick chose *Strawberry Fields* (his number 66) it didn't seem appropriate to include it in my own list. But of course it is. Rock music hardly comes more compelling and personally meaningful than this.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HtUH9z_Oey8

Pete's comment on Mel's 98. *Strawberry Fields Forever*

I honestly find it hard to know what to say about this track. I feel I know it so well that I don't even need to listen to it. It's seminal, pivotal, essential, all these things – and it's forever buried in my head.

But do I *like* it? Well, yes, of course I like it. I like the extraordinary aura of mystery that it creates. Every time you listen to it you can hear something new. I like the teasing, contradictory lyrics and the complex musical arrangement, with its tight, urgent brass interpolations, its heavy cello bass, and Ringo's quite remarkable percussion. As for the shape of the melody and harmonisation, they're truly astounding. The song pushes normal chord sequences to places they would never go in typical pop music, or for that matter in any other type of music.

In short, you can't have an appreciation of the Beatles without paying due respect to this track. It marks a pivotal moment on their musical journey, and answers forever the question of whether or not they were truly ground-breaking. Of course they were. The evidence is here in this one song.

Yet I would argue that paradoxically, this song didn't altogether define the future direction of the band's output. Their subsequent music was often radical too, but in different ways. This was a kind of end point in one particular thread of their development. Or better, perhaps I should say it was a striking diversion on to a route that subsequently bumped back closer to the

mainstream – but whose elements then infused the rest of their output, reappearing in numerous other songs in subtler form.

Intellectually, the track is clearly more challenging than *Penny Lane* (and I agree that McCartney was probably inspired to write that song by *Strawberry Fields* rather than the other way round); but musically, for me it doesn't have the exuberance of *Penny Lane*, or its irresistible musicality. Not that the two songs should necessarily be set against each other just because they were released together. But it also lacks some of the other things for which I loved the Beatles – tunefulness, vocal harmonies and so on.

So just as you point out that it was perhaps *original* as distinct from great, I would say I *admire* it rather than love it. I do have affection for it, and would feel bereft if I could never hear it again, but I don't necessarily want to hear it every day.

99. Hello, Goodbye, The Beatles (1967)

Composers: Lennon McCartney

Single

I have to set aside my disappointment at selecting apparent McCartney banality for number 99. This song is stupendous. And while many people saw its release as a decline into Beatles-by-numbers recording – tuneful, commercial, gimmicky ending etc – there are a good few of us who increasingly saw something more behind it.

And yes, I know that McCartney knocked out the lyric as a mindless let's-think-of-a-bunch-of-opposites exercise. But it displays that peculiar quality of several of his successful songs, something approaching universality just by virtue of being simple. *Silly Love Songs*, *Yesterday* and *When I'm Sixty-Four* are examples (and of course there are plenty of mindlessly simple McCartney songs for which this is not true). *Hello, Goodbye* is the most fully realised because the music is so well integrated with the meaning.

At the risk of sounding even more pretentious than usual, *Hello, Goodbye* is simultaneously an utterly joyful and desperately poignant record which somehow gets to the root of our humanity. Feelings aren't binary of course, but people, and our language itself, often see them as such – why else would we have such definitive concepts as “happiness” and “sadness”, “beauty” and “ugliness” etc?

This isn't special pleading. The contrarities of the lyric are not quite as random as they first appear. First there is an inherent sadness in lines like “I don't know why you say ‘Goodbye’, I say ‘Hello’,” and “You say ‘Why?’. I say ‘I don't know.’” The line “You say ‘Stop’. I say ‘Go’.” either means nothing or something for all of us.

Then there's the sound. You may think I'm exaggerating when I say that those two harrowing notes of punctuation that George slips in between verses (the first time we hear them is just after “go, go, go” – you must know the notes I mean) are some of the saddest sounds in rock music. The contrast with the bouncy rhythm and silly words is what makes them so achingly poignant for me. This combines with the soaring rises and precipitous falls in the tune, and the haunting background vocals for a quite stunning apposition in tone and feeling.

I've seen one view that *Hello, Goodbye* is about the transition from death to reincarnation. You won't be surprised that I don't agree. But I do know exactly why someone with certain beliefs would think so. My own beliefs say death – the “goodbyes” – may be unutterably sad, but that doesn't stop us also exuberantly celebrating the life that has ended, or birth, or life itself... You name it. We're the bizarre creatures who are aware of our inevitable demise and the unhappiness which others around us experience all the time, and yet determinedly for the most part insist we should carry on living.

That's where the track's extended ending comes in. There's real joy here. The celebration.

But don't take any notice of me. Anyone can attach their own meanings, which is what makes McCartney's simple-minded universality so powerful!

I'm not asking for much once I'm dead. But I do want this played at my funeral (or my wake, should the unnecessary formalities be skipped).

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rblYSKz_VnI

Pete's comment on Mel's 99. *Hello, Goodbye*

Now this is fascinating. When *Hello, Goodbye* came out, I did indeed worry that I was hearing a Beatles-by-numbers song, though I didn't think of it in quite that way at the time. I was disappointed that it seemed so simplistic, especially in terms of the lyrics. People around me were praising it up as the latest exciting Beatles release, but I felt rather as if I'd been told a joke I didn't understand.

Yet in spite of that, I could see that there was something beguiling about it, and it gradually grew on me. And I agree about the inherent sadness in the line "I don't know why you say 'Goodbye', I say 'Hello'." Even back then, I felt this was saying something altogether more than banal. I also came to appreciate the overall *sound* of the track. It's uniquely what it is – something you can say about a lot of Beatles music. As with most of their tracks, a lot of thought clearly went into creating that special sound.

And that coda! I've just read that this was originally part-improvised, and was Lennon's favourite bit of the song. Apparently the same applied to the run-out at the end of *Ticket to Ride*. As you say, it's exuberant, and is built round a very nice vocal harmony (a top tonic over a third, which is a classic sung major chord).

Yet I have to admit that though I now like this track, I'd never elevated it to the status you accord it. The fact that you've chosen it for your ninety-ninth selection is making me rethink this! Until now, if I've ever thought about it, I suspect that I've continued to bemoan (to myself) the fact that the lyrics aren't more interesting, or at least more varied. Now I'm worrying that I'm still missing the point. But I'm closer to cracking it now than I've ever been, so thank you for opening my eyes to something I've apparently been pointlessly denying all these years.

100. *The End*, The Beatles (1969)

Composers: Lennon McCartney
from the album "Abbey Road"

"And in the end, the love you take, is equal to the love you make..." So Paul McCartney could write poetry after all. A lovely bit of simple McCartney universality to end the Beatles' recording career.

Hard to believe the symmetry, but this really was the last track they recorded together. So it's difficult to separate sentiment from critical judgement. The closing "lyrics" do rather sum up what the Beatles were trying to say while they were being and not being hippies, and I really like that. But they're a wonderful resonant couplet anyway, which still lives with me as a reminder to try to be a more considerate person.

Despite being obviously contrived (well-contained?), the jam session at the heart of the track is powerful and exciting, with a steady build-up by three guitarists individually in turn trying to express what they stand for. Naturally the conclusion is that they stand together.

This track lasts less than two and a half minutes. The progrock groups that followed the Beatles recorded tracks which frequently felt as if they lasted two and a half hours. Considering the styles and sounds which they successively go through here, the Beatles economy is incredible: the end of the Abbey Road medley, Ringo's drum solo as a kind of prelude (he could do better, honestly), the "love you" refrain, the fabulous guitar solo jam session building to the gentle resolution of the piano followed by the Beatles singing their

perfect finale in harmony, a burst of strings and Ringo now getting the drums just right for an exit. All the right chords, and in the right order! Heart-stopping, for me anyway.

And a nice way to get to the end.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=12R4FzIhdoQ>

Pete's comment on Mel's 10. *The End*

Perfection! The rightness of your choice of this track to end your top hundred is breathtaking. What else could you possibly have picked? I share all your thoughts about it, and hold it in the same high regard. It's truly wonderful, and the idea of the Beatles concluding the album (and their whole career) with this piece was truly inspired. I loved it at the time and I love it still.

There's one point where I depart from your take on it, and that's in the fact that I never actually thought of *The End* as a complete track in its own right. I always considered it to be part of a continuous sequence that starts with *Golden Slumbers* and then segues directly into *Carry That Weight* (these two are in fact indelibly linked), and onward into *The End* ... and arguably finishes with *Her Majesty*.

I'm tempted to go on by giving you my thoughts on my expanded version of what you've picked, but a truly outrageous idea has just come to me. What if I pick the whole of the sequence as *my* number 100? Would that be an irredeemably childish attempt to steal your idea and in effect trump it, or would it have some legitimacy? I await your thoughts! [*Postscript: I'm pleased to report that I didn't.*]

Suffice it to say here that the bits you've chosen are wonderful. Who would ever have expected, or indeed knew in the day, that all three Beatles would perform a lead guitar solo in that instrumental section? Back then, we simply didn't think of them in that way. Paul played bass, John played rhythm, George played lead. Yet here they came up with a marvellously even-handed assertion of their joint contribution to the entire Beatles project. And that final rhyming couplet – what can I say? Spine-tingling in its inspiration. It's almost on a par with “One small step for man...” And as far as we know, a committee didn't write it – just Paul.

Thanks to them, and thanks to you for playing the game so fulsomely to the last.

MEL'S LIST

No	Track	Artist	Sent	Batch
1	<i>It Ain't Me Babe (Bootleg version)</i>	Bob Dylan	19.2.15	1
2	<i>It's A Raggy Waltz</i>	The Dave Brubeck Quartet	19.2.15	1
3	<i>I'm Looking Through You</i>	The Beatles	19.2.15	1
4	<i>Mulder and Scully</i>	Catatonia	14.3.15	2
5	<i>Handbags and Gladrags</i>	Stereophonics	1.8.25	30
6	<i>Local Boy in the Photograph</i>	Stereophonics	14.3.15	2
7	<i>You Really Got Me</i>	The Kinks	1.4.15	3
8	<i>Sweets For My Sweet,</i>	The Searchers	1.4.15	3
9	<i>I Can't Let Go</i>	The Hollies	1.4.15	3
10	<i>Magdeline Laundry,</i>	Mary Coughlan	30.4.15	4
11	<i>What Do Pretty Girls Do?</i>	Kirsty MacColl	30.4.15	4
12	<i>Fairytale of New York</i>	The Pogues & Kirsty MacColl	30.4.15	4
13	<i>I Don't Like Mondays,</i>	Boomtown Rats	30.4.15	4
14	<i>Light My Fire</i>	The Doors	6.5.15	5
15	<i>Alone Again, Or</i>	Love	6.5.15	5
16	<i>White Rabbit</i>	Jefferson Airplane	6.5.15	5
17	<i>For What It's Worth</i>	Buffalo Springfield	6.5.15	5
18	<i>Ohio</i>	Crosby Stills Nash and Young	6.5.15	5
19	<i>Diamonds and Rust</i>	Joan Baez	4.8.15	6
20	<i>Going Back</i>	Dusty Springfield	4.8.15	6
21	<i>Nutbush City Limits</i>	Ike and Tina Turner	4.8.15	6
22	<i>Who Will Buy?</i>	The Cast of Oliver	18.8.15	7
23	<i>Tonight</i>	Marni Nixon, Jimmy Bryant	18.8.15	7
24	<i>I Get a Kick Out of You</i>	Gary Shearston	18.8.15	7
25	<i>Somewhere Over The Rainbow</i>	Judy Garland	18.8.15	7
26	<i>Theme for Young Lovers</i>	The Shadows	15.9.15	8
27	<i>On The Beach</i>	Cliff Richard	15.9.15	8
28	<i>Girl of my Best Friend</i>	Elvis Presley	15.9.15	8
29	<i>Hurricane</i>	Bob Dylan	5.10.15	9
30	<i>Like a Hurricane</i>	Neil Young	5.10.15	9
31	<i>Telegraph Road</i>	Dire Straits	5.10.15	9
32	<i>Going Home</i>	Ten Years After	5.10.15	9
33	<i>She's Not There</i>	The Zombies	9.11.15	10
34	<i>Gloria</i>	Them	9.11.15	10
35	<i>For Your Love</i>	Yardbirds	9.11.15	10
36	<i>Tell Me What He Said</i>	Helen Shapiro	24.12.15	11
37	<i>Allentown Jail</i>	The Springfields	24.12.15	11
38	<i>I'll Never Find Another You</i>	The Seekers	24.12.15	11
39	<i>Barges</i>	Ralph McTell	24.1.16	12
40	<i>Mr Bojangles</i>	Nina Simone	24.1.16	12
41	<i>I Think It's Going to Rain Today</i>	Nina Simone	24.1.16	12
42	<i>Up The Junction</i>	Squeeze	28.7.16	13
42	<i>Always the Sun</i>	Stranglers	28.7.16	13
44	<i>Start!</i>	The Jam	28.7.16	13
45	<i>Changing Man</i>	Paul Weller	28.7.16	13
46	<i>Stand By Me</i>	John Lennon	2.10.16	14

47	<i>Maybe I'm Amazed</i>	Paul McCartney	2.10.16	14
48	<i>Run of the Mill</i>	George Harrison	2.10.16	14
49	<i>Love You More Than I Can Say</i>	Bobby Vee	14.11.16	15
50	<i>Don't You Ever Change</i>	The Crickets	14.11.16	15
51	<i>Maybe Baby</i>	Buddy Holly	14.11.16	15
52	<i>Life On Mars</i>	David Bowie	7.12.16	16
53	<i>Bennie And The Jets</i>	Elton John	1.8.25	30
54	<i>Go Your Own Way</i>	Fleetwood Mac	7.12.16	16
55	<i>Alternate Title</i>	The Monkees	2.8.17	17
56	<i>Dancing Queen</i>	Abba	2.8.17	17
57	<i>Baby Jane</i>	Rod Stewart	2.8.17	17
58	<i>Please Mr Postman</i>	The Marvelettes	7.3.18	18
59	<i>He's A Rebel</i>	The Crystals	7.3.18	18
60	<i>She's Got You</i>	Patsy Cline	7.3.18	18
61	<i>It Might As Well Rain Until September</i>	Carole King	7.3.18	18
62	<i>Paper Sun</i>	Traffic	20.5.18	19
63	<i>Dear Mr Fantasy</i>	Traffic	20.5.18	19
64	<i>White Room</i>	Cream	20.5.18	19
65	<i>You Keep Me Hanging On</i>	Vanilla Fudge	20.5.18	19
66	<i>I Just Dropped In (to see what condition my condition was in)</i>	Kenny Rogers and the First Edition	20.5.18	19
67	<i>Crying In The Rain</i>	Everly Brothers	26.9.19	20
68	<i>Leaving On A Jet Plane</i>	Peter Paul and Mary	26.9.19	20
69	<i>Your Wildest Dreams</i>	Moody Blues	26.9.19	20
70	<i>Another Suitcase In Another Hall</i>	Madonna	26.9.19	20
71	<i>Skeet Surfin'</i>	Val Kilmer	1.2.20	21
72	<i>Back In The USSR</i>	Beatles	1.2.20	21
73	<i>I Get Around</i>	Beach Boys	1.8.25	30
74	<i>Another Brick In The Wall</i>	Pink Floyd	22.4.2	22
75	<i>American Idiot</i>	Green Day	22.4.20	22
76	<i>Politik Kills</i>	Manu Cha0	22.4.20	22
77	<i>Runaround Sue</i>	Dion and the Belmonts	25.10.20	23
78	<i>Summer in the City</i>	The Lovin' Spoonful	25.10.20	23
79	<i>I Heard It Through The Grapevine</i>	Marvin Gaye	25.10.20	23
80	<i>Kodachrome</i>	Paul Simon	6.4.21	24
81	<i>Hotel California</i>	The Eagles	6.4.21	24
82	<i>Dancing in the Dark</i>	Bruce Springsteen	6.4.21	24
83	<i>Handle With Care</i>	Traveling Wilburys	6.4.21	24
84	<i>Don't look Back in Anger</i>	Oasis	22.8.21	25
85	<i>Why Does It Always Rain On Me</i>	Travis	22.8.21	25
86	<i>Take Me Out</i>	Franz Ferdinand	22.8.21	25
87	<i>The Night They Drove Old Dixie Down</i>	Joan Baez	18.1.22	26
88	<i>Quitting Time</i>	The Roches	18.1.22	26
89	<i>Black Horse and the Cherry Tree</i>	K T Tunstall	18.1.22	26
90	<i>Honky Tonk Women</i>	Rolling Stones	15.10.22	27
91	<i>Baker Street</i>	Gerry Rafferty	15.10.22	27
92	<i>Crazy Man Michael</i>	Fairport Convention	15.10.22	27
93	<i>Brothers In Arms</i>	Dire Straits	15.10.22	27
94	<i>All Along the Watchtower</i>	Jimi Hendrix	15.10.22	27

95	<i>Like A Rolling Stone</i>	Bob Dylan	20.1.23	28
96	<i>Visions Of Johannah</i>	Bob Dylan	20.1.23	28
97	<i>Things Have Changed</i>	Bob Dylan	20.1.23	28
98	<i>Strawberry Fields Forever</i>	The Beatles	14.8.23	29
99	<i>Hello Goodbye</i>	The Beatles	14.8.23	29
100	<i>The End</i>	The Beatles	14.8.23	29