

Nick'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. *Heartbreak Hotel*, Elvis Presley (1956)
2. *What'd I Say*, Jerry Lee Lewis (1961)
3. *Peggy Sue*, Buddy Holly (1957)
4. *Somethin' Else*, Eddie Cochran (1959)
5. *Cathy's Clown*, Everly Brothers (1960)
6. *Johnny B Goode*, Chuck Berry (1958)
7. *Rockin' In Rhythm*, Duke Ellington (1931/1954/1964 etc)
8. *Stormy Weather*, Ivie Anderson and Duke Ellington (1940)
9. *Birdland*, Weather Report (1977)
10. *Don't Get Around Much Any More*, Mose Allison (1963)
11. *Love Letters*, Ketty Lester (1961)
12. *Stay With Me Baby*, Lorraine Ellison (1966)
13. *You Don't Have To Say You Love Me*, Dusty Springfield
14. *Ode To Billy Joe*, Bobby Gentry (1967)
15. *Will You Love Me Tomorrow*, Carole King
16. *Helpless*, Neil Young (1970)
17. *Only The Lonely*, Roy Orbison (1960)
18. *Late For The Sky*, Jackson Browne (1974)
19. *Everybody Knows*, Leonard Cohen (1988)
20. *All Along The Watchtower*, Jimi Hendrix (1968)
21. *Highway 61 Revisited*, Johnny Winter (1969)
22. *My Back Pages*, The Byrds (1967)
23. *Last Great American Whale*, Lou Reed (1989)
24. *Out Of Time*, Chris Farlowe (1966)
25. *Maggie May*, Rod Stewart (1971)
26. *Keith Don't Go*, Nils Lofgren (1975)
27. *(Your Love Keeps Lifting Me) Higher And Higher*, Jackie Wilson (1967)
28. *Bring It On Home To Me*, Sam Cooke (1962)
29. *(Sittin' On The) Dock Of The Bay*, Otis Redding (1968)
30. *Lean On Me*, Bill Withers (1972)
31. *Here Comes The Night*, Van Morrison (1965, 1974)
32. *Brown Eyed Girl*, Van Morrison (1967)
33. *Madame George*, Van Morrison (1968)
34. *(Jackie Wilson Says) I'm In Heaven When I See You Smile*, Van Morrison
35. *Who Knows Where The Time Goes?*, Fairport Convention (1969)
36. *Wall Of Death*, Richard and Linda Thompson (1982)
37. *Strange Affair*, June Tabor (1980)
38. *Heard It Through The Grapevine*, Marvin Gaye (1968)
39. *Tracks Of My Tears*, Smokey Robinson and the Miracles (1965)
40. *Papa Was A Rolling Stone*, The Temptations (1972)
41. *Midnight Train To Georgia*, Gladys Knight and the Pips (1973)
42. *Case Of You*, Joni Mitchell (1971)
43. *I've Got You Under My Skin*, Ella Fitzgerald (1956)

44. *Ne Me Quitte Pas*, Jacques Brel (1959)
45. *Dimples*, John Lee Hooker (1956)
46. *Smokestack Lightning*, Howlin' Wolf (1956)
47. *Statesboro Blues*, Taj Mahal
48. *No Reply*, The Beatles (1964)
49. *Paint It Black*, The Rolling Stones (1966)
50. *Just One Look*, The Hollies (1964)
51. *Lola*, The Kinks (1970)
52. *Hold On*, Tom Waits (1999)
53. *So Long Marianne*, Leonard Cohen (1967)
54. *Thunder Road*, Bruce Springsteen (1975)
55. *Like A Rolling Stone*, Bob Dylan (1965)
56. *The Times They Are A-Changin'*, Bob Dylan (1964)
57. *Visions Of Johanna*, Bob Dylan (1966)
58. *Tangled Up In Blue*, Bob Dylan (1975)
59. *Alone Again, Or, Love* (1967)
60. *Break On Through (To The Other Side)*, The Doors (1967)
61. *Somebody To Love*, Jefferson Airplane (1967)
62. *Feel Like I'm Fixin' To Die Rag*, Country Joe and the Fish (1967)
63. *Stir It Up*, Bob Marley and the Wailers (1967)
64. *Pressure Drop*, Toots and the Maytals (1970)
65. *Tide Is High*, The Paragons – (1966)
66. *Strawberry Fields Forever*, Beatles
67. *Substitute*, The Who (1966)
68. *Waterloo Sunset*, The Kinks (1967)
69. *Tumbling Dice*, Rolling Stones (1972)
70. *Salaman*, Toumani Diabate and Ballake Sissoko (1999)
71. *Kala*, Ali Farka Touré and Toumani Diabate (2005)
72. *Homafu Wawa*, Vieux Farka Touré (2016)
73. *Dipama*, Richard Bona (2005)
74. *You Can Call Me Al*, Paul Simon (1986)
75. *Sky Blue And Black*, Jackson Browne (1993)
76. *Down To Zero*, Joan Armatrading (1976)
77. *California Dreaming*, Mamas and Papas (1967)
78. *Carmelita*, Warren Zevon (1976)
79. *Cold Kisses*, Richard Thompson (1996)
80. *Romeo and Juliet*, Dire Straits (1981)
81. *She's Not There*, Zombies (1964)
82. *Ain't No Sunshine When She's Gone*, Bill Withers (1971)
83. *High Flyin' Bird*, Richie Havens (1966 or 1967, depending on who you believe)
84. *Respect*, Aretha Franklin (1967)
85. *Loan Me A Dime*, Boz Scaggs (1969)
86. *Layla*, Derek and the Dominoes (1970)
87. *Black Muddy River*, Norma Waterson (1996)

Nick's Selection 1: 1-6

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Early rock'n'roll (mostly).

1. *Heartbreak Hotel*, Elvis Presley (1956)

Composers: Axton/Duerden

In 1997 we saw Roger McGuinn performing solo. The performance took the form of a canter through his life in music. He started by saying that his view of the world changed when he heard a song on his transistor radio and decided instantly to learn to play the guitar. The song was *Heartbreak Hotel*.

I think it had an equivalent impact on me – the guitar came later and feebly, but the music made my 8 or 9 year old jaw drop. I can remember pop songs that predate it, but they were the likes of “Love and marriage ... go together like a horse and carriage” [Oh yeah??? but I suppose Frank Sinatra would know.] True, there was Bill Haley, but I thought then, as I still do, that he’s crap. Elvis was (to pinch Eddie Cochran’s terminology) something else.

Elvis aficionados claim that the Sun recordings are the definitive early recordings, and they are really interesting (where else would you find reworked country songs rubbing shoulders with delta blues?) but to me fractionally flat-footed. He’s not very good as an out-and-out rocker. (*Hound Dog* is really not convincing – they had 31 takes, and it shows). *Heartbreak Hotel* seems to me to be where he really gets it together. A pivotal recording, and one I still think is wonderful.

The factual information. Recorded and released in January 1956. Written by Tommy Duerden and Mae Boren Axton (“Who?” do I hear you say?). Elvis started out on Sun Records under the celebrated Sam Phillips, along with Jerry Lee Lewis, Carl Perkins, Johnny Cash and Roy Orbison, but moved to RCA Victor for this recording. Elvis’s normal backing musicians (Scotty Moore on guitar, Bill Black on bass and D. J. Fontana on drums) were augmented by Floyd Cramer on piano and the great Chet Atkins on guitar (though the guitar break sounds more like Scotty Moore than Chet Atkins to me).

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=e9BLw4W5KU8>

Mel’s comment on Nick’s 1. *Heartbreak Hotel*

Well here’s a thing. Nick chooses *Heartbreak Hotel* as his first record. And says he feels what I always thought people must have felt in 1956 when they first heard it: “What’s this? What is this?”

Self-evidently it turned the world of music inside out. Yet it’s not an out-and-out rocker. It’s rather jazzy.

So would I pick this as one of my 100? If not, which? And here’s the brilliance behind this game. It’s making us rethink the history of our musical enjoyment, and our personal histories too. With surprising conclusions.

I like virtually every Presley single from 1956 to 1963. (After *Devil in Disguise*, which Lennon voted a miss on Juke Box Jury, there’s hardly anything worth bothering with. Presley becomes a pastiche of himself.) But curiously I am not very excited by any of them now. What kind of top 100 would it be without any Presley? Silly? The ones I go back to are the solidly well-written songs like *She’s not You* and *Girl of My Best Friend*. But can these be classed among the very best of all the pop and rock there’s been? Maybe I’ll cop out and choose *Heartbreak Hotel*. Illuminating, Nick.

Pete’s comment on Nick’s 1. *Heartbreak Hotel*

I completely agree that *Heartbreak Hotel* is pretty much peerless in the Presley canon, and have always thought so. I was slightly too young or lacking in awareness to appreciate it when it was new, but I’ve become more and more impressed with it as the years have passed. I think this will be my Elvis choice too, if he is included in my list.

2. *What'd I Say*, Jerry Lee Lewis (1961)

Composer: Ray Charles

Well, if there's an out-and-out rocker, it must be Jerry Lee Lewis, however repellent he may be as a human being. He produced a handful of outstanding tracks. So why this, rather than, say, *Whole Lotta Shakin' Goin' On* [sic – at least they used apostrophes] or *Great Balls Of Fire*? Well, compare this version of *What'd I Say* with Ray Charles' original. That is good, but to me curiously anaemic – cool, sexy even. But Jerry Lee just lets rip – not, however, at the expense of musicianship: a couple of really good pianists. I've known it said that there's a run he does which is not far from impossible.

To me, this is as exciting as rock gets. Nothing at all to do with me sharing Jerry Lee Lewis's birthday (he is the older of the two).

Recorded in Memphis in Sam Phillips' studios (the successor to the original Sun studios). It was recorded in 1961, later than most of the great JLL material. There appears to be no information about other musicians or whatever – probably invisible in the shadow cast by Jerry Lee's immense ego.

One little digression: there's an irony in the backing vocals, as with Little Richard and Sam Cooke. None of the three was noted for exactly saintly lives, but all bothered God, at least intermittently. And here you have backing singers sounding as if they are singing in their cassocks. Hmmm.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=owCiPI4xBn4>

Mel's comment on Nick's 2. *What'd I Say*?

Well this is an education. I've never listened to Jerry Lee Lewis twice before. And I've never really *listened* to him at all. The track is surprising because all the energy is in the instrumentation. Lewis himself just sounds so smooth and relaxed (sexy? a matter of taste). Totally in control of something that sounded utterly out of control when I first heard it in the Sixties.

One problem hearing it on YouTube is that if you don't stop it at the end it runs into an excruciated Tom Jones version. Which I suppose highlights how good Jerry Lee Lewis is.

Pete's comment on Nick's 2 is missing.

3. *Peggy Sue*, Buddy Holly (1957)

Composers: Holly, Allison, Petty

Buddy Holly is simply one of the great originals, and, like the other early rock choices on the list, hugely influential (early Beatles, anybody?) but worth listening to as something way more than a historical monument. There are almost too many songs to pick from, but I think *Peggy Sue* gets it.

It's a simple enough song in terms of words and structure, but has a terrific drive to it. The guitar break couldn't be much more straightforward, but is just spot on.

It was recorded in 1957. Apart from the boy Holly, the Crickets were pretty anonymous, with one exception: Jerry Allison on drums. (I seem to recall that *Peggy Sue* was actually his girlfriend.) It's the drums that combine with the guitar to give the song its drive. Jerry Allison had a career as a session man after the day the music died. The bass player Joe

Mauldin was the other consistent member of the Crickets: I have a transcription of the bass lines for the greatest hits, and they are ... what's the word? ... pedestrian would be a polite way of putting it. But the music taken as a whole is terrific.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OUesbTObC9A>

Mel's comment on Nick's 3. *Peggy Sue*

This is odd. I was about to write, "I don't need to listen to this on YouTube. I hear it all the time anyway – and have always loved it." But I did, and found that you'd given us a link to the wrong recording, Nick! This one's got the Crickets chirping away in the choruses. But the version I own now and the versions I've always played only have Holly vocalising.

Naturally I prefer it without the new-fangled and extraneous intrusions. But it's still great.

My own choice of the definitive Holly track is probably a toss up between this and *That'll Be The Day*. But I also have a great fondness for the tracks he recorded so astutely after his death – including *Reminiscing*, *Brown-Eyed Handsome Man* and *Wishing*. Possibly because I was already familiar with most of his music before these became hits (thanks to a cousin who had all the albums in 1961), and these later songs were fresher – and better produced.

No, I could listen sequentially to everything he ever recorded and never tire. He was an amazing composer and a brilliant performer. He invented the singer-songwriter long before anyone knew what it was.

Pete's comment on Nick's 3. *Peggy Sue*

Totally agree with all your judgements about this. Holly was a genuine original – something that can't be said for many artists – and this song was perhaps the ultimate expression of his newness. Yes to the drive and the drums, yes to the guitar break: simple, but perfect in context. Truly a great, and I think I will add it to my own list.

4. *Somethin' Else*, Eddie Cochran (1959)

Composers: Sheeley, Cochran

Eddie Cochran was one of the great early rockers – decent singer, good guitarist, and good songwriter. I think he has to be high up the list because to me he's the performer who first establishes rock as the music of the young, most obviously in *Summertime Blues* and *Something Else*. Of the two, *Summertime Blues* seems to me to try a bit too hard. Here we have what is, if not the earliest, a very early example of teenagers finding their voice through rock. So his heirs must include the Who and '70s punk. Be that as it may, it's just a great bit of rock'n'roll.

Recorded June 1959. Eddie Cochran recorded the guitar and bass parts; the drummer is Earl Palmer, who was Little Richard's drummer (interesting when segregation in popular music was still the norm in the US – when Booker T and the MGs put out the "Green Onions" LP in 1962 the cover picture was changed from a picture of the group to a picture of green onions [geddit?] to mask the fact that there were two black and two white members).

There seems to be some disagreement about whether the co-composer was Eddie or his brother Bob, who otherwise seems entirely invisible. My reaction is distinctly towards the "who cares?" end of the spectrum.

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

Mel's comment on Nick's 4. *Somethin' Else*

I used to think Eddie Cochran recorded four songs and then died. But I've slowly come to realise that he was bigger than that, and your point about the man who gave rock and roll lyrics to teenagers is a bit of a revelation.

Those four songs must have been on a memorial EP before people knew he was going to last, because he actually left nearly an albumful of classics which have stood the test of time. I think you've helped to persuade me that *Somethin' Else* is the best of them. It doesn't quite have the wit of *Summertime Blues*, but then it doesn't have the slightly embarrassing teenage reference points either, and it drives along like a loaded fuel tanker without brakes – or a speeding taxi with a blow-out.

Wikipedia is interesting about him: Dave Dee of Dozy Beeky etc was a cadet at the police station where they towed the taxi that killed him, and he lifted Cochran's guitar, taught himself to play and became a big star too. So Eddie has something else to answer for. Not that you need to believe Wikipedia.

Pete's comment on Nick's 4. *Somethin' Else*

I don't know this as well as *Summertime Blues*, but as you say, it stands up well beside it. Interesting that he played more than one instrument on it himself. Often the way. And yes, he was a core contributor to the shape of popular music that followed.

5. *Cathy's Clown*, Everly Brothers (1960)

Composers: Everly, Everly

It's curious that Jerry Lee Lewis's later reputation (other than for marrying under-age girls) is more for country music than rock. But, if you look at Elvis's output, rock and country are in some way obverse and reverse of the same musical coin. And when it comes to mawkish but melodious popular music, well the Everlys have to be there.

Leaving the likes of *Ebony Eyes* to one side on the grounds of good taste, the choice could really be any one of a number of songs. But this is the one of which I have the strongest contemporary memories, and it still seems to me to be the best of the bunch, and an outstanding example of the Everlys' perfectly matched voices.

The record was released in 1960, so into something of a desert – after the heyday of rock'n'roll and before the Beatles etc. As so often with records of this vintage, there seems to be no information about personnel, but Chet Atkins was involved with quite a lot of the Everly's output (even though he recorded for a rival label), and played guitar on quite a few of their records.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yyeryRobP2g>

Mel's comment on Nick's 5. *Cathy's Clown*

Fine song. Fine choice. But there are almost too many to choose from. *Crying In The Rain* is my favourite because I discovered it for myself on Radio Luxembourg, and because Goffin-King can do virtually no wrong. I was going to suggest *Love Is Strange* as a contender (a Buddy Holly song) but when I relistened just now I was reminded of a crap spoken section in the middle. (*Till I kissed Her* is still great. *Lucille* shows they can rock pretty well.

Perhaps we don't need to choose. Or do we, Pete?

Pete's comment on Nick's 5. *Cathy's Clown*

This song is already on my own list, so what can I say? I forgive them their occasional mawkish aberrations; there was no rule book, because they were writing it as they went along. Basically, although others had used vocal harmonies in popular music before, the Everlys were the definitive exponents, and they took it to new levels. It changed everything.

Curiously, although little of the Beatles' output ever sounded remotely like the Everlys, without them I would contend that the Beatles could never have happened – or at least would never had the impact that they did. The Everlys put male two-part harmonies on the map forever after, and the Beatles (and all of us) benefited. And this song, with its plangent chorus and resonant descending harmonies, is sublime.

6. *Johnny B Goode*, Chuck Berry (1958)

Composer: Berry

This is another of the “where it all started” recordings. A few years back I bought a Chuck Berry compilation, and two things struck me. First, it was like having a reference book on the shelves because so much stemmed from him. There's an obvious example – think of how the early Rolling Stones depended on him. In fact I think I was probably first aware of him about the same time as the Stones were releasing *Come On*. Secondly, his *oeuvre* (blimey) consists of a constant reworking of about three or four tunes and riffs. But what tunes and riffs!

This seems to me to be the definitive Berry song. It is a curious fictionalised autobiography: he was a city boy not a country boy (apparently the original was “coloured boy”, changed to ensure that it would be played on white radio stations) and there is, through some incomprehensible oversight, no mention of the first prison sentence he had already served by the time of its release.

His early reputation was for showing a country influence in blues-based songs, thus providing a sort-of mirror image of Elvis Presley and Jerry Lee Lewis. But, whatever the historical significance, the issue is always the music, and I still feel my spirits lifting when I hear this.

It was recorded in at the Chess Studios in Chicago (where many Southern bluesmen had moved). Chess Records will doubtless crop up again in my list – it was the focal point for much of the great rhythm and blues, in the proper sense rather than the dross now masquerading under the purloined name. Willie Dixon, one of the key figures at Chess, is on bass and Fred Below (*sic*) on drums. Johnny Johnson was Chuck Berry's piano player for ages (and sued him a few years ago for recognition – or money, as it's known – as co-author of many of the songs). But this recording apparently features Lafayette Leake, one of the Chess stalwarts.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=T38v3-SSGcM>

Mel's comment on Nick's 6. *Johnny B Goode*

Now here's another discovery. I've always thought Berry to be an underrated songwriter. His subject matter and lyrics are so often original and striking. Has anyone else done anything like *My Ding-a-Ling*? (I don't like the song hugely, but I like it that a really rude song was a big hit.) *No Particular Place To Go* and *You Never Can Tell* gave the charts the capacity to be witty and pertinent as well as popular.

But till recently I'd overlooked the musical originality in his earlier rock and roll and blues recordings. BBC4 music documentaries have helped me. *Jonny B Goode* is wonderful lyrically, musically and in its performance. It's better than the unavoidable Beatles version (unavoidable if you bought their first “Greatest Hits” album anyway), and better than many other covers. Yet I had to listen carefully to it again now to appreciate that it's actually incomparably better.

It's my kind of rock and roll. Great choice.

Pete's comment on Nick's 6. *Johnny B Goode*

Yes, Chuck Berry's brilliance is difficult to tie down. His music is indeed slightly "samey", and his guitar playing sounds deceptively simple. It's not, of course, and part of his achievement was the variety within the idiom. I've always felt, like you, that his influence was enormous, and has arguably not been given the general acknowledgement it deserves. And of course the riff that launches each verse of this one is more or less definitive. Thanks, by the way, for the detailed illumination of aspects of his life and career.

Jazz and associated deviant forms: *This may seem odd as a sequel to the early rock'n'roll, but ...*

By around 1962 I was pretty obsessed with a lot of forms of music, but classical was losing out to popular music of various kinds. This was about the time that I defected from the flute to the guitar. My older brother's year worked out that the school, while frowning on pop/rock as beneath consideration, was prepared to recognise jazz, provided a teacher was prepared to "supervise" (meaning nothing more than put his name to) a jazz club.

So we were able to wangle a way of listening to jazz at some lunchtimes. Jazz, it may be said, included such artistes as Big Bill Broonzy, Sonny Terry and Brownie McGhee – oh, and the young Bob Dylan. We also played something purporting to be jazz interspersed with Eddie Cochran and the like. So I encountered quite a lot of jazz then, much of which I have never heard since, though some of it stuck.

Mostly I haven't heard enough since for those nascent tastes to go anywhere. I had various LPs – Charlie Parker, Dizzie Gillespie, Stan Getz, Chick Corea, Miles Davis among others – but never replicated more than one or two on CD. So this is the remains of something which was more than a blind alley – but not much more. It's somehow the other door through which I came in.

And Mel's perspective on jazz at school:

When I was at school there no encouragement for listening to jazz even as a quasi-scholastic activity. The music teacher treated lessons as an opportunity for him to indulge his love of Beethoven while we pretended on the basis of zero instruction to follow the score. No other music existed.

In fact I provided the lunch time musical entertainment (Beatles, Searchers, Shadows etc) by lugging my incredibly heavy hand-built reel to reel tape deck the two miles to school and back every day.

Yet when it came to the Christmas dance I was forbidden to book a pop group of any kind, so I hired a jazz band (this was the time when Dudley Moore's Quartet were popular) and asked them to sound as poppy as they could. That wasn't a lot, but the dance was not quite the disaster it could have been. The band must have hated me!

7. Rockin' In Rhythm, Duke Ellington (1931/1954/1964 etc)

Composers: Ellington/Carney/Mills

In the Summer of 1964 I went to see Duke Ellington at the Royal Festival Hall. It remains one of the most powerful musical memories I have. I saw Ellington a couple of other times (once in Great St Mary's, weirdly), but the first concert was the one that really did it for me. The strongest of the strong memories is of *Rockin' In Rhythm*.

This was an early Ellington composition (the first recording dates from 1931) written to accompany a dance by, if I remember rightly, one "Snakehips" Tucker. Ellington obviously reworked it as time passed and the personnel in what he called his "Orchestra" changed.

I'm sure a purist would prefer one of the earlier recordings, but to me it's the one that is closest to what I heard that I treasure. I just remember a row of horn players rising to their feet and producing the most astounding, soaring, wild sound, especially towards the end.

I subsequently found a quotation from André Previn which sort of captures articulately what I felt: "Stan Kenton stands before a hundred reeds and brass, makes a dramatic gesture, and every studio arranger in the audience knows just how it's done; Duke

Ellington lifts his little finger, three horns make a sound – and nobody knows what it is.” But that analysis doesn’t touch on the sheer excitement of it all.

Not that I fully realised it at the time, I saw some of the original Ellington greats – Clark Terry (who has died very recently) and Cootie Williams on trumpet (Williams could make the trumpet growl; Terry specialised in stratospherically high notes); Harry Carney, the sole ever-present on baritone sax; and some of the great new(er)comers – Paul Gonsalves on tenor sax (he was as white as a sheet, and died not much later, allegedly as a result of excessive enthusiasm for the poppy) and Sam Woodyard on drums.

The recording I got after the 1964 concert was made in 1954, and I still have it on vinyl, but there seems to be no version of that recording on t’internet. But now I find that there is a recording on YouTube of the tour I saw – doesn’t remotely do justice to it, but maybe you’ll get the idea:

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

There’s a sideline on “popular” music here. You’ll recall, Pete, that when you set the terms of engagement for this exercise, you said that *Rhapsody In Blue* would probably be permissible. I remember, again, someone saying that Gershwin was deemed the “acceptable” side of the legit/popular divide and was therefore permitted to write at length; Ellington, who was seen as falling the wrong side, was constrained by what could fit onto a 78. Quite interesting ...

Pete’s comment on Nick’s 7. *Rockin’ In Rhythm*

Yes, to me this is a nice example of a big band with credentials beyond what that term suggests. Fantastic sounds, especially from that trumpet-player. And a remarkably spare, almost tense piano part.

I certainly take your point about the “right” and “wrong” side of what was acceptable, and recognise your observation that Ellington tended to fall on the latter side. This piece shows how wrong-headed that distinction was. By the way, the fact that you *saw* Ellington live more than once yet again has me in awe ...

Mel’s comment on Nick’s 7. *Rockin’ In Rhythm*

So Nick quite likes Duke Ellington. And I appreciate the education. But here’s something that’s beginning to be a recurring theme with our game: which version are we actually listening to?

The 1964 recording of *Rockin’ in Rhythm* we were directed sounded quite interesting, and I got more out of seeing Ellington’s hands in at the keyboard in the film than I’ve ever got from just listening to him. Then the brass came in and I was unmoved. It was all a bit predictable (I can’t comment on musicianship). Then it occurred to me that there might be a more authentic version closer to the time when you attended that concert.

The other YouTube version I found may come from 1958. The showmanship of the pianist was less in evidence. But suddenly I could understand why you were blown away by the “orchestra”. This was a much raunchier, wilder performance with much more original contributions from everyone with something to blow.

Real excitement. May even have converted me. If I could find more like this I’d be interested in listening. Thank you.

8. *Stormy Weather*, Ivie Anderson and Duke Ellington (1940)

Composer: Arlen

One of the other times I saw Ellington, he had the wonderful Ella Fitzgerald singing with him for part of the concert. But I’ve never heard an Ellington/Fitzgerald collaboration

which sounds as good as this. It's a wonderful song, and a clear example of something that I have been puzzled by.

There were astounding black musicians, some of whom achieved a degree of, often rather risqué, recognition. But their publicly acceptable "voice" came primarily through composers most of whom were middle-European Jewish immigrants – Gershwin with "Porgy and Bess", Kern with "Showboat" and so on. Harold Arlen was second generation, but the point still holds. He also wrote the songs for "The Wizard of Oz", which is strikingly white.

Ivie Anderson was Ellington's singer during the '30s, but is not a name I'd encountered before I heard this recording. Not as distinctive as Ella Fitzgerald or Billie Holliday, but she more than does the job.

This recording dates from 1940. No personnel given on the recording I've got, but the growling trumpet must be the aforementioned Cootie Williams, and I guess the sax noodling away behind the vocals is Johnny Hodges.

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

Pete's comment on Nick's 8. *Stormy Weather*

Having parents with a grounding in classical music but a penchant for other kinds, I grew up hearing standards like *Stormy weather*, which was later picked up in performance by my sister and her friends and colleagues. In a corner of my mind I quite liked this kind of music during my childhood, but at the time it didn't penetrate the barrier that said it wasn't *my* kind of music.

In retrospect, I've recognised that it's wonderfully adult, and much more sophisticated than most later pop; and Harold Arlen was an important and enduring figure in all this.

Mel's comment on Nick's 8. *Stormy Weather*

Undeniably a great song. But I'm always going to hear it with an image in my head of Shirley Bassey wearing hobnail boots. Hilarious for the incongruity, and the diva's curious subservience to the anarchy. Which is a shame.

As you say this is a fine version. Enjoyable. But the only way I'm going to be moved is to laughter. Sacrilege?

I appear not to find the meeting of black music with white composers as surprising as you, Nick. The Gershwins were treading on dangerous ground with "Porgy and Bess", and there's more than a hint of oppression in the motive behind *Somewhere Over The Rainbow* if you extract the sweet Miss Garland.

So the whities were doing their bit. And it seems rather natural that black musicians would go for this sort of transitional fiction in the hope of achieving some recognition in mainstream America. And that's without needing a reference to Jewish victimhood. (Oh, there I go.)

9. *Birdland*, Weather Report (1977)

Composer: Zawinul

Well, somewhere in the top 100 there has to be space for arguably the most phenomenal bassist of the lot, Jaco Pastorius. But it's not just him: Weather Report consisted of a row of exceptional musicians – Pastorius (fretless Precision bass, since you ask), Joe Zawinul (keyboards), Wayne Shorter (saxes), Alex Acuna (drums), Manolo Badrena (percussion).

"Heavy Weather", the LP from which this comes, was recorded in 1977, and seems to me to be a successful fusion of improvisational jazz and the more structured approach that came from soul via funk. But *Weather Report*, unlike much jazz at the freer end of the spectrum, satisfy my craving for melody.

Wayne Shorter went on to other things, some of which I like. In 1987 Jaco Pastorius, by then suffering pretty badly from bipolar disorder, not to mention the predictable drugs'n'alcohol, was killed by a bouncer outside a nightclub in Florida. The bouncer was convicted of manslaughter – but then Pastorius wasn't black.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JI1QCXIXlp8>

Pete's comment on Nick's 9. *Birdland*

Your description of this piece (improvisational jazz fused with the more structured approach) perfectly sums it up. Of all the jazz forms, funk is one of those that particularly appeal to me, and in fact I'll be having at least one piece with jazz funk influence in my own top 100.

I always quite liked *Birdland*, though funnily enough, I found on re-listening that I was frustrated by the tension you describe in it, and suspect I always have been. I was craving for the musicians to break free of the rigid structure at some point. But I suppose it's part of the skill of the piece that they don't.

Mel's comment on Nick's 9. *Birdland*

I've only ever known Weather Report by report. So when this track started I was excited to hear a rather groovy tuneful bit of accessible jazz whose intriguing opening notes made a big concession to attention-grabbing conventional rock.

And then ... My complaint was going to be that it didn't develop. But that's unfair. It kept on developing in various ways which to my untrained eared seemed rather arbitrary. And it did so – cleverly, I concede – for a rather long time.

Parts are great. Every so often there was a change I particularly liked, but when they'd done with that they moved onto something else less appealing. The nice tune, if that was what was attracting me, didn't sustain the piece, and eventually seemed to be intrusive. The fade out at the end seemed to give the game away. They probably went on playing for ages after that, but the producer felt as I did that we'd had enough for the time being!

I did play it three times, and have enjoyed the moody succeeding YouTube track (*Heavy Weather?*) rather more. So it's certainly not all bad.

10. *Don't Get Around Much Any More*, Mose Allison (1963)

Composers: Ellington, Russell

While I was still at school, the music pseuds, of whom I guess I was one, listened to quite a lot of jazz, particularly the sort of jazz that overlapped with the more exotic end of rock. Georgie Fame was quite important, because a lot of his earlier stuff was poppier versions of the likes of Lambert Hendrix and Bavan (from whom he got *Yeh Yeh*).

Mose Allison was another of his favoured sources, and I bought "Mose Allison Sings", recorded in 1963 in 1964 or '65, complete with cover picture of someone looking like a 30-odd year old lecturer on an evening off. While we were still in Milton Keynes, maybe the early Nineties, Mose Allison appeared at the Stables (the Dankworth/ Layne venue on the edge of MK), so of course we went. Onto the stage shuffled this wizened, stooped, white-haired old man. I found myself thinking, "No, no that's not Mose Allison," but of course it was and remarkably he could still do it. In 1964 I thought the music was cool and witty, and I still do.

Another Ellington composition. Ah well. I liked the song's understatement, which I thought was the perfect match for Allison's delivery. The bassist is Addison Farmer, the drummer Nick Stabulas, not that I've ever encountered either before or since. I'm sure I was a tit at 16, but I think I got this right. The whole LP is good or better, but the track in question is at 23.05:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Z4ZnsifCXMM>

Pete's comment on Nick's 10. *Don't Get Around Much Any More*

Yet again, hearing this was an education. I listened to some additional tracks, having failed at first to notice where I was supposed to start playing, and was particularly taken by the obvious influence Allison had on Georgie Fame. His style of delivery was subtle and charming, and was presumably highly original, though much imitated later. Your anecdote about seeing that imposter shuffling on to the stage is priceless.

Mel's comment on Nick's 10. *Don't Get Around Much Any More*

Well this is interesting. I know Mose Allison even less than Duke Ellington – ie not at all. But I can see the attraction of Allison's sophisticated delivery.

This is a super song which invites his languid and slightly ironic voice. Nice arrangement too. I can understand as I write how this man might ease the frustrations of Budget Day.

Here come the girls (not for the first or last time)

11. Love Letters, Ketty Lester (1961)

Composers: Young, Hayman

In 1962, for one of my earlier experiences of one night stands (not, you understand, of a sexual nature) I went to the Regal Cinema in Cambridge, I think maybe to see the Everly Brother (*sic* – Don was incapacitated by drugs at the time). The act I have the strongest memories of was actually Ketty Lester, who was in the hit parade at the time with *Love Letters*. I thought she was terrific, and I still think this is a classic. The song itself dates from 1945, when it was featured in a film called (wait for it ...) “Love Letters”, in which it was sung by Dick Haymes. That version is on YouTube if you feel like checking it, but, as they say, it wouldn't stand out in a crowd of three.

When I saw Ketty Lester, she came on stage and introduced “My piano player, Lincoln Mayorga”. He was a session player, arranger and producer who had a microscopic success as part of the Piltdown Men (whose irresistible work was credited to “Mayorga/Cobb”). So I imagine that this fantastic arrangement is his work (the drummer, incidentally, was Earl Palmer of Little Richard fame – cf. Eddie Cochran's *Somethin' Else*). This arrangement seems to me to have come to define the song – various subsequent versions, Elvis Presley's for instance, simply imitate it. But Ketty Lester's voice is just perfect for the song. I actually owned another 45 by her, but I can't offhand remember what it was. She was a one-hit wonder. But what a hit!

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=txahSHR2Jb8>

Pete's comment on Nick's 11. Love Letters

To hear that you actually *saw* Ketty Lester in concert is tantamount in my universe to seeing someone step out of a screen and emerge as a three-dimensional entity. Well, perhaps not that, but I'm still greatly impressed. In 1962 it had never even occurred to me to go to any live pop concert, let alone one featuring someone as sophisticated as this (or so I would have considered her).

This version of *Love Letters* was part of the soundtrack of my first year at boarding school, and now seems more like the stuff of legend than something performed by a living person who could actually be seen in person, in Britain, on stage. Although I didn't really know what to make of records like this, which didn't fit into my neat notion of what constituted a “pop song”, I had to admit to myself that I liked it enormously – especially that haunting piano, which for me represents a major aspect of the memorability of the recording.

So thank you for informing me, only 53 years late, of the pianist's name! Incidentally, this was one of my early exposures to diminished chords, at a time when I didn't really even know what they were. Songs like this prompted me to find out.

Mel's comment on Nick's 11. Love Letters

A great track, and by my reckoning streets ahead of the Presley imitation. Yet I'm dragged back once again to asking what I'm listening to. The YouTube link takes me to a rather flat vocal, precise, but not very soulful. Good enough, but ...

I immediately thought there could be a difference between this and the sound quality of old mono FM radio and, hence, the reel to reel tape deck I was using when the record came out. So perhaps I was remembering a song that was better than it actually is.

But no. It's modern technology which has screwed it! When I looked round YouTube I found another version which was much richer, much more like what I remembered and loved in 1963.

Conclusion: it's the appalling clipping of sound quality in ubiquitous low-level MP3 files. Our capacity for listening to music on quality playback equipment has never been greater, but many people insist on using and then rebroadcasting the audio equivalent of a black and white TV set. Fortunately I did in the end hear Ketty at her lovely best.

12. *Stay With Me Baby*, Lorraine Ellison (1966)

Composers: Ragovoy, Weiss

One of a fair number of disquieting features of rock/pop is the number of songs written by men to be sung by women in which they recognise their role as doormats for men. *Angel Of The Morning* is an extreme case and might make the list.

Stay With Me Baby is a classic of the genre (Jerry Ragovoy also wrote *Piece Of My Heart*, another example). It's not intrinsically a woman's song – after all, it was one of the umpteen covers (over-)done by the Walker Brothers. But this, the definitive performance, makes it pretty clear that that is what it is. So there is a degree of guilty pleasure here, but what the hell.

It dates from 1966, so really at the peak of the classic soul period (Otis Redding, Wilson Pickett etc). That part centred on Memphis, and specifically Stax Studios. But this is from one of the other two great centres, Philadelphia (the third being Muscle Shoals, Alabama). It was recorded when Frank Sinatra cancelled a studio session he'd booked, so presumably this isn't a backing by specialist soul musicians.

Songs don't come much more visceral than this, and the whole performance, from the opening arpeggios, through Lorraine Ellison's voice to the horns at the end is extraordinary. Terrific chords, but totally unsingable (well, by me at least).

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5TOaUxgkLSg>

Pete's comment on Nick's 12. *Stay With Me Baby*

Your analysis of this piece makes a good case in every regard. And thank you for explaining that the backing probably isn't by specialist soul musicians. If true, I guess paradoxically this may have helped to make the recording more interesting. It pulls all the stops out, and there can't have been many singers then or since who could have competed with it as well as Lorraine Ellison did (and come out ahead).

I'm put slightly in mind of Beverley Knight, who is wonderfully versatile, and always strikes me as someone waiting for the big number that will secure her place in the history books.

By the way, something else I like about the Lorraine Ellison recording is that despite the visceral vocal style that you describe, musically it never forgets that it's a pop song at heart, not some kind of emotional tract. Perhaps that partly helps make the guilty pleasure easier to justify. Some successful performers seem to end up mistakenly believing they are greater than the songs they sing, but it's often a risky road. Not in this case.

Mel's comment on Nick's 12. *Stay With Me Baby*

I wasn't aware of the original and a lot of people have recorded this. So it's one of those fine songs which have always seemed to be around. Sadly my enthusiasm for it was dulled in the Sixties by the Walker Brothers dirge, and I can't remember whose pacier version I have in my head even now.

Lorraine Ellison certainly sings it with feeling. But the orchestration on the recording spoils it for me somewhat. It's over the top and intrusive, sometimes vying to be more raucous than the singer. (Contrast the big build-up Dusty Springfield songs where the orchestra is a large part of the show but usually kind of knows its place.)

Doubtless there's electronic wizardry around today which could correct this and give me the great track I'd like to hear!

13. *You Don't Have To Say You Love Me*, Dusty Springfield

Composers: Donaggio, Pallavicini, Wickham, Napier-Bell

Dusty still seems to me to be one of the truly great female singers, not necessarily always provided with fitting material (a perennial problem, as witness Alison Moyet). Happily she got enough worthy material, of which this is a good example, and one which I remember well first from "Top of the Pops" and the like, and then regularly ever since.

It's one of a number of songs where a continental original (in this case Italian) was given English lyrics and became a hit. There is a certain irony here, in that my recollection is that we all sneered at French/Spanish/Italian pop at the time. Even worse, some of the versions are travesties of the original: it remains to be seen if Jacques Brel's *Ne Me Quitte Pas* makes the cut, but it is so much better than *If You Go Away* that it's embarrassing.

Any way, Dusty's song ... Released in 1966. According to Wikipedia, there were 47 takes. If that's true, I don't think it shows. Just terrific from the grandiose intro on. And Dusty provides an object lesson in how to vary your voice according to the changing requirements of the song (unlike the crudeness of Cilla Black, who had two vocal settings done to death in her Dionne Warwick rip-offs – "little girl" and "fishwife").

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6IXr5dZ9iAk>

Pete's comment on Nick's 13. *You Don't Have To Say You Love Me*

OK, this one is in my own top 100 list already, so I'm probably anticipating myself here, but I must comment on the structure of this song – something I seem to be doing with quite a number of the pieces we're all choosing.

It starts with a fairly complex scene-setting section (the "verse", you could say); you feel it's leading somewhere else, but you don't know quite where to. Then it resolves itself into the beguiling "You don't have to say you love me" chorus section. It's as if, in the middle of a slightly tense and uneasy conversation, the other person suddenly gives you a broad, unexpected musical smile. And although it taps into all kinds musical tricks to hook us, it never becomes trite.

Then we get a repetition of the verse, keeping us waiting a bit longer for another fix of the chorus. I always contrasted that in my mind with the follow-up, *All I See Is You*, written in the same vein but by a British composer, Clive Westlake. This time, the opening section is arguably more complex and musically challenging, but once we go into the big chorus, the opening is never repeated; we just get rehashes of, and embellishments on, the chorus.

Even in the day I felt that this was pandering somehow to the baser musical instincts of listeners (including me). Little did I know then that this approach (constant repetition of the "hook") would become *de rigueur* in a lot of the more exploitative 2000s music. One of Ollie Murs' big hits, for instance, concludes by repeating the chorus about fifteen times. (Don't get me going.) *You Don't Have To Say You Love Me* avoids all this, and as you say, is sung impeccably.

Mel's comment on Nick's 13. *You Don't Have To Say You Love Me*

Interesting theme emerging here – the three of us are going for a lot of the same performers, but not necessarily the same tracks. Have to admit this is a superb song and performance. One of many. My personal definitive 160th Birthday Party Collection has *I Just Don't Know What To Do With Myself*, *Some of Your Lovin'*, and one other which you'll see later – chosen for the quality of the songs rather than any difference in Dusty's rendition.

That's a lot of great music. So perhaps we should reflect on the importance of great performers getting the best choice of songs from great songwriters. Presumably commercial success attracts the songs and vice versa – and inversa.

Incidentally, it took the advent of modern music reproduction technology to alert my brain to the fact that she *doesn't* sing "You don't have to say you love me just *because you can*."

14. *Ode To Billy Joe*, Bobby Gentry (1967)

Composer: Gentry

When this came out in 1967 I didn't think much of it, but over the years I have come to think that it really is pretty remarkable. The whole sound is sultry, the mood superficially offhand, but there's an awful lot going on beneath the humdrum surface.

This in itself is unusual in pop and rock, which, where someone like Cole Porter goes for urbane understatement, tends to opt consistently for hyperbole. This song is weirdly oblique, with an awful lot of dire things going on, but all of them offstage (not that the song bears any other discernible resemblance to Greek tragedy). Bobbie Gentry would never say what the mystery object thrown off the bridge was – I always somehow assumed it was an aborted baby, but who knows? Not necessarily the point.

I vaguely remember Bobbie Gentry from a telly series. Unlike Ketty Lester, she wasn't quite a one-hit wonder, but sadly the world would have been not a great deal poorer if she had been.

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

Mel's comment on Nick's 14. *Ode To Billy Joe*

A superb song with a fitting downbeat delivery and a haunting accompaniment. I might have chosen myself if I'd remembered it.

I only recently became aware of the mystery surrounding what was being thrown off the bridge. And since Bobbie Gentry won't say, I can't be amiss in having always filled in the detail with something modest, like flowers as love tokens. After all, she ends up throwing flowers anyway.

However I concede that, since the song brilliantly conveys our lack of awareness of the emotional states of others, the door is open to something much more important falling in the river. So the aborted foetus is a real if rather dramatic possibility. But it's not a necessary reading when black-eyed peas and Papa dying seem to carry the same weight.

Oh what a clever lyric!

Pete's comment on Nick's 14. *Ode To Billy Joe*

Agreed, it IS pretty remarkable. Not only does the story end badly, it also starts and continues badly, as you say.

I'm glad you like this, because I too have felt increasingly that it's one of those unexpected gems that come up from time to time. The words are spare, yet plunge you into a fully realised world, and the varied, precise orchestration adds to the tense, strained feel of it. And having painted the backdrop to the tale and hinted at the strange events at the heart of it, the narrator shocks you by revealing that her own life has since moved on – and not necessarily for the better. Very unsettling.

15. *Will You Love Me Tomorrow*, Carole King

Composers: Goffin, King

If Carole King hadn't existed it would have been necessary to invent her. It's extraordinary that she wrote so many of the memorable (and some of the less memorable) songs of our earlier pop music years, often in the Brill Building, and then reinvented herself completely in Los Angeles with the wonderful "Tapestry".

According to Roger McGuinn, the job in the Brill Building was to go to the office, listen to hits on the radio and write something to emulate their success – how on earth that could produce anything but imitative dross is a tribute to (some of) those involved.

The post-Brill reinvention was not, of course, a complete reinvention. *Will You Love Me Tomorrow* bridges the not-so-great divide, which is why it is in my list as a way of having the best of both worlds. But it is a terrific song in its original Shirelles incarnation too (according to the dubious Wikipedia, this was "the first Billboard number 1 hit by an African-American girl group, possibly the first by any girl group").

It was pretty touch and go whether to pick this or *You've Got A Friend* or *It's Too Late* – maybe there'll be a further choice subsequently, but this'll more than do for now.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GLA7sanwnN8>

Mel's comment on Nick's 15. *Will You Love Me Tomorrow*

Impeccable. Another one I might also have picked, while playing obligatory homage to "Tapestry". Not to mention the golden age of US girl groups.

I've always thought the lyric is spot on – thoughtful and intelligent in a basic sort of way. (In fact I seem to recall the odd woman quoting the title almost verbatim when I made improper suggestions, though the actual drift might have been "get lost".) It's certainly true to life.

In the light of your thoughts, Nick, on the institutionalised sexism of many male songwriters, this sensitive perspective was quite perspicacious of Gerry Goffin, assuming he was writing the lyrics as usual. But he could have been ruefully remembering some woman who found an excuse to rebuff him just when he thought his luck was in. Cynical? Who me?

My Carole King's greatest hits CD, which of course includes this, is one of my most played records. The wonderful Brill Building hit *It Might As Well Rain Till September*, which was one of the first records I bought, is also in that collection. That will be in my 100 even though its lyric sounds so insignificant alongside the "Tapestry" tracks.

Pete's comment on Nick's 15. *Will You Love Me Tomorrow*

Yes, Carole King is a towering figure in our music history, and her achievement is astonishing. *Will You Love Me Tomorrow* is a good choice, but your alternatives would have been worthy too.

I would unhesitatingly say "Tapestry" is one of my favourite albums of all time. Yet sitting here looking at the track listing, I'm wondering if I would definitely pick any of them for my own top 100. If we had separate top hundreds for different styles and moods, I would probably include nearly all the tracks on one or other of them, but in my composite list, I don't know.

Perhaps that album has too many bitter-sweet memories for me. I bought it when my life had reached one of its lowest ebbs. I was training with BRS, it was a cold, wet winter, and I had been sent home to do a week's cold calling around the Newcastle and Gateshead area. This was the joyous soundtrack to a truly miserable experience!

As Carole King album tracks go, I might instead pick a delightful duet with James Taylor from "Carole King Music" – a number called *Song Of Long Ago*. See

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oMxJqevlZzo>. But more on Carole King from me later ...

Industrial strength misery: *As an irrepressibly ebullient and positive person, I have sometimes looked to music to temper any excessive boisterousness. These seem to do the trick. Don't click on the links when you are on your own and there are sharp implements or bottles of pills in the house.*

16. *Helpless*, Neil Young (1970)

Composer: Young

Says it all really. Neil Young's material seems to me pretty uneven, but there's a significant body of remarkable songs. But this is the one I always go back to.

I was a bit disappointed when I realised there wasn't really a town in North Ontario called Helpless, but I've learnt to like the idea that you change the name of your home town to Helpless – it would be wonderful when going through those tedious security checks (date of birth/mother's maiden name etc) to say you came from Helpless.

But back to misery. The melody couldn't be much simpler, nor yet the words – just a wonderful evocation of feeling excluded from the pleasures others seem to draw from life.

There are various versions of it, all with their merits – the song is so simple that it seems able to change sound. I think I was first aware of it from Crosby Stills Nash and Young's "Déjà Vu" (1970) which now sounds a bit twee to me, but there is an earlier recording from his *Crazy Horse* years and various others up to the last one I was aware of, from his "Unplugged" CD.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=J2z7LXpAX3Q>

Pete's comment on Nick's 16. *Helpless*

I identify with everything you say about this, Nick. Feeling excluded – yes, sums it up. And I agree that it's a classic. It's one of those songs that I admire rather than love, so it will never be in a top list of my own. Yet, paradoxically, I can see that it's an important and memorable work, and the world would be a worse place without it. I feel the same about many many songs, in fact. A hundred choices simply isn't enough.

Mel's comment on Nick's 16. *Helpless*

I wonder whether we all drawn to this because it chimes with different aspects of our personality.

I think this is a song about nostalgia. About an aching memory of a part of one's past. Not a wish to go back, but the need to hang on to it. It's memory that makes us helpless because it's not in our control, not the memory of anything actually helpless. A nice idea, and certainly one which resonates with me massively.

Various live versions always seem suitably raw and I'm also drawn back to "Unplugged", though it was good to discover one with the Band.

When I was in Canada last year I went through a few of the places on Highway 7 that turn up in Young's songs, and Helpless wasn't one of them. In fact, he doesn't seem to have lived much further north in Ontario than I did when I was camping there, and there's an awful lot more of the north and the cold than that! But it's all pretty desolate unless you like lots of identical trees, so the poetic licence is forgivable. (Incidentally I had an ice cream in Wawa, also on Highway 7, which surprisingly is a song by George Harrison.)

I like Young most when he's rocking. More of which later.

17. Only The Lonely, Roy Orbison (1960)

Composers: Orbison, Melson

Roy Orbison's voice is truly amazing. He was, as I've already said, one of the original Sun Records crop of singers, and tried at that time to sing rock – not the best idea in the history of music. *Pretty Woman* (1964), which may make the cut, might count as more pop than rock.

Be that as it may, he found his natural milieu in misery. In some ways that's unfair: if you compare his version of *Crying* with Don McLean's, Orbison's works better because it's actually less overwrought. I nearly went for *Crying*, but decided in the end that *Only The Lonely* has to be there as wonderfully characteristic Orbison.

To say it's self-pitying is a bit like revealing that the sun rises in the East. So Roy Orbison is the man who raised self-pity to an art form.

The only musician involved who I've heard of is Floyd Cramer on piano (see *Heartbreak Hotel*), and the singers might be the Jordanaires, also as used by Elvis. This song is referred to by Bruce Springsteen in *Thunder Road* (doubtless to appear in due course), and Bruce is at the forefront of the tribute "Black And White Night", a DVD of which is of course in every good home. But, as it says in *The In Crowd*, the original is still the greatest [or, since it rhymes with "imitate us", perhaps that's "the greatus"].

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kjq4wYuwxgxs>

Mel's comment on Nick's 17. Only The Lonely

What can one say? To deny that this is the defining song by one of the all time pop music greats is merely to haggle over the price.

And you completely put your finger on any slight discomfort we might feel about a career based on misery (musical and personal). His artistry, voice and (often) his songwriting pull it off.

Does this mean I don't have to pick a favourite Orbison track?

Pete's comment on Nick's 17. Only The Lonely

A brilliant song, and worthy of being in anybody's top one hundred. Apart from all the points you make about Orbison in general, I find the verse pattern of this one intriguing. It's structurally teasing in its small way, and I always find it difficult to hum along with this and get the "sha la las" in the right place. I think we're all agreed that a variety of Orbison songs probably vie to be in our list. Yes, his voice was amazing – and so was his song-writing ability. He knew exactly where his strengths lay, and was able to come up with work that allowed him to give it full exposure.

18. Late For The Sky, Jackson Browne (1974)

Composer: Browne

Jackson Browne is not the most heart-warming individual on the planet – what sort of arsehole says he'll give a woman a lift home from a party if she'll travel naked? And then writes a song about it??? Every time I reflect on what an abysmal human being I am, I should remind myself of this.

Despite this, his songs are generally thoughtful and at best really stunning. There are a lot of candidates clamouring for inclusion – *Running On empty*, *Fountain Of sorrow*, *In The Shape Of A Heart* and *Sky Blue And Black* spring to mind. But for reasons I can't entirely account for, *Late For The Sky* has to be here. It was the first of his songs really to

get under my skin, and I have tried to sing it (hmmmm). It's about the fag end of his life with his wife, who committed suicide shortly after the LP had been made in 1974. And it shows in this song – desperately bleak stuff, for all its melodiousness.

Jackson Browne has always been supported by good musicians, mostly from the LA cabal. The indispensable musician is David Lindley on lap steel (or other guitars or violin). Browne toured solo a few years back, and sounded pretty thin. He then toured again with David Lindley but no other backing musician, and was terrific.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kqYiHkx7ils>

Pete's comment on Nick's 18. *Late For The Sky*

Well, this was a revelation. I've never paid any attention to Jackson Browne before, and I can see that I should remedy this. The song you chose is tuneful, and his voice is likeable and polished. I can see from this choice that Browne has the potential for bleakness of vision, but I'm not sure if that would encourage me or put me off when it came to hearing more of him.

I don't want to give the impression that I only like upbeat music! I'm sure this will be plain from some of my future choices. But I'm also not sure just how much unfamiliar bleak music I will want to subject myself to, when I feel I probably know quite a lot already. But it's food for thought, at any rate – and if I want to break myself in lightly by choosing the tuneful kind, this would probably be a good place to start.

Incidentally, vocally Jackson Browne reminds me of a singer I rather liked in the day – Jim Croce, whose voice had a similarly distinctive metallic timbre, and whose work was also vaguely similar in musical terms, though he died before we were able to find out if it would ultimately take him in a purely commercial direction or elsewhere.

Mel's comment on Nick's 18. *Late For The Sky*

There are some performers, usually singer songwriters, which people recommend to me with the either overt or implied comment, "I can't understand how you don't already know this person's work." You, Nick, are certainly among them. And the honest answer is that I've been lazy.

And then ... My god, this song is incredible. I've just read the lyrics on line and they almost brought me to tears. What's so astonishing is that there's gut-wrenching poetry in almost every line. It's no surprise to me that this is the song you chose, unless this man's a genius with other masterpieces up his sleeve.

Digging deeper, the honesty is searing, without a trace of "art" or contrivance in the lyric. I think its power is also in the way it steers so carefully between and away from self-pity and bitterness. He doesn't need to explain why or how he once loved this woman. The fact that he did is there in everything he says. One of the most remarkable poems about the end of a love affair I've come across.

And then ... As often seems to be happening, YouTube kept running and up comes his version of *Fountain Of Sorrow*, a song I've only known and loved by Joan Baez. He hasn't got such a pretty voice, but it's my second Jackson Browne discovery of the day. Wow.

I like this game.

Nick's reply to Mel's comment

Jackson Browne has to be thought about. The "Late For The Sky" album is more or less wonderful all the way through, as is "Running On Empty". Personally I have rather less enthusiasm for "The Pretender", which tends to feature high in those silly lists of people's greatest this that and the other.

If you want a pretty good sample of his output, try "The Next Voice You Hear", which is a greatest hits album (only of course there weren't any hits), and contains two songs I didn't know previously and both of which I think are terrific – *Call It A Loan* and *Sky Blue And Black*. He's more or less incapable of being boring: one of the songs that gets played

occasionally on the radio is *Tender Is The Night*, with its heart-warming line “I win, you win, we lose”. Interesting.

19. *Everybody Knows*, Leonard Cohen (1988)

Composer: Cohen

The king of music to slash your wrists to, as we knew when we were students. I imagine one of the earlier songs will appear in due course. But as I decline into the vale of clichés, it is this song from 1988 which comes into my mind most frequently. The melody is still minimal but matches the jaundiced (jaundiced here meaning, of course, candid) words perfectly.

After being cleaned out by his manager, Cohen reinvented his performance persona, and is, in a remarkably different way, as wonderful as ever. We saw him in 2012 and it was one of the truly memorable concerts we’ve seen. There’s a performance very similar to the one we saw on YouTube, but, when it comes to choosing an indispensable version, I prefer the sparseness of the original.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Gxd23UVID7k>

Pete’s comment on Nick’s 19. *Everybody Knows*

I listened to this with fascination, having not consciously heard any later Cohen, and therefore having allowed my memories of his music in our student days to colour my thoughts about him ever since. Vocally, his style clearly varied over the years, and I would hardly have recognised this as him, so it’s intriguing to be prompted to catch up.

I have to respect the fact that you’ve braved the scepticism in some quarters about his melodic minimalism and downbeat take on life, and in spite of them found positive things to value in his work, and I find myself objectively applauding your comments. I probably don’t have it in me to embrace his kind of music much further than that, but at least this has opened my eyes to the fact that there is more to his music than I thought – and I might even like some of it. Certainly, as with Neil Young, I feel the world would be a poorer place without his work in it.

Mel’s comment on Nick’s 19. *Everybody Knows*

I came to this song with the confidence that Leonard Cohen reborn was going to be a pale reflection of his original glory. That’s the reason I’ve continued to ignore him. But it’s just faintly conceivable that every once in a while I’m wrong.

This song reminded me of Dylan’s blistering *Everything Is Broken*, a great universal sweep/swipe at society but more subtle, and ultimately more personal and painful. And the implications multiply the more you play it. Gor blimey it’s good.

I’ve not been one of those who complained about his lack of a voice or tunes (they’re always more than adequate for me). So this is really compelling listening, and another wonderful discovery.

Quite a batch of songs. Thanks, Nick.

Nick’s response to Mel’s response

Leonard Cohen’s later output is in its own way as remarkable as the early stuff (which for me has to feature at some point in this exercise). I know the later material from the DVD of his concert from about 2010, which was very much like what we saw, and is excellent, and from a double CD called “The Essential Leonard Cohen” (no expense spared on coming up with that title). The double album covers the whole range of his output, and gets played pretty incessantly in the Andrew household. The songs are varied, and never less than thoughtful and provocative. As far as the later output goes, there are love songs – *Dance Me To The End*

Of Love – or political songs – *Democracy [Is Coming To The USA]*. The compilation doesn't include his song about cunnilingus, but I'm sure you can find it (the song, that is) if you wish.

Mel's supplementary comment, September 2022: Straight after first hearing this at Nick's instigation in 2015 I bought the brilliant Leonard Cohen double CD he recommended which includes some of the wonderful and more "recent" (since the 1960s!) material which I'd been missing. *Everybody Knows* has grown on me to become essential, almost compulsive, listening. It's about insubstantial relationships and it's about the state of the world. And mostly it's about the sickening deception that pollutes public and private life everywhere. A magnificent tour-de-force. Thanks again, Nick.

Nick's Selection 5: 20-22

First sent 28.7.15

Dwarfs on giants' shoulders: *Well, not really dwarfs on giants' shoulders – or, if so, they are rather large dwarfs, and in this instance there's only one giant. I have to confess that I am rather fighting shy of where to go with Bob Dylan in this exercise, but am comfortable (well, relatively) with picking work by some of his disciples.*

20. All Along The Watchtower, Jimi Hendrix (1968)

Composer: Dylan

Everyone know what a stupendous guitarist Hendrix was. The problem to me is that sometimes his consummate skills resulted in a cacophony which at worst I find hard to see as music.

Even when that isn't the case, Hendrix's virtuosity meant that he sometimes seems to showboat or lose shape and direction, but not always, and certainly not here. In this case, he harnesses his virtuosity successfully to the song, and the results are stunning. With few exceptions, it is a pretty safe generalisation that originals are better than covers, but, despite the position Dylan holds in my pantheon, I actually prefer this to the original.

There's not much point in adding comment. The track came from "Electric Ladyland" (1968), a double LP featuring a cover showing a lot of young women who seem to have mislaid their jumpers. During the protracted production of the LP, the Jimi Hendrix Experience (Hendrix plus Noel Redding on bass and Mitch Mitchell on drums – both, I think, very good musicians rather unfairly overshadowed by Hendrix) was disintegrating. Wikipedia says that the story has it that Dave Mason is on bass and Brian Jones (yes, that one) on percussion. Be that as it may, this is to me definitive stuff.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TLV4_xaYynY

Mel's comment on Nick's 20. All Along The Watchtower

This is definitively and unreservedly in my 100 too. An extraordinary blast of energy which still gets me going even on serial replays. I agree entirely with what you say about this and about Hendrix. You want to love his music but sometimes his lack of discipline gets in the way. But here he simply re-creates the song.

Dylan complained that once people had heard Hendrix's version they insisted that he should also do it the same way. The perfectly good "John Wesley Hardin" version was consigned to the scrapheap. I don't think we should be too embarrassed about preferring this to the original.

Though the Hendrix performance seems to be everything, I wouldn't want to overlook the way the sound brilliantly conveys the frustration and anger and ultimately the mysteriousness of the luminous lyric. Dylan is having a business meeting at his Woodstock estate in upstate New York (no, another Woodstock, really). It's winter and his manager and some other manipulative thieving bastards are there giving him a hard time.

We hear what the Joker says to the Thief and the cynical businessman's response. Moving back we can see other people shifting about in the room who are not involved, but who Dylan endows with a semi-mythical significance. Then the sounds of a much wilder natural world intervene from outside to put the crummy scene of the meeting into context. Perplexing but vivid.

Pete's comment on Nick's 20. All Along The Watchtower

I can see why you would pick a Jimi Hendrix track. He was a kind of minor marvel – someone who appeared to have arrived in the world fully-formed, and who helped define what solo guitar

should sound like (and has indeed sounded like ever since). The virtuosity is breathtaking: yes, sometimes OTT, but of the music I know myself, mostly just extraordinarily good. Obviously he didn't arrive like that – he worked at it like everybody else – but his technique was certainly mature by the time he hit the big time.

Curiously, I don't think I've included any tracks featuring extended virtuoso guitar in my top hundred, but it doesn't mean I don't admire this type of music profoundly, which I most emphatically do. When I see the likes of David Gilmour or Eric Clapton or Jeff Beck in some TV show or other, demonstrating just what they can do, I'm invariably stunned by them. I don't really understand why they're not on my list; I can only conclude that my notion of music that I need on my prolonged stay on my large desert island uses other criteria.

But when I listen to this track, I'm wondering if I'm missing something! If I were picking a Hendrix track myself, I think I would go for the obvious and choose *Hey Joe* (love the percussion), but it would be a close call.

21. *Highway 61 Revisited*, Johnny Winter (1969)

Composer: Dylan

In the last analysis, then, I'd rather listen to Hendrix's version of *All Along The Watchtower* than Dylan's. This falls in a different category – it doesn't outdo Dylan, but is just a fantastic take on the song.

Johnny Winter and his brother Edgar are (wrong tense in the case of the late Johnny) Texan albinos. Both played blues-based heavy rock, generally not much to my taste. But I think this is terrific stuff, though I expect both of you not to share my enthusiasm. I am, I have to recognise, a sucker for slide guitar (more doubtless to appear later), but there is more to it than that – a frenetic energy and drive to the whole performance. And then there's that coruscating guitar.

The track comes from Johnny Winter's second LP, and dates from 1969, not that I remember even his name from when we were students. Edgar Winter is in the band, along with others whose names mean nothing to me.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=COYkTX7dGLA>

Pete's comment on Nick's 21. *Highway 61 Revisited*

Wow! This is superb. The slide guitar is completely mesmerising. I'd never even heard of Johnny Winter, I'm ashamed to admit, so this was a revelation. I'm not sure that I'm a big fan of the quality of his voice yet, but I could listen to this track many times over. The energy and drive of this are hypnotic, and you'd be hard put to find an more compelling or exuberant demonstration of the impact a slide guitar can have. Excellent choice!

Mel's comment on Nick's 21. *Highway 61 Revisited*

When I've seen Johnny Winter on telly I've really not liked him. Perhaps it was his material, or my inexcusable discrimination against Mexican albinos. But this is tremendous.

The vocal is good, though not quite as distinctive or as hilarious as Dylan makes it. But the music feels a lot more coherent, and it's a much more enjoyable rocker than the original. Naturally, the guitar is the thing that makes it – as you rather more elegantly explain.

Like you, I can be strongly protective of the Dylan originals. But this version certainly gives more pleasure than offence.

22. *My Back Pages*, The Byrds (1967)

Composer: Dylan

The Byrds have to be in my list because this is one of the defining sounds in my life with rock. The Byrds appeal to me in the way that takes the Everly Brothers' appeal forward a decade – melodious, pleasing harmonies, superficially simple but with plenty of substance.

I once heard someone say that Kipling was a major novelist who never wrote a major novel. Trying to decide which Byrds track should be in the list made me wonder whether the equivalent is true of them. I started off thinking I'd include *Mr Tambourine Man* (a dire electronic bleepy version of the opening riff was my ringtone on one of my earlier mobile phones), but using one verse of the Dylan song, not one of his best either, ultimately seems a bit underwhelming.

Then I wondered about *Chimes Of Freedom*, and some of the non-Dylan songs (*Turn, Turn, Turn* or *Bells Of Rhymney*). But I have always rated *My Back Pages*, and this is a lovely marriage of song and sound. It comes from their LP "Younger Than Yesterday", released in 1967, a not entirely insignificant year in our lives. I'm younger than that now.

I never saw the Byrds, but have seen Roger – still using his original, apparently less pious, name, Jim, in 1967 - McGuinn solo twice, and he was excellent both times. He's actually a much better guitarist than I had realised, and his voice made me wonder what the rest of the Byrds did, other than provide harmonies as any session singer might have.

I still have an LP by him stuck away in the cupboard – "Cardiff Rose", not bad, as I recall. But then he had served his time – he started off performing with various "folk" groups and then Bobby Darin, who subsequently installed him as a songwriter in the Brill Building at a time when he (McGuinn, that is!) also performed with Judy Collins.

He then became part of the stampede to the West Coast, where the Byrds came together. On their earliest tracks, McGuinn is the only member to play an instrument, and it is his voice and 12-string playing which really defined the Byrds sound, at least till the later Gram Parsons-influenced incarnations.

He used a Martin and a Rickenbacker in 1997, then just a beautiful blonde Rick the second time we saw him: this was his weapon of choice during the Byrds' heyday. Gene Clark, with whom McGuinn performed as a duo in LA before the Byrds, had left the band by the time this record was made, so the lineup was Jim/Roger McGuinn, David Crosby, Chris Hillman and Michael Clarke.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dOqnk4HPwVE>

Mel's comment on Nick's 22. *My Back Pages*

My delight at seeing you choose this is nearly as great as that for *All Along The Watchtower*. I've had the "Younger Than Yesterday" LP since it was released, and copied it to tape and then to CD, and since Christmas had it in a pristine (non-crackly) form as part of a CD box set. *My Back Pages* is my favourite track on an altogether marvellous and highly distinctive album. But I was unaware Nick that you might share my penchant for at least some of the Byrds repertoire. How nice.

They looked silly when they were trying to be the Beatles, but there was a long and engaging trajectory from mop-tops to psychedelic hippies to country-rock pioneers and C&W rednecks which is well worth celebrating.

This includes all the tracks you mention plus a number of others. But I think *Eight Miles High* is my favourite, partly for the wonderful opening bass riff and partly for the joke. No matter how much they insisted that it was written about people at Heathrow seen from an aeroplane (confirmed by the lyrics), the title and the music and the composing of them certainly *are* all about drugs!

There's a peripheral Byrd's anecdote I've wanted to shoehorn into these commentaries, although I know it doesn't apply much to your choice. Quite recently I was listening to a

Searchers compilation – you know, the group I once regarded as second in the world only to the Beatles. Round about the same time I played some early Byrds too, and was suddenly struck by the similarity of what I can only describe as their delicious musical jangling. A bit of reading quickly revealed that the Byrds credited the Searchers (one of the first groups in the English invasion of the States in 1963/64) with inspiring the distinctive sound on their early hit singles. One bonus point each to the Searchers for their innovative style and Mel for his perspicacity.

Pete's comment on Nick's 22. *My Back Pages*

Nice one. I like your analysis of the Byrds, their abilities and their contribution to music. In a way they were quite narrow in terms of their musicality and overall contribution to the canon, but what they did was so distinctive and compelling that it has rightfully earned them a permanent place in music history. That slightly husky, textured harmony has never been paralleled by anyone else that I can think of; it was unique to them, and executed impeccably.

I've always liked *My Back Pages*, so it's a good choice. The other tracks that you mention are also great, so I can see that this was a tough choice. Again, if I include one of theirs myself I will probably go for the obvious with *Mr Tambourine Man* partly because those opening bars are so utterly compelling, and I like the arc shape, with those same bars concluding the song.

How interesting to hear your memories of seeing Roger McGuinn in performance, and to find out from you about the guitars he used. A Rickenbacker and a Martin – these are sounds I haven't educated myself to recognise, but I can see that I should.

23. *Last Great American Whale*, Lou Reed (1989)

Composer: Reed

Lou Reed is one of the real mavericks of rock – maverick meaning that a lot of his output seems to me to be crap. But when he's good he's very very good. This track is a particular favourite of mine, which I first encountered on a compilation tape (remember cassettes?) sold in aid of Greenpeace. I subsequently bought the album from which it came, *New York*, which is predictably not entirely even, but seriously worth a listen.

This choice may be something of an oddity for me. Generally, I am drawn to melody, whether in classical or rock music, and no one could accuse Lou Reed of being a king of melody. Nevertheless, the backings are at best examples of excellent musicianship, and can serve to highlight the words, which Reed said was his intention.

That's all well and good provided the words are worth listening to. I think they are here – Lou Reed has invented a crazy myth which serves to skewer some pretty fundamental things about the American psyche (and, sadly, not just the American one). I was reminded of this the other day when Obama announced his plans to introduce less anaemic controls on carbon emissions: more or less all the Republican presidential candidates were quoted as saying there is no such thing as climate change – still.

So attitude to the natural world, guns, brain-deadness ... this seems to capture quite a lot. And the incongruous wry humour is something that characterises Reed at his best, as here.

It dates from 1989. The guitarists are Reed and Mike Rathke, Rob Wasserman is on bass, and Maureen Tucker of Velvet Underground fame [fame?] is on percussion.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xTlsSXNT2bg>

Mel's comment on Nick's 23. *Last Great American Whale*

As a former activist who has long-believed that rampant consumerism is wrecking the planet not just for animals and plants but for future generations of my own species, I've always been disappointed by the quality of enviropoet music. It ought to be doing so much more, but it's almost always too obvious and too nice for its own good. This song does a much better job than most, and as you say, it isn't only about the environment.

It achieves this feat partly with the cleverly sparse musical accompaniment to the spoken lyric, but also by using fantasy, metaphor and above all wit and irony. Other songwriters should take note.

I can't remember hearing this before and, if I have, I didn't listen to it. So thanks, Nick for the discovery.

Pete's comment on Nick's 23. *Last Great American Whale*

My goodness, I don't really know what I can say about this that will contribute to the sum of human knowledge or opinion. I've always enjoyed *Walk On The Wild Side*, so I don't want to give the impression that I am unaware of Lou Reed or don't like him, but he doesn't generally fire my enthusiasm the way he does yours.

However, I take your point about the background to your selection being efficient and musicianly, and I can see why you might like the theme that Lou Reed is arguing. I don't think I could ever pick something so cerebral for my own top hundred, but I find it rather marvellous that you have. Anything further will be just improvised waffle, so I'll leave it at that.

24. *Out Of Time*, Chris Farlowe (1966)

Composers: Jagger, Richards

It intrigues me that dotted throughout the history of rock there are people who are (actual, or in this case in effect) one-hit wonders whose one hit is definitive – *War* by Edwin Starr and *Duke of Earl* by Gene Chandler, for instance. Strictly speaking, Chris Farlowe is I suppose a two hit wonder, but this to me is the song and sound which defines him.

The position of this to the Stones is rather like Cliff Bennett and the Rebel Rousers* to the Beatles: McCartney produced *Got To Get You Into My Life*, and Mick Jagger produced this – he allegedly also sings backing vocals, and there is certainly a pretty Jaggeresque voice in the background. According to Wikipedia, he used the backing track for one of the later versions of the song attributed to the Stones.

This was a number one hit in 1966. There's nothing subtle or profound about it musically or lyrically, it's just a belter. The backing band is like a who's who of guitarists – Joe Moretti (who, as Pete said, was responsible for the riff on *Shakin' All Over*), Big Jim Sullivan (also referred to somewhen by Pete, I think), Jimmy Page and Albert Lee. Oh to have seen that**. Mind you, I'm not sure what three of the four are doing: one plays some rather incongruously melodious phrases, given the acerbity of the song. And the drummer, Andy White according to Wikipedia, appears only to have got to page 1 of the "Ladybird Book of Drumming" – but who cares?

Lest you think I am slipping, I saw Chris Farlowe performing with Van Morrison a few years ago. Van's vocal power more or less blasted him off the stage, which says more about Van Morrison than Chris Farlowe. Moral: you don't have to be the greatest singer in the world to produce a classic (though it can't but help!).

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LMli47EQVWE>

*Well, here's something I didn't know till now. Chas and Dave were Rebel Rousers. Hmmm.

**I have a terrific recording of Richard Thompson's *Beat The Retreat* (far from his best song) with June Tabor singing, backed by Danny Thompson, Martin Carthy, James Burton and David Lindley – one bass hero and three guitar heroes on one record. I ended up queuing for a beer behind Martin Carthy at our now defunct folk club, and asked him if they'd ever all been in the studio together: no, only Tabor, Thompson and him. Moreover, he didn't even know that James Burton had been dubbed in: his reaction was, "Are you sure? I wouldn't have thought David Lindley would have left enough space."

Pete's comment on Nick's 24. *Out Of time*

I'd never noticed the rather routine percussion in this recording, but one of the joys of this game is being prompted to listen to the music with new attention. I was all set to take issue with you and say the drumming was great ... but it's not! However, the record itself IS great – indeed superb, and a candidate for my own top hundred.

I've always loved it, and now that you've pointed out the names of some of the other musicians, I am aware of even more reasons why I like it so much. But of course Chris Farlowe's voice is also superb, and the song itself is a typically well-constructed Jagger/Richards piece with classic chord sequences and an irresistible chorus. Thank you for the interesting detail you've provided.

Mel's comment on Nick's 24. *Out Of Time*

Clearly I suffer from a personality flaw when so many people rave about this record while I remain unmoved. It's not a bad Jagger-Richards song. They were capable of much worse.

Farlowe's distinctive vocal style renders it very well indeed. The backing is interesting; the first thing I noticed today was the funny drumming!

It's good, but not good enough to excite me.

25. *Maggie May*, Rod Stewart (1971)

Composers: Stewart, Quittenton

I have a bit of a problem with Rod Stewart. Well, quite a lot of a problem. Basically, I have two reasons. First, to me he epitomises a lot of the posturing – prinking? – of “rock stars”. Secondly, he sings songs in a way that sounds as if he hasn't a clue what the songs are about (except when they involve prinking – *Do Ya Think I'm Sexy*: well, thanks for the invitation, Rod, but no I don't). Has he a clue what the words of *Reason To Believe* even say?

But *Maggie May* is an exception to my Stewartophobia. Just a song which manages to capture something, despite the unsubtlety of the story (allegedly based on the circumstances of little boy Stewart losing his virginity, as if we care). To me, as we might have said when we were students, it contains within itself the reason why it is so and not otherwise.

It always seems to me that the early Rod Stewart is a rather unlikely and fairly remote outpost of folk rock (or is that faux croc?) in terms of instrumentation and sometimes idiom. On the “Every Picture Tells A Story” LP from which *Maggie May* came there's a folkie guitar preamble to it by Martin Quittenton, and there are mandolins (apparently Ray Jackson of Lindisfarne fame), 12 strings and acoustic guitars played in a somewhat folkie way all over the place. But has anyone ever seen Rod Stewart with his finger in his ear? Thought not.

I prefer a different version where the sound owes more to Ian McLagan's Al-Kooperish organ backing till near the end. There has always been an argument about who played the excellent bass line on this track. The aforementioned wonderful Danny Thompson is said to have played on the LP, but he denies playing on *Maggie May*. The most likely candidate appears to be Ron Wood, who accordingly goes up in my estimation. Mind you, he had quite a lot of headroom.

Thankfully, I have never had the delight of seeing Rod Stewart prinking live. But this track suggests he can't be all bad. Well, not quite.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Z8Y_8nzWh2M

Mel's comment on Nick's 25. *Maggie May*

It would seem that the only thing about Rod Stewart we agree on is the need to include this song in our Top 100, Nick. And, though I'm not even especially a fan, I have to protest against the many ways you deride him.

Let's take as read the reasons for our appreciating *Maggie May* and deal with the real issues. As songs about losing virginity go (and they often go very badly) this isn't at all bad. And how can we be snotty about a rock star who asks if we think he's sexy? He's obviously having a laugh. This is a guy who put tartan and footballs on album sleeves after he became a tax exile. Can't pop celebrities, whether we like their personalities or not, also have a sharp sense of irony?

I couldn't make this case with confidence if it wasn't for the quality of his songwriting. His “Best Of” catalogue is stacked with singles with super memorable tunes and pop arrangements, and the lyrics – get this – are frequently thoughtful and even heartfelt. *The Killing Of Georgie* was actually a brave release for a pop star at the top of his game. *Young Turks* is a joyous singalong anthem for rebellious youth from the perspective of an aging rocker. I'm with him all

the way. *Baby Jane* is the real fury of a jilted lover turned into a fine pop song (admittedly it's hard to feel sorry for him when he's had so many gorgeous young blonds). Then there's *I Still Love You* from "Atlantic Crossing", the song which persuaded me he's a man of honest, if sometimes messed up, feelings.

Real honesty often masked by a heavy veneer of superficiality.

There's a slight risk of inconsistency here in view of my personal dislike of, say, PJ Proby (who I learned this week started his career deliberately masquerading as a black artist) which can overwhelm any appreciation of an artist's ability. But Rod Stewart can sing and write and survive in the business. His voice is extraordinary – hence my view that his *Handbags and Gladrags* is easily as good as any other version. I'd also argue that his extraordinarily singing and fame came too easily for him, so he doesn't always put them to best use.

So I'd agree that he throws away Tim Hardin's impeccable *Reason To Believe*. But turning the issue on its head, would you have wanted him to wring out meaning from the dismally Christian *Sailing*?

For me Rod Stewart is an interesting performer who amounts to very much more than a one and a half hit wonder like Chris Farlowe.

Pete's comment on Nick's 25. *Maggie May*

Another bit of total agreement. I've always considered *Maggie May* to be one of the greats of all time, so I'm delighted to find it on your list. I liked it from the first time I heard it; I still remember marvelling at the apparent lack of rhymes – a daring rarity then and now. This got me listening more carefully than I might have done otherwise, and I wasn't disappointed at what I heard.

In terms of my general appreciation of Rod Stewart, I think I fall somewhere between you and Mel, though perhaps I'm closer to Mel's general enthusiasm than to your more reserved position.

As an aside, I've always been very fond of a single that Stewart released in the late 1980s called *Downtown Train*, which in fact was quite a big hit for him. I'm sure you both know it, but in case not, here's a link:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4VBt-7ox8KA>

It's a classic rocker with an engaging melodic structure, ever-compelling ground-bass bars and rising bass sequences. And of course a memorable chorus. Overall, perhaps it's relatively obvious, until you listen to the rather marvellous words. It was written by Tom Waits, which helps explain this, but I think Stewart makes a pretty good job of it. Waits' own version, recorded a few years earlier, takes his special brand of lugubriousness to a new place!

26. *Keith Don't Go*, Nils Lofgren (1975)

Composer: Lofgren

Nils Lofgren has been around for ages, mostly a pretty long way below the radar, at least until he was brought into the E Street Band, originally, I think, as a replacement for Steve Van Zandt, but now they both appear with the band. He first came to my attention by joining Neil Young at the time of "After The Goldrush", on which he appears to have had some singing responsibilities as well as playing guitar and piano.

Keith Don't Go comes from his first solo LP, imaginatively called "Nils Lofgren"* released in 1975. The subtitle of the song, *Ode to the glimmer twin*, explains what it is about: it's a plea to Keith Richards not to leave the Stones. Apparently successful.

The trigger for the song seems to me more or less irrelevant. It's just a terrific bit of rock. Lofgren's songs can be trite and/or mawkish, and his brilliant guitar playing is at risk of being too facile for its own good, but here I think he just gets everything together and really rocks.

And he can get an extraordinary range of sounds from a guitar – yes, playmates, we have seen him live a few times, and he is excellent. But my enthusiasm for this song predates my seeing him. The drummer on this track as on the rest of the LP, incidentally, is Aynsley Dunbar, who drummed with just about everyone in the '60s and '70s (including, bizarrely, Lewis Collins, subsequently a crap actor in “The Professionals”).

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pRvBlyU-4zw>

*The LP also includes a version of *Goin' Back*: not bad, but the piano backing is strangely over-bouncy. Not a patch on Dusty.

Mel's comment on Nick's 26. *Keith Don't Go*

I didn't know Nils Lofgren at all till today, and now I know him a bit. Such is progress.

The first YouTube version of this song I caught was a big disappointment, but it turned out to be a young person learning to play it. Then I heard a solo studio version by someone else pretending to be Nils Lofgren and was not prepared to be taken in twice. Then this one revealed himself to be a virtuoso guitarist looking like a young Mark Knopfler with even more showing off – though it's undeniable that he had a lot to show off with. Just to be sure this was the real Nils Lofgren I then watched the on-stage video and at last got what you meant when you said it was a rocker.

Impressive stuff. But is he always as clever as this? If he is it could get a little wearing!

Pete's comment on Nick's 26. *Keith Don't Go*

OK, well unlike Mel I was aware of Nils Lofgren, but certainly hadn't paid a great deal of attention to him. I really liked this piece, and I quite agree that it's a great rocker. As I didn't know it before, it hasn't yet insinuated itself into my head, but I expect if I hear it a few more times it might.

27. (*Your Love Keeps Lifting Me*) *Higher And Higher*, Jackie Wilson (1967)

Composer: Jackson, Smith

If you want sheer exuberance, is there anything to match this? This was apparently Jackie Wilson's forte, and it is striking that it comes across so strongly on this record. Just even more uplifting than my wonderbra. This was released in 1967, so a full 10 years after the similarly upbeat *Reet Petite* (which, incidentally was co-written by Berry Gordy Jr). It sounds like a throwback, except that nobody sounded much like Jackie Wilson in 1957 either.

The bass on this track is the great James Jamerson, sadly less audible on YouTube than my CD. I think it's terrific driving stuff, but here on not much more than autopilot by his extraordinary standards. Apparently Motown paid its session men so badly that they moonlighted for other labels (though the Wikipedia entry says they were motivated by respect for Wilson – sounds a bit improbable to me, but who knows?).

The Wikipedia entry on Wilson does give a good sense of the linked cabals of musicians at the time – Berry Gordy, Wilson's cousin Levi Stubbs and so on. Be that as it may, you'd have your work cut out to mistake Jackie Wilson for anyone else. A true original. Which isn't to say that all originals are good, or that all those who are good and original are to my taste. But this is.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GcwqCmEi9Jc>

Pete's comment on Nick's 27. *Higher And higher*

Well, I've always liked this too, and now that I've been spurred to listen to it closely, I'm even more impressed at the quality of Jackie Wilson's voice. As you say, he was a true original, and yes, this song is uplifting (never mind the wonderbra). Your "linked cabals" point is interesting, and I intended to browse this subject more fully as soon as I allow myself the luxury.

Mel's comment on Nick's 27. *Higher And Higher*

I mustn't be rude about this because I can see why it could be exciting. And you were very polite about *Nutbush City Limits*, Nick. But this does sound like a lot of other black American performers to me.

I'll listen to *High and Higher* in future with a greater appreciation of its power. But I don't expect I'll ever really like it.

Nick's Selection 7: 28-30

First sent 27.10.15

“Do you like soul music?” “No.” “We’ll do the trouser press.”: Only yes, I do like soul music, even if the trouser press was better than a prefabricated concrete coal bunker uh. Soul was raucous, libidinous, good dance music (for those unlike me who can dance) and so on. It was also one of the places where there was a real popular voice for black Americans, whose music was fundamental to American popular music, yet who were often unheard, uncredited and/or banished to “specialist” radio stations and hit parades.

There’s an interesting but tangential reflection here on the Vietnam war. I have an CD of music about it. Not for once Country Joe’s splendid Feel Like I’m Fixin’ To Die Rag and the like, which tended to characterise our student and post-student days, but the music of the poor bastards who disproportionately made up the bulk of the fighters, and the corpses. Guess what – they were black (did anybody say “Buffalo soldiers”?): someone said when the Americans erected the Vietnam memorial statue in DC, with one white, one black and one Hispanic soldier that statistically they should all have been black.

Yet as with quite a lot of jazz and some rock (Eddie Cochran, as we’ve seen), some music was quietly multiracial, as Booker T and the MGs were – but the original cover for the “Green Onions” LP was suppressed because the record company didn’t want to remind people that they were two black men and two white men.

I saw a telly programme three or four years ago when Booker T and the MGs (minus Al Jackson Jr, who was murdered in 1975) were talking about working at the Stax studios: things changed when Martin Luther King was killed, and Cropper and Dunn were instantly personae non grata. Dunn was obviously choking up while they were talking about it. Stax of course continued, with Isaac Hayes as the driving musical force, but the music tended to have a more militant stance – not that this is somehow bad, let alone incomprehensible.

Mel’s general comment on Nick’s Selection 7, numbers 28-30:

A man without soul: You have me at some disadvantage. I didn’t really like soul music in the Sixties, and I don’t understand it now. Both statements may be untrue, because I also don’t know what it is. Definitions change over time (as in “rhythm and blues”), and logic tells me it can’t be any-old music sung by black people. And if it includes any music sung soulfully the term is even more nebulous than I thought it was.

My dislike is cultural rather than racist. As a teenager I could never feel any affinity with the Maidenhead residents who liked soul music. They seemed empty-headed fashion seekers (yes, mods) whose opinions and tastes I didn’t want to be associated with. Among my friends, soul music had to be modulated through the medium of groups like the Beatles. (Admittedly, the mods were less aggressive than rockers, who I didn’t mix with at all except when they tried to beat us up. I could run in those days, which may explain why there was no opportunity to be put off rock and roll.)

So whatever the definition, the soul music I heard was not a separate genre. It was *all* pop, and I didn’t hear it unless it got into or close to the charts. I can’t complain: this was only one aspect of being a culturally deprived Maidonian.

28. Bring It On Home To Me, Sam Cooke (1962)

Composer: Cooke

Sam Cooke seems to me to be the first master of soul music – almost everything that Otis Redding, Wilson Pickett et al did is there, at least embryonically, in Sam Cooke, and he was

responsible for some of the most wonderful songs of our youth. But this is the track where it seems to me all the elements are most perfectly fused.

Of course the song is musically simple – a three-chord wonder, and the premise is one of the clichés of popular songs – man wants less-than-entirely-faithful woman back. But this defines the cliché gloriously (just as “The Magnificent Seven” defines so many of the clichés of Westerns). What we end up with is just a perfect soul song.

The recording was made in 1962 and released as the B side of *Having A Party* (a song which sounds to me like Sam Cooke producing another few yards of wall-to-wall Sam Cooke). Wikipedia gives a list of musicians which means nothing to me, though it’s interesting that the backing includes a pair of string quartets ... plus two extra violins.

More strikingly, the backup singer is Lou Rawls, here showing that he was capable of much more than crooning *Lady Love*. The song has of course been covered umpteen times (there’s an extraordinary version by Van Morrison on his live double LP “It’s too late to stop now”).

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WjtndPBN6jE>

Mel’s comment on Nick’s 28. *Bring It On Home To Me*

So I honestly didn’t know what you were writing about when you identified this as a perfect soul song. I assumed I didn’t know the song either till I heard it. But I certainly do, and it’s great. (My route to it inevitably was via the Animals.)

For the record, I thoroughly enjoyed almost all the Sam Cooke singles which got into our charts – even including less inspiring gems like *Twisting the Night Away* – but to me they were all out-and-out pop. He had a wonderful mellifluous voice which also had real edge on the faster and the more “soulful” tracks. But I was unaware that he was writing all this stuff himself, so that boosts him even higher in my estimation.

One song which I thought might be “soul” is his glorious *A Change Is Gonna Come* which more than redeems itself after the awful orchestral intro. But it may not fit your comments about soul music being never knowingly understated. I remain confused.

Pete’s comment on Nick’s 28. *Bring It On Home To Me*

I’ve always loved Sam Cooke’s voice, and thought his work an immensely valuable contribution to music. But when I say “always”, I didn’t actually latch on to him properly while he was still around, and first discovered his music through cover versions. For instance, I first knew *Bring It On Home* in the Animals’ version, and *Wonderful World* by Herman’s Hermits. In later years I’ve come to like and appreciate Cooke’s work for what it was, while at the same time admiring the way he created so many songs that others could pick up and run with.

Sticking to his version of *Bring It On Home*, which I’ve heard before but not listened to with such attention, I can entirely see why you would pick it. It’s simple in structure, but that’s no criticism. And unusually for Cooke, it has a vocal harmony line almost throughout, which adds an extra dimension. I also love the very specific type of string arrangement used in many of his songs, including this one. It adds a kind a gentle, reflective tone that either complements or contrasts with the meaning. And regarding meaning, I was interested to realise that his version has an extra verse that is absent from the Animals’, and makes more sense of the narrator’s predicament. He wants her back despite her waywardness.

I have to add that the Animals’ version has always been a great favourite of mine in its own right. I love the tightness and precision of their arrangement, right from those broken chords on piano that launch it. I feel it keeps Eric Burdon’s edgy, resonant voice on point, and creates extra tension. Also, they rather astutely hold back on the vocal harmony until the last verse, making it an extra joy when it eventually comes.

That said, the Animals’ version is a much angrier, more vehement take on the song than Sam Cooke’s, and today I’ve really enjoyed listening to his reflective, accepting and perhaps more plausible approach to the story.

An excellent choice.

29. (Sittin' On The) Dock Of The Bay, Otis Redding (1968)

Composers: Redding, Cropper

Otis was I guess the archetype of the Sixties soul singer, which really means of all time. His output isn't entirely even (whose is?), but includes a list of superb songs. They have retained an extraordinary currency – recently we went to the wedding of a couple in their late twenties, and their first soppy dance together was to Otis's *That's How Strong My Love Is*. Can you imagine us in the early Seventies picking something from the 1920s?

This song is rather low-key and contemplative compared to Otis's norms, or the norms of soul, which like most pop music is "never knowingly understated". Otis is said to have written the core of it in 1967 while he was overlooking San Francisco Bay while staying in Sausalito between performing at Monterey and San Francisco. It's pretty morose stuff, but superb.

The song is credited to Otis and Steve Cropper, the excellent guitarist with Booker T and the MGs, who will be the keyboard and rhythm section here. Al Jackson Jr was an incredibly tight drummer, and Duck Dunn is one of the great bass players. He's not spectacular like James Jamerson: more like Gary Tallent of the E Street Band, who said "what I do nobody notices till it stops." Not true, but you know what he means. I have a copy of the *Green Onions* LP on vinyl. I must admit too much of it sounded like backing tracks, but remarkable stuff.

Anyway, back to the *Dock Of The Bay*. Whoever was whistling could have done with a few more lessons, but what the hell. This was part of the last batch of recording Otis did in late 1967 before he was killed in a plane crash in December. The track was released in January 1968. Estupendo.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rTVjnBo96Ug>

Pete's comment on Nick's 29. (Sittin' On The) Dock Of The Bay

This sums up the late 1960s for me, conjuring up long periods of tinkering with my Lambretta in our garage in Gosforth. But I fear that is hardly a reflection of the song itself! Well, I do like the song in its own right, including its low-key style and approach. It's brilliantly evocative of a mood, a feeling and possibly even a location. One could almost say it's definitive; no one could capture and convey all this better.

I'm struggling to find much more to say, but that doesn't mean I like it any less. I know very little of Redding's other work, and I'm probably not sufficiently attracted to the "purer" forms of soul to want to, but this will do me fine.

And I'm happy with the whistling!

Mel's comment on Nick's 29. (Sittin' On The) Dock Of The Bay

As with Pete's *Whiter Shade of Pale*, I realise I'm going against the grain on this one. It's a nice enough song well delivered. Everyone loves it. And I do like it. But I don't see what makes it a classic to raise it above the rest. (Of course it doesn't help that I don't have the appropriate adoration for all the rest.)

What you call "low key and contemplative" sounds to me in the lyric like a bit of a whinge. I'd be deliberately contentious if I questioned the song's credentials and suggested Otis Redding was making something out of nothing. But it must be legit to ask whether the song takes us very far.

There may be some genuine personal feelings in here. But the subject matter sounds like a lot of other songs to me. And it can't be an entirely personal song because this guy says he's nothing to live for and he's had to make the dock his home. I can believe he was lonely, but I doubt Redding was homeless, and the song he was writing was worth millions!

Of course it wouldn't be worthwhile to make these obviously niggling points if *Dock Of The Bay* wasn't widely acknowledged as one of the greats. I just wish someone could explain exactly why this is. Then I could perhaps get on with enjoying it for what it is to me.

30. *Lean On Me*, Bill Withers (1972)

Composer: Withers

I don't know whether it is particularly helpful to categorise Bill Withers as "soul" – it's soul inflected, but Withers tended to work with people towards the jazz end of the spectrum (not that this is unusual, as we'll see with what I expect to be some of my subsequent choices).

He was an oddity – he was responsible for four indispensable tracks, but most of the rest of his output is ... OK. Or less. The other three I would argue for are *Ain't No Sunshine When She's Gone*, *Lovely Day*, and *Who Is He (And What Is He To You)*. *Lean On Me* is the most obviously soul-influenced of the four – there's something spiritual-like about it, as there is about a lot of soul (S. Cooke and A. Franklin very obviously).

As with *Bring It On Home*, it's a simple song, but all the more powerful for that. Withers' voice is terrific and I really like the bass line – Melvin Dunlap, since you ask (no, nor me). The keyboard has a curious timbre, as if it's being played through a phaser which hasn't quite been turned off, and this seems to have been exaggerated and to have infected other elements of the recording during the transfer to YouTube if I compare it to my CD. I hope you can live with that for the purpose of this exercise.

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

Pete's comment on Nick's 30. *Lean On Me*

You have usefully pointed out how this relatively unsung writer contributed several such enduring songs to the canon. It hadn't struck me before. Curiously enough, I think I prefer *Ain't No Sunshine* and *Lovely Day* to this one.

I've always enjoyed it, but wouldn't have rated it so highly in a personal list. That said, as with so many songs, I have my own vocal harmony line for this that I always supply (in my mind if not out loud) when I hear it, so it's obviously found a place somewhere in my affections. And I agree about the strange timbre of the keyboard, which is one of those small features that single it out.

Mel's comment on Nick's 30. *Lean On Me*

Before I comment on Bill Withers I must complain that the song on your YouTube link was followed immediately by the Foundation's *Build Me Up Buttercup*, and before I could do anything about it the mood was ruined. A song so dreadful that my reservations about soul music become minor quibbles by comparison.

I didn't think I knew Bill Withers at all, but *Lean On Me* was immediately familiar. Since I don't recognise any of Wikipedia's list of cover versions, this may well be the one I know. Again it's a nice song, well performed. And I quite like it. But I'm not specially moved by it.

I'm glad you also mentioned *Ain't No Sunshine*, though, because I think this is a more interesting song musically.

Time to grasp a nettle: *I know that I've been rather fighting shy of where to go with various central figures who have to feature heavily in my top 100 – but how heavily, and which of the indispensable jewels am I going to ditch? But it ain't going to get any easier, so here goes. Van Morrison.*

31. Here Comes The Night, Van Morrison (1965, 1974)

Composer: Berns

This was of course an early favourite, from the time when the only member of Them to feature on Them records was Van Morrison – as I have already said, the celebrated guitar is actually played by one J. Page. Be that as it may, my love of the 1965 original was actually overtaken by the live version from Van's 1973 tour, released as a double LP, "It's Too Late To Stop Now", in 1974. I recognise that the choice of the live version is partly enabled by having the original permanently in my head, so it's a way of having my cake and eating it. But is that a crime?

Cheerful songs are fast and sad songs are slow. So this must be even more cheerful than the original – it goes like the clappers. And the arrangement is something else: the backing is provided by what is called the Caledonian Soul Orchestra (I hope the intrusion of the word "soul" won't cause you too many problems, Mel). It just sounds fantastic, and is said to be unusual among live recordings for having no overdubs.

Bert Berns, who wrote the song, is an influential figure in pop/rock. He co-wrote *Twist And Shout* and was involved with a lot of post-rock'n'roll pop acts, many black. He doesn't sound like someone you'd be likely to invite to your birthday party. But then I want to listen to this track, not to invite him to my birthday party. Van Morrison started to record solo for Berns' Bang label after Them, and there was a stand-off between them when Berns died – after the subsequent legal kerfuffle, Van went on to record "Astral Weeks".
Thankfully.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=E9WqXDDWxro>

Mel's comment on Nick's 31. Here Comes The Night

Let me start by saying that *Here Comes The Night* nearly made it to my list and was closely pipped by *Gloria* – making it my second favourite Van Morrison track. It's an absolutely terrific song and performance. Both are true for the live version. But.

The rest is going to sound rather negative because I found the sound on the live recording rather soupy, and it certainly affected my appreciation of it. Even allowing for the sound quality, two of the most impressive features on the Them single are eroded by this performance – the stunning clarity of both the voice and the guitar, and the way the doomful arrival of the night is beautifully realised by the twangy guitar. The tension between the jaunty verses and sombre chorus punctuated by what has always sounded a bit like Duane Eddy to me are what give the single its superb edge. I yearned for this on the live recording but the contrast is so muted that the effect is lost.

That's more than a petty complaint. But I can't deny that Morrison does a superb job. And the backing, though a bit fussy in places, makes this stand out. So I can see why you rate it.

Pete's comment on Nick's 31. Here Comes The Night

Your 1973 version is a revelation, and what you say about having the original embedded in your head is very valid, and is indeed a good demonstration of an occasion when you can have your cake and eat it. I must say this is a tad *too* fast for my liking, but it's always instructive to hear an

alternative take. I always liked the original, anyway. The transition between the urgent verse sections and the measured chorus sections is peerless.

32. *Brown Eyed Girl*, Van Morrison (1967)

Composer: Morrison

I am obviously too obtuse to see that the song is intrinsically racist if the original version was “brown skinned girl”, and don’t think that Van Morrison’s subsequent* dislike of it means we should all join in his judgement. I knew and liked the song before I knew either of these bits of information, and don’t feel obliged to change my opinion post-hoc.

This dates from 1967 and was recorded in New York after the demise of Them and while Van was working under the auspices of the lovable Bert Berns. It always seemed to me that *Here Comes The Night* and *Brown Eyed Girl* work as obverse and reverse of reflections on early relationships. Where the former is full of resentment, envy and self-doubt, this is more about elation (not to mention sexual exploration and fulfilment) recollected in tranquillity – well, maybe not all that tranquil. There is a joyousness about it which is reflected in the backing (the names of the musicians mean nothing at all to me, sadly), and I love the way the guitar and bass work to sustain the mood.

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

*Subsequent, it would appear to the 1973 tour, on which it featured, though it wasn’t included on the record.

Mel’s comment on Nick’s 32. *Brown Eyed Girl*

This has got to be one of Van Morrison’s more accessible songs. A simple exuberant lyric, as you say, and a catchy lilting tune. As ever the voice is compelling. But the song is a lightweight, as it seems the composer readily acknowledges. Not that this is an objection. It’s high quality pop and I’ve always liked it.

There’s a risk that the “brown-skinned” or “brown-eyed” debate runs into the bog of political correctness. I’m not suggesting you’re culpable here, Nick, but the point seems interesting since Wikipedia is in its objective way clearly occupied by the issue.

I don’t doubt that the calypso style is telling us exactly the colour of her skin, and we’re not in much doubt about Morrison’s tint. But what the hell? Two of my favourite songs are the Rolling Stones’ *Brown Sugar* and Neil Young’s *Cinnamon Girl* – and they derive much of their impact from the knowledge that some white men are turned on by black women. I don’t get the point of denying that. Fortunately, as far as I know those other tracks have never been bowdlerised.

But how’s it offensive to write a song about this? How’s it necessary to engage in heart-searching about self-censorship (if that’s really what Morrison was doing when he made the change to “brown-eyed”)? It’s not as if these songs are saying their subjects are or deserve to be treated as inferior in any way.

Almost as questionable is that the record company on some releases of this song took the trouble to edit out the salacious line about making love in the grass, and spliced in an innocent line from another verse! I daresay future generations will in turn laugh at us derisively for never being quite sure how to handle references to race.

I wonder if you think I’m being insensitive.

Pete’s comment on Nick’s 32. *Brown Eyed Girl*

It had never occurred to me that the girl in question might be dark-skinned, and it seems rather bizarre that Van Morrison should make this his excuse for not liking it. Anyway, it’s another classic. I’ve always liked the way he keeps you waiting through two verses before finally

delivering the memorable chorus. We're all waiting agog by then for the memorable line "Do you remember when ..." The joyousness is palpable.

33. *Madame George*, Van Morrison (1968)

Composer: Morrison

How "Astral weeks", released in 1968, passed us by as students I don't know, but I am not displeased that I made good the gap by buying it blind in the early Seventies. The first time I heard the LP and this track in particular I just felt thrilled, and I still do in a more decorously geriatric way.

The story is remarkable – Van getting together with an assortment of musicians and recording the whole LP in three days (not, I think, quite consecutive days, but still phenomenal). But then the musicians are truly exceptional. The wonderful bass is Richard Davis, who is one of the jazz greats. I once tried to imitate the bass line because it sounds simple, but it is humbly difficult to copy. The drummer is Connie Kay of the Modern Jazz Quartet (who I confess I haven't listened to since school). And so on.

I have an earlier version on vinyl which is interesting but thin by comparison. It contains quite a lot of references to Belfast, so it presumably relates to an incarnation before his translation to New York. There are about as many interpretations of the song as days in the year, but it doesn't seem to be "about" anything which can be satisfactorily pinned down, though it has a strong sense of narrative. So I hear different things in it each time I hear it, and love them all. This is in the uppermost reaches of my top 100. Three chords: who needs more?

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xrOgYjp2Ojo>

Mel's comment on Nick's 33. *Madame George*

Well don't expect me to make fun of you for choosing four tracks by the same guy, not when they're this good.

Thanks for taking me back to "Astral Weeks". Although I've listened to this album quite a bit, I've never taken the trouble before to trace through the jumble of lyric references and try to see what they add up to. I should have done, because although this is stream of consciousness stuff that doesn't provide a single rationally understandable picture, it is a million miles from the style of lyrics I recently dismissed as twaddle. It's thoughtful, thought-provoking and full of vivid and arresting images, many of which do, or could be seen to, contribute to a complete little video in the mind.

Of course it wouldn't work like that without the stunning vocals, the arrangement and the backing music. I just love the solo violin, by the way. *They* are doing the job of interpreting the lyric (so we don't need Wikipedia for this). And what it amounts to is something deeply nostalgic, respectful, and rather sad without being Richard-Thompson depressing. This track is a striking example of music which I have come recently to recognise as "humane" – you feel (of course I mean I feel) you have heard the voice of a compassionate human being and you come out of it feeling somehow uplifted by it.

All this is no more than regurgitating what you say about the song. I well understand why you place it high in your hundred. Maybe I would have done if I'd come to this revelation earlier. But I intend to provide my own examples of "humane" music later.

A final grump. Why the bloody hell is this track not included on my Van Morrison's greatest hits album? An outrage, but one which, despite your role, Nick, as honorary president of the Van Morrison Fan Club, I can't hold you personally responsible for.

Pete's comment on Nick's 33. *Madame George*

Haunting. Mesmerising. I'd never listened to this all through before – especially not the very long run-out section. I completely see what you mean about the subtle bass line, which is such a fundamental part of the whole thing. I also completely see your point that it doesn't need to be “about” anything – it's about what it is, and that's enough.

34. (*Jackie Wilson Says*) *I'm In Heaven When I See You Smile*, Van Morrison
Composer: Morrison

You wouldn't naturally gravitate to the king of curmudgeonliness for straightforward infectious expressions of pleasure. So here it is. Just wonderfully elated music. The reference to Jackie Wilson seems to me to be a mite mystifying, though the atmosphere is like Jackie Wilson in *Higher And Higher* and *Reet Petite*. It's the latter which is said to have provided the reference. The only time I ever tried to track it down, I was left none the wiser, so perhaps it's just to do with mood. Ultimately who cares? If you like the song, you won't care, if you don't, maybe you will.

It comes from Morrison's 1972 LP “Saint Dominic's Preview”, which I would categorise as good but not indispensable given the comparators. The quality of the musicians, whose names again mean little or less to me, is evident, but there is here evidence of one of Ivan's lesser recognised skills – he is reputedly responsible for the arrangement of the horns, which is just spot on.

I suppose I should mention Dexy's Midnight Runners. I saw them at the height of their fame in Dunstable (oh yes). A decent band, and a decent version. But why settle for that when you can have the real thing?

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TYO_1VN7h8c

Pete's comment on Nick's 34. (*Jackie Wilson says*) *I'm in heaven when I see you smile*

Well, what do you know – here's yet another classic! And another joyous track. Interesting to read your research on the lack of explanation for the Jackie Wilson reference. Thank you for that. I knew the Dexy's version better than this, and always quite liked it, but it's been an education to listen properly to the real thing.

Mel's comment on Nick's 34. (*Jackie Wilson says*) *I'm in heaven when I see you smile*

They can't all be absolutely great. And this isn't. But it's a fine track which benefits from the crystal clear recording.

The record quality seems to have a wondrous effect on the brightness and immediacy of the music, not just the brass. The fun is certainly contagious. I often feel that big band productions like this lose their impact because the instruments drown one another out – something we will doubtless be exposed to when Jools does his New Year Hootenanny show again this year.

I don't know how clever you have to be to avoid the problem, but Van Morrison does and a track which I would probably have found missable turns out to be a very jolly above average pop song.

I also wonder whether a greater appreciation of Jackie Wilson (or leaving out the references to him altogether) would have raised my enthusiasm for this selection. Who knows how deep my suspicion of soul music really goes?

What the hell's folk*? Or rock? Let alone folk rock? *A few years back I got a retrospective Richard Thompson triple CD, which felt to me like a cross-section through my life in music, or at least one crucial part of it. Courtesy of my iPod I was listening to the CDs on the train the other day, and it still feels like that. I probably listen to him more than any other single performer. But I do stray not infrequently into other folkie byways which may get a look-in. Be that as it may, here are three starters.*

** Folk guitarist Martin Simpson has now provided the answer. He defines folk as "music to accompany a raffle".*

35. Who Knows Where The Time Goes?, Fairport Convention (1969)

Composer: Denny

The first time I ever went to a Leeds University hop [sic] in December 1967, the headline act was, I think, Eddie Floyd. But the act I liked best was a five-piece band fronted by a woman playing an autoharp. Stuart Laing typically identified them correctly as Fairport Convention, in the days before Judy Dyble was replaced by Sandy Denny. I never saw that or any subsequent incarnation of the band (mixture of lack of occasion and a dislike of Dave Swarbrick's violin playing), though we were at Sandy Denny's last concert.

This song is to me the perfect example of Fairport Convention's work, of Sandy Denny's haunting voice and of the extraordinary subtlety of the guitar playing of a 19-year-old. It's also a good example of the bass playing of Ashley Hutchings, though it sounds too loud and weirdly boomy here compared with my recordings.

It comes of course from "Unhalfbricking" (1969). The song predates Denny joining Fairport – I've got the version she recorded during her brief time in the Strawbs. A friend who was at school with Dave Cousins said that he (Cousins) claimed to have written it, but surrendered it to Denny because she threatened to tell Mrs Dave that they were having a dalliance. Cousins apparently said this was why the song didn't sound like any other Denny song. My responses would be a) it sounds a bloody sight more like Denny's songs than Cousins', and b) ultimately who cares?

Be that as it may, the song had clearly evolved significantly in the intervening couple of years. Its imagery isn't the most original, but I can't bring myself to be bothered about that. It's a delight, and would quite likely make the cut if we were doing a 10 rather than 100 greatest.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RSABfJWqh38>

Mel's comment on Nick's 35. Who Knows Where The Time Goes?

So you got to this one before me! This was a definite for me, though I'll have no problem choosing another Fairport Convention great for my hundred.

Judging from your description, I think I may like this song more than you do. Early Fairport are among my top five favourite bands, and *Unhalfbricking* is one of my very best-loved albums, marking the start of truly wonderful transition from the electric folkie group with the girl to the "folk rock" fusion that is generally reckoned to have achieved its apogee in *Liege and Leaf*. (And it was only last week that I paid real money for the first Fairport album to replace my cassette. Judy Dyble's not quite Sandy Denny, but who is?)

You're right about the lyrics which on the face of it are good but not outstanding, and I've often pondered what's going on. After all, wondering where the time has gone is a cliché of the first order – which I refer to mentally several times a day. It may sound a bit question-begging, but I honestly think that it's partly the performance which lifts the title line above the obvious. How

can we fail to be moved by the subtlety of the guitars, Sandy Denny's beautifully ethereal voice and the way she hangs on to the words. So that one *feels* the song is taking on significance.

The sparseness of the lyric and the few hints that we do get also contribute to this impression of depth of meaning – migrating birds and the seasons, watching a fire burn, the solitude after socialising, and then love itself. Extremely clever, or multi-layered by accident maybe, but still powerfully redolent. "I don't know what it means but bloody hell it means a lot to me." These are qualities which make this a very special song indeed.

Good point about the boomy bass on the CD version which I hadn't noticed before – evidently someone was playing around on a computer when it was reissued. And yes, Dave Swarbrick is the Jeff Lynne of folk rock – brilliant while there are geniuses around to keep him under control but a little embarrassing when he is the leader of the band. Fortunately not in evidence on this seminal track.

Pete's comment on Nick's 35. *Who Knows Where The Time Goes?*

I bought "Unhalfbricking" myself while we were all at Cat's, and thought it was wonderful. Full of variety, and hardly a duff track on it. Over the years I've played it almost to death. And I always thought *Who Knows Where The Time Goes?* was one of the stand-out songs – so eloquently delivered, so well paced, and with those wonderfully subtle, almost incidental guitar interpolations. And with that unusual bass treatment, which I must say never troubled me.

I note that a few months ago the two of you were arguing about which of you liked it more, and I have to say I probably need to pitch into that argument and claim my own stake too. Definitely one to go on my short list.

36. *Wall Of Death*, Richard and Linda Thompson (1982)

Composer: Thompson

I have always liked this song for reasons I can't entirely rationalise. I think it's something to do with the contrast between the rather jaunty melody and arrangement and the proto-morbidity of the lyric. That rather characterises Richard Thompson – we've seen him countless times, and he has a very genial way of performing deeply pessimistic songs. Maybe this song epitomises that for me.

It sounds like a pop song – but it's like an embarrassing relative of the pop family, getting drunk and telling unsuitable jokes. Why it should appeal to me, as someone whose life has broadly been an exercise in unrisk-taking, I haven't a clue – unlike poles attracting, maybe.

Richard Thompson is of course one of the most brilliant guitarists on the planet. Similarly, his songwriting is quite extraordinary. His voice ... well, it's not going to win any prizes: he describes it as half an octave of baritone. But it more than does the job, here and elsewhere. Linda Thompson's voice is good, but ... not as good as Sandy Denny's, for which it often seems to me to have been something of a substitute.

By the time the LP from which this track comes was released in 1982, the relationship was in a very poor state of repair, and it was their last as a duo. What a way to go.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GcFhyj2kgdo>

Mel's comment on Nick's 36. *Wall Of Death*

I've been apprehensive since we started that one day I would have to comment on some suicidal dirge by Richard Thompson that I ought to like! I needn't have worried. This is quite a jolly song, with a good tune and a wonderful guitar break which leaves me craving for more. The two Thompsons sing pretty well together and the whole thing is enjoyable.

So on my interpretation anyway it's not an especially pessimistic song (though I accept that I don't know Thompson's lyrics well enough to be sure that when he uses the word "death" he

really doesn't literally mean "death"). I think he's saying: forget the frippery, what we need is a bit of risk and edge to make life meaningful. Who's going to argue?

Which leads me to the view that, if I'm right, the lyric is fine but not especially insightful or attention grabbing. I'm saying this half in the hope that Richard Thompson is expressing some dark death wish worthy of further interpretation, but I don't think he is. I'd be interested to hear what you think Nick, not because I'm complaining about the song – it's good – but because you obviously think he's a much better songwriter than I do and I've always wondered what I'm missing.

I also wish I understood music better so that I would know what is it that makes him such a great guitarist, though on the evidence of my ears I've no reason whatever to doubt the opinions of others.

Pete's comment on Nick's 36. *Wall Of Death*

Well, the two of you have said almost everything that needs saying about this. It's like a pop song ... in fact it is a pop song if you want it to be. It's tuneful, and the chord sequence (especially in the descending "Let me take you" line) is wonderfully emphatic. Of course, as you say, the form belies the rather morbid content. In this regard it reminds me of one of my past selections, *Oliver's Army* by Elvis Costello, which bemoans the fate of the world's foot-soldiers in marvellously exuberant and upbeat form. Anyway, I've always liked this piece, and it's certainly a fitting way to celebrate Richard Thompson's talent.

Incidentally, though I'm always the first to urge you not to watch distracting YouTube videos when playing these tracks, I couldn't help but watch and be rather fascinated by some of the wall of death stuff. A nicely assembled selection with some remarkable vintage footage. And on another point, a few weeks ago I unintentionally latched on to a TV programme in which a modern wall of death rider was making an attempt to break the world speed record on live television. I think he made it, at something like 65-70 mph. The circumference of the circuit looked somewhat bigger than that of typical fairground assemblies, which may have helped.

37. *Strange Affair*, June Tabor (1980)

Composer: Thompson

Richard Thompson's songs are covered endlessly, sometimes well, sometimes not, but the covers are rarely better than the original versions. However, in this case the original Richard and Linda Thompson version seems to me to be something of a throw-away of an extraordinary song. It comes from "First Light" (1978), their first LP after converting to Islam, and Martin Simpson, of whom more anon, told me that the strange lyrics are influenced by Sufi poetry.

The original recording of this cover version comes from June Tabor's 1980 LP "A Cut Above", credited to "June Tabor with Martin Simpson". Tabor's voice is, as everywhere, wonderfully clear. She says that the most important thing to her is the words, and that shows, but she also sings with a powerful sense of the music.

She worked (and one suspects more) with Martin Simpson on three LPs from 1977 to 1987. And so to Martin Simpson. What a stunning guitarist. If there's a criticism to be made of him it's that he is technically so good that, in the words of the Emperor Joseph about "The Marriage Of Figaro", there might sometimes be too many notes. But he was and is terrific: we saw him most recently last week – he lives in Sheffield now.

Simpson does *Strange Affair* solo – in fact Margaret once got him to perform it for me at a gig on my birthday. His voice is not on a par with his guitar playing, so it's conspicuously better with June Tabor doing the singing.

The 1980 recording seems not to have made it to YouTube. That features Simpson on acoustic and electric slide guitars (not, I take it simultaneously – I should hope that's

beyond even him), piano, bass, drums and some strings. This version is really a hybrid – Tabor’s voice accompanied by the guitar accompaniment used by Simpson solo.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WVFpMLE6WIo>

Mel’s comment on Nick’s 37. *Strange Affair*

This is strange, or puzzling anyway. No argument with the performers. The best folk music for me comes with musical clarity – and Martin Simpson is evidently a master – and singing without false mannerisms like sticking your finger in your ear and quacking like a duck. This is high quality stuff. (YouTube followed this with June Tabor singing Jefferson Airport’s *White Rabbit*, very different from *Strange Affair* and not a Grace Slick, but still a pretty stunning performance. She’s good.)

What I find unexpected is your choice of song, Nick. There’s no need for me to be surprised by any engagement with a spiritual life which might contribute to our understanding of our brief purposeless spans or make them seem less purposeless. When I write it’s all I write. But, without going into the detail of the translated words, it’s half about a perceptions of reality which I won’t argue with, and half, it appears, about “the one who loves you best”. Not dear Margaret but One Upstairs who we normally put energy into repudiating.

So my questions are about what the song means to you, and are probing enough for me to understand if you don’t want to or don’t feel required to answer.

When you listen to it on your music system or when one of the performers does a live request specifically for you in concert (you namedropper!) do the lyrics matter? Do you register a general impression of the whole or a word by word meaning? Do you take from it the parts which are relevant to you and ignore those which are not? Do you think the lines I believe refer to god are referring to something else? Are any of these questions relevant?

No challenge. I’m honestly interested in how you tick. You chose this song for a reason, and I don’t think you’ve quite explained what this is.

Pete’s comment on Nick’s 37. *Strange Affair*

I can’t claim to like this in the same way as the two songs above, but I can admire it. Everything you say about it is there and is apt, and Martin’s Simpson’s guitar playing is every bit as stunning as you say. So much talent (those chords played on the harmonics, for instance), pitched in almost casually, as if anyone could do it. And a suitably earnest performance from June Tabor. As to what the song is actually saying, well it looks as though you’ve investigated it as far as it can be investigated, so I won’t presume to add anything else.

As an aside, I completely agree that one can draw pleasure and enlightenment from works that appear to have a religious background, even when they contradict everything one believes. That’s rather a facile comment, I suppose, but I thought I’d better make it. Watch for more on this in my own future selections ...

Motown: *Pace Mel, I can still see as much (or as little) utility in “soul” as a musical category as I can in any musical category. I don’t regard Motown – defined clearly, if not helpfully, as the output of one label – as soul, though the margins are pretty blurred in the case of a singer such as Marvin Gaye. Motown seems to me to be poppier than most soul (though not, for instance, than the pop end of Sam Cooke’s work). It is strange, too, to reflect that my first real awareness of Motown was through British bands’ reworkings: Can I Get A Witness by the Stones – which presumably implies that it’s R and B (not R’n’B) – Chains and Please Mr Postman by ... now who was it?*

38. Heard It Through The Grapevine, Marvin Gaye (1968)

Composer: Whitfield, Strong

Gladys Knight is one of the great pop voices, though her material is uneven to put it politely. But her original version of this song pales into insignificance compared to this. Marvin Gaye’s voice is fantastic – rather reedy compared to a lot of his singing, but to my ears hauntingly appropriate to the sentiment.

But it’s the arrangement which really does it for me – the backing is more a matter of creating an atmosphere than of musical virtuosity. Be that as it may, here comes one of my little digressions. The bass is the incomparable James Jamerson, who also played a totally different (more difficult, and more characteristic) bass line on the Gladys version. There is clearly a tendency for any good bass playing on Motown records to be attributed to him as a way of saying “it’s good” – made possible partly because Motown weren’t over-fussed about listing who played on which recordings. But this is him.

If you are tired enough of life to check who bass players list as influences, he’ll come up more than anyone else (Jaco Pastorius comes up a lot, but often as an all-time great rather than an influence). Just listen to the bass on good Motown records – and even some otherwise not particularly good ones.

Well, that’s enough of that particular hobby-horse. Others will be ridden in due course. This version illustrates a characteristic of Motown as a money machine: if you’ve got a decent song, produce multiple versions, thus maximising the royalties. Be that as it may, the money-grubbing could obviously produce extraordinary results. The Gladys version came out in 1967; the song was included in a Marvin Gaye LP in 1968 and only released as a single later that year. Good move.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hajBdDM2qdg>

Mel’s comment on Nick’s 38. Heard It Through The Grapevine

As you can imagine, Nick, I never got too excited by the notion of the Motown brand. It was just a bunch of black performers who quite often produced pretty good pop music. Some of which I liked. And some which I didn’t.

And this track, by my reckoning, is probably the greatest of them all. For a long time I rated it among my five favourite tracks of all time. Then the jeans advert made it permanently so ubiquitous that it was hard to enjoy it quite so much. Even so I’ve never doubted it’s quality and power.

The arrangement is sensational, and the opening little short of breath-taking – a single drum beat, then instrument by instrument building the insidious haunting rhythm, then the shriek of a horn, and then Marvin Gayes’ voice just as much an instrument as the rest. You’d think it would get to be a mess with so much going on but the strings and wind section are used so sparingly it just aches.

The words are simple but quite arresting. It's a pretty unpleasant experience that's being described, and one which we can instantly recognise. I've often tried to draw an intellectual connection between the sound of the record and the lyric, but I can't. They just work together brilliantly.

What a joy. I could listen to it all night.

[Pete's comments are missing for this batch of songs.]

39. *Tracks Of My Tears*, Smokey Robinson and the Miracles (1965)

Composers: Robinson, Moore, Tarplin

This is wonderful stuff, and not because the bass is ... guess who? In this case, more of the credit should go to Marv Tarplin, the guitarist with the Miracles and apparently the originator of the riff on which the song is based.

Smokey Robinson produced a row of excellent songs (though I have to confess that Bob Dylan's alleged assertion that he was the greatest living American poet seems a fractionette over the top). This is the one, though, that I come back to.

Simple, pretty mawkish, sounds like a good way of having things both ways ("Though she may be cute, she's just a substitute"): there are any number of criticisms which can be fairly levelled at it, but this seems to me to be one of the glories of pop music: however valid such criticisms may be, the good'uns remain good'uns.

Smokey Robinson was of course a fairly big shot at Motown, and is responsible for a decent sized truckload of good recordings. There are quite a number of more upbeat songs, but to me he is more successful at the maudlin end of the pop spectrum, as here. Not a lot to say, really – I just think it's wonderful stuff.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=do3Oo8jHoTA>

Mel's comment on Nick's 39. *Tracks Of My Tears*

This, Nick, is a perfectly acceptable pop song. But if you compare the obvious artifice of the lyrics (excepting the neat bit of cake-and-eat-it which you point out, which does at least sound real) with *I Heard It Through The Grapevine*, you must see why I can't rate this one anything like as highly.

As for the musicianship and arrangement, they're OK too. But to me it sounds like so much else that came from the label. Berry Gordy was an incredibly shrewd businessman, and he knew how to make hit records. So he did it a lot. One day we may come to attribute similar status to Stock, Aitkin and Waterman.

Alright. A cheap joke. But it kind of sums up how I feel.

40. *Papa Was A Rolling Stone*, The Temptations (1972)

Composers: Whitfield, Strong

The Temptations seem to me to be about the most interesting of the Motown vocal groups, mainly because they were all able to sing the lead lines – compare the Four Tops, who, for all the qualities on their best records, were distinctly samey because of their dependence on Levi Stubbs' vocals.

This isn't to say that the Temptations are uniformly good, but their best records are, in my view, terrific. There are several competitors for inclusion in my list – *My Girl*, *I Wish It*

Would Rain, Beauty's Only Skin Deep, Just My Imagination, but this is the one for me. There are a couple of versions: one, used I think as the LP track, is nearly 12 minutes; the single version is a mere 7 minutes. Which of these you prefer is partly a matter of what you make of instrumental component, heavily influenced to my ears by Isaac Hayes, most obvious in the unsubtle use of a wah-wah pedal, but I think 7 minutes is better balanced between the lyric and instrumental elements.

It's a pretty rough perception of life – compare and contrast the earnest but sanitised lyrics of *In The Ghetto* – and the backing here is suitably uncompromising: if I'm right about Isaac Hayes, then this relates to the rise of black power movement (the white members of Booker T and the MGs became personae non grata at Stax after the death of Martin Luther King, when Hayes basically took over).

Here it's more jazz inflected and "urban" than the conventional Motown sound, and the lyrics have the equivalent punch to them. How can you not like a line as good as "And when he died all he left us was alone"?

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=U74Bt9EyJTQ>

Mel's comment on Nick's 40. *Papa Was A Rolling Stone*

I was all prepared to write "ditto" against this one after dismissing *Tracks of My Tears*. But that was before I listened to it. I had, for instance, previously written it off on similar grounds to my rejecting the execrable *In the Ghetto*. But that's hardly fair.

There is a small amount of crap here in the words and their rendering, but I have to admit that the lyric, instrumentation and performance are on the whole, as you say, terrific. A moment of enlightenment for a prejudiced old bugger. So thanks, Nick.

41. *Midnight Train To Georgia*, Gladys Knight and the Pips (1973)

Composer: Weatherly

This is one of the gloriously daft pieces of pop. I assumed it's a fictionalised (not to say sentimentalised) version of what happened when Motown decided to move operations from Detroit to Los Angeles in 1972. Only it was originally a sort of country song recorded as *Midnight Plane To Houston* by its composer, Jim Weatherly (it's on YouTube if you want the amusement).

The Pips' contribution is wonderfully silly – they seem to be able to provide a narrative voice from any perspective or just to go "woo woo" according to ... nothing in particular. And the song is not exactly a paean to feminism (though it was of course originally a man following a woman, so ...). But to me it's just a splendid piece of pop.

Gladys Knight's voice was never better. But it's the way the whole song hangs together that I like. I find the backing particularly intriguing. The wash of violins and the honking horns are pretty standard, so the standout sound is really the bass. Not Jamerson (though sometimes people say it is – as I said this often means no more than "I think it's good"). This is actually Bob Babbitt, another of the great and largely unsung session men.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AoF9lh8TiSM>

Mel's comment on Nick's 41. *Midnight train to Georgia*

I've got mixed feelings about this one. I've always loved the sound of this song without actually listening to it properly. So I don't even know whether the version I liked was by Gladys and her Pips. It probably was because the best thing about this recording is the sound of her voice.

Unfortunately you've spoilt it a little for me by so comprehensively detailing the defects which became glaringly obvious as soon as I did listen to it. You do so with such relish that I started to wonder why you'd picked it at all. No don't tell me; I do know.

Apart from the magnificence of the vocal performance, there is still quite a bit in this cranky lyric to redeem the song for me. I like the idea of the guy going back to a simpler place and time. And for some reason the line, "I'd rather live in his world than be without him in mine" has always had a powerful resonance for me. It's a tough choice many couples have to make, though I concede that devotion and submission are equally good readings for this woman's choice.

Anyway, this record's so good I didn't even associate it with Motown till now!

42. Case Of You, Joni Mitchell (1971)**Composer:** Mitchell

I remember Joni Mitchell from our student days, and remember really liking *Both Sides Now*, a song which now seems a mite twee. Knowing more of her work is mostly to do with Margaret, who was and is a fan. I don't like quite a lot of her output because I think it's too self-consciously arty, but I don't think she can ever be accused of being boring. Of her LPs, I think "Blue", which dates from 1971, is the best, and of the tracks on "Blue" the best to me is *Case Of You*.

Why? Well, it embodies the most intense emotion – the intensity really oversteps the mark when Joni goes off on her great swoop on the word "Canada" (and there are versions where she doesn't), but I can forgive it here. The emotion is complex – this is about a dying if not dead relationship, and she greets the already subverted pledge of constancy as a (not "the") northern star with "I'll be in the bar", just as the taste is "so bitter and so sweet". And the image of drinking a case of her lover and still being on her feet is a wonderful evocation of intensity. It's a song which will predictably reduce me to a gibbering wreck (how you tell the difference from my normal state is a moot point).

Joni's accompaniment is a dulcimer, and if you want to know how it's done, click on this (played by a resident of Penistone, I'm sure you'd like to know).

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

Other musicians are drawn from the usual cabal of LA musicians, in this instance James Taylor and Russ Kunkel. The real thing (as opposed to the Penistonian version) is here:

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

Pete's comment on Nick's 42. Case Of You

Excellent! And a coincidence, too (more below).

I completely agree with you that "Blue" was Joni Mitchell's best album, and I also agree that her work gradually became more and more self-consciously arty. One can admire performers who want to experiment and go to new places, but if one doesn't like the places they reach, there's nothing much one can do about it. I became less and less interested in her work over the years.

However, I thought "Blue" was a perfect fusion of her imaginative and heartfelt lyrics and her ability to put together a good tune. I always rather liked *Case Of You*, so you didn't have to do any persuading to get me to listen to it and enjoy it again. Your comments pretty much sum it up.

Incidentally, I was watching a BBC4 programme the other night about old rock stars who keep on going (maybe you saw it too?), and one of the talking heads was comparing a Joni Mitchell song as performed by her originally to a performance she gave many years later. His comment (paraphrased from memory): "You could see that she finally understood what she meant when she wrote it." I'm not sure that it's a universal truth; for instance, I prefer Niel Sedaka's original *Breaking Up Is Hard To Do* to his later version, which I personally have always found a bit portentously over-dramatic. But it's an interesting take.

I love the dulcimer masterclass! Totally fascinating. Thank you a million times for putting me on to that. What a delightful and talented lady. Do you know her, or is her place of residence a complete coincidence? I'm planning to listen to some of her own records when I get round to it.

Finally, I should say that I will very probably include a song from "Blue" in my own top 100 – but it won't be this one. Watch this space ...

Mel's comment on Nick's 42. *Case Of You*

I've always felt slightly guilty that I didn't acquire the widely acclaimed "Blue" album after I pirated and endlessly enjoyed "Clouds" from person unknown in Cambridge. And here is a welcome taste of it.

My feelings about Joni Mitchell would seem to be similar to yours – *Both Side Now* was a lovely "folk song" at the time though it no longer holds quite the same power. And later albums I've variously admired and endured (including the self-consciously middle class *Hissing Of Summer Lawns*) are just a bit too clever to be either fun or moving.

Case Of You does seem to bridge a gap between the extremes, an accessible but powerful song with a telling, arresting image at its core, and mainly constrained vocal artistry. I'm still dry-eyed after a couple of hearings, but I well understand how it could be affecting.

Makes me keener to hear the rest of "Blue" [which I bought shortly after writing this commentary].

43. *I've Got You Under My Skin*, Ella Fitzgerald (1956)

Composer: Porter

Well, here is my slightly reluctant contribution to our group Porterolatry. Reluctant not because she shouldn't be there, but for two different reasons. First, there are so many competing songs, two already on your lists, but others, including *Begin The Beguine*, *It's Too Darn Hot* and *In The Still Of The Night*, for which I have a particular weakness. But in the last analysis it has to be *I've Got You Under My Skin*.

There is then the second problem, of version. I don't like Sinatra's take for my usual reasons – too jaunty, not contemplative enough. I think the Four Seasons' version is interesting, but not serious enough for a serious song. Diana Krall sings it so slowly that it dies in its sleep. And so on.

This is really another case of a song in pursuit of an ideal version (which exists only in my head). But Ella's is as good as I can find. Yes, I did see her and she was fantastic. Her voice was one of the wonderful instruments. She doesn't have the interpretative intensity of a Billie Holliday (who didn't sing this as far as I know), but then Billie is rarely if ever an easy listen, so I'm opting for the beauty of the singing.

If you go back to my comments on Pete's musical selection, I said that Porter's "voice" tends to be smart and unchanging by comparison with Hammerstein's. Here, he seems to me to get a striking balance between wit and emotional intensity – "Use your mentality,/ Wake up to reality. But ...". And the pivotal "but" is preceded by an augmented chord rather than the dominant 7th. The whole song is subtly nuanced, so "I said to myself this affair ..." is half a tone lower than the equivalent phrase in the first verse. Not easy to sing, but Ella can of course do it. The backing is too much of a "rent-a-big-band" sound, but you can't have everything. As another song says "It'll have to do until the real thing comes along".

The song comes from "Born To Dance" (1936), conspicuous otherwise for not having any obviously standout Porter songs. In it, it's sung by one Virginia Brice to a boyish James Stewart. It has its moments, but she conveys her emotions facially by looking as if she's got a particularly severe belly-ache. Ella's recording is from the indispensable "Ella Fitzgerald Sing The Cole Porter Songbook", recorded in 1956.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2TG7AqzyQQU>

Pete's comment on Nick's 43. *I've Got You Under My Skin*

I'm really puzzled about how to respond to this one. We all know the song to some extent, and I've certainly heard it many times by most of the performers you mention. I agree that it's a perceptive lyric that pretty well nails the sentiment, but I'm not sure that any of the recordings I've heard ever really succeeds in representing a true fusion of music and meaning.

The Four Seasons' version is pretty, but as you say, doesn't attack the content seriously. For feeling, I prefer Sinatra's version, though I won't argue over the point that it's a little jaunty. Yet somehow, even after listening several times, I couldn't find perfection in Ella Fitzgerald's version either. This is possibly because I've never entirely warmed to her as a singer, and that's my problem, not yours.

I hear her voice more as a jazz instrument than as a human being expressing emotions, but I accept that this may be due to a stubborn failure to open my mind to it. By the time I was aware of her, she probably seemed too old for me, or not pretty enough! Yes, call me shallow. I wish I could find the depth that you clearly do, and if nothing else, you've prompted me to keep on trying.

What you say about the structure of the song is interesting – especially the half-tone variation. The augmented chord that you mention is quickly here and gone, but I get your point. And yes, rent-a-band, although a good one, it has to be said.

Mel's comment on Nick's 43. *I've Got You Under My Skin*

This song has always existed. There is no time when I first became aware of it because it's like the radio, or apples, or wallpaper. That's not in itself a value judgement, though it is also unarguable among the greats of the Twentieth Century.

I don't enjoy it as much as *I Get A Kick Out Of You* (which deliciously followed my YouTube playing of this, creating entirely unfair competition for your selection, Nick!). But I still regard it highly.

As for Ella Fitzgerald, I never quite got her – probably put off by my parents once sounding rather dismissive of her when I was too young to know better. Yes, I'm that shallow. So this is valuable education. She doesn't try to interpret this song the way Sinatra does (typically getting the kind of random interpretation that sounds like an idea he and Dean Martin might have come up with at the urinal after a few drinks). She just sings it rather mellifluously, which I guess is her forte. And she certainly doesn't throw it away in a pop-group-sings-the -classics mode.

44. *Ne Me Quitte Pas*, Jacques Brel (1959)

Composer: Brel

I knew this a bit for a long time, but it was YouTube which brought it back to mind a few years ago. I think I first knew it in the '70s, when someone I knew was playing it as an antidote to the anodyne Rod McKuen version, which defies even Dusty's attempts to breathe life into it. This is another song where the emotion is taken neat. That is not without its complexities, as the song was written by Brel to his departing mistress while he was living in Paris and his wife was in Brussels. But then this is not a conventional love song. It veers between fantasy and self-abasement, but the imagery at either extreme is very powerful – “l'ombre de ton ombre, l'ombre de ta main, l'ombre de ton chien”. According to Wikipedia, Brel described it as a hymn to the cowardice of men. Interesting.

It's a pretty good rule of rock music that anything based on classical music will be pretty naff. Well, this is the exception which proves the rule (sorry to use the logic-defying cliché). This draws on Beethoven and Liszt, but not simply by pinching the tunes, at least in the case of Beethoven – maybe that's why it works when others don't.

The song was originally recorded in 1959, but Brel did a number of other versions.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=q_bq5mStroM

While on the subject of Brel, you might like to look at the original of *Seasons In The Sun* – so much better than the Terry Jacks travesty that it's not true.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ho2pNUKInBo>

Pete's comment on Nick's 44. *Ne Me Quitte Pas*

My god, what an extraordinary performance. I've seldom seen anyone deliver a song with such intense emotion. Thank you for the gloss on the history, which adds multiple dimensions to the song; but just taken on its own merits, it's amazing.

Self-abasement? Hm. I suppose so. You'd think there would be a yawning gap between the stiff-upper-lip reaction to rejection and this kind of let-it-all-hang-out lament, yet perhaps where the two responses meet, there's a fine line between "boo-hoo" and "bugger it".

Either way, thank you for revealing this to me. I've always thought I should know more of Jacques Brel's work, though this is feels a bit like being thrown in at the deep end!

Mel's comment on Nick's 44. *Ne Me Quitte Pas*

This song works extremely well as the cry of a man deranged by the loss of his lover. And I mean that to be complimentary. It's powerful stuff, and I enjoyed it. But, I feel sure, only once.

The trouble with boring songs about boredom and deranged songs about derangement is that they can't help raising the question of whether you the songwriter might have been a bit to blame for your present discomfort. The words and their delivery together create a barrier for me. I can admire both. But don't necessarily expect me to share the emotion.

That said, this song has some superb over-the-top rhetoric which can't easily be dismissed. I've tried to write self-conscious hyperbole in verse and I know it's very hard to pull off. And I confess that I did make the mistake of watching the video to help with the translation, so it was difficult to separate the performance from Brel's slightly goofy and very sweaty face. Sorry.

In summary: a delight to be introduced to the song and the performer, but for now I won't be rushing back.

Can Blue Men Sing the Whites? Well, sorry for this, but it had to happen. I first started listening to blues or R and B (when it was the real thing, not the crap currently usurping the title) as part of the surge which produced the burst of British creativity in the earlyish Sixties. My first encounters were actually with delta blues or folk blues in around 1962 or '63, rather than the Chicago R and B of Muddy Waters and the like, which I first heard around 1964 (see below). My delta blues roots are still quite strong – evidence may be forthcoming later.

Pete's general comment on Nick's Selection 12, 45-47

Hm. Your descriptions of these three tracks are fascinating, and I've learned something just getting into the spirit of them. This kind of music is where it all started for us and people like us, so I've always had a respect, nay reverence, for it, and I've enjoyed being cajoled into listening to these particular tracks. In some ways all three of your selections have a kind of purity about them that no derivative music can ever have because it's ... well, derivative. So it feels almost cleansing to visit the real thing.

That being said, I can't say I've been drawn to spend a lot of time listening to "original" blues music over the years. I could make a show of faux self-deprecation by saying I must be too shallow, but that would be silly. The simple fact is that I prefer the music that sprang from the blues to the real thing.

So my comments about these three pieces (or the first two, anyway) are predicated on my being a) relatively ignorant about this kind of music, and b) not a regular fan. Which means basically that I don't have much to say! But I'm still glad to have been pushed into listening to and thinking about these examples.

Mel's general comment on Nick's Selection 12, 45-47

I should say first that to my surprise I have heard of all three of these guys. Did I ever tell you I don't like blues music. I hope not because I evidently like it quite a lot. (But do I like it as much I enjoy making fun of it? Probably I do, but would I admit it?) I went as far as recording three John Mayall albums in Cambridge and occasionally listened to bits of them until the tape wore out. So it would be very hard to assert that the only Blues I like are Moody.

More candidly, Pete's general description of his appreciation of blues music seems similar to mine.

45. *Dimples*, John Lee Hooker (1956)

Composer: Hooker

This is pretty conventional R and B territory – it must be conventional because John Lee Hooker was in "The Blues Brothers", a film which delights me every time I watch it. Hooker was one of the greats of R and B. His history is not unlike that of many bluesmen – born in Mississippi, moved to Detroit, more often Chicago, in this case via Memphis.

As often in this music, the attitude to women is not exactly enlightened (the Rolling Stones were particularly adept at picking up this characteristic), but I'll live with that. Musically it's simple – rudimentary, if you like. But I've tried and failed abysmally to play cod-John Lee Hooker riffs: there's more to it than first meets the ear.

To me this is a track which epitomises what I find addictive in rhythm and blues: it's easy to see why it had such an impact on a generation of British musicians, who, ironically, reimported it to the States, and along with their own success created a market for the original bluesmen. The impact is of course shared across a fair number of bluesmen –

Muddy Waters and three Kings (B. B., Freddie and Albert, two thirds of whom I saw, Pete): just listen to Elmore James and then to the original Fleetwood Mac.

But in the last analysis – earlier than that, actually – I tend to prefer John Lee Hooker to the others a lot of the time: there’s a sense of irony, something laconic about it, which is rather obviously missing from the rather obvious *Hoochie Coochie Man*. *Dimples* dates from 1956, but was released in the UK in 1964 to coincide with the (admittedly fairly cliquish) taste for blues sparked by John Mayall, the Stones, the Yardbirds et al. That was when I first heard it. Still listening.

Another digression. John Lee Hooker always played an Epiphone, whereas the other blues greats mostly played Gibsons (Muddy Waters normally played a Telecaster, just to be different). Epiphones were and are seen as the poor man’s Gibsons (BB and Freddie played ES335s, Albert a Flying V when I saw him). So presumably Gibson paid John Lee Hooker to promote Epiphones – or have I missed something? Is it just badge engineering?

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

Pete’s comment on Nick’s 45. *Dimples*

I like this because it’s such a classic example of what it is. It couldn’t be bettered. What else can I say? And yes, I bet he was subbed by Gibson. Then again, maybe he actually liked Epiphones for some reason. (I suppose I told you I now have an “affordable” Epiphone semi-acoustic of my own, did I?)

Mel’s comment on Nick’s 45. *Dimples*

This is by far the simplest and most challenging of the three songs for me. I’ve never seen “The Blues Brothers”, so maybe I’m missing one of the dimensions which would help my appreciation. (I have no doubt that the film is as good as everyone says it is. But when it comes on I always think of something more interesting to do than watch the rather unappealing Belushi.)

Dimples is the most interesting word in the lyric, so I suppose the song gets off on the right foot. And I was happy to listen to it again here. Several times in fact. But my prolonged pleasure in it is limited by what seems like repetition and lack of development, though I guess you’d argue with that perception, Nick.

While I feel sure I must have seen John Lee Hooker doing more interesting songs on telly, I can’t remember what they might have been. So this is all I have to go on. And it’s great as far as it goes. Somehow not an invitation to hear more from the legend, though. I wish it was.

46. *Smokestack Lightning*, Howlin’ Wolf (1956)

Composer: Burnett

Ironical? Laconic? Er ... no. This is simply one of the great voices of the genre, which I expect you both to loathe – sorry to inflict it on you. Guess what? Born in Mississippi, moved to Chicago. Not, from what one gathers, someone to meet down a dark alley. But the music is archetypal – must use the fewest chords ever (well, maybe one can be equalled, but not beaten).

It was recorded in 1956, and, like *Dimples*, released in the UK in 1964, which is when I first heard it. I thought it was terrifically powerful then and still do. What I didn’t know then was that it was a classic example of the output of Chess, the key Chicago blues label. The musicians, other than Mr. Wolf (whose name is actually Chester Burnett – hence the Burnett to whom the song is credited) on vocals and harmonica, are Chess stalwarts – Willie Johnson and Hubert Sumlin on guitars, Willie Dixon on bass and Earl Phillips on drums. Willie Dixon is actually one of the key figures in Chicago blues, not just for his bass

playing, but for his prolific songwriting. I nearly chose Dixon's composition *Spoonful*, but this won out.

According to Wikipedia, Howlin' Wolf was singing this as delta blues in the '30s. That I would like to hear – as long as the recording isn't as atrocious as many of the very early delta blues recordings are.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9Ri7TcukAJ8>

Mel's comment on Nick's 46. *Smokestack Lightning*

This is fabulous stuff. I've always been intrigued by the song, and the need to listen to it properly now has spurred me to find out what it's about. And lo and behold it turns out to have a surprisingly compelling lyric.

Drawing on my interest in railways in the age of steam (I refer you to an earlier conversation about Cambridge Station being the wrong colour in an episode of *Grantchester*) I had guessed from the "whoo hoo"s that the lightning is a feature of the fire in wood burning railway locomotives. But I didn't previously get that Mr Wolf's woman was leaving him for another man in this very train. The lightning turns out to be a fine image in a well-constructed lyric that is streets ahead of the other songs in this selection and all the other classic blues songs where the singer wakes up in the morning to find another reason why he should be miserable today.

I find this genuinely sad. I can see and feel it's sad; I didn't need someone to tell me it is.

Of course the mournful delivery, the persistent though varying vocalised engine whistle sounds and the trundling rhythm are a perfect match for the words. This is also a singer with a highly distinctive sound backed by a tight band who all work well together in ways which are beyond my ken.

Mesmerising.

Pete's comment on Nick's 46. *Smokestack Lightning*

Well, of course this is another classic. I find it more difficult to listen to this than to the Lee Hooker track, perhaps because it comes over to me as even more relentlessly "hard core", but if I wanted to listen to something like this, this is what I would listen to. If you see what I mean!

47. *Statesboro Blues*, Taj Mahal

Composer: McTell

Statesboro Georgia, that is. Of course I first heard this as we all doubtless did on "The Rock Machine Turns You On". So it was one of the stock sounds of our student years. But I've listened to Taj Mahal quite a lot over the years since, and he seems to me to be one of the great stalwarts. The song, as performed by him, is again a straightforward bit of rhythm and blues, but he just does it brilliantly. The original is by Blind Willie McTell (a 12-string man, incidentally) – you can hear it if you're feeling strong:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fnWxZtI3ONY>

So belatedly, thanks to YouTube, I can now see what Taj Mahal was doing with original delta blues. I'm sad enough to find that interesting, but that's not why this song is here. That's because I always enjoy listening to it. I think it was one of my earlyish encounters with electric slide guitars – still something of an addiction. It's the slide-dominated sound that does it, though he can't half sing!

Incidentally, if you want an example of how to go over the top, try the Allman Brothers' version, which is pretty gross, despite and to an extent because of the flamboyance of Duane Allman's slide guitar playing.

There's a tiny bit of rock history here. The slide guitarist is Jesse Edwin Davis, and the second guitarist is listed on the album as "Ryland P Cooder". Apparently the former taught the latter to play slide while they were making the LP. We will encounter Ryland P again at some point in the remainder of my 100.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fQMU1S8FhKg>

Pete's comment on Nick's 47. *Statesboro Blues*

Ah, now this is something I would happily listen to any time. It's a completely different take on the blues, isn't it? I love the driving beat and the hypnotic slide guitar. It immediately had me floundering around my screen, trying to find the volume slider in order to turn the sound up MUCH louder! It's very contained, of course, which gives it a curiously compelling quality. I find myself wanting it to let rip even more than it does ... then realising it's not going to, and enjoying what it does do that bit more. I've already played it three times. Thanks for bringing it back into my life.

Mel's comment on Nick's 47. *Statesboro Blues*

I've never heard Taj Mahal before as far as I'm aware. In fact I honestly didn't know whether it was a man or a band (and cultural connotations made me slightly unsure whether it was animate at all).

This is an enjoyable sound, despite the dull-as-ditchwater words. I don't appreciate music enough to understand why it should have been picked up and developed by musicians with such widely different styles – Blind Willie to the Allman Brothers is quite a leap. But I'm in no position to argue.

As you say Nick, Mahal has a good voice and can play an instrument. I think my problems would begin if someone sat me down and asked me to listen to a whole album.

[Postscript from Mel, September 2022: Nick wouldn't have been surprised that I didn't know the writer of *Statesboro Blues* Blind Willie McTell. And he might have been exasperated to learn that I thought he might actually be a mythical invention of Bob Dylan's. *Blind Willie McTell* is a beautiful, riveting track released on one of Dylan's "Bootleg" CD collections that pictures slavery and oppression in the US South. Nick's commentary on *Stateboro Blues* has now taken me back to *Blind Willie McTell* with renewed enthusiasm and the fresh insight that the song has to be about Dylan's powerful emotional response to hearing the music of a real singer called Blind Willie. Such are the wondrous unexpected musical pathways that our game has created.]

Farage's choice: *I am mindful that I have been running scared of certain territories, both absolutely central to my musical listening since the early Sixties. (The Rand B selection addressed the first of several remaining lacunae.) So now it's time to grapple with Sixties British pop.*

I find this really difficult, because so many groups have been so significant; then, having wrestled with that problem there's the equal struggle to decide which of the tracks which constitute part of my musical life is most representative of different kinds of significance to me. Really it can't be done, and thankfully, for all the interesting dimensions of this exercise, picking track A rather than track B doesn't mean I can never listen to track B again. Just as well.

48. No Reply, The Beatles (1964)

Composers: Lennon, McCartney

Or McCartney/Lennon as the CD sleeve now has it, for pity's sake.

I have great memories of us singing this together, Pete. But the reason it's here isn't just sentimental. It seemed to me, and still seems to me, that this song signalled the extent to which the Beatles shook up rock from a pretty early point in their careers, 1964 in this case.

It's a pretty conventional song in some respects, but deviates from the norm just enough to add real nuances. The lyric isn't too far from familiar territory, but the tone is different. The brush-off is first conveyed by the unidentified "they", who "lie" – a switch from the oblique to the (unusually) explicit which gains force from the contrast. And so on. Likewise, the use of a 6th chord rather than a major at the end of the first line, and the major 7th on the second "no reply" just add a depth to the music.

What else? Well, John Lennon's voice is wonderful (I feel tempted to say "of course", but that's wrong), but so is his rhythm playing. McCartney was an excellent bass player, Harrison is a rather underrated guitarist, Ringo ... well, there I think my praise stutters to a halt. But who cares?

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pOajTlfJve8>

Pete's comment on Nick's 48. No Reply

Wow! I've just played this on YouTube, and been reminded what a stunning song it is. So inventive, so carefully constructed. I completely agree that the sixth and seventh chords give it a real edge. Despite being a song about jealousy, it has the Beatles' characteristic warmth, yet those chords throw in a new element of uncertainty.

I would just add that I also always liked the middle section. It ramps up the attack, moving into a more positive mode with some nice harmonies as the narrator asserts that he "loves you more than any other guy". Intriguingly, these lines carry with them an implied threat: "If I were you ..." Again, not quite the stuff of a conventional pop lyric.

Yes, I do remember singing this. And yes, I also remember reflecting how this and other Beatles songs of the period tackled real issues in a new, as you say, unusually nuanced way. A fantastic song.

Mel's comment on Nick's 48. No Reply

I can say this for all four of these choices: thanks for the opportunity to listen to this one a bit more closely than usual.

Punchy, urgent, edgy, darker than we had come to expect. Even I can appreciate the unexpected chord changes and the strident voice which all add to the mood. And what I take to be harmonies. Glorious.

Incidentally, I won't have you writing off Ringo's drumming so completely. He got *very* much better later. I might feel obliged to pick a song that makes my point.

Anyway, this whisks me back to the excitement of Christmas '64 in a girlfriend's front room. Ahh!

49. *Paint It Black*, The Rolling Stones (1966)

Composers: Jagger, Richards

One of the salutary dimensions of this process has been confronting things about records which otherwise passed me by or which I conveniently chose to ignore. The Stones have featured large in my rock pantheon since *Come On*. But there are deeply unadmirable things about them – I think I've referred in passing to the misogyny of many of the lyrics. There is, too, something pretty squalid about not allowing Darryl Jones, who has played bass with them since Bill Wyman's retirement, to be designated a Rolling Stone, thus ensuring that he doesn't receive Rolling Stones royalties. Ironical, given the supposed roots of their music.

But be that as it may, they have to be here, probably more than once but we'll see. As I said, I generally liked their music from the start, but think this, dating from 1966, is probably the first truly outstanding song. First thing to say is that it has a terrific drive to it, and I suppose that's what originally excited me as an 18 year old.

Second thing – the sitar works well here, and is properly integrated into what's going on. I suppose that back in the Sixties I was rather taken with the sombreness of the lyric. It now seems more than a trifle stagy, but criticising the Stones for being stagy has about as much point to it as criticising them for breathing. So it has been on my mental list for a long time, and now makes its official debut.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=O4irXQhgMqg>

Mel's comment on Nick's 49. *Paint It Black*

Fabulous song. Arresting. Compelling. A lyric that deals with lost love not as "I'm sad, I'm going to cry" but in a series of images which nevertheless are direct and vivid. (I presume it's about love, though I suppose it could be about medical depression, which crops up later in *Mother's Little Helper*. Oops.)

I was intrigued by your suggestion that this was their "first truly outstanding song". So I checked up, and you're right. I'd been bowled over by the simple driving beat of *Come On* and thought, and still think, *It's All Over Now* to be an absolutely superb pop song. But the lyric and musical production of *Paint It Black* are thoroughly original.

I must say I've always been curious that a group which could produce such a long succession of wonderful hit singles (*Little Red Rooster* excepted, an imitation-blues step too far for me) was capable of producing such uniformly tedious albums. I tried so hard at so many parties to like *Aftermath* and the best that came from it was the gruesome sexism of *Under My Thumb*. A good song, but its offence was visceral even in my unenlightened teenage years.

So let's thank the illusion of deities for singles like this one

Pete's comment on Nick's 49. *Paint It Black*

An interesting choice from the Stones repertoire. What you say about it (and them) is interesting and worth pondering – though none of it has ever stopped me enjoying their big numbers, of which this is one.

I've never got to know their albums well, so I can't comment on what Mel has said about them, but I thought and still think that their singles were wonderful. I shall certainly be choosing one for my list. It won't be this track, but I must say I've always enjoyed it. As will no doubt be predictable by now, I love the harmony line thrown in (I assume) by Keith Richards on the line "happens every day", which helps lift the tone from the sombre minor key to a positive major – even though the lyrics merely underline the negative.

50. *Just One Look*, The Hollies (1964)

Composers: Troy, Carroll

Again, I really like the early Hollies stuff, often rather more than when they tried to get artier. I always thought this track was wonderful for its sheer energy and verve. In this respect, it epitomises something about the British sound of the Sixties, particularly its earlier manifestations as here (1964). The original was, as you both doubtless know, by Doris Troy, whose version is cool and soul-inflected (yes, Mel, the s-word again). I actually own it on CD and play it pretty often. For reference, here it is:

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

The Hollies just make the song a blast of boyish enthusiasm – three minutes of saying "wow". Subtle as a flying mallet, but then the energy is irresistible – and the harmonies, of course. Taking a more or less obscure black American track and making something else of it was a classic device of Sixties British groups, some times more successfully than others. This one works, partly because it isn't remotely an imitation of the original – I have no problem in listening to both and loving them for totally different reasons.

The Hollies were, I think, a better group than they were given credit for. Two good singers, whose voices match perfectly, not in the Everly Brothers sense, but because the differences in tone add to the richness. But the band, and I think particularly Tony Hicks on guitar, were seriously good and generally just taken for granted.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=10GeM482y9M>

Pete's comment on Nick's 50. *Just One Look*

I completely agree that the Hollies have been underrated over the years. They were one of the biggest bands of their time, and came up with some fantastic material, putting a unique spin on other writers' songs and coming up with some memorable songs of their own.

Yet for some reason they often fall through the cracks when it comes to retrospectives and historical commentary, and they're chiefly celebrated on radio through two very atypical records, *The Air That I Breathe* and *He Ain't Heavy, He's My Brother*, a pair of late pot-boilers that they didn't write. Fair enough, these two songs have given them remarkable longevity, but in my book for the wrong reasons.

As an aside, I also think it's a little unfair that whereas pop band lead singers like Mick Jagger and even Peter Noone are remembered by name and often cited in connection with their music, no one outside the cognoscenti ever mentions Allan Clarke, whose distinctive voice was such a key element of all Hollies music, including the two songs I just mentioned. End of rant.

On to *Just One Look*. Yes, not at all a copy of the original. A complete re-working, and all the more valid for that. I always liked it. It was my introduction to their distinctive harmonies, with Graham Nash's high edgy part already striking. Also it had that driving "Mersey" energy about it that captured the spirit of the time. Unlike you, Nick, I ended up preferring their later sixties material (e.g. *I'm Alive*). To me this track alerted to me what they might be capable of, and I was gratified when they proved (to my taste, anyway) that I'd been right.

As a footnote, I was intrigued that in a Graham Nash concert this year (yes, I sometimes go to concerts!) he performed a Graham Gouldman song (*Bus Stop*) to celebrate the Hollies period of his career. Not quite sure why, though Gouldman is another very underrated member of the pop pantheon. Nash also performed *King Midas In Reverse*, which of course he wrote himself – and which I also like.

Mel's comment on Nick's 50. *Just One Look*

I'll take almost any early Hollies hit you care to name and relish it. Not for its lyrics, not for its memories. Just the sound. This is a perfect example.

Just One Look doesn't quite have the drive of *I'm Alive* and *I Can't Let Go*. But it makes up for this in its sheer musical joy. At a time when everyone was imitating everyone else from the North West, no one sounded anything like the Hollies or the Searchers. It's a tribute to their musicality and musicianship, which as you say tended to get taken for granted.

Fine Choice.

51. *Lola*, The Kinks (1970)

Composer: Davies

There are so many wonderful Kinks songs, but I've got to include *Lola* (and yes I did see them perform it). As with *No Reply*, it doesn't seem to stray too far from the conventional. Except that it turns convention on its head, from its opening chords going from C major to D major to E major rather than G major.

Likewise the lyric – after all, this predated (or should that be prefigured?) the kitsch ambiguities of David Bowie. It contrives to be a wonderful piece of rock while having a seriously witty lyric (despite the best efforts of Coca Cola, whose negative role is immortalised by the reference to “cherry cola”). But the idea that the world is turned upside down except for *Lola*, or that the singer is “glad I'm a man and so is *Lola*” continues the ambiguity to the end of the song. Is the obliqueness of the discovery of *Lola*'s sex a bit coy? Well, on balance I think it's fair enough, particularly given the time it appeared (things have obviously moved on more than a trifle by the time of *Crocodile Dundee*).

This YouTube version seems to have become deviant in one respect – the cherry cola is now Coca Cola as originally intended. There seems to be no explanation, and the recording appears otherwise unsullied.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LemGocvc4oU>

Mel's comment on Nick's 51. *Lola*

Do you think that Ray Davies was/is bisexual? It's not a question we should ask these days. But I think he's teasing us with the possibility. (So he raised the issue. Not me!) The earlier *See My Friends* is a song about swinging the other way after a woman gave him a hard time. Then he issues the playful *Lola* with the ambiguities which you deftly highlight, Nick.

It's not strictly relevant. But I suppose it must have been my personal discomfort which had this song relegated to the “Kinks Novelties Department” along with *Dedicated Follower* and others. It's a designation which I use to distinguish his less serious lyrics from ones which feel rooted in a more real and empathetic observation of life. You know – *Waterloo Sunset*, *Autumn Almanac* and *Sunny Afternoon* etc. The real classics.

This doesn't mean I don't like *Lola*. I think it's a hoot, and homophobia doesn't interfere with my enjoyment at all. But he's having a laugh with us here rather than celebrating the rich diversity of life, as he does in his best songs.

Or is he?

Pete's comment on Nick's 51. *Lola*

A totally wonderful track! Agree with everything you say. I have to admit that in a corner of my mind I used to be tempted to rank it in that same mental list that Mel mentions of “novelty Kinks numbers”, but with a proviso: I always felt that in musical terms it ranked with their heavier rock songs, not with the more frothy *Dedicated Follower* group. So it was a bit of a puzzle to me. Basically it teasingly threw out all kinds of challenge – not least the sexual ambiguity, which I confess used to make me slightly uneasy. Nowadays I just think, “Who the hell cares,” and I feel I have licence to enjoy it for its musicality, which I think fantastic. *And* for its teasing qualities.

And yes, those opening chords in the “wrong” key are a musical tease in themselves. Ray Davies used a similar trick in *Autumn Almanack*, which in my book is another brilliant song, and which for me will always evoke Bass beer and those evenings we all spent in the Jolly Miller pub.

On reflection, there is something which unites these disparate tracks. In very different ways they depict a dramatic scene or scenes, but none is a straightforward narrative. Just an inconsequential thought.

Pete's general comment on Nick's Selection 14: 52-54

All three of these pieces are by performers I'm conscious of having neglected over my life. I sometimes wonder why, and whether it's because I've sought out easier options. I hope not. Anyway, I needed challenging to revisit them, and these three pieces have in every case reminded me what I've been missing. So thank you for that.

52. *Hold On*, Tom Waits (1999)

Composers: Waits, Brennan

Well, Tom Waits has to be there as far as I'm concerned. I listen to him quite a lot, and am amazed at the range of his music and his capacity to provide penetrating comments on America and American society (even to a modest degree in this song).

The album from which this comes, "Mule Variations" (1999) illustrates the general proposition perfectly. It is, for instance, the source of *Chocolate Jesus*, to which I referred recently. I should probably go for one of the obviously meaningful or challenging songs, but the truth is that it's the gentler songs which represent my default setting.

I could include any one of a number of these more or less equally happily, but I have decided on *Hold On* because I think it sounds terrific (not a bad thing in a song), because there are some extraordinarily well-turned lyrics ("With charcoal eyes and Monroe hips", "Well go ahead and call the cops/You don't meet nice girls in coffee shops" and so on), but mostly I suppose because it works like a noirish indie film. The narrative is episodic to say the least, but it moves along, not least because of the way it is carried by the backing. It just creates a mood which I find irresistible.

Never seen Tom Waits live. More's the pity (though on the great black and white tribute to Roy Orbison his contribution is not going to win any prizes – it earns a wonderfully dismissive look from the consummate James Burton at one point). I assume the co-composer is Kathleen Brennan, the person to whom young Tom is married.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DkpaKx1UUUw>

Pete's comment on Nick's 52. *Hold On*

Tom Waits is someone about whom, like Dylan, the more timid used to say, "He writes a lovely melody, but what a pity he can't sing." In my earliest Dylan days, I was almost taken in by that bollocks. And arguably Tom Waits demands even more "adjustment" than Dylan did.

Luckily I persisted and discovered Dylan. Perhaps I've never progressed far enough with Tom Waits, probably because of the darker and more challenging nature of some of his stuff and his even more lugubrious voice, but I know great work when I hear it, and here is some. I totally agree that the backing helps to carry this piece along – crisp, tuneful and persistent; but of course his voice is at heart of it, providing that extraordinary contrast with the accompaniment.

This is one of those pieces that haunts you. The chorus will suddenly pop up in your head, and stay with you for hours. So thanks for bringing it to my attention.

Parenthetically, I always liked *Downtown Train* by Rod Stewart. It alerted me to Tom Waits' own version, which I now also like. But I still think Stewart made a decent job of it, bringing out different aspects from Tom Waits' version.

Mel's comment on Nick's 52. *Hold On*

Well I asked for it. And I got it (him) and very much more happily than I was expecting. My instant reaction after only a few chords was: this is wonderful, not at all how I remember Tom Waits. I immediately appreciated everything you say about the song and performance – gentle, great sounding (amazing base on my headphones plus what sounds like delicate and intricate guitar work set well back behind the vocal) and lyrics to admire. I don't know how original the opening lines are, but "They hung a sign up in our town / 'If you live it up, you won't live it down'" is beautifully redolent and sets the theme and tone immediately.

I was loving it and then something strange happened. I found myself thinking: "Great song, but is it really challenging enough?"! Obviously there's no satisfying me. I think one source of the problem is that the oft-repeated chorus undermines the tension and desperation of the rest of the song. Just a bit lightweight by comparison. I also know that Tom Waits can be a whole lot more demanding.

Yes, I know that's over-critical. But this is perhaps an indication that, after I've assiduously avoided Tom Waits all these years, fearing that he will dispirit me, you've identified an unexpectedly enjoyable way into his music. I hope it won't be the last of him that I listen to. Thanks.

53. *So Long Marianne*, Leonard Cohen (1967)

Composer: Cohen

This is a bit of an oddity in the early Cohen canon because it purports to address Marianne directly, whereas most of his songs are, at least ostensibly, rather more contemplative. It has a bitterness which is normally much more oblique in his songs. So its tone is more like many of Dylan's songs (*One Of Us Must Know* for instance) yet it is classic Cohen – the self-analysis and the familiar use of Christian imagery, for instance.

So why this one? Well, I like the directness, which is matched by the intensity of the rhythm guitar, which gives a sense of urgency which I don't feel in the accompaniment to, say, *Sisters Of Mercy*. Other aspects of the backing are in my view mixed – the familiar female voices, a bonkers but rather wonderful bass guitar line (one Willie Ruff, apparently – no, me neither) and an over-emphatic drummer (Jimmy Lovelace – ditto – who sounds to me as if he trained in a military band and thought that shifting from sticks to brushes made him a rock drummer).

It was released on "Songs Of Leonard Cohen" (now there's an album) in 1967, but my esteem for it is of a later date, and totally without any reason other than ex-boyish enthusiasm. It predates our seeing him in 2012, when I thought he sang it wonderfully, though I don't feel this is entirely borne out by the latter-day versions on YouTube. So it's the original which I cling to.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3XzAjfwQtvM>

Mel's comment on Nick's 53. *So Long Marianne*

I hardly needed any reminder of this superb song, and it's noted that Leonard Cohen is the only person other than Van Morrison who so far appears twice in your list. No arguing with that.

For me, *So Long Marianne* is one of those songs which vividly conjure a place in time – Cambridge 1968/69. When poetry almost literally filled the air (my air anyway), even in albums of simple tunes sung by a gravelly-voiced man. Thrilling. I'm not sure it has a particularly profound lyric, but its poetry provides a very effective way of expressing regret for a real lost love. I can live with the copious religious imagery since so much of it so arresting and apposite. ("You held on to me like I was a crucifix" is particularly striking.)

As you suggest, this has a musical energy which you don't get too much of on the first two albums, so it's a bit of a standout. Now you've chosen this I'm pondering even more than before which of his songs I'll choose. I'm trying to avoid overlapping with yours, and you've had two extremely good ones already.

Pete's comment on Nick's 53. *So Long Marianne*

Well, I go along with everything you say about this. As a long-time Cohen-dismitter (perhaps through a combination of fear and neglect), I recognise that this is one of his more accessible pieces, and all I can say is hooray for that. It has persuaded me to let him back in my life, and for this I'm grateful. Yes, urgent and driving; yes, surprising military percussion; but it all works. I even like the background singers. They inject a nice touch of musicality that his relentlessness might otherwise override.

Hello again Leonard Cohen. Back to those distant days.

54. *Thunder Road*, Bruce Springsteen (1975)

Composer: Springsteen

I don't entirely buy the praise heaped on "Born To Run" (the album rather than the track), which seems to me to have some fairly pedestrian songs on it along with the stupendous stuff. I have been known to select the tracks on the album which I regard as the really strong ones and play just those. If you do that, it is a really depressing piece of work, and I suppose that I am drawn to the combination of Springsteen's extraordinary energy (yes, I have seen him live several times, and I think the first time I saw him, in 1982, is second only to Bob Dylan in 1978 in my personal hit parade) and his sombre view of the world.

Thunder Road uses one of the stock themes of rock – "We've gotta get outa this place", as the Animals succinctly put it – but it makes a lot out of it. There is for a start a real sense of desperation about it, and a sense of ordinariness ("You ain't a beauty but hey you're alright"), along with a degree of pragmatism: if Mary (who's incidentally superseded by Wendy in *Born To Run*) won't make the long walk, he's off at any rate.

Cars feature pretty large, but they aren't polished and souped up: "All the redemption I've got is beneath this dirty hood." This predates Springsteen casting himself as Blue Collar Working Man, a persona about which I have distinctly mixed feelings, but with hindsight you can see that coming. Here though the oily rag is still an oily rag, not something from the props department. Likewise, he may be "pulling out of here to win", but by the end of the album the death of the small time gangster is met with indifference, and poets [*sic*] "wind up wounded and not even dead." What a lark. What a song to begin the lark with.

"Born To Run" represents the point at which the E Street Band really came together. Clarence Clemons (who died while we were all in Snowdonia) has tended to be the name people remember. Well, he has one (splendid) sax sound, but really that's it. Other band members seem to be much more significant, particularly Roy Bittan on piano, Max Weinberg on drums and Garry Tallent on bass (he and Danny Federici being the only survivors from the earlier incarnation of the E Street Band, which included Vinnie "Mad Dog" Lopez on drums – now there's a rock'n'roll name).

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JGBXnw86Mgc>

Mel's comment on Nick's 50. *Thunder Road*

One obstacle for me is that Springsteen's PR has always seemed to precede the music and has always told me how much I should admire him. That's guaranteed to get my back up. Even so

I've enjoyed a good few tracks on the "greatest hits" double CD, though I don't think I've ever really *listened* to him. So this has been an overdue opportunity for some discipline.

Thunder Road is genuinely interesting in many ways, some of which I really needed your commentary to alert me to. Its rather gentle start was a bit of disappointment. (*Thunder Road* is a title which demands a rocker, doesn't it?) Then it picked up pace and I was caught up in the excitement. For a while.

Then I was disappointed that it didn't seem to go as far as I'd expected. Perhaps I was anticipating more ambition from the guy who was born to run, but it seems to me that he's more interested in sex with Mary (laudable enough, though limited) than some heroic escape from town. And, while I'm ready to recognise Spingsteen's pulling power, he has a rather odd way of wooing her.

Perhaps what I've just described is the whole point of the song, in which case apologies to you and Bruce. Complaining that the song also sounds just a little less ambitious musically than other favourites would presumably come up against the same objection, but I'll do so anyway.

It's all relative, of course. This is an engaging track by an exceptionally talented singer-songwriter, which does avoid the patronising illusion of the rock star playing at being the working class hero, as you say. I like its drive, even if it doesn't get beyond city limits, and the narrative is vivid and credible, if obtusely macho. Objectively I have nothing against it except knowing that I like some of his other songs more, despite their stronger hints of play acting.

Pete's comment on Nick's 54 *Thunder Road*

Well golly gee. I'm sitting here, listening to *Thunder Road* on my earphones with the volume turned up as loud as I can take it and tears of exultation in my eyes, and I'm thinking, who can I tell about this transcendental experience? And then I realise: it's YOU!! (i.e. both of you.) And that's exactly and precisely what this whole game has been about.

Wonderful. A pot boiler of deeply pleasing quality. What a poet – and what a beautifully rounded, satisfying expression of that simple theme. I much prefer this to *Born To Run*, or in fact any other Springsteen number I can think of. Your gloss on it, Nick is useful, informative and interesting, but even without it, I'd be happy simply to let this wash over me. As you say, what a lark. I'm happy to leave it at that. This is deliberately manipulative, visceral music, and hooray for that. I need this kind of music in my life.

PS I just DID read Mel's response to these three songs, and I have to say that personally I think this piece is about more than just sex with Mary! I do see a wider outcome to the narrative. But maybe it's subjective in the end.

Dylan: *Spurred by Mel's observation that Leonard Cohen is only the second person by whom I have chosen more than one track, it is about time I took the plunge. So Dylan it is. This is seriously problematic for me, first because for many years, from when I bought his first LP (which I still own), I played his records far more than those of anyone else, and secondly because so much of my guitar playing and droning has consisted of more or very occasionally faintly less pathetic attempts at Dylan songs. But this is no time for continuing the cowardice. Breathe deeply, step forward, curl your toes round the end of the 10 metre diving board ... oh my god – can I step back without looking a complete dick? Aaaaaaagh ... plouf – sorry, Brexiteers, I mean splash.*

Mel's general comment on Nick's Selection 14. 55-58

I've had one already one Dylan track, *Hurricane*, while trying to inflict my longest favourite tracks on you. But it's always been my intention to choose three more. As you've indicated, it's just what one has to do. Not only does four not need an apology, I've also experienced the pain of establishing selection criteria and then the anguish of making specific choices.

Having said that, perhaps the choice was not as hard as we think if we both want to include *Like A Rolling Stone* and *Visions of Johanna*. And since you and I tend to home in on slightly different things in our music, I'm close to saying that there must be something transcendent in these songs. As Dylan is only a Nobel laureate and not yet a saint that would be silly.

Pete's general comment on Nick's Selection 14. 55-58

OK, confession time. Me and Bob Dylan: an incomplete journey. There he was, in the background to my whole 1960s experience, yet for me he didn't occupy the fundamental role he should have. I was aware of him (how could I not be?); I liked some of his music; yet I somehow failed to engage with him adequately. Admittedly, I used to cringe when people around me said, "He writes great tunes, but he doesn't know how to sing them," yet I never protested. I wasn't yet hooked.

In fact I think I was already at Cambridge when I bought my first (and apparently only) Dylan album – the original "Greatest Hits". But my goodness, I played it almost to death. I finally started to understand what I'd been missing. I also recorded other albums from generous friends, and got to know a lot of his music from that period.

But then I drifted away. I didn't buy his later albums. I scrounged "John Wesley Harding" and "Nashville Skyline" to record, but wasn't really taken.

I'm a philistine! I know it. When I hear the two of you comparing notes about your transcendental experience of Dylan throughout his career, I feel like an adolescent among worldly adults – someone who has failed to see the joke, or the point.

I'm serious!

So it's been partly enlightening, partly reassuring, to find that my recollections are not too far from yours – just far less extensive or profound. I still feel in some respects a Dylan tyro. I've always admired him, but up to now it's never occurred to me that he might have that *sine qua non* quality for me. And on reflection, I suppose he does. I love his vehement delivery, his anger, his raw insights, his tunefulness, his poetry. So if this game has done nothing else for me, it has brought that awareness into focus. For which thanks.

My comments on specific tracks are rather brief compared with yours, but it's pointless for me to restate what you've already said, or to claim more insight than I actually have. Consider me to be going through a process of re-education. Which I'm glad to be doing.

55. Like A Rolling Stone, Bob Dylan (1965)

Composer: Dylan

Well, it has to be there, doesn't it? What a song. The chord sequence is typical of Dylan at the time, and I suppose the flood of words (like "vomit" according to Dylan in a "Rolling Stone" interview: certainly that word captures the vitriolic quality) as well as the semi-controlled intensity are likewise pretty typical. Not much to say about it in all honesty – it speaks for itself.

Yes he did perform it, very differently, when I saw him in 1978, and it was one of those truly glorious occasions.

So if comment is superfluous, what shall I say? Well, I can regurgitate the two bits of trivia I know. First, the band was augmented by the musicians who had played on the session which produced the non-acoustic version of *Sound Of Silence*. Secondly, Al Kooper has been quoted as saying that he is a fraction behind the beat because he didn't know the chords – rather implausible: they're not difficult, and he'd have picked them up pretty quickly even if he had had brain fade at the start. But he says too that he was unfamiliar with the organ and overawed by gate-crashing a Dylan recording session and was anxious not to get it wrong, so ... just behind the beat.

The recording dates from 1965 (June 16th, to be precise). But it is timeless. As if you need a link:

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

Mel's comment on Nick's 55. *Like A Rolling Stone*

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 comment on Nick's 55. *Like A Rolling Stone*

I go with Mel on the excitement of those opening drum beats and chords. Wow! I can't really add much to what the two of you have said. I feel informed and vindicated.

56. *The Times They Are A-Changin'*, Bob Dylan (1964)

Composer: Dylan

To be honest, this is a fairly arbitrary choice among the early Dylan “protest” songs, because I’ve got to have one of the early songs, and this is the one that I still occasionally play on the guitar when there’s no one within earshot.

It’s curiously simple – the guitar accompaniment is really very straightforward. It’s slightly strange to modern ears that it’s in three four rather than four four (incidentally, the Byrds change *Chimes Of Freedom* – another candidate for this slot in the list – to four four). Musically it’s pretty straightforward, and the lyrics are fairly stock earnest Sixties stuff, but who cares?

If you think about such songs as *Hattie Carroll*, *Masters Of War*, *Pawn In The Game*, or even *Hard Rain*, none is exactly subtle or full of new insights, though I rate some more highly than others. Not the point – all wonderful in their own way or ways. So this’ll do as an example of a cluster of songs which defined a significant slab of my adolescence and which I haven’t yet outgrown. 1964: the year I did most of my “O” Levels.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TLPV4wtZ6HE>

Pete’s comment on Nick’s 56. *The Times They Are A-Changin'*

I’ve always liked this. It’s hard to see it in perspective when we know what Dylan went on to achieve after this; but if it’s possible to view it objectively, it sums up the generational urge to reject what has gone before, and does it in a pretty definitive way.

Mel’s comment on Nick’s 56. *The Times They Are A-Changin'*

I have ambiguous feelings nowadays about the early protest songs. The choice of this one seems incontestable for historical and cultural reasons alone. But it’s so familiar and it was so easily surpassed lyrically and by the greater musical complexity of what followed that I often skip through this and other protest tracks on the greatest hits albums.

The one exception among the protest songs is the less well-known *The Lonesome Death of Hattie Carroll*, which, though far from perfect, tells a gripping story with bitterness and outrage that I still find moving.

Even so, this is your choice and I should pay attention. We didn’t complain about the song itself at the time. If I remember correctly the responses to the album playing scratchily on the Dansette at parties were mainly directed at Dylan’s weird voice and delivery. This was a while before I was turned on to his genius, which came belatedly when I stumbled on “Blonde On Blonde”. I wasn’t even personally excited by the song’s message at the time, even if I recognised that something interesting might be going on.

The song didn’t come out of nowhere – his hero Woodie Guthrie, by then suffering from dementia in a nursing home on the outskirts of New York, was his inspiration, and the language and approach is self-consciously old fashioned and folkie. Dare I say clunky?! The theme too is apparently the result of Dylan’s rather pretentious effort to write a song for his times. As cynical anthem writing goes in an industry which is full of it, this one, it has to be admitted, was phenomenally successful.

So, considering its importance as a standalone emblem of the early Sixties and its critical place in Dylan’s career, it would be idiotic to deride *The Times They Are A-Changin'* for its evident flaws. It’s still a fine song however you look at it. But I’m more struck by it as an illustration of how Dylan’s own times were a-changin’ – from the workmanlike plodding of this landmark (1964) to the riveting *Like A Rolling Stone* (1965) and the ambrosial riches of *Visions of*

Johanna (1966). Two years! It's the sort of creative development that Keats is famous for, and he had terminal TB to push him along.

The Times They Are A-Changin' is a song I want to stand on a plinth in an open space so that I can admire it if I want to, but also pass by without guilt, eagerly anticipating a meeting with my hero in person somewhere nearby.

57. Visions Of Johanna, Bob Dylan (1966)

Composer: Dylan

And so to "A" Level year, 1966. I still remember where I was when I first heard *Blonde On Blonde*, which is self-evidently one of the seminal LPs (yes, I know it's a double LPs if there are any pedants reading this – as if). This is where there's a bit of a snag with the current exercise. How do I pick one track from something which I tend to regard as a single entity? On the other hand it would be a betrayal of something undefinable to include nothing from it.

So, since I assume the referee won't allow me to count its entirety as one choice, after interminable dithering I have decided that this one will have to stand as a proxy for the whole (reminding myself that this process is ultimately as artificial as it is arbitrary, and the ref can't stop me from listening to the whole record).

So why this one? Well, it is just endlessly fascinating. Every time I think I've got some sense of it, it changes (cf. my comments on "Madame George"). I always like recalling Brendan Behan's reply to a journalist who asked what the message of something he'd written was: his reply was "Message – who do you think I am – the bloody postman?". What comes across is the atmosphere, the sense of images, some realistic, some surreal, moving in and out of focus, a sense of hauntedness, yearning and of failure.

Al Kooper is of course there, again, doing his stuff. I don't really think the spiky guitar phrases (Robbie – credited as "Jaime" – Robertson, I think) work entirely. What I do like is the way the bass playing of Joe South – in particular the unsettling way he slides onto notes, so presumably a fretless bass. But enough – the overall sound is as compelling as everything else here.

The link below is not to the recording I have known for just under 52 years, but it is interesting and the date coincides with the release of the LP. YouTube seems not to have the released album version, so I assume that you will root out your own well-worn copy. If it have been purloined by family, friends, lovers or thieves, replace it.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3AxfGzW7AdY>

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). 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 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 comment on Nick's 57. *Visions Of Johanna*

Wonderful. So evocative yet so teasing. Which bits are real, and which are not? I suppose it doesn't matter, though I think I've always tended towards Mel's interpretation (you'll have to take my word for that). Anyway, it's a relief to realise that no one else knows for sure what it actually means either. I'm not alone. And I DO remember it well enough to relive a certain reverence that I must have felt about it in the day.

Incidentally, I love the electric backing to this and other Dylan music of the period. I always get a sense that it's rough at the edges, almost "incomplete"; yet in a paradoxical way that's what the music needs. It IS complete, because this is what they wanted. It's intricate and full, yet not ultra-refined. It's in your face yet unobtrusive at the same time. (Oh dear, did I just write that?) In other words, it's ideal for purpose. I know what you mean, Nick, about the guitar, but I'm more than happy to accept even that.

Thanks to Mel, by the way, for your very plausible gloss on the strange line about the electricity.

58. *Tangled Up In Blue*, Bob Dylan (1975)

Composer: Dylan

I can't get away from the deeply uncontroversial sense that "Blonde On Blonde" is the pinnacle, but there has to be something later here too, and not the stunning live albums (well, two of them are stunning).

As usual with Dylan, there is too much competition. I remember that many years ago Mel mocked my enthusiasm for "Planet Waves", but neither that nor the effluence of time have dimmed my enthusiasm for it. "Blood On The Tracks" is the obvious LP to go to. But there's still the problem of choice. So again here goes.

I dither about including *Lily Rosemary And The Jack Of Hearts*, which I always enjoy and which shows a different dimension of Dylan, but I thought I'd be accused of not taking this exercise seriously (oh no!!!) if I didn't choose what is self-evidently the best song on the album. So here, predictably, is *Tangled Up In Blue*.

The imagery, like that of *Visions Of Johanna*, shifts, but here seems to have roots of a sort in stock Americana – the boy from the wrong side of the tracks, drifting around the country and so forth. But they are woven into a changing but intensely personal picture of an emotional life falling apart. It's just extraordinarily haunting, but in a quite different way from *Visions Of Johanna*. He's a clever boy, that Bob.

Who the musicians are seems pretty opaque. None was credited, and the story has it that the musicians were pissed off that they never received royalties. Some attributions are given on "Songfacts", but they don't mean anything to me or add anything as far as I can see.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QKcNyMBw818>

Mel's comment on Nick's 58. *Tangled Up In Blue*

Whatever I said to you about "Planet Waves" was unjustified. Not because it isn't inferior to "Blood On The Tracks" (it is) but because no offence should rankle for that long! *And I shouldn't have mocked you.) So you've chosen from the better album. Incidentally, I prefer "Desire", and I'm also sorry to be so cantankerous about this because as far as I can remember I pirated all three albums from you in the first place, for which I need to be eternally grateful.

My own favourite from the records is the gut-wrenching *If You See Her Say Hello*, which shows that Dylan could still write a brilliant tune as well as absorbing lyrics. And the *Hard Rain* live version of *Idiot Wind* (less so the one on this album) sets a pretty good bench mark across the entire world of popular music for what a really angry song should sound like. Oh, and I have to agree with you that *Lily, Rosemary And The Jack Of Hearts* would have confirmed you aren't taking this seriously.

As for *Tangled Up In Blue*, I enjoy it and admire it. I know other people who cite it as among Dylan's very best songs. Wikipedia refers to its dazzling lyric. And I've no particular reason to object. It just doesn't get me going like many of his other songs.

I think the reason is that this may be that it is an entirely fictional story, and not an entirely original one. (Yeah I know Hamlet wasn't original either, but you know I haven't got the capacity for consistency.) Dylan's story-telling is usually immaculate, but I'll usually get more from his approximations of real-life stories – "Hurricane", "Hattie Carroll", "Joey" etc – or his more personal lyrics. I find the "John Wesley Hardin" album challenging for the same reason.

I also gather from Wikipedia that *Tangled Up In Blue* is an exercise in time-shifting in recounting a story – which I presume means the sort of thing we became accustomed to with *Catch 22*. So this song is admittedly a bit confusing, but you don't need a time machine to unravel it. It's vivid, it has the reach and scope of a Hollywood movie and it's shoved remorselessly along by the violin which characterised albums of this period. I don't get much heartfelt feeling from it, because the story-board approach doesn't lend itself to dwelling on uncomfortable emotions.

But my problem is bigger than that: somehow I don't believe in it. I do wish I could get as much out of it as my friends do, though.

Pete's comment on Nick's 58. *Tangled Up In Blue*

Hm. I've always liked this, but never before considered it in such depth. Thanks for getting me to do so. I wouldn't call it one of his greatest works, but it's certainly a very "finished" piece. And even if it's derivative, it kind of redefines the genre it's imitating.

Nick's Selection 16: 59-62

First sent 13.8.18

And so to the US and our student days.

Mel's comment on the year he first met Nick and Pete: All four choices date from 1967. Thank goodness nothing else much happened that year.

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

Composer: MacLean

Since this has already been chosen by Pete and we've made our comments, I really have nothing to add, except a very brief personal observation. It has to be here because it is the stand-out track from one of the LPs which was in danger of being totally worn out when I was a student. I have the CD now, and have to admit that the charms of the rest of it are more resistible than they were, but this track is essential, so ... here it is.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_X3HKEC68EM

Pete's comment on Nick's 59. *Alone Again, Or*

Actually it turns out to be Mel who selected this for his top 100, just beating me to the post. If he hadn't chosen it I would have, so it's a rare example of a piece on which we seem to have total unanimity. Is this a record? Anyway, I made some observations about it before, so this is just a catch-up. As you say, it's essential. Clever, precise, musically exuberant. The words are incredibly spare, and say very little on their own, but in context they're as mysteriously plangent as ever. I love it.

Mel's comment on Nick's 59. *Alone Again, Or*

If Pete really had chosen this before me I would still have included it in my 100 – making this the only song so far which has achieved utter unanimity. It's too good to fight over.

Beautiful. Ineffable. Still sends shivers...

60. *Break On Through (To The Other Side)*, The Doors (1967)

Composers: Morrison, Manzarek, Densmore, Krieger

If Mel hadn't already gone for *Light My Fire* I'd probably have gone for that, but there is much more competition in the Doors catalogue than in Love's, so I have opted for *Break On Through*, also from "The Doors" (1967).

You probably don't recall that I owned "Waiting For The Sun" (1968), and I dithered about choosing *Five To One*, but I somehow feel I'm a bit old for it – but if it were to feature at , say, a 141st birthday party I might find my aged limbs twitching convulsively to it even now.

I commented on the absence of a bassist in the context of *Light My Fire*. In this instance, Wikipedia says that Ray Manzarek played a Rhodes piano bass, which seems likely given the sound. But really who cares? This is just out-and-out rock'n'roll. It still has the capacity to sound seriously exciting.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-r679Hhs9Zs>

Pete's comment on Nick's 59. *Break On Through*

It's very rare for a band to have such a distinctive sound that you recognise it within seconds of hearing the intro of any song; but that's what you get with the Doors. I think it's partly the combination of that voice and the insistent keyboard. It's a little frenzied, a little angry, a little mysterious, a little hypnotic – and it has that unique sound. And to me, the sound is redolent of our years at Cat's. Because it's slightly “destructive” pop (in the best possible sense), I think I would find it hard to listen to a lot of it all at once these days, but when I do hear it, I'm drawn irresistibly back, and it's a welcome journey.

Mel's comment on Nick's 60. *Break On Through*

Nick, you old hippy!

I think this is a druggie song, though I suppose it could also be about living life and death to the full, as advocated by the charismatic Mr Morrison. More surprising than your selection of *Break On Through*, though, is that you toyed with the possibility of including *Five To One*, which has always sounded to me like a straight call to revolution. You'll be telling us next that while passing yourself off as a diligent student of English literature you were actually an undercover member of a Maoist cell.

They are both great songs. I secretly prefer *Five to One* but, rather like you, I do feel a bit old for that now. Perhaps for different reasons.

I'm very much aware of *Break On Through*, and still a committed Doors fan. Only two or three months ago I bought the first five Doors albums to replace unusable tapes of *The Doors* and *Strange Days* and worn out *Waiting for the Sun* and *The Soft Parade* LPs. It's easy to see from the successive albums how the Doors started to lose the raw energy and immediacy which made them so riveting. Some later stuff was more subtle and some was more poppy. Mostly good, but it was hard to beat the explosive impact and other-worldliness of *Break On Through* which opens the first album. Brilliant.

Judith Durham apart, you won't normally find me commenting on people's appearance, male or female. But I've got to say looking at the old footage that Jim Morrison was a very handsome man. I can well imagine how women found him the Lizard King.

61. *Somebody To Love*, Jefferson Airplane (1967)

Composer: D Slick

To me, *Surrealistic Pillow* (1967, as we all know) is one of the indispensable LPs, but again, which track epitomises that? Late to the party yet again. But this time, much as I like *White Rabbit*, my choice would fall elsewhere. For me, it was a toss-up between *Somebody To Love* and *Embryonic Journey*: Jorma Kaukonen is a terrific guitarist.

But in the second from last analysis, it won't really do – the track is a bit of an anomaly on the album. Moreover, Grace Slick has to be there. As does Jack Casady, who is one of the great bass players (not that I could justify another guitar, I do rather lust after an Epiphone Jack Casady signature bass – black, not the ghastly bilious gold). The album version of the track has to be the choice, of course, but just look at the Woodstock performance (and listen to the thunderous bass):

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2EdLasOrG6c>

Enough of such self-indulgence (well, no, not enough, actually). Here is the original. Incidentally, the writer was Grace's brother-in-law, and the song dates from her pre-Airplane incarnation as singer with The Great Society (available on YouTube: pretty thin fare by comparison, not least because Grace was obviously banished to an adjacent room for the recording).

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Rw7BSVBrpTg>

Mel's comment on Nick's 61. *Somebody To Love*

Still one of my favourite bands after all these years. And if they hadn't recorded *White Rabbit* (as close as it comes to rock genius without actually being *Visions of Johanna*), this track would have to be in my 100.

Every time I hear it I can recall Stuart, in your room, pointing to the line "Your friends treat you as a guest" to illustrate the lyrical brilliance of what is self-evidently an amazing musical performance. Sorry to go on about lyrics, but a song with this musical urgency and searing vocal delivery needs to be about something pressing, and needing someone to love is high on the list of reasons to be painfully agitated. It's another example of the unholy Grail of blending words, music and performance to turn entertainment into art.

Thanks too, Nick, for prompting me to go back to the wonderful *Woodstock* footage. Have I mentioned before that this is my favourite film? (Of course I have.) Doing so has revealed the potency of the bass playing, which normally goes right over my head or under my feet. But here I get it. And I'd almost forgotten how attractive Grace Slick used to be, not that I mention people's appearance.

What a trip, man.

[In passing, Nick is referring to the US version of the "Surrealistic Pillow" LP. I think we impoverished Brits had to wait year for compilations and reissues to give us *White Rabbit* on an album.]

Pete's comment on Nick's 60. *Somebody To Love*

And lo and behold, here's another group with a unique sound (mainly thanks to Grace Slick's voice, as far as I'm concerned). And another band that reminds me irresistibly of Cat's. Strangely, although I liked them at the time, I like them more now: so unusual, so emphatic. Believe it or not, I never knew what Grace Slick looked like. Now that I've watched her in the *Woodstock* performance (and several others, I may as well admit), I realise I would have been even more of a fan if I had!

Tremendous. Incidentally, I've always liked *White Rabbit* immensely. I love the steady build-up – that fantastic crescendo leading to the repeated, emphatic final line. Wow!

I greatly enjoyed the guitar lesson by Jorma Kaukonen. What a marvellous discovery. He makes it look so easy ...

62. *Feel Like I'm Fixin' To Die Rag*, Country Joe and the Fish (1967)

Composer: McDonald

This isn't here to show that I'm capable of autonomous action, oh dear me no. I actually got to Country Joe a bit late, but this is a song which epitomises something about the Sixties, "protest", and so on. But more than that, I found myself going back to it, not for the first time, when the Iraq fiasco kicked off. So it evokes to me not so much the impotence of protest and the associated songs as Shaw's comment that the only lesson of history is that people don't learn from history.

I like the manic energy, the use of an old rag, and the fairground sound. (Did Country Joe know, or know of, "Oh What A Lovely War"? – possibly: the Broadway production was 1965, the same year as the first incarnation of the song.) Be that as it may, it's how the song harnesses these roots to a ferociously funny lyric which does it for me.

Country Joe was of course one of those dangerous leftie radicals. His output might be described politely as uneven (some is ... well, crap, and he wasn't above maudlin stuff: you may recall that he wrote *Here I Go Again*, recorded by, among others, that celebrated revolutionary socialist Twiggy).

The link is to the whole LP, which came out in 1967. Don't worry – it's only the first 3 minutes 15 seconds (probably more than enough in polite society). There is of course a Woodstock outtake on YouTube as well. Extraordinary stuff. Great music – no; but what the hell ... give me an F [etc, the next letters to be selected according to the sensitivity of the people within earshot].

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3W7-ngmO_p8

Mel's comment on Nick's 62. *Feel Like I'm Fixing To Die Rag*

Oh joy! Such riches! What a bunch of records. And another opportunity to go back to Woodstock.

I first heard Country Joe and the Fish on John Peel's late night *Perfumed Garden*. He must have played this (presumably without the quintuplet "Fuck"), but it was the film of "Woodstock" that grabbed me by the throat in the very early Seventies and taught me at last that it was both respectable and necessary to put two fingers up to our elders and "betters".

Up to that point protest songs were "culturally significant" musical curiosities that Bob Dylan and some inferior chart contenders performed, somewhere way over there. With *Fixing To Die* I suddenly realised there was a point to them for me personally, not just the music industry.

This is delivered with such contagious enthusiasm, and is so hilariously funny and so horribly real, I can quite see why Iraq took you back to it, Nick. By then, of course, we could wage war fairly safely and ensure that it was only the enemy that would get killed by the thousand. Back in the Seventies Sue's sister Kay ran away from the US to Canada with her draft-dodging American husband to avoid the very high chance of him being killed or maimed. One of Barb's housemates in the flat where she lived in London was a cannabis-smoking draft dodger who was starving himself just so that his body weight would drop low enough for him to go home and be excused from service. I marvelled at the time that such madness should come to the UK. Country Joe was hardly joking.

I know it took a while, quite a long while, but it was protests from American people that eventually got the shambolic imperialist warmongers out of Vietnam. Country Joe's effort is emblematic of, if not exactly instrumental in, the occasional good that entertainers and populist movements can achieve together.

Many thanks in these less optimistic times for reminding me of that.

Pete's comment on Nick's 62. *Feel Like I'm Fixing To Die Rag*

Hmm! I knew immediately what I wanted to say about the three songs above. With this one, I'm kind of lost for words. I can see that it's all you say it is, and I do remember it. It brings back other aspects of our Cambridge life to me – going to the cinema, seeing what filmmakers were doing, discussing it afterwards. And it brings back that spirit of protest and dissent too. There seem to be hints of the Bonzos' sound and attack as well. As will be clear from my own music choices, I've never picked anything like this, but now that I've sat and listened to it and thought about it, I can see why you would. As ever, this process is endlessly illuminating, and I'm really glad it hasn't fizzled out.

My sympathies are divided about quite where to go right now with my musical selections. There are two rather separate routes, both important to me and I've been dithering, which is of course dreadfully bad for me. So let's see where we go.

Pete's general comment on Nick's Selection 16: 63-65

Curiously, Nick, when it comes to commenting on your three latest selections, I find myself wanting to deliver a combined response that applies to all of them. I suppose it's partly because they are all broadly in the same genre – call it reggae, ska or whatever you like. Perhaps it was a reflection of how you were feeling when you chose them, but anyway I agree that they all have a kind of mesmeric quality, and it's easy to allow them to wash over you. Which however would be underrating the musical skill, as you point out.

Thinking about it, when a reggae track starts playing almost anywhere, it invariably brings a smile to my face: which is a pretty impressive thing. I find it hard to think of any other genre that would have such an instant effect. This is something of a puzzle to me, because I wouldn't instinctively say it's a favourite genre of mine, and I don't think I'll be choosing any tracks in this style myself. It seems to be an instance of my head telling me one thing but my heart saying another. This kind of music somehow conveys a deep sense of joy to me, and I owe you a vote of thanks for prodding me towards admitting I like it more than I realised.

63. *Stir It Up*, Bob Marley and the Wailers (1967)

Composer: Marley

I started to listen to Bob Marley in 1976 under the influence of a friend at the OU. Apparently this dates from 1967 (ring a bell?) but I first knew it from the LP "Catch A Fire" (1971). As a devout leftie, the aforementioned friend tended towards the political end of Marley's spectrum. I saw the point, but couldn't help thinking "yes, but ...". If you take *Buffalo Soldiers* as an example, the way the Unionists exploited black slaves who joined the army was outrageous. But that scarcely seemed to me to warrant the analogy that Marley was trying to draw between them and Rastas.

Whether that is what lies behind this choice is a moot point. Moreover, it would be absolutely fair to say that this is simply to substitute a questionable political standpoint for a quite arguably more questionable view of women. I blame the chaemo for my ideological lapse. I just love the cool, almost effortless, sound and the way it wafts me along. Effortless is of course the wrong word: this is a classic example of the art lying in hiding the art. The bass playing is terrific. I don't generally like wa-wa or phasers, but here they work. And the guitars behind the singing (Marley and Peter Tosh presumably) are terrific.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=S3UqvWk8-uw>

Pete's comment on Nick's 63. *Stir It Up*

Well, Bob Marley may have been politically driven in much of what he did, but this particular song is big on what you rightly call its cool effortlessness. And on your point about use of phaser technology, it's interesting to be reminded that records were using that kind of thing so long ago. And what a heavy, resonant bass. Love it!

Mel's comment on Nick's 63. *Stir It Up*

As owner of the "Legend" greatest hits collection I've always regarded Marley as someone who only produced masterpieces. Deciding which I liked best has been largely beyond me. For pop

enjoyment I'll usually go for the obvious *Woman Don't Cry*. Then *Exodus* is the one for sheer excitement, and it yet might make the 100. But how can I neglect all the other tracks?

Stir It Up, is easier to overlook because it is, in contrast, so incredibly laid back. So thanks for alerting me. I can't argue with what sounds even to my ears like wonderful musicianship. And if I'd ever looked at the words before now I would certainly have been impressed by the lines,

I'll push the wood (stir it, stir it, stir it together)

Then I blaze ya fire

What CAN he be talking about?!

But he didn't really need to give any verbal clues with a song whose mood is so overwhelmingly redolent of seduction. Phew! I think I may be too old to be listening this. Good choice.

64. *Pressure Drop*, Toots and the Maytals (1970)

Composer: Hibbert

I have to confess that I still fail to distinguish between rock steady, backbeat, ska and other antecedents of reggae. On the whole probably not worth losing too much sleep over. I think Toots and the Maytals are generally seen as ska. And yes, Pete, we did see them live. They were ... what's the word? Underwhelming. Ah well, you lose some, you lose some.

I first encountered this song on the sound track for "The Harder They Come" (1972), which I thought was a decent film if not without the blaxploitation characteristics of the time. This is the song that lived and lives with me. Why? Well, I love its melodiousness (not to mention the bass line – easy enough, but terrific). And I am struck by the contrast between the joviality of the sound and the really pretty scary lyric (such as it is!) – a pressure drop in the Caribbean of course presaging a hurricane.

Basically I just love the sound.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DKVB_CtU8XQ

Pete's comment on Nick's 64. *Pressure Drop*

Again, this is big on melodiousness, which will never find any quarrel from me.

Mel's comment on Nick's 64 *Pressure Drop*

I don't listen to much Caribbean music, and certainly wouldn't be able to distinguish a ska from a backbeat if I was hit over the head by one. (I think my limit is knowing to feel uncomfortable when people like 10 CC do songs I enjoy in West Indian accents.)

Given my declaration of ignorance you won't be surprised to hear I was unmoved by this one. It's not unpleasant. But it seems to my ears too much like many other songs of its time, some of which came across as more tuneful and less repetitious.

The most rewarding feature of this selection is the revelation that you like it. I'd no idea that what I'd generically call reggae fell into the broad basket of your musical tastes. Enlightening, and pleasing to discover.

65. *Tide Is High*, The Paragons – (1966)

Composer: Holt

If you can believe Trojan Records, who should certainly know infinitely better than me, this is "rock steady". So there.

This is maybe an odd choice. I rather liked the song when Blondie did it, and was duly outraged by Atomic Kitten's travesty. But it somehow seemed to me there was more to the song than met Ms Harry's eye (or ear). I just found this on YouTube a few years ago, and I think it's lovely. Why? Well, it has the close harmony qualities of earlier black singing groups transposed to a very different musical world, and the voices (despite the less than wonderful recording quality) are delightful. And was there a better use of a violin in popular music until the Rolling Thunder Review? Complicated? No. Do I enjoy listening to it? Every time.

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

Mel's comment on Nick's 65. *Tide Is High*

I knew I'd love this as soon as I saw the title and the Caribbean context. As you say, it's a joy.

I won't hear a word said against the immaculate Blondie, but this (original?) does things Debbie Harry wouldn't have been interested in. It's quite remarkable that such a complicated assembly of sounds come together is such a satisfying whole.

Some prominent words awkwardly don't quite fit the music – "... who-oo gives up just like thaat" has the stresses all wrong, and it feels lumpy and disjointed. On the other hand, the rest of the song is beautifully melodic with words and notes in all the right places. The lumpiness turns out not to be an eyesore; it's a quirky landscape feature which makes the overall view more interesting.

And these kinds of contrast appear to be the key to the success of the record.

There shouldn't be a violin there at all, you think as the track starts. And even if there should be, that's not the way violins should sound. But what a fantastic accompaniment. The glorious close harmony singers start out slightly out of sync suggesting we're in for a vocal mess. Then they confound that expectation. By the end it's as tight and natural as you could possibly want.

It all sounds too clever to have happened by accident. Brilliant find, Nick.

Pete's comment on Nick's 65. *Tide Is High*

It's fascinating to realise that Blondie based their version of this song so closely on the original. Having heard theirs so many times, I guess I'll never be able to dissociate it in my mind from that, but it's nice to be reminded how it started out. This however has that interesting edge added by the Caribbean aura and the different vocal style, as well as a kind of self-conscious rawness about it (a feature of much of this kind of music). It's hard now to know how much this was intended and how much an accident of the style and production methods. Anyway, I really like this.

66. *Strawberry Fields Forever*, Beatles**Composers:** Lennon, McCartney

I know the story has it that this was meant to be part of “Sergeant Pepper”. Obviously it came out of the same sessions, and its sound world is the same. But I can’t quite see where it would have fitted on the album, even though I think that often there’s a pretty high bullshit quotient in the concept of concept albums.

Be that as it may, this is a wonderful song. Until I knew what *Strawberry Fields* actually was, it seemed rather other-worldly, and I think this remains the case even knowing what the institution was – more to do with what it represented to Lennon than anything to do with the life of those incarcerated there. Lyrically it is odd – the words read like a scarcely edited monologue, which contrasts pretty starkly with the deliberateness of, to use the obvious comparison, “Penny Lane”.

I tend to be one of the people who think that Ringo Starr never got beyond “Drumming By Numbers Volume Two”, but here the drumming is excellent and integral to the effect of the song as a whole. There seems to be no suggestion that it was anyone other than Ringo, though you may recall that when we were students there was a story that his limitations were overcome by telling him to hit each of his drums, the sound was recorded and then the appropriate noise was dubbed one by one by, presumably, George Martin. That seems to me to be highly improbable – a drum makes many more than one sound, and it would be much easier to get a session man in than to go through that rigmarole. So ... well done Ringo.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=44GB53rnI3c>

Mel's comment on Nick's 66. *Strawberry Fields Forever*

I hardly need to listen to the YouTube version. This song has been more or less fixed in my brain for over 50 years. Until now it was going to be one of my choices, too, but I may try to avoid the duplication.

My interpretation of the song is simpler than yours. This is John Lennon's mind at the time – a few steps downward into mental chaos from the cry of *Help!* I recognised some of the turmoil and escapism from the moment I first heard it.

In 1968 this was one of the weirdest and therefore most original pop song lyrics we'd ever heard, and there was not the least doubt in my mind that this was the greatest song of all time. It doesn't have quite the same mind-exploding impact today, but it is still fairly extraordinary lyrically and musically.

You must be aware, incidentally, that those people who regard Ringo Starr's drumming as inferior are fundamentally wrong. I had every intention of using this track (or *Rain* which is magnificent almost entirely because of Ringo's drumming) to prove the contrary, but you've partially pre-empted me. He could play the drums and he got very much better at what he did as time went on. But the other egotists in the group were usually not very interested in providing encouragement or the musical opportunities for him. Just occasionally it suited them to let Ringo fly. (I hope to come back to another poignant example of this later.)

This is an amazing record which goes a long way to proving that Lennon was the band member with real creative imagination, against which McCartney's claim to be a member of the avant garde is merely laughable self-aggrandisement.

A perfect choice.

Pete's comment on Nick's 66. *Strawberry Fields Forever*

Yes, a phenomenal song: one where there are constant developments and changes in texture all the way through, and because we know the piece so well, we hear them coming and anticipate them. Well, I do, anyway! I like your description of the lyric as “like a scarcely edited monologue”, and I’m sure you’re right that the reality of the institution wasn’t really part of Lennon’s vision of the place. He used his childhood memories the area as a metaphor for “nothing is real” imaginative flights (however induced), and turned the whole thing into a strange kind of scolding celebration. Music and content fuse together superbly.

I agree that Ringo’s drumming is wonderfully precise and effective. Arguably he tended to downplay his own abilities. I have to agree with his own estimation that his most accomplished performance was on *Rain*.

In the day I preferred *Penny Lane*, which as you imply is lyrically more rounded (and more tuneful, which I have to admit was a key feature for me). Both songs are musically more complicated than they seem, but *Strawberry Fields* wins on that count by some margin. Have a look at the Wikipedia entry for it to see something of the extraordinary musical complexity of the chord changes.

67. *Substitute*, The Who (1966)

Composer: Townshend

I know that there’s an argument that the line “I look all white but my dad was black” makes this racist. I think I could argue that either way, but if it is racist, it’s at the bottom end of that repellent scale. Whatever the conclusion there, I still think it’s a terrific song.

The Who are of course one of the great bands (yes, we have seen them a time or two, though of course the last time there were only two of the original members in attendance, visibly at least; on that occasion the drummer was Zak Starkey, who was very good).

I tend to prefer the earlier Who stuff to the more grandiose things they went on to. I like the energetic sense of failure, alienation, deception and cynicism that comes through this song, and how it combines with the manic energy that characterises The Who at their best, whether or not the lunatic Keith Moon is beating the shit out of the drums.

Incidentally, John Entwistle is in my view an extraordinary bass player who seems to get rather less credit than I think he deserves

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ts9-4jbFWGg>

Pete’s comment on Nick’s 67. *Substitute*

I’ve always loved this – the energy, the harmonies, the simple inventiveness. I can see that arguably there could be an underlying racism in the “dad was black” reference, but it certainly never struck me that way at the time; I heard the line as a straight comparison between appearance and reality, not a value judgement. In defence of this view, it’s worth pointing out that not all comparisons made in the song suggest that one option is preferable to the other; for instance, “The north side of my town faced east / And the east side faces south” clearly isn’t suggesting that east or south are in some way more “worthy” than north. It will be a sad day when we’re banned from even listening to material that was created in different times just in case offence could be inferred, and regardless of whether it was actually intended.

Musically speaking, with the perspective of years, I like The Who in all their periods, though I agree that they were at their purest when they were just starting out.

But I have to say I have a great fondness for *I Can See For Miles*. However ambitious or apparently chaotic their music, they usually tended to come back to the basic three-party harmony where they started. Oh, and I agree about Keith Moon’s amazing drumming, of course, and also John Entwistle’s bass.

Mel's comment on Nick's 67. *Substitute*

A Who song should be obligatory. I still can't decide which one mine should be, but *Substitute* has got to be a major contender.

It's news to me to hear there are objections to the reference to a white man with a black father. That's ludicrous in a work of the imagination which operates almost entirely through arresting metaphors. We might as well say Pete Townshend was biased against precious metals in favour of plastic, or a magnetism-denier because his town faced the wrong way.

It's an ingenious and apposite conceit to suggest that someone would feel a sham if they were white with a black father. The other way round would perhaps be slightly less surprising and more likely to provoke consternation, though this is a reversible image which would still be valid. Because it's a clever image!! Part of a clever song for god's sake.

I'm not shouting at you Nick, just at those stupid pillocks who have the effrontery to object and whose existence you've just alerted me to.

I was always amazed and a little shocked by the way the Who, quite unlike anyone else, rendered real emotional states which weren't connected with love into uncompromising red-raw lyrics. In this regard they went much further than Ray Davies, who as you point out could often introduce sentimentality into his reality.

Substitute is one of those early songs of alienation. It's made palatable by the uncomplicated music and the sharpness of the wit. I enjoy these more than most of "Tommy", though it has to be said that sensory deprivation and paedophilia are quite tough subjects for pop songs too, and I've always admired the aspiration behind their flawed rock opera.

Naturally, I've never seen the Who. But I was close enough to them to *hear* them at the university recording the *The Who Live At Leeds* album while visiting, among others, your former wife. Does this count?!

68. *Waterloo Sunset*, The Kinks (1967)

Composer: Davies

And another appearance for the Kinks. Ray Davies is a wonderful songwriter despite rather than because of his capacity for sentimentality, and no one in their right minds would deny that this is pretty schmaltzy – Terry and Julie living in bubble of love which insulates them from the people who swarm like flies. To the allegation of schmaltz my response would be "so what?". It's just a delightful song.

It sounds simpler than it is, I'd say. I'd forgotten until writing this how much I like the bass and drums (Pete Quaife and Mick Avory). I find myself unable to conclude about one thing – in the final repetitions of "Waterloo sunset's fine" is the sound bulked out by keyboards? If so. It's Nicky Hopkins, who is the keyboard player on a lot of the Stones' records around this time.

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

Pete's comment on Nick's 68. *Waterloo Sunset*

Well, I was always planning to make this one of my own choices, so I don't know whether to be pleased or disappointed that you've got there before me. I don't mind the fact that it's sentimental; what beams through to me isn't so much schmaltz as Ray Davies' deep fondness for London (and by association for life). Seldom has anyone encapsulated these things so effectively, as far as I'm concerned. And yes, I agree that keyboards are used in the run-out. I'm sure of it!

Pseuds' Corner: I can't think of any other song that uses descending harmonic and melodic sequences in such an unselfconscious and inspired way as this. The song is full of them – either entire scales or Davies' trademark chromatic sequences – and yet the effect isn't downbeat, as you might expect; it's uplifting. Every time the descent reaches the bottom, it's on a solid

dominant chord leading us on to an affirming key-chord. It says that for Terry and Judy at least, all seems to be well with the world.

That said, each verse ends on a minor chord (“paradise”), so arguably Davies is saying in musical terms that their optimism is circumscribed. However, at the end, the run-out takes us beyond that chord to an endless dominant: perhaps a suggestion that if Terry and Judy’s world isn’t as perfect as they want to believe, there’s always hope of something better.

I would have had this in my top ten. Maybe I still will.

Mel’s comment on Nick’s 68. *Waterloo Sunset*

Again, what a wonderful choice. My favourite Kinks track too, after they settled down from the early rockers.

I don’t know whether the guitar work is particularly clever technically. But from the very first note I get the sense that the instrument, for all its other wonders, was invented primarily to make this record sound extraordinary. It doesn’t provide an accompaniment; it’s a central player that punctuates and drives the tune along more emphatically than Davies’ somewhat weedy and lugubrious voice, but in perfect accord with it. Lovely stuff.

And of course the tone of the music is beautifully suited to the laid-back observational style of the lyric.

I’ve always had a very slightly uneasy relationship with Terry and Julie. On one level they’re a cheap way to bring sentimental love into a song that hardly needs it. On another they brilliantly help with focusing down from the wide angle view of people swarming like flies to the telephoto minutiae of two people’s lives in the chaos.

The song would be quite a bit more indulgent and sterile without them. Ray Davies has ingeniously superimposed three worlds on top of one another – the river’s, the couple’s and his own.

And there’s also more going on in the head of the songwriter than you’d get from a lesser lyricist. He’s lazy in his contemplation, enthralled, self-contained (not needing a friend) and, curiously, unafraid. Terry and Julie are unafraid too. Is it a scene that would be scary without the sunset, or is it just inherently peaceful? A few odd words that add depth and wonder to something which could so easily have been a sentimental daydream.

No wonder Ray Davies is rated so highly as a songwriter.

69. *Tumbling Dice*, Rolling Stones (1972)

Composers: Jagger, Richards

And here we have Nicky Hopkins with the Stones. There’s often a problem with the Stones’ recordings, that they sound as if they were recorded in a phone kiosk at the bottom of a swimming pool. Well, in this case I don’t care.

In many ways I think the Stones were at their best in the Mick Taylor era. Here, ironically, Mick Taylor is playing the bass: I think it’s a fraction over-enthusiastic, but its melodiousness makes a happy contrast with the pedestrian playing of Bill Wyman. Keef is credited with “guitars”, so I presume it’s multi-tracked. Charlie Watts’s drumming is as excellent as ever.

But why this song rather than any one of many others – *Brown sugar* as an obvious floor-filling example? Well, it’s got a wonderfully raunchy sound to it

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6U8JlcB_BzA

Pete’s comment on Nick’s 69. *Tumbling Dice*

Yup, I’ve always liked this. It does everything you say, and does it to wonderful effect. I think I marginally prefer *Honky Tonk Women* from this later period of their original fame; it’s also

raunchy, and has that irresistible chorus. In fact standing back, I liked the Rolling Stones far more than I ever admitted to myself in the day, and I will certainly be including something from them in my remaining selections. The combination of the amazing drive of their music and the effective use of clever melody and harmony is seldom celebrated to the extent that I feel it deserves.

Mel's comment on Nick's 69. *Tumbling Dice*

Well I think I understand why you would choose this track. And I'm bound to diminish it by saying it seems there's a lot going on musically although I'm not entirely sure what it is. What I can make out does sound very good, but it doesn't actually excite me.

Highly regarded tracks are sometimes described by aficionados as "musically tight" while they sound almost cacophonous to me. I'm apparently not attuned to skilful musicians jamming together.

This is really disappointing because I was expecting to enjoy it when I read your recommendations. But my general lack of appreciation quickly led to me picking out other flaws. For a start, your warning about the sound quality definitely doesn't understate the problem. You could have added that it sounds like a live recording made on a mobile phone. It's also melodically inferior to many other Stones singles, and as a result it seems to go on a bit.

Ultimately you have undermined your case by reminding us of *Brown Sugar* to which I have been quickly driven back for a listen. *Brown Sugar* is to my ears superior in so many ways. It has a better tune, more energy, and lot more variety of tone and pace. And – sorry son – I can make out the words better! It's a great Stones record.

If you are still speaking to me you may wish to remind me that the guitar playing on *Tumbling Dice* is better. To which I will nod sadly.

Well, sorry, but it was bound to happen. World music – there's a foolish name: where does the rest of music come from? It is really a pretty racist categorisation. So I am doubtless guilty of post-colonialism or wishy-washy guilt-ridden liberalism or bank robbery or something. But tough. I listen to African, mostly Malian, music rather a lot, and like it. I always thought that one of T. S. Eliot's more implausible arguments was that poetry in a foreign language could be appreciated even when you didn't understand it, or not fully, or something of the sort. I would have to admit that I don't understand the words in these choices when there are any, and that, although I wish I did, I can fairly happily live with my ignorance. But that is something to do with how music works, Mr. Eliot.

Pete's comment on Nick's Selection 19, 70-74

! If ever this game was supposed to point us at music we would never otherwise have listened to, this batch really hits the spot. Well, I'm delighted to report that I greatly enjoyed all five tracks. So the system has worked.

But the question you pose, namely "Is this really 'World Music' at all?", is interesting. I guess the purist answer is no – which suggests to me that I should perhaps rewrite a comment made in my latest novel, in which one of the characters asks another, "Did you know Hebden Bridge is considered a centre for world music?" (Don't ask.) Perhaps I should insert "so-called" in there?

I found I enjoyed each of your tracks more than the previous one ... up to the last. I'm a massive Paul Simon fan, and I understand why you've included this track of his here, but it's never been among my favourites. However, it's been interesting to listen to it in the context of this clutch of material, and it's certainly fitting and relevant.

Thanks again! My next selection won't be nearly as surprising as this (not in a good way, anyway ...).

70. Salaman, Toumani Diabate and Ballake Sissoko (1999)

Composer: Diabate

When I was driving to work I used to alternate between Radios 4 and 3, depending on how irritating "Today" was. I first heard the CD from which this comes one morning on Radio 3 and just thought I have to have it. I still play it a lot. It manages to be both soothing and stimulating, I have listened to it as hard as I listen to anything and have also used it as wallpaper, and it works brilliantly in either role.

The music is played on koras, extraordinary instruments played with the thumb and first finger of both hands to produce an extraordinary variety of sounds. I love the glorious cascades of notes. I think the whole album, *New ancient strings*, is terrific, but one has to jump one way or another. So *Salaman* it is. This track is apparently based on a traditional song and is meant to evoke "the power, intensity and fickleness of love". Well, without the blurb I wouldn't get that, but I think it's delightful whatever.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GOkD9DcgKEE>

Pete's comment on Nick's 70. Salaman

Yes, this washes over you, doesn't it? Cascades of notes – yes, soothing, and also haunting. I really enjoyed it. My only reservation over a piece like this is that it's very confined in musical structure – the same chords constantly repeated. I realise that's the point, so it's not a criticism, more a comment on my personal reaction to music in general. Clearly in this case there's

massive elaboration within the basic structure, so I'm not making a federal case out of it. It works for me in the terms it sets out.

Mel's comment on Nick's 70: *Salaman*

I immediately understood your remark about listening closely or having this as background music. That was what I got from it after only about 30 seconds.

This is really remarkably intricate compared with what I'm used to listening to, but at the same time so engrossing that it feels as if the effort of listening could be rewarding – if only I had a clue what was going on.

The “world music” (grotesque terminology as you suggest) which I am more likely to listen to is Indian, and this is curiously reminiscent. The reason, I imagine, is the complex rhythmic structures of both, which outwit our “first world” mentality. But this differs from the sitar and tabla in its delightful airy lightness. So it's easy to see this as relief from the heavy-handed verbal batterings dealt out by Humphrys.

It's great to have been introduced to it – I thoroughly enjoyed hearing it. But I find it difficult to envisage coming back to the pleasure, because it feels so remote from the rest of my experience, musical and otherwise. And nowadays I rarely listen to “Today” anyway.

71. *Kala*, Ali Farka Touré and Toumani Diabate (2005)

Composer: Trad arr Diabate

The genius of record companies is such that I can scarcely read the blurb on this album. From what I can make out it doesn't add much – though the two musicians apparently come from different regions and musical traditions in Mali. Toumani Diabate (see above) is on kora again. Ali Farka Touré was a multi-instrumentalist, here I think on guitar. He died in 2006, the year after the CD “In The Heart Of The Moon”, from which this comes, was released.

So why is it here? Well, again I love its lilting lyrical qualities, how it ebbs and flows. It has the capacity to improve my frame of mind. YouTube doesn't seem to have this track separate from the whole album, but it starts at 4.55. However, I'd encourage you to listen to the whole thing if you don't know it already.

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

Pete's comment on Nick's 71. *Kala*

I found my foot tapping as I listened to this. And by the time it had finished I was drumming on the desk as well, and even humming along! So amazingly, it actually did to me what you say it does to you – changed my frame of mind. Amazing! And this happened before I had read your words.

Mel's comment on Nick's 71. *Kala*

This has some of the attractive qualities of *Salaman*, including much of its lightness and rhythmic intricacy. But its melody and structure sound rather more familiar to my Euro-centric ears. I know this is doing it down unfairly, but when it gets going I rather expect Peter Paul and Mary or someone from a children's TV show of the Seventies to burst in at any moment with a delightfully catchy but lyrically cringeworthy folk song.

Mercifully this doesn't happen, so I'm free to enjoy this, and then the track which follows and the one after that. By which time the hypnotic quality of the music I wasn't originally aware of has unexpectedly got a grip. In a nice way. You were right to recommend the album as a whole.

Kala is bit too jangly for me. But still intriguing.

72. Homafu Wawa, Vieux Farka Touré (2016)

Composer: Touré

Just to prove I haven't changed my spots, I have seen Vieux Fraka Touré twice, once at the Chicago Blues Festival and once about 5 miles from here at Kate Rusby's supposed folk festival – "folk" as we know is about the most meaninglessly flexible term in music. Vieux Farka Touré is Ali's son, and there's some elaborate and uninteresting reason for him being called Vieux. Ali was often pointed to as the intersection where traditional Malian music met the blues. Vieux is rather further down the blues road, but it still has many of the characteristics which attract me to Malian music.

This track is from "Samba", recorded live in 2016. It seems to me to have the excitement of the rock of our early adulthood and yet clearly comes from somewhere other than Leeds University Union in 1968. Live he was terrific. Not that I can dance any more (no change there, I expect you are saying, but the excuse has improved), but if I was going to, this would do it.

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

Pete's comment on Nick's 72. Homafu Wawa

This is everything you say: familiar jazz rock in an unfamiliar wrapping. This piece again got me tapping on my desk. I really like this kind of music.

Mel's comment on Nick's 72. Homafu Wawa

When this started I thought immediately "this is going to be a hoot". Then it got a bit ordinary and I was disappointed.

And then ... the blues kicked in and, as you say, I was listening to something familiar from the late Seventies. But also something exotic and strange. I could imagine a fantastic evening listening to this band live, if only I could image what it's like listening to live music.

Great! I could listen to this a lot.

73. Dipama, Richard Bona (2005)

Composer: Bona

Richard Bona was born in Cameroon, and appears now to move between West Africa and the US. We have a couple of his CDs, and get a lot of enjoyment from them. He is a bass guitarist, generally categorised as playing jazz, and the CDs warrant this.

But I have chosen an atypical track, which sounds as if it owes more to Motown than Miles Davis. But what the hell. I think it is lovely. I haven't a clue what the words mean, again. I tried once and drew a blank. I could try again, but somehow it seems not entirely relevant. I just enjoy the inventive (but unchallenging) mellowness of this track.

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

Pete's comment on Nick's 73. Dipama

OK – this is UTTERLY my kind of music. I love it! Musical, tightly constructed; pretty melody; chord sequences that are fully worked through; clean and simple electric band arrangement;

and nice background singing to provide harmonies and open the whole thing out. I could point you to numerous broad parallels in the work of people as diverse as KT Tunstall, James Taylor, Paul McCartney, Paul Simon, Michael Bublé, Ralph McTell, Ed Sheeran, Janis Ian ... I could go on. This is what I'm always waiting for. If only I could understand the words!

Mel's comment on Nick's 73. *Dipama*

It's usual to find myself saying, "I don't know what to think about this." It sounds rather like a lot of well-recorded music by many artists, including the laid-back very attractive religious tosh by Yusuf Islam – the star formerly known as Cat Steven, ne Steven Demetre Georgiou. And for all we know the lyrics are indeed also fatuous.

There's not much to dislike here. Or remember.

74. *You Can Call Me Al*, Paul Simon (1986)

Composer: Simon

I'm rather taking the piss by including this here I suppose. It was a long way from my first contact with African music – I can remember Miriam Makeba appearing on the telly in the '60s, and listened to the likes of Hugh Masakela and Abdullah Ibrahim from the '70s onward. Doubtless there were others too.

But Ladysmith Black Mambazo's impact was still memorable. There are more striking examples of their contribution to "Graceland", and the controversy about whether Paul Simon was contributing to a broadening of musical taste or exploiting black musicians is not a comfortable one.

But bugger it, I always enjoy this track. The sound is terrific, and this is one of my all-time favourite bits of bass-playing (not just the extraordinary salvo at 3.44): when we saw Paul Simon in Hyde Park, the bassist in question, Bakithi Kumalo, played throughout the set and was terrific (and he did the bit referred to above impeccably). Oh, and by the way I think it's a good song! Irritating video but good song.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uq-gYOrU8bA>

Pete's comment on Nick's 74. *You Can Call Me Al*

I've never before thought so hard about what this song means. I even had to look up other people's interpretations to assure myself I was on the right lines. And yes, I seem to have got it! So thank you for waking me up to something I'd previously taken for granted. And yes, the bass is outstanding. But then, I find most of Paul Simon's music beautifully considered and precise.

As for the criticism he has faced over his approach to African music, I've never been particularly exercised by it. I've always felt that he simply recognised a kind of spiritual connection between the way his own music was developing and the instruments and sounds available from other places. He wanted something more than the establishment rock sound could provide.

Maybe I'm being simplistic and too forgiving. But in my estimation he's been one of the most significant of all contributors to the music world, and I hate feeling he has anything to apologise for!

Mel's comment on Nick's 74. *You Can Call Me Al*

Well one of us must be taking the piss! This is not so much world music as American-genius-for-dominating-the-world-music. I don't think I've wanted to argue with you this much since I couldn't understand yer blues.

First, though, I'm grateful that you have prompted me to find out what the song's title is about (just someone getting Simon and his wife Peggy's names wrong at a party, apparently).

Now, this is not really African, it's great pop, with a fascinating lyric. In fact, it stood out on "Graceland" as one of the most strongly studio-based tracks in contrast to those recorded abroad or compiled from bits of African music.

Part of the lyric does appear to reflect the African tour, although that's because it's a song about alienation, which can result from being in an alien land. Irrespective of that, the lyric does contain some extremely memorable lines. "He sees angels in the architecture/spinning in infinity," is at the same time both strikingly visual and metaphysical, as well as a verbally dextrous and effective bit of alliteration.

I'm not proud of being someone who doesn't really appreciate Ladysmith Black Mambazo even though I own their hit album. I wish I liked them more. But this is not them. This is synthesised music in a real sense, multi-layered, electronically manipulated. To brilliant effect too.

And as if I haven't finished arguing, I never did buy that African musical exploitation idea. Paul Simon exploited just about any experience throughout his career, including the people he worked with. It's what artists do. Knocking him for it, not that you do, is like complaining that Keats sat around reading books or Shakespeare stole his plots. Yes, they all hoped to make a dollar or two, but it wasn't as if that was their only purpose or they could help themselves doing it. It's all about the synthesis, man.

On top of everything, I rather like the quirkily memorable video.

Great choice, Nick. We just don't quite agree why!

75 Sky Blue And Black, Jackson Browne (1993)**Composer:** Browne

This is not the obvious choice for a second Jackson Browne track – that would be *The Pretender* (not as highly rated by me as by many), *In The Shape Of A Heart* or *Fountain Of Sorrow*. It's a close call between the latter and this song, but here goes.

This must I think be about his relationship with his wife, who committed suicide in 1976 – songs such as my previous choice, *Late For The Sky*, and many of the songs on “The Pretender” – are clearly about it. If I am right, this means that he was still gripped by it, and in a strikingly morbid, if not suicidal, way at that. The sound is extraordinary, and there are some very haunting images.

We've seen Jackson Browne live a lot, mostly with various bands, but once solo, where the absence of David Linley's guitar was rather like the Browne equivalent of Neil Sedaka's lack of harmonies (or trousers). These days he tours and records without Lindley. More's the pity, though actually Lindley doesn't play on this track – this is one Mark Goldenberg, more restrained than Lindley (not saying much!).

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZaTo4YFgAIY&list=RDZaTo4YFgAIY&start_radio=1&t=0

Mel's comment on Nick's 75. Sky Blue And Black

What an incredibly beautiful song. No wonder I went straight to Amazon to buy the “Greatest Hits” album when you sent us *Too Late for the Sky* five years ago. This one is even better.

Sadly the CD I bought wouldn't copy well, so it hasn't driven around on a memory stick in my car where I mostly listen to music. Otherwise I might have been choking to *Sky Blue and Black* back since 2015.

This gentle reflective Jackson Browne appeals to me more than the upbeat, confident-sounding musician on songs like *Doctor My Eyes*, *The Pretender* and *Fountain of Sorrow* which display the same song-writing talent without this subtlety in their performance.

Quite apart from the sound of the recording, I've been bowled over listening properly to the lyrics. How about this for summoning up the presence of his dead wife:

You're the colour of the sky
Reflected in each store-front window pane
You're the whispering and the sighing of my tires in the rain
You're the hidden cost and the thing that's lost
In everything I do?

Yes! The words would stand out printed in a book with wide margins, let alone in a crafted piece of music. Then there's the compact simplicity in lines of what oft was thought but ne'er so well express'd, like,

There's a need to be separate and a need to be one
And a struggle neither wins.

I could cite almost every other line in the song too as an example of superior lyric writing.

Another interesting thing for me is the way many of the strong rhymes are neatly underplayed by Browne's performance as he drops his voice at the end of lines. You don't need to punch home stuff this good.

I wish I'd discovered Jackson Browne earlier in life and that I played him more today.

Pete's comment on Nick's 75. Sky Blue And Black

I particularly enjoyed Mel's detailed commentary on Jackson Browne. I must say I was struck myself by the resonance of the apparently simple lyrics – the structure and the neat, satisfying rhymes. How nice to find real poetry in a song, yet a song that is musically satisfying as well. The combination is too rare.

It seems to me one can read the song without knowing about his past, and see it as being about separation rather than death. Perhaps that's just me wanting to lighten the mood. Anyway, part of the skill of good poetry is the universality of the application.

I was never really aware of Jackson Browne in the day, but if I had been I imagine I would have been a big fan. I really like the sound of this kind of combo. Oh, and I like the guitar solo. So there you are: certainly not the articulate detail of Mel's response, but between the two of you, you've already said most of what needs saying.

76. *Down To Zero*, Joan Armatrading (1976)

Composer: Armatrading

Sorry as ever, but yes, I've seen Joan Armatrading, most recently at the Picturedrome in Holmfirth on her valedictory tour. It struck me then that she was a more interesting guitar player than I had previously realised. She is splendid live. In fact I first became aware of her through a performance on "The Old Grey Whistle Test" a very long time ago (might even have been when this came out in 1976) and thought "wow".

This is one of the songs that I think she performed then, and I still think it's as good as anything she's done. She has produced an array of powerful songs, often as here with something of a twist to pop conventions. But this one will more than do as an example.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7147pAjGbpU>

Pete's comment on Nick's 76. *Down To Zero*

I've been aware of Joan Armatrading forever, of course, and always felt I should appreciate her music more. I suppose she's always struck me as being rather disconcertingly "grown up"; her music has a kind of earnestness about it that intimidated me instead of inviting me to like it.

Perhaps that's more a response to the timbre of her voice than anything else. At times like this I suspect that I'm just lazy; it would have taken an effort to understand more of what she was about, and I've never made it.

What you say about her makes sense, Nick, and if I don't experience the same reaction, the fault is in me, not in the stars. At least you've prodded me into listening to this piece afresh, and indeed listening to some of her other songs as well, just to get more of a flavour of what I've been missing all these years. And it's been a welcome reacquaintance.

Mel's comment on Nick's 76. *Down to Zero*

Joan Armatrading won't be appearing in my 100 for the same reason that Elvis Costello (and a few others) won't. I admire them enormously as songwriters and performers. But they have very distinctive styles which I don't really enjoy listening to. They ask more of me than I'm prepared to give.

I've always compared Joan Armatrading with Tracy Chapman, a lesser artist who emerged at roughly the same time, and whose songs are more direct, more accessible and for me more exciting.

This one rather makes the point. *Down to Zero* is vaguely familiar because I think I had her first album back in the Seventies, and I do get it that it's a powerful song about rejection. Yet I can't quite work out what it's saying about rejection. If I listened and worked harder I might be enlightened, and even that's not guaranteed. In fact my reading today of the basic plotline

doesn't seem to coincide with the understanding of YouTube commentators. The result is actually a little frustrating.

It's good stuff and a strong performance. I won't turn it off if it's on. I won't consciously put it on either.

77. *California Dreaming*, Mamas and Papas (1967)

Composers: John Phillips, Michelle Phillips

When we were students I played the Mamas and Papas and the Lovin' Spoonful a lot. These days I find the Lovin' Spoonful pretty easy to ignore – tuneful and congenial (as long as you disregard the excessive interest in under-age girls, but that was pretty common: what cover is Blind Faith's album sold with these days, I wonder). But that's about all, with the exception of *Summer In The City*. But I think there is some substance to the Mamas and Papas, and I still enjoy this song every time I hear it.

The Mamas and Papas of course taught Fleetwood Mac everything they knew about marital complexities – the musical core of the group was John Phillips, whose wife was shagging Denny Docherty after whom Cass Elliott lusted forlornly, and the latter two were the vocal heart of the group. Sounds like the plot of a play (Sartre's *Huis Clos* almost).

The song still seems to me to be evocative of a pretty forlorn version of the American dream. Incidentally, the flute solo is one Bud Shank, a jazz musician and bandleader. I had an LP by him from when I was at school. When the kids gave me a turntable a few years ago, I played it. I thought it was, if not crap, then at least something I would happily never play again. Ah well.

I've seen it suggested that the picture of Bob Dylan on the cover of *Desire* is homage (pronounced, incidentally, to rhyme with porridge) to John Phillips, whose "Wolf King of LA" has a somewhat similar picture of him in a hat. Dunno.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aQ53_yJ7tKw

Pete's comment on Nick's 77. *California Dreamin'*

Well, I could take this as an invitation to become really fired up, so I'll try to rein in my enthusiasm. Clearly all three of us are admirers of this band, and that has to be significant. Very few performers over the years have truly defined a new kind of take on music, but the Mamas and Papas did.

It's easy enough to trace the influences (in fact they did it for us in a song), but they took them in a unique direction. The multiple interweaving harmonies and chanted background lines are matchless. As far as I'm concerned, this band is quite simply among the most significant acts to emerge in my lifetime.

Curiously, although they influenced much subsequent music, it's not that easy to point to any specific song and say, "There's a lot of Mamas and Papas in that." Their subsequent influence has been more subtle than that: a harmony line here, a bit of counterpoint there. But as you say, Nick, personal chaos in their lives was certainly echoed later in other acts.

This song is a particularly good example because it combines the fantastic attack of the music itself with some wonderfully evoked images. Is it about the American dream? Maybe, or maybe it's simpler than that. Here again, we're looking at something that can be read in different ways, which is part of its strength.

People seldom seem to talk in reverent tones about John Phillips, but when I listen to something like this, I find myself thinking they should. He was a true original, and it's a shame that he didn't achieve more or gain wider recognition. Not that the group could have succeeded without the other elements that you mention – Cass, Denny and even the diaphanous Michelle.

What good fortune that they all came together eventually. For a while *California Dreamin'* did become a reality.

Mel's comment on Nick's 77. *California Dreamin'*

Say no more!

I only resisted choosing this myself in favour of *Monday Monday* because I'm a snob and *California Dreamin'* has been featured for years in TV ads, and mistakenly presented *ad infinitum* as part of a yearning for America itself.

It's haunting and beautiful. Right from the opening guitar, through the stunning vocal harmonies, and the democratic distribution of the words between the four of them, to the achingly desolate flute. All perfectly matched to the lyric. Unsurpassed pop.

I feel ashamed for not picking it before you. But I do know there's no "g" in "Dreamin'".

As for the also gee-less Lovin' Spoonful: they're not completely forgotten ...

*Nick's Really Cheerful Choices***Pete's comment on Nick's Selection 20, 78-80**

As so often, your latest tracks have either reminded me of something I thought I knew but didn't, or they introduced me to something I definitely didn't know. One of these three was familiar from frequent repetition on the radio, one was familiar only for its performer, and of the third I knew nothing – either performer or song. Which is what this is all about.

And they are all also very strong on lyrics – poetic gems of their kind.

78. Carmelita, Warren Zevon (1976)

Composer: Zevon

I got onto this song after Jackson Browne performed it the last time we saw him. Warren Zevon is one of the real oddballs, and it's a shame that *Werewolves Of London* is about the only song by him which gets any airplay. He was by all accounts "difficult" to work with, meaning, I think, that he was out of his skull quite a lot of the time. Be that as it may, he put out some extraordinary stuff.

So why this song? Well, I think the contrast between the "Mexican" music (nicely done, but sounds like it's showing how Marty Robbins' *El Paso* should have been performed) and the grimness of the subject matter is very effective.

I suppose there are two popular stereotypes of Mexicans – the villainous drug-dealer-cum-gangster and the jovial peasant who is poor but loves the land. So this is something of an antidote to that. When I first went to the States in 1974, blacks in subordinate Rolex were invisible. By the time I went back in 1994 or 95, they had been superseded by Hispanics (ironically so named after the colonial power who oppressed them).

The song was first recorded by one Murray McLauchlan in 1972, but the date I've given is for Zevon's own recording. The contrast is not uninteresting – McLauchlan's version sounds more C&W than Mexican, and the vocal is less dissolute.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xeboOI8wXN4>

Pete's comment on Nick's 78. Carmelita

Well, I'm sorry to say I've never come across Warren Zevon until now – but I immediately liked the tuneful, accessible quasi-Hispanic accompaniment from the kind of ensemble I always enjoy, and I also appreciated his droll delivery. Clearly the musicality of the piece forms a stark contrast to the bleak message of the lyrics ... but then, the message is deftly expressed, reminding us that art elevates the mundane, etc etc.

I see that various other singers have also recorded this, including Linda Ronstadt. How I managed to miss him all these years I don't know. The bleakness of this song might put me off repeated listening, but he does what he sets out to do very effectively.

Mel's comment on Nick's 78. Carmelita

Oh Nick, is there anything we can do to cheer you up? You shouldn't be listening to this stuff. It depressed me just to think that you might be enjoying it!

OK, it's a rather good song about heroin addiction. But I'm assuming it's not a subject which impinges directly on our lives too much. So how can it appeal to you?

Yet as I'm writing I realise it's also a rather good song about someone in anguish desperately clinging to the person they love.

Fair enough. But wow.

79. *Cold Kisses*, Richard Thompson (1996)

Composer: Thompson

One of the things that I find remarkable about Richard Thompson is that he writes songs which I take it are fiction – maybe I mean I hope they are. We know he’s a pretty morose character, though that is not remotely how he comes across in performance. But the personae in the songs are clearly a fiction sometimes, and I rather hope that is the case here.

That said, it would of course not have any effect if it didn’t strike chords of some sort. And I like the way it works as a sort of drama. Thompson has written some terrific narrative songs, but this is more like a scene from a film or play. It is very evocative of a mood, and seems to me to have more emotional complexity than the average song (not, it has to be said, that the bar is generally set very high). I still probably listen to more Richard Thompson than is consistent with a healthy diet. Ah well.

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

Pete’s comment on Nick’s 79. *Cold Kisses*

What a clever little story – and so wittily told. On first hearing I was actually laughing out loud at a couple of points – notably where he tells us he was buried in a novel when she came back. I love the way he uses basic narration techniques in a way that seems simple, but is actually cleverly worked out and skilful.

As you say, he vividly evokes the scene and the impulse that drove it. The theme reminds me of one of my own song choices, *I Remember Yesterday* by Janis Ian: reflections on other relationships before “I” came along.

I don’t know much of Richard Thompson’s work, but I always enjoy it when I hear it, and it’s impressive that he was still writing material like this into the 1990s. You’ve done a good job of keeping him in front of me over the years.

Mel’s comment on Nick’s 79. *Cold Kisses*

After *Carmelita* I dreaded what I would hear from Richard Thompson. And I wasn’t disappointed. Or naturally I was. If you haven’t slit your wrists after number 78 this should do it.

God this is so awful. Toe-curling and gut-wrenching at the same time. I don’t think I’ve heard Richard Thompson more dreadful or more brilliant. It’s a song which makes me feel the world is a better place for its being there. But just don’t make me listen to it.

The surface things are fine to talk about. Wonderful performance – riveting delivery, sombre, matter-of-fact, dramatic but not in the least melodramatic. Nice little tune that moves along well to counterpoint the aching truths of the lyric. But what is this man going through to write it?

I honestly didn’t know that Thompson could be this good/bad. What an eye opener.

And Pete, have we been listening to different songs?!

80. *Romeo and Juliet*, Dire Straits (1981)

Composer: Knopfler

Dire Straits have to be there, and my intention had been to go for *Sultans Of Swing*, but then I changed my mind.

Again, I like the evocation of atmosphere. If Wikipedia is to be believed, the song was written after Knopfler had been binned by an innamorata. If so, one has to suppose that the real circumstances have undergone a pretty dramatic facelift, but it still has the appropriate emotional range and impact. And happily this was still at the stage when Dire Straits performed tight songs tightly, before they decided to go off on great rambling digressions which made a 4-minute song last about four times as long.

Knopfler played a National resonator guitar, hence the wonderful sound. The drummer was still Pick Withers at this stage. He is a bit of a curiosity – it's rather obtrusive, but I can't help admiring it for all that. And the keyboards are apparently Roy Bittan of the E Street Band.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iJmER493F4U>

Mel's comment on Nick's 80. *Romeo And Juliet*

I'm delighted that you've chosen a Dire Straits song. I didn't know you liked them. But I can now see why that is: we're attracted by rather different things about them. In which connection, if the tracks which you believe to be four times longer than they need to be include *Telegraph Road* and *Brothers In Arms* you are simply mistaken, and I want you to retract! They are both ineffable.

On the other hand, it's unlikely that you would pick a Dire Straits track that I don't like to some degree. It took me a while over the years to warm to this one because, though it's based on a drama, the drama is deliberately underplayed lyrically and musically. Now I realise this is precisely the strength of *Romeo and Juliet*.

The playing is obviously much more subtle than on *Sultans Of Swing*, which is also marvellous of course. So it's absorbing in a completely different way. And the track highlights both Mark Knopfler's impressive song-writing range and an important stage in his extraordinary and rapid progression from show-off guitarist, through writer of tight, personal, reflective songs like this, to superstar composer of stadium-filling anthems with grand themes.

While this thought was always at the back of my mind, listening closely to *Romeo And Juliet* tonight confirms for me just how sensitive he could be. It's amazing that banal-sounding lines like "Now you just say, Oh, Romeo, Yeah you know I used to have a scene with him" can be so powerful. It's good to be nudged to this appreciation.

Another entirely random thought about the earlier songs is just how often Knopfler talks about things, women and relationships being "dirty". It crops up here too. I've often wondered what his hang-up was. It's almost as if he's grappling with misogamy, though I've never heard that said.

However, in the context of the depressing themes of your other two songs here, I have to assume you were attracted to this one largely because of the theme of hopelessly doomed love. Which I have to admit is pretty well done.

But for god's sake, Nick, put on some Bonzo Dog or Rutles or something!

Pete's comment on Nick's 80. *Romeo And Juliet*

Well. There was I thinking I knew this song quite well ... but I didn't. I knew the "plot"; I knew what it was about; but I'd never actually listened to it carefully from start to finish. Again, it's a poetic little piece in which apparently throw-away lines add up to something more than the sum of its parts.

It came over to me this time as a surprisingly anguished love song – something that simply hadn't penetrated my consciousness before. Oh, and at times the overall effect (and Knopfler's vocal delivery, of course) reminded me of Bob Dylan – something else that had never struck me before.

Thank you for making me pay attention! I've enjoyed reaping the rewards.

*Nick's Reasons to Be Cheerful Parts 81-83***81. *She's Not There*, Zombies (1964)****Composer:** Argent

I've rather been fighting shy of choosing a Zombies track because there are too many candidates for inclusion and because they represent a rather significant element in our shared experience. This is of course about the one track which still gets played and would be identified by the average person in the street. That is a modest contributor to my decision to include it.

For all its exposure, it still doesn't sound hackneyed to me. In all honesty, I'd have to make something of an exception to that statement in the case of the keyboard solo, which isn't exactly Rod Argent's finest hour, but so what? Colin Blunstone had (and has) a remarkable voice, and the band were always excellent. But then neither of you need to be told that or anything else about it.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=it68QbUWVPM>

Pete's comment on Nick's 81. *She's Not There*

I was about to start by saying I couldn't think why nobody had chosen this track until now. Then I realised Mel had already pointed out that he did so six years ago! Basically, I think we would all like to lay claim to it. Perhaps we should take it as read that the song is checked by default – a bit like the Bible and Shakespeare at the end of "Desert Island Discs".

It's sublime, and as you've hinted in your description, little more needs to be said about it. What a privilege to have been around (and receptive) when music like this was being injected into the world.

But perhaps I'll take issue with you, Nick, over your lack of enthusiasm for Rod Argent's instrumental break. I've always liked it. It's fairly complex, and must have demanded considerable dexterity. That doesn't make it great, of course, and I think I know why you question it; but I suppose I've come to accept it by virtue of constant repetition. If it were played any differently now, I would feel somehow cheated.

Anyway, I've always been impressed that such an extraordinary piece could be created by such a young band. I love the explosive urgency, the neat switches from major to minor and back, and the uniquely plaintive voice of Colin Blunstone: all combined in a tight and resonant blast of anguish. Truly stunning.

Mel's comment on Nick's 81. *She's Not There*

I had to look up my advocacy for this track in "Mel's Selection #33" back in 2015, just in case I disagreed with myself. And I don't even disagree with you, Nick. Spot on in every respect, and we can't have any regrets for the repetition/overlap of choices.

It remains as striking as it ever was 57 years ago. My fears that its use in a ghastly perfume ad would make it pall have proved unfounded. Sue and I, whenever we hear it, still go "Ahh" in unison, inadvertently quoting another great Zombies song.

In 1964 pop music was still regarded as an entirely disposable commodity. So isn't this extraordinary in so many ways?

82. *Ain't No Sunshine When She's Gone*, Bill Withers (1971)

Composer: Withers

You may recall that I have already chosen the obvious Bill Withers track, and having a second in a mere 100 choices may seem to be over-egging it, but I find myself drawn to it. The song is, at least superficially, as simple as they come, the loneliness and wretchedness simply being allowed to speak for themselves – even the repetition seems to me to work in context.

The backing has an unusual haunting feel to it, maybe rather surprisingly given that the bassist is Duck Dunn and the drummer Al Jackson Jr of Booker T and the MGs, and Booker T did the string arrangement. The guitarist is someone called Stephen Stills.

I think one of the things I like about it is the spareness of the lyrics, bass and drums contrasted with the lushness of the strings. The song is only just over 2 minutes, which is pretty stingy by 1971, but it says what it's got to say and then stops. There are lots of other versions, but, as another song says, "other guys imitate us/But the original is still the greatus".

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

Pete's comment on Nick's 82. *Ain't No Sunshine When She's Gone*

Thank you, Nick, for filling me in on the performers who made this deceptively simple piece as memorable as it is. I've always liked it when I've heard it, though it's never occurred to me to seek it out. Yes, lush strings and economical backing; and yes, a haunting feel throughout.

The point of it is simple and clear, much as is the case with the Zombies' track (although in a very different mood). It's hard to think of any song conveying its core sentiment better, or any version doing it more effectively. I've really enjoyed giving it closer scrutiny (I've just played it three times).

As an aside, I found that listening to it repeatedly put me in mind of one of my own selections from a long time back, *Stop* by Sam Brown. That song is quite different: anguished, where Bill Withers' song is reflective. But the orchestration put me in mind of it, especially those fulsome minor-key chords played by the strings. For the record, *Stop* is one of my candidates for my top eight (if there is such a thing).

Mel's comment on Nick's 82. *Ain't No Sunshine When She's Gone*

It was somewhat surprising to see this in your collection, not because it's another Bill Withers song, but because it's something so familiar from someone whose music I don't know anything about.

Ain't No Sunshine is arguably the best thing in "Notting Hill", though, where it's played rather affectingly against a backdrop of changing seasons in the eponymous market. Other than that I've never given it a thought. The fact that it stood out so strongly for me in the Richard Curtis submasterpiece is either a tribute to its musical qualities or a reflection of the lack of any other interest in the film. It's never occurred to me to decide which, but it's definitely not because I cared about the characters.

I can only say that it's very nice, and I have no reason to dislike it or disbelieve your case for choosing it!

83. *High Flyin' Bird*, Richie Havens (1966 or 1967, depending on who you believe) **Composer: Wheeler**

People who remind people about the wonders of Woodstock have only themselves to blame if it comes back to bite them in the bum (no names, no pack drill). Richie Havens was one

of the originals: he managed to make every song he did distinctive, even when he was covering well trodden ground as here.

He played Guild guitars (with an open tuning, mostly stopped with his thumb) throughout his career: it's just as well there isn't a National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Guitars, because he certainly gave them a caning.

I think what draws me to his music is the combination of manic driven rhythm and a voice which sounds like he's got some pretty tough mileage on the clock. Again, there's a very jazz-inflected backing. Harvey Brooks, the bass player, was on *Highway 61 Revisited*, and played bass on some tracks of the (bassless) Doors' "The Soft Parade".

This is the first track on "Mixed Bag", which I think is a pretty amazing album. How it passed us by when we were students I don't know, whereas of course we did get to hear *Eleanor Rigby* and maybe *Just Like A Woman*. *High Flyin' Bird* has of course been round the houses: it was originally sung by Judy Henske (I've got it on an Elektra compilation) and subsequently by many others including of course Jefferson Airplane.

The songwriter, Billy Edd Wheeler, was not even a name to me until now, but he wrote quite a lot of songs that I've heard of, most of which I am happy to forget. That must prove something. Or nothing.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sUydgjBM4VY>

Mel's comment on Nick's 83. *High Flyin' Bird*

For a moment, Nick, it seemed possible you were going to say you saw Richie Havens at Woodstock. Anyway I think you'll find a very creditable performance of this song is in the "Woodstock" documentary – which incidentally is probably my favourite film. You should both take another look at it.

But I have very mixed feelings about this track. My favourite West Coast band by far is Jefferson Airplane, so what's Richie Havens doing singing one of "their" songs? On the other hand this is decidedly the better version.

This is blues, isn't it? So what's all this jazz? And what a marvellous backing.

Richie Havens sounds and looks like a very clever guitarist. Sadly his style tends (judging by only a few hits, admittedly) to make his songs all sound a bit similar to the uninitiated like me. So his repertoire is a tiny bit boring perhaps.

But this is a sensational vocal performance of a lyrically interesting song. I like it a lot.

Pete's comment on Nick's 83. *High Flyin' Bird*

Well, I'd never heard this before, and it's really haunting. You'd probably expect the next comment from me – that I'm fascinated by the way there are several instances in the accompaniment where the chord jumps fleetingly from minor to parallel major and back in the same bar. It's very unsettling, and also rather intriguing.

The urgency of the percussion is fantastic, as is Havens' voice (nicely summed up in your description). And there's some busy and intricate guitar work going on here too. I knew Richie Havens' name back in the day, but that's about all I did know. Intriguing to discover what he actually got up to all these years later.

84. *Respect*, Aretha Franklin (1967)**Composer:** Redding

Aretha Franklin really has to be there, but the choice of track is quite problematic – she seems to me often to be better than her material. But this one makes it. The original version is of course by Otis Redding (1965). But, for all its qualities, it's really a rather irksome song – a man having a whinge about having to work for a living and demanding respect from a woman.

Give it to a woman, and one who can sing like this, and it becomes a very different kettle of fish, and duly became a rallying call for feminists.

Like many soul singers, Aretha started in gospel and dipped in and out of it throughout her career. Her singing always shows her roots, but the feistiness is pretty far removed from it here. The “sock it to me” stuff is tiresomely dated, but the Muscle Shoals Rhythm Section are as terrific as ever. The sax solo is King Curtis and the pianist is of course Aretha Franklin.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wNwUQJzPY2o>

Mel's comment on Nick's 84. *Respect*

I was somewhat surprised when Aretha Franklin died, not because I'd attributed the qualities of immortality to her but because the media made it sound as if we'd just lost Lennon or Presley. She was a soul singer, so I obviously wasn't going to understand. But the lavish praise for her vocal style showed that I was missing something very substantial indeed.

And still am.

Rationally, I am perfectly prepared to accept she was the best in her area of artistic endeavour. And it's no wonder that *Respect* has become a feminist “anthem”. Well, one was needed and Dolly Parton wasn't going to provide it.

But let's face it, this track is not without its clichés. The churchy responses of the backing group and the awful “socket to me's”, which I believe were later humiliated with relish by “Rowan and Martin's Laugh In”, are just a little grating even in a great performance like this.

Don't get me wrong, I wouldn't dare criticise this track in public! Then again, I don't often listen to it in private.

Good choice, but not one of mine.

Pete's comment on Nick's 84. *Respect*

Unfortunately (because it sounds so trite) my reaction to this track falls somewhere between Mel's and Nick's. Yes, it's a great example of the work of a woman soul singer, dating right back to the earliest days of this kind of music; and yes, it's beautifully executed. And I like Nick's comment that coming from a woman, the words have so much more meaning than they did in Otis Redding's original. Moreover, I don't think Nick needed to apologise for the “sock it to me” style of the arrangement, which was novel back in the day, and is well executed.

But I agree with you, Mel, that she was a soul singer, not a goddess. There's a thread in musical appreciation that tends to revere singers who are “soulful” in the broader meaning of the word – as if their ability to deliver emotion in a song somehow elevates them above other types of performer. I'm not saying this was Nick's view; I'm just agreeing that one's reaction to them should be proportionate.

If I'd chosen a track by Aretha Franklin, I would probably have gone for the obvious and picked *I Say A Little Prayer*. I've heard it so often that it's almost ceased to have an independent existence (independent of my brain, I mean), but it's a clever song, nicely orchestrated and “contained”, and would get my vote over *Respect*.

85. *Loan Me A Dime*, Boz Scaggs (1969)

Composer: Robinson

The reason for choosing this is not the headline name. At his best (e.g. on “Some Change”, 1994), Boz Scaggs is very good, but his output is ... erratic might be a way of putting it.

This is fairly early stuff, after he left the Steve Miller Band. He got a contract with Atlantic Records and recorded this with the Muscle Shoals Rhythm Section (again) and the extraordinary Duane Allman on slide guitar (apparently Scaggs often plays all the instruments on his recordings, but not here!).

This predates the Allman Brothers and Derek and the Dominoes, so this is the young Duane learning to strut his stuff. Wikipedia says that the original recording was a 40 minute jam, cut down to a mere 12 minutes or so. I’m not sure I’m up for 40 minutes of it – a bit too late ’60s maybe – but even if you don’t like it, at least you get value for money out of it.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Vv60Dz9hUPo>

Mel’s comment on Nick’s 85. *Loan Me A Dime*

Ah, yer blues. Not knowing the musicians, without the capacity to fully appreciate the musicianship, with a song used more for improvisation than tune, with a very limited lyric to engage with, and with no live performance to relate it to, I initially felt a little out of my depth here.

I know I chose *Going Home* by Ten Years After, but that was because it comes from my favourite film. As blues isn’t/aren’t generally my thing, I wasn’t expecting much from this. But the jam session does actually generate enough energy, diversity and development to make the marathon pretty engaging.

The concentration element did prove a small challenge for me. I must have drifted off because at one point I suddenly realised I’d heard advertising in the middle of the performance, and YouTube had transitioned to its next track, which was a live version of the same thing, another 15 minutes long!

So suddenly I had a reference point against which to assess your selection. And the 13-minute cut-down jam is distinctly better to my ear than the live one – less brassy, less showy. Even so, I’m pleased to have listened to both and to have experienced the prowess of the previously undiscovered musicians you’ve cited. Good stuff.

Pete’s comment on Nick’s 85. *Loan Me A Dime*

What surprised me about this track was that twelve minutes didn’t seem too long! The musicians had something to offer right to the end, and the limited contribution of Boz Scaggs himself wasn’t a drawback. He sings his bit soulfully enough, but as Nick points out, it’s the totality of this that makes it interesting, and the nice solid backing that is actually something more.

This kind of track leaves me wondering about my own musical realm. If I’d wanted to pick something like this, would I have known about this in order to pick it? (No.) Would I have wanted to pick it? (Very probably not.) Do I confine my own musical interests too narrowly? (Probably.) I enjoyed this enormously, yet would I rush to listen to it again? Perhaps not.

86. *Layla*, Derek and the Dominoes (1970)

Composer: Clapton

And so to another Duane Allman track. It is normally associated of course with Eric Clapton, not least because it is to do with the great esteem in which he held Mrs Harrison, who of course appears here as Layla. I've seen Clapton perform it, playing variously lead guitar and slide: the story has it that it was Duane Allman at this time who taught him to play slide (one suspects that the word "properly" should be added there).

The cognoscenti always curl their lips at the single version, and go for the LP version, which ends with the protracted piano section and culminates in the twittering of a budgie or some such. I've gone for this version, but I can't really say that I find the piano bit (credited to Jim Gordon, the drummer rather than the keyboard player Bobby Whitlock) particularly satisfying or relevant.

I've dithered about whether to include this at all. It gets played so often that it is rather autopilotish. But it would be an oddity not to have Clapton – the only person inducted into the Rock'n'Roll Hall of Fame three times – in the list somewhere. On balance this seems the one to go for.

We've probably seen Clapton perform more than we've seen anyone else. Varying experiences, but at his best he's been fantastic.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TngViNw2pOo>

Mel's comment on Nick's 86. *Layla*

I've always been slightly ambivalent about this. On the one hand it's a big pop hit, with all the requisite qualities. A great guitar riff to draw you in. Hypnotic repetition of the title. Key changes in all the right places. Changes in tempo. The kitchen sink. So isn't it just a little bit contrived?

On the other hand, it's utterly compelling. Even if you're an unmusical me, you know you're listening to a rather extraordinary musical performance. And every time I hear the opening notes, there's a bolt of recognition and exhilaration. So what's so bad about being transported by superb pop?

I'm less familiar with this album version, which has a little more interest towards the end than the single. Or does this lengthy new interest overstay its welcome somewhat, suggesting that the single is still the definitive?

No: what absurd quibbles. This is great rock and roll. Why can't I just slump back, close my eyes and be glad to have been part of the generation that knew this joy first?

Pete's comment on Nick's 86. *Layla*

Wonderful. Nick and Mel have summed up the virtues of this track already, so I'm left with little to add. Yes, classic guitar riffs, driving urgency, unexpected key changes. One extra comment I might make is to underline the overall strangeness of the melody, which was a repeating feature of the music with which Clapton and friends seemed to excel in several of their different guises. Try humming it. You can't!

Regarding the second instrumental half, I've always liked it, and felt it definitely adds something to the whole. Unlike the first half, it's melodically straightforward (you *can* hum it if you really want to). To me it's the calm after the storm – a kind of exultation after the frenzy of the first half, with a nice middle eight section that gets repeated several times.

In a way, there are two *Laylas* – the one consisting of just the first half, which clearly stands perfectly well on its own; and the entire piece, taking in both parts. I like each of them.

87. *Black Muddy River*, Norma Waterson (1996)

Composer: Garcia

This is the first track on a CD imaginatively called “Norma Waterson”, which I had the good taste to buy when it came out. The CD is not entirely even, but I really like it. This is my favourite track.

Norma Waterson is one of a tribe of Watersons who have had an impact on folk (or “folk”) music. She was married to Martin Carthy, who has had a similar impact, most obviously in terms of guitar playing, and their daughter Eliza carries on the tradition (with results which I find rather uneven). The CD features Martin and Eliza, plus the great Danny Thompson on bass and Richard Thompson on guitar. The drummer is one Roger Swallow, otherwise of the Albion Band. So it’s something of a Who’s Who of English folkies.

In accordance with the dogma of dyed-in-the-wool traditionalists, this is a song by Jerry Garcia. The Dead’s version of it is slower and inevitably more in keeping with what I suppose we have learnt to call “Americana”, but the two versions are not dissimilar in feel.

I think it’s a very good song, full of telling images evoking somewhat ambiguous reflections on ageing. But the whole thing comes together – simple melody, haunting voice, wonderful bass and some delightful twiddles from Thompson, R.

Of course we saw her, though only since we moved up here. Excellent. I light a metaphorical atheist-friendly candle to her.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=svpcW1s7JV4>

Pete’s comment on Nick’s 87. *Black Muddy River*

What a nice surprise! I came to this with an unforgivable prejudice against Norma Waterson: in my mind, she was a rather old performer who was locked into the “worthy” end of English folk rock, with an emphasis on traditional “olde Englishe” folk. I’ve never been able to buy into that, so I assumed I wouldn’t like this.

More fool me. This is beautifully melodic, with fabulous multi-part harmonies from Eliza Carthy *et al.* Mel, you made all my points for me, so I can’t do much more than repeat them. What we have here is a solid, tight folk rock ensemble with a strong bass, nice guitar breaks from Richard Thompson, and a great song by Jerry Garcia and Robert Hunter of Grateful Dead. The whole thing is delightful. I’m not sure that it has converted me to Norma Waterson’s voice or to the rest of her output; but this is a gem.

And I can’t resist drawing a parallel with Kate and Anna McGarrigle. Frankly, the multi-part harmonies and overall arrangement of this piece are massively evocative of many of the McGarrigles’ songs. And they got there first; this piece was recorded long after the classic McGarrigle work. Mel, I wish you could overcome your dislike of them and enjoy some wonderful music from performers who sound surprisingly and indisputably like this.

Mel’s comment on Nick’s 87. *Black Muddy River*

I’m still getting over the fact that I have spent my life overlooking the Grateful Dead, presumably because I heard something atrocious by them in 1969. Such is prejudice.

Black Muddy River is an extremely good song as you say. And not at all what I expected from Garcia. While I have been aware enough of Marty Carthy to have admired him over the years, Norma Waterson has escaped me till now. And it’s my loss.

As well as the fine lyrics and the tune, this track has everything. A lovely voice, super harmonies, instrumentation elaborate enough to surprise and engage (not to mention the pleasure of hearing Richard Thompson without the necessity for him to depress me), all performed by a bunch of folkies who avoid damning themselves with the common folk clichés. Tremendous.

When I let YouTube play on I discovered Norma was as capable of folk trivia as the next authentic artiste, but also inventive enough to apply her luscious voice to other more interesting songs. Shame I had to wait for her to die before noticing, but thanks for the prompt.

Oh, and it is definitely an improvement on the original.