

Pete's Top 100 Tracks

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1. *Magic Moments*, by Perry Como (1958)
2. *Torn*, by Natalie Imbruglia (1997)
3. *Dancing In The Street*, by Martha and the Vandellas (1964)
4. *Let Me Down Easy* by Ralph McTell (1974)
5. *Don't Dream It's Over* By Neil Finn (1986)
6. *Apple Cider Re-Constitution*, by Al Stewart (1975)
7. *Da Do Ron Ron*, by The Crystals (1963)
8. *The Third Man Theme* (or *The Harry Lime Theme*), by Anton Karas (1949)
9. *If I fell*, by the Beatles (1964)
10. *Crazy Dreams*, by Paul Brady (1979)
11. *I Remember You*, by Frank Ifield (1962)
12. *In Dreams*, by Roy Orbison (1963)
13. *24 Hours From Tulsa*, by Gene Pitney (1963)
14. *I'll Never Get Over You*, by Johnny Kidd and the Pirates (1963)
15. *In My Mind a Miracle*, by The Zombies (2004)
16. *America*, by Simon and Garfunkel (1967)
17. *Kiss Me*, by Sixpence None The Richer (1998)
18. *Hold Me*, by PJ Proby (1964)
19. *Oliver's Army*, by Elvis Costello and the Attractions (1979)
20. *Grace Kelly*, by Mika (2007)
21. *In Your Quiet Place*, by Gary Burton and Keith Jarrett (1971)
22. *Hi-Di-Ho*, by Blood Sweat & Tears (1970)
23. *The Girl From Ipanema*, by Astrud Gilberto (1964)
24. *Heart Like A Wheel*, by Kate and Anna McGarrigle (1975)
25. *Brando*, by Dory Previn (1974)
26. *A Whiter Shade Of Pale*, by Procol Harum (1967)
27. *Somethin' Stupid*, by Frank and Nancy Sinatra (1967)
28. *World Without Love*, by Peter and Gordon (1964)
29. *Keep On Running*, by The Spencer Davis Group (1965)
30. *While My Guitar Gently Weeps*, by the Beatles (1968)
31. *If This Be The Last Time*, by Oasis (1984)
32. *Senior Citizens*, by Pete Atkin (1973)
33. *Mr Blue Sky*, by Electric Light Orchestra (1977)
34. *Eternal Flame*, by the Bangles (1989)
35. *Take My Breath Away*, by Berlin (1989)
36. *Stop*, by Sam Brown (1988)
37. *Song of Long Ago*, by Carole King (1971)
38. *The Incidentals*, by Alisha's Attic (1998)
39. *She Makes My Day*, by Robert Palmer (1988)
40. *The Living Years*, by Mike and the Mechanics (1988)
41. *True Love*, by Bing Crosby and Grace Kelly (1956)
42. *Good Vibrations*, by The Beach Boys (1966)
43. *My Life*, by Billy Joel (1978)
44. *Monday, Monday*, by the Mamas and the Papas (1966)
45. *Goodbye To Love*, The Carpenters (1972)

46. *Waterloo*, by ABBA (1974)
47. *James Bond Theme*, by John Barry Orchestra (or ensemble) (1962)
48. *You Only Live Twice*, by Nancy Sinatra (1967)
49. *We Have All The Time In The World*, by Louis Armstrong (1969)
50. *Please Please Me*, by the Beatles (1963)
51. *Eleanor Rigby*, by the Beatles (1966)
52. *She's Leaving Home* by the Beatles (1967)
53. *From A Distance*, by Tilda Swinton and ensemble (1990)
54. *Chancer Theme*, by Jan Hammer (1990)
55. *Stayin' Alive*, by The Bee Gees (1977)
56. *You're No Good*, by Linda Ronstadt (1975)
57. *Lonely Boy*, by Andrew Gold (1977)
58. *Love Over And Over*, by Kate and Anna McGarrigle (1982)
59. *Hello Mary Lou*, by Ricky Nelson (1961)
60. *Things*, by Bobby Darin (1962)
61. *Hey Baby*, by Bruce Channel (1961)
62. *Sealed With A Kiss*, by Brian Hyland (1962)
63. *Under Pressure*, by Queen and David Bowie (1981)
64. *Slow Train*, by Flanders and Swann (1963)
65. *I Like It*, by Gerry and the Pacemakers (1963)
66. *You're My World*, by Cilla Black (1964)
67. *This Is Love*, by George Harrison (1988)
68. *Better Things*, by Ray Davies and Bruce Springsteen (2010)
69. *Karma Chameleon*, by Culture Club (1983)
70. *Chan*, by the Buena Vista Social Club (1997)
71. *Other Side Of The World*, by KT Tunstall (2005)
72. *Shine*, by Take That (2007)
73. *I Remember Yesterday*, by Janis Ian (1981)
74. *Free Ride*, by Marshall Hain (1978)
75. *Carey*, by Joni Mitchell (1971)
76. *Look Through Any Window*, by the Hollies (1965)
77. *The Things We Do for Love*, by 10cc (1976)
78. *This Will Be Our Last Song Together*, by Neil Sedaka (1973)
79. *I Want To Hold Your Hand*, by the Beatles (1963)
80. *We Can Work It Out*, by the Beatles (1965)
81. *Day Tripper*, by the Beatles (1965)
82. *Apache*, by The Shadows (1960)
83. *Theme From Les Aventuriers*, by François de Roubaix (1967)
84. *Miss Me In The Morning*, by Mike D'Abo (1971)
85. *This Will be Our Year*, by the Zombies (1968)
86. *You're A Lady*, by Peter Skellern (1972)
87. *That's Life*, by the Monalisa Twins (2017)
88. *Here Comes The Sun*, by the Beatles (1969)
89. *Hey Jude*, by the Beatles (1968)
90. *Beyond My Wildest Dreams*, by Mark Knopfler and Emmylou Harris (2006)
91. *Stella By Artois*, by Kate & Anna McGarrigle (1978)
92. *The Closest Thing to Crazy*, by Katie Melua (2003)
93. *Don't Know Why*, by Norah Jones (2002)
94. *Sweet Baby James*, by James Taylor (1970)
95. *Don't Talk to Him*, by Cliff Richard (1963)

- 96. *I Know Where I'm Going*, by Allan Gray (1945)
- 97. *The Last Time*, by The Rolling Stones (1965)
- 98. *Canço del Lladre*, by Helen Swansbourne (2023)
- 99. *All You Need Is Love*, by The Beatles (1967)
- 100. *A Day In The Life*, by The Beatles (1967)

Pete's Selection 1: 1-3

First sent 20.1.2015

To get the ball rolling, below is my initial list of three. As you can see, it's very random and not a little provocative (I suspect some items will have both of you foaming at the mouth). Incidentally, my comments are barely half the length that I'm saying we should allow. I might get more verbose as we go along!

1. Magic Moments, by Perry Como (1958)

Composer: Burt Bacharach and Hal David
Single

This embodies the spirit of the fifties for me. Innocent, retro, with a beguiling hint of romance. It sums up sunny summer days – even walking in line to the cricket ground in the park that my prep school used (I hated the whole experience, but it was bound up in a glowing childhood full of positives). Who'd have thought Bacharach and David would progress from this ditty to the sophistication of their later output?

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9ND3oghPL5M&feature=kp>

Mel's comment on Pete's 1. *Magic Moments*

It seems churlish to say anything but nice things about such songs of lyrical and musical innocence. I don't have any precise memories to replicate your summer cricketing, Pete. I have no idea where or how I first heard it. It's always been there and I share a sense that this is somehow emblematic of childhood. And I'd forgotten Bacharach and David wrote it.

Fascinating. But I do have to raise questions about the entirely alien culture that this type of US pop presented to us (touch downs and Halloween hops – what on earth were they when I was 12?). I can't prove that this song led to a lifetime of disorientation and suspicion of the States, but I think in a tiny way it contributed.

Nick's comment on Pete's 1. *Magic Moments*

Any song that contains the line "The day that the floor fell out of the car when I put the clutch down" obviously has a lot to commend it, though for me Perry Como is something of a rentavoice singer. I'd not ever noticed this was Bacharach and David, and you're right, Pete, that it's intriguing to think of this in the light of their subsequent successes.

CLICK TO RETURN TO START OF DOCUMENT

2. *Torn*, by Natalie Imbruglia (1997)

Composer: Anne Preven, Scott Cutler and Phil Thornalley
Single

Fantastic attack in the chords of every bar: an inspired bit of arrangement. Also some unexpected and jazzy seventh chords. And to be fair, sung with a suitably indignant tone that squeezes the maximum out of the words, and varies from verse to verse, rather than just repeating the same thing every time. Truly a marvel of production and overall “concept”, and a stunning mainstream pop record.

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VV1XWJN3nJo>

Mel's comment on Pete's 2. *Torn*

I can only thank you Pete for introducing me to this superior pop song. Everything you say about it sounds right, though I have to trust your musical exposition. I have never been aware of hearing anything by this singer before, and never intended to listen to her. *Torn* starts as if it's going to be yet another disposable run-of-the-mill downbeat album track and somehow develops into a distinctive absorbing and engaging experience. The lyric quickly sounds intelligent and worth a listen, and it suddenly belies its own initial trajectory by developing a tune! Then as you, say, its production and vocal delivery burst out all over into something really interesting. Varied but consistent. More of these sparkling illuminations please if you have them.

Nick's comment on Pete's 2. *Torn*

I remember hearing this when I was in the gym at work, and liking it. As Mel says, very superior pop, which happily controls the sort of cod angst that seems to me to bedevil a lot of the current wave of adenoidal female singers.

RETURN TO START OF DOCUMENT

3. *Dancing In The Street*, by Martha and the Vandellas (1964)

Composer: William “Mickey” Stevenson, Ivy Jo Hunter and Marvin Gaye
Single

The embodiment of exuberance. A simple but really clever musical structure in which the main key chord that makes up most of each verse is a flattened seventh, urging you constantly onward. The whole thing then hits a climax in the middle eight with the triumphant dominant on “around the world” (only appearing twice in entire the song). It was hijacked as a civil rights anthem some years after it came out, and perhaps it works as one, but the writers denied it ever had that intent, and it certainly doesn't need to be read that way.

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CdvITn5cAVc&feature=kp>

Mel's comment on Pete's 3. *Dancing In The Street*

I really hoped I'd enjoy this more after your rousing recommendation. At least it's not Jagger and Bowie overacting, I thought. But I'm afraid I don't feel the energy it's intended to generate, and I never did – though I'm sure I danced to it a few times on a Sunday night at St Joseph's Youth Club with the priest studying us from the shadows. The uplifting joviality of the version by the Mamas and Papas courtesy of your “Greatest Hits” LP, Nick, makes that the definitive one for me. There the energy comes from not taking the song seriously, and from the trick of refusing to let it end till they'd squeezed out the list of dancing cities. A minor example of not being restrained by the form, which was perfected elsewhere by the Beatles. So sorry not to share your enthusiasm for Martha's effort.

Nick's comment on Pete's 3. *Dancing In The Street*

I don't think this makes the cut compared with a lot of the amazing output from Motown, but I don't share Mel's preference for the Mamas and Papas [version]. I always enjoy the Martha and the Vandellas version, but wouldn't regard my life as impoverished by not hearing it again to the extent that I would by the absence of ... but no, not yet. It struck me as a tribute to the song that Bruce Springsteen could do *Racing In The Street* on *The River* and assume that everyone would get the reference.

RETURN TO START OF DOCUMENT

I'm delighted that you've both entered into my game with such gusto! I am flattered and also gratified: it's already intriguing and illuminating in so many ways. Widens our exposure to other music, throws new light on what we thought we knew already, and gives us the chance to experience each other's preferences without the weight of instant expectation. And to play at being informed critics ...

Below are my next three proposals. As you will see, I've started taking more advantage of my word allowance.

4. *Let Me Down Easy* by Ralph McTell (1974)

Composer: Ralph McTell

From the album "Easy"

Mel – your recommendation of *Barges* by Ralph McTell (which I didn't know but found impressive) prompts me to introduce my own Ralph McTell item for my top 100. I would happily describe "Easy" as one of my favourite albums of all time. There isn't a dud song on it; other gems include *Maddy Dances* (yes, that Maddy) and *Sweet Mystery* (which is what he wishes he could allow his girlfriends to remain). If you don't know these, you should listen to them as a matter of priority, and indeed to the whole album.

I choose *Let Me Down Easy* because it's simple, neatly written with some nice consistent imagery, and convincing. Also it has a very pretty tune – one of those that seemed to exist already, and be waiting for someone to discover it. As for the words, for me they sum up everything one wanted in life but couldn't have because it was somehow never meant to be. My favourite line: "No need for you to try to explain it / It's enough for me to know that you tried." As with your reaction to *Barges*, Mel, I find it hard ever to listen to this without feeling affected.

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

Mel's comment on Pete's 4. *Let Me Down Easy*

How wonderful to be reminded of this superb album and this beautiful song. I had it on tape for years, till the reel to reel died – an outcome of my voracious piracy. Presumably you were the source, Pete? I loved virtually everything on it indiscriminately, which probably meant I listened to it all rather superficially. Now you've reminded me of the subtlety of this gentle lyrical song. For me Ralph McTell's up there among the great folkies, but folk lovers don't necessarily welcome me saying this. Like you Nick, my neighbour Mike is a devotee of Richard Thompson, and treats with me disdain for saying that I enjoy McTell more. Well even if no one is going to play the guitar better than Thompson, McTell is at least tuneful, insightful and cheerful! *Let me Down Easy* is a very welcome rediscovery.

Nick, the reference to McTell's exquisite *Barges* was a dummy run when Pete suggested this game to me and I wanted to see whether I could contain my overwhelmed response to the song in only 200 words. When I found I could I approved Pete's limit.

Nothing is arbitrary! I'll include it formally later.

Nick's comment on Pete's 4. *Let Me Down Easy*

I didn't know this song, and I hadn't realised until I read Mel's comments that there is a rule that you can like either Ralph McTell or Richard Thompson but not both, just as you can like either the Beatles or the Stones (well, both, actually) or either Manchester City or Manchester United (neither thanks, if it's all the same to you). Having said that, Richard Thompson did a

belated riposte to *Streets of London* called *Sights And Sounds Of London Town* on a very good CD called Mock Tudor, in 1999: a better song than McTell's, but not a classic RT track.

This song is interesting because it's one of those where the lyric is much darker and more challenging than the music might lead you to suspect (something that might be called Stockholm Syndrome because Abba are arch-exponents, but that name has already been kidnapped and held to ransom). I have to confess that Ralph McTell has been something of a closed book to me. Must try harder.

5. *Don't Dream It's Over* By Neil Finn (1986)

Composer: Crowded House

Single, and on the album "The Very Best Of Crowded House" (and others)

I experience a frisson whenever I hear those semi-staccato chords of the opening bars. The whole song is intricately constructed and arranged, with its striking and plaintive major seventh in the second bar of each verse. (Or perhaps that should be a relative minor ninth? Or perhaps I'm veering into the realms of pretentious twattery.) And of course there's that irresistible chorus. Then in comes that wonderful Hammond organ for the instrumental break, which interestingly doesn't exactly follow the melodic pattern of the rest of the song: a pause as a prelude to a restatement of the theme? But as to what that theme is, you tell me! It's full of paradoxes. Don't dream what is over? Things going wrong, or things getting better? It's a fusion of optimism, resignation, determinism and insouciance: quite a feat to pull off.

Neil Finn has apparently never explained what he thinks it means, and the words are sufficiently ambiguous to leave it open; but along the way it's both haunting and compelling, and musically those positive chords in the chorus seem to offer an implicit reassurance: things may be bad and could get worse, but this is good. Anyway, apparently the New Zealanders voted it their best song ever, so maybe I'm over-complicating it, and the answer is staring me in the face. I have this on an album of Crowded House's greatest hits, which is another of my favourites of all time.

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

Mel's comment on Pete's 5. *Don't Dream It's Over*

This is appreciation synchronicity which didn't come about through piracy. Geraint bought me the "Crowded House Greatest Hits" as a Christmas present and for a long time I thought it was just quite nice. Years later I created my most complete and successful video edit – of Rhodri's wedding to Julia on a vast sunny New Zealand beach. If there's any other group from NZ I don't know them, so Crowded House had to provide the soundtrack.

I listened to it all again and again hunting for the right tracks and was bowled over. *Don't Dream It's Over* is extremely good, and I understand, without fully appreciating, its musical versatility. But it's a little fussy for my tastes compared with the stunning neo-Beatle pop that Neil Finn achieved in *Weather With You* and *Private Universe* which both went on the video. I can't play them now because Sue cries at the reminder of that beach and Rhodri's failed first marriage.

Nick's comment on Pete's 5. *Don't Dream It's Over*

Good song, good band. I think I've always rather preferred *Weather With You*, but it's clearly top-notch stuff. I should probably know more of their work, but ...

Pete's comment on Nick's comment on *Don't Dream It's Over*

Interesting that you prefer *Weather With You* to my choice of *Don't Dream It's Over*. I was torn between the two myself. *Weather With You* is an example (one among many) of a song with an unconventional structure, and that possibly tipped the balance for me. It postpones the big chorus while it iterates a couple of times through the “verse”, but after that it never returns to the opening figure, but just repeats the chorus in various different forms. And I'm quite happy with this, so I don't want to leave the impression that I think this is in some way a flawed technique. It all depends how it's done. Mind you, here it's not repeated fifteen times, which unfortunately happens with some songs ...

[The above is adapted from a comment on Nick's own selection of Dusty Springfield's *You Don't Have To Say You Love Me*.]

6. *Apple Cider Re-Constitution*, by Al Stewart (1975) [First sent 16.8.2025]

Composer: Al Stewart

On the album “Modern Times”

Back in the day, I felt I'd somehow missed out on Al Stewart. I was aware of him – listened to some of his songs on the radio, and rather liked what I heard – but I never followed up. Then as the years passed I revisited what he'd been doing in his early career, and got to know some of his music better. Lately (in 2025) I've realised it had become part of my life, and I've shared my enjoyment with my partner Helen, so I've substituted one of his songs for my original selection.

The track I've picked, *Apple Cider Re-Constitution*, is an up-tempo piece with memorable lyrics, a nice melody and a punchy arrangement that includes electric and acoustic guitars and strings. And it's sung, like all Stewart's material, with that distinctive, clear voice.

What's it about? It seems to be a re-imagining of an incident from the narrator's hitchhiking (or motorcycling?) days in which he arrives with his girlfriend at a disused railway station, and they spend the night there. But it expands into a broader reflection on passing time and the challenge of finding a direction and reaching a destination.

The lyrics are nicely done, with some evocative use of language, and include some surprising images (check out the line about her appealing surface!). Ah, but what is the meaning of the title and the lines about “Easy rider / comes to me with apple cider”? I'm inclined to see the latter as a comment on the tension between the beguiling itch to wander and the problem of finding somewhere to go.

In his youth Al Stewart associated with many music luminaries of his day, and actually shared a flat with Paul Simon for a while. This track's performers include Fairport Convention's Simon Nicol on acoustic guitar. It was produced, incidentally, by Alan Parsons, who also wrote the string arrangement. He was assistant engineer on “Abbey Road”, and has worked with numerous other celebrated artists over the years.

Al Stewart was still active in 2025, performing around Britain and the United States.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=r5_G8v_iic8

Mel's comment on Pete's 6. *Apple Cider Re-Constitution*

Er yes. Al Stewart. How I've wished for nearly 60 years that he was better than he is. Admittedly, if this is a track from 1971, he hadn't had much time to move on from the toe-curling twee narcissism of his first couple of albums which we listened to together over coffee back in the late Sixties. *Apple Cider Re-Constitution* is certainly better than much of that early stuff.

My problem is that even while Al Stewart was infuriating me with his jangly tunes and depressing superficiality, I quite liked a lot of it! In later years I bought a bundle of his first three albums, and then found I couldn't bear to listen to them. So perhaps I'm also frustrated with

myself. I know he can write a nice melody, as he does here, and he can produce lyrics which almost have something interesting to say, as here. But if only...

My beef with his songs, which are often rooted in some very specific and clearly expressed personal experience, is that the clarity itself makes their lack of depth and/or significance all the more obvious. This song floats around in a similar vein. We have a pretty solid picture of the railway station, and a rather commonplace restless retreat from the normality in the city. So what does he add? A neat and slightly obscure line about apple cider – which you don't seem to have had much trouble unravelling. To find this satisfying I'd want more mystery from the station (which really is quite an unusual setting for a song), and more wrestling with the restlessness. As with so many of Al Stewart's songs, he seems to promise much more significance than he actually delivers.

In case this sounds silly, I'll compare Stewart with his contemporary folky Ralph McTell whose songs have a way of telling us more than what they actually say.

These complaints don't make this a bad song. They just illustrate why I feel frustrated that Al Stewart's self-evident musical talents have never engaged me or excited me more than they do. And as if I haven't done enough to deride the poor man, I don't think Al Stewart has a very wide vocal range. So all his songs sound very distinctly like Al Stewart. Which creates the ultimate problem – he reminds me too much of those tracks I used to cringe at back in 1969. But prompted by your endorsement, I promise to go back listen again.

Pete's comment on Mel's comment on *Apple Cider Re-Constitution*

Basically, I accept almost everything you say about this track, Mel, and about Al Stewart's music in general. I was particularly struck by your penetrating comment about the paradox at the heart of it: clarity, as you say, can be the enemy of impact. I sometimes worry about that in my novel-writing! On reflection, maybe I was subliminally conscious of this in Stewart's music even back in the day, and it's why I didn't make more of an effort to follow his career. Or am I being wise after the event? Anyway, your analysis is nicely expressed and worked through. But this doesn't stop me thoroughly enjoying the musical exuberance of *Apple Cider*, which is my favourite among those of Stewart's tracks that I know. It's nicely crafted tuneful pop with a decent enough message, and that does it for me.

This track was a late substitute for Pete's original selection, so Nick did not have the chance to review or comment on it. Pete's original choice at this point was James Blunt's 2004 hit You're Beautiful.

Pete's comment in 2025: I liked the acoustic-electric ensemble of You're Beautiful, and also the way it appeared capture a moment in time, but I now realise my liking for it was transient, and my interpretation was perhaps naïve. Its selection provoked a somewhat acerbic exchange with Nick, who abhorred it and considered it a "stalker's anthem", so dropping it should help us to forget an incident that briefly threatened to derail this whole project, but happily didn't.

Addition to original three items in Pete's selection 2 First sent 12.3.2015

7. *Da Do Ron Ron*, by The Crystals (1963)

Composer: Jeff Barry, Ellie Greenwich and Phil Spector (1963)

Single

I had to think long and hard about which American girl group song from the sixties I would pick, but I do ron ron like this early example. To me it was the template for this type of music. Shall la la la la-la li I elaborate further? I love the attack of it, the relentless pace. And, um um um-um um, I like the saxophone solo, which is perfect in context. Do wah you agree? Na na na na-na-na na. Ob-la-di-hell, it's hard to decide. Wo wo yeh yeh. Incidentally, Ronnie Spector (nothing to do-be-do with the Crystals directly) appeared on Jools's New Year show this year, and although her voice is hardly what it once was, I yi yi yi

yi yi yi-yi thought the classic *Be My Baby* (by the same writers) still had the power to create that special ooh ma ma magic. As soon as those first chords chime in, boom bang-a-bang, you're transported. You'd have to be-bom be-bom be-bom be churlish to deny it. Bra.
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=v-qqi7-Q19k>

Mel's comment on Pete's 7. *Do Do Ron Ron*

Is this one of your first 100? Have you been drinking? Or are you only being extremely witty at the expense of the murderous Phil Spector? We have a right know so we can keep track of all the tracks and laugh in the right places.

Nick's comment on Pete's 7. *Do Do Ron Ron*

I'm pleased that *Da Do Ron Ron* is in your list – I can see that there's a curious pattern of thought* emerging between my ears, when I think "Ah good, I was thinking about including X or Y, but now Pete/Mel has included X I can include Y with a clear conscience". So *Da Do Ron Ron* somehow should be there ... and it is.

When I was working, I noticed that if I was reading something which triggered my disapproval, my criticism of the author's grammar, punctuation, misuse of words and so on rose in proportion to my antagonism. Thus with Captain Blount – how can he have a plan when he's never going to see the poor woman again? Compare and contrast the philosophical and linguistic precision of *Da Doo Ron Ron* (a worthy successor in this regard to "Tutti Frutti"). Just wonderful stuff, however revolting Phil Spector may be. I owned an EP with this, *He's A Rebel* – written, incidentally, by Gene Pitney – and two other tracks I can't immediately bring to mind. I haven't got to the point of deciding which of the songs of the almost interchangeable girl groups (not insignificant, this) of the time will make the cut, but at the end of the season, Brian, this will clearly be there or thereabouts.

Sept 2022: Pete's comment on Nick's and Mel's response to *Da Do Ron Ron*

In truth, my *Do Do Ron Ron* selection was originally meant at least partly as a spoof, which Mel correctly guessed. However, I always intended to include one of Phil Spector's girl group tracks, but hadn't yet decided which, so when I realised this had been taken as a genuine submission, my selection was made for me, and I wasn't unhappy with it.

8. The Third Man Theme (or The Harry Lime Theme), by Anton Karas (1949)**Composer:** Anton Karas

Single + film score

I've consulted the rules, and I *think* film music is allowed! This piece was a number one in the US by some reckonings, and sold millions of copies, so it was certainly treated like a pop song by the public. I admit it's extremely difficult to hear it without having your head filled with images from the film, and that makes impartial assessment difficult – especially for me, given that “The Third Man” is my second-favourite film of all time. I think its intense atmosphere, its live sound, its imaginative photography and the overall thrust of it are wonderful. But whether as part of that greater whole or on its own, the music, with its lurches from jaunty irony to urgency, frenzied anticipation and lament, is peerless. I can't overstate my admiration for it.

The main theme doesn't encompass all this, of course; to experience every aspect you'd have to listen to the entire score or watch the whole film. But to me it has a magic that is endlessly uplifting. I first knew it from the very inferior “Third Man” television drama series of the early 1960s, starring Michael Rennie. This used a different recording of the main theme for its signature tune, not with any evident involvement from Karas; and it was played much more slowly and lugubriously than in the film, presumably in an attempt to give it portentousness. When I eventually heard the real thing, I was amazed to discover its much faster pace and more sprightly delivery. It was a valuable lesson in musical subtlety.

Anton Karas never produced anything else like this in his life, before or after; it was an extraordinary one-off, which in some ways perhaps makes it more enigmatic and difficult to evaluate. But I know where I stand on it.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=te9fqm6rUPY>

(I like the link above, because it's basically the opening credits of the film, followed by the opening voice-over sequence (featuring the voice of director Carol Reed himself), setting the scene. If you continue that far, by the way, the “Valli” star in the credits was Italian actress Alida Valli.)

Mel's comment on Pete's 8. *The Third Man Theme*

I hate it when people say, “This (something-or-other) is what it's all about.” Because it never is. But, wow, your choice here comes pretty close to what we're about. I'm really quite excited.

I was recently casting my mind back to my parents' small collection of 78s and wondering whether there was anything there which had stayed with me enough to be worth celebrating. There were very few popular songs, and a smattering of dull classical-sounding film tunes. And, yes, I'd completely forgotten *The Third Man Theme* – which I might well have chosen. Spooky coincidence in relation to a tune so relatively old and obscure?

Even as a child I regarded it as a strange, unique piece of music. Accessible, but like nothing else I'd heard. I asked my parents what made that sound and they told me it was a zither, as if everyone played music on a zither. They liked to challenge my perceptivity, but they couldn't fool me. Then it was spoilt by the plodding TV version, which made it literally forgettable. So hearing the original again for the first time in perhaps 50 years I can appreciate its originality all over again.

And it's still exceptional. Pacey, varied, lilting, matching the mocking tone of Wells' narration in the opening clip from the film. Redolent of the comfort and security of home in the 1950s, rather than the murderous insecurity of post-war Vienna. It's all there again.

Wonderful! How else was I going to have this flashback? I even want to see the film again. Thanks, Pete!

Pete's comment on Mel's comment on *The Third Man Theme*

Just for the sake of accuracy, it is in fact Carol Reed, the director, who narrates the opening voice-over of "The Third Man" in the role of an anonymous scene-setting black marketeer. However, I'm absolutely delighted at your enthusiasm for this choice, and urge you to watch the whole film at an early date. The fusion of images and music is truly amazing – as is everything else about it.

Nick's comment on Pete's 8. *The Third Man Theme*

We haven't been able to find Nick's comments on The Third Man Theme. He may well have written them, but if he did, our collective archiving system has let us down.

9. If I fell, by the Beatles (1964)

Composer: John Lennon ("Lennon-McCartney")

On the album "A Hard Day's Night"

How can we make choices from Beatles music? It's impossible. This is just an example, but one for which I have great fondness. It takes two-part harmony as far as it can go, and I learned both parts at some indeterminate time in my youth. Many's the time I've sung it through in the kitchen or elsewhere with one or other of the women in my life.

Lyric-wise, it's hard to know if John Lennon was being serious in its message, as he later professed, or was writing it as a *jeu d'esprit* to see how far he could go with the "I-he-she-we" approach for which early Beatles music is famed, and which is particularly clearly enunciated here. But that doesn't matter; it's a charming piece on its own terms, and as usual, the bitter-sweet message belies the pretty tune; it points out that there are always winners and losers when relationships start and end. One could of course quibble with the very notion of "If I fell", since falling in this situation tends to be something that happens spontaneously, not by choice. But I'm more than happy to forgive that.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kPKYPI1jjdg>

Mel's comment on Pete's 9. *If I Fell*

If "The Third Man" is your second favourite film, Pete, "A Hard Day's Night" is in my top five. So we're still very much on the same wavelength. Or kind of. I'm guessing the YouTube video is an outtake from the film because I can't recall John attempting to woo Ringo. Did he? (Yes, we're not supposed to watch the video. But this is the Beatles.)

The songs and exuberance of "A Hard Day's Night" (film and LP) perfectly captured what I was feeling in 1964. I was more thrilled by both than anything from the Beatles up to that point, with the exception of *I Want To Hold Your Hand* which is such a compelling piece of popular music (and which I now notice you were equally excited by, Pete). And this is the best of the slow album tracks by a long way.

If I Fell didn't fit any personal experience, though I felt intensely that I could identify with it. And here you are raising a serious question about the nature of love itself. I think I did wonder when it was released whether one can deliberately fall in love, and I concluded that I could. It's certainly possible for someone who finds that falling in love is easy to resist doing it. So, logically, doing it can be a partly conscious choice. That's my view, but it's a bit late to test it

empirically. Note, you absolutely must read this in the context of my insistence that I fell in love with Sue at first sight without believing this was possible. My argument is potentially contentious and needs both corroboration and mitigation!

A very fine choice with or without the conceptual springboard.

Nick's comment on Pete's 9. *If I Fell*

We haven't been able to find Nick's comments on If I Fell. He may well have written them, but if he did, our collective archiving system has let us down.

10. *Crazy Dreams*, by Paul Brady (1979)

Composer: Paul Brady

"Hard Station"

There was a very instructive documentary on the story of Irish music on television the other day, but it made no mention of Paul Brady, a talented and durable contributor. I guess he wasn't considered enough of an innovator, but his brand of folk-rock is distinctive and in my book significant.

I like *Crazy Dreams* partly because it's more pop than folk. If you don't know it, you need to imagine coming across it on an album or in a concert where it has perhaps been preceded by a succession of more folky numbers. Then comes this: the whole atmosphere goes up a notch (if that's not a mixed metaphor), and you're listening to a little masterpiece that pulls together all Brady's musical influences in a way that for me defines what this kind of pop music is about.

Lyricaly, it's narrated by a performer who's on a tour in a cold and inhospitable place, and is basically saying "Fuck this, I'm going home". (He says it somewhat more eloquently than that.) I love the last verse – the affirmation that it was the right decision – and I love the tight musical ensemble and crisp guitar, with melody and delivery that underpin the message: a positive one, yet one tinged with regret about the "crazy dreams". Once you've heard it a time or two, you'll find it difficult to get it out of your head.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tr1KbMWfnXo>

Mel's comment on Pete's 10. *Crazy Dreams*

The unusual crispness and clarity of the recording which you mention also hit me immediately. A startling contrast with the wall-of-sound indulgence of the Manic Street Preachers, and later Stereophonics, Oasis and their ilk! (Yes I readily acknowledge that point.)

I don't know Paul Brady at all, but he seems highly accomplished, probably a musician who knows exactly what he wants. I didn't detect any folky content here, so I'm wondering what your context was. The tune is not attention-grabbing, though the lyric is quite interesting. I'm left wondering whether he really does say "fuck this" and act on it or the "fuck this" is more likely part of the crazy dreams which motivate the song, and he only imagines catching the plane. But the instinct is recognisable, and the song wins points for credibility from me. I worked in Aberdeen for three or four months and that was so crappy that one day I really did put everything back in the car and drive home (my speed down the M6 was a bit like flying).

A very enjoyable listen.

Pete's comment on Mel's comment

I think your point about that Paul Brady song and the "crazy dreams" is a good one. Is it the expectation of fame and fortune that is the crazy dream, or the desire to jump off the treadmill

and back into a vision of life as it ought to be? Just the kind of ambiguity that can intrigue and add depth to a song (or alternatively obfuscate, depending on how you feel about it).

Nick's comment on Pete's 10. *Crazy Dreams*

We haven't been able to find Nick's comments on Crazy Dreams. He may well have written them, but if he did, our collective archiving system has let us down.

To complete this weekend's flurry of contributions from me, here is my own next batch of songs: four this time. They all date from within a year of each other, but not through any intent of mine to group them together in any other way.

11. *I Remember You*, by Frank Ifield (1962)

Composers: Victor Schertzinger (music), Johnny Mercer (lyrics)

Single

Sometimes all the elements of a song come together in an indefinable, almost magical way, elevating what might seem unremarkable into something outstanding. For me that applies to Frank Ifield's *I Remember You*. From the crisp, clean start with those A-major guitar chords right through to the end, it's faultless. Verse one: statement; verse 2: restatement and elaboration, with an intriguing chord sequence leading you back eventually to where you started; verse 3: recapitulation and finale. Definitive.

It was a peculiarity even in its own time: a song written 1941, updated in 1962 with added falsetto and a different pace, and yet still oddly anachronistic. But I've always felt that with the help of producer and musical director Norrie Paramor, and especially of harmonica player Harry Pitch (there's a surname to conjure with), Frank Ifield made it into something really special. It doesn't say anything very important, but it's sung with warmth and character, it has that nice spare accompaniment ... and the haunting harmonies of the harmonica give it a unique, compelling quality.

To me it represented a symbolic end to the music of the 1950s and my childhood (admittedly carried forward by a couple of years) and the beginning of the Mersey sound and all that followed. It has added nostalgia, too, since it straddled my own transition from home life to the start of my years at boarding school. Bravely, I always thought, Ifield followed up with an entirely different type of song, the up-tempo big-band style *Lovesick Blues* (this time dating back to 1922), which seemed to me to baffle the public into making it another number one single. I ended up liking that too, but nothing could equal *I Remember You*. In my book its seven weeks at number one were well deserved, and I have to say that if we were picking eight records here, not a hundred, this would probably still be on my list. Don't ask me why. I couldn't really give you a sensible answer!

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

Nick's comment on Pete's 11. *I Remember You*

Strangely, I saw Frank Ifield as well as Ketty Lester at the Regal, but on a different bill. My memory is that he always looked as if he'd just been polished till he shone. I think Karl Denver was on the same bill, so it must have been a bit of a yodelfest. There must have been something of a fashion for yodelling – Frank Ifield subsequently released *She Taught Me To Yodel*, and Del Shannon did *Swiss Maid* (on which, bizarrely, he didn't yodel). One of the blinder alleys in rock'n'roll maybe. Falsetto, as on *I Remember You*, is of course a different matter – doo-wop, Jimmy Summerville etc.

Mel's comment on Pete's 11. *I Remember You*

One of the many bizarrely uninhibited things I did at school was run a sweepstake in 1962 for classmates to bet on the top ten. It was conducted ethically and with mathematical precision so that everyone's forecasts were carefully analysed and scored. The person who most closely predicted the *NME*'s actual placings got all the money.

The excitement was enormous when *I Remember You* entered the chart at 17 and was number one within two weeks. Then two more number ones – the first artist recording in Britain to achieve this with three successive releases, we marvelled. The only time in my life when gambling seemed to have a point. Ifield fever gripped us. A group of us pooled cash to buy his first LP.

So I do know what you mean about this song, Pete. Musically it exposed me to a few C&W standards. Then early in 1963 came *Please Please Me*, and we no longer needed Frank. But I readily recognise the refreshing jolt and pleasure it gave us at the time. I no longer have quite the same enthusiasm for it, but even so there was a little thrill in being required to hear it again!

12. *In Dreams*, by Roy Orbison (1963)

Roy Orbison

Single and on “In Dreams: The Greatest Hits”

I had a hard time deciding which Roy Orbison track should be in my list. Should it be the bravura *Running Scared* – one of the shortest pop songs in pop history, with an amazingly bold ending that seems in musical terms to leave you hanging in the air? Or *Falling*, which is in some ways my personal favourite? Or the two-part harmony of *Pretty Woman*, which I confess I would have chosen if over-exposure hadn’t pummelled its brilliance almost into oblivion?

Any of these would do, and others besides, but I have to come down on *In Dreams*. I’ve always been fascinated by the way it’s made up of a series individual melodic sections or verses that never repeat, yet unlike other songs that have attempted something similar, it never leaves you regretting the bits that have already been and gone. It drives forward all the time, supported by the consistency of the arrangement and the build-up to one of Orbison’s famous high finales. It might be stretching a point to suggest that this picaresque quality parallels the dream sequence of the song, but I do feel that overall, the song conveys the “imaginary woman” theme as well as any work ever has.

To me Roy Orbison towers over the majority of his contemporaries. Almost like ABBA, but in a very different way, he ploughed his own furrow (how many more mixed metaphors would you like?), producing a uniquely brilliant body of work.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SBBJ6FBKfxQ>

***Postscript:** KD Lang turns out to be a great fan of Roy Orbison. I’ve never followed her career closely, but I thoroughly recommend her song *I Confess*, which I discovered three years ago when she performed it on Later with Jools. It’s a stunning pot-boiler and Roy Orbison tribute, played and sung with tremendous gusto by all concerned. In fact come to think of it, it’s a possible contender for my top 100 (I’ll ponder that point). Listen to it VERY loudly right through to those wonderful Orbisonesque concluding flourishes. This is mainstream pop with panache!

[September 2022: The Later YouTube video has been taken down. This is the official one.]

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mPAjZWOHya4>

Nick’s comment on Pete’s 12. *In Dreams*

Roy Orbison is one of the indispensable voices – see an imminentish list from me. It intrigues me that he hasn’t dated as badly as many, but I think that’s because nothing and no one sounds like him. As you say, Pete, there’s a long list of candidates for inclusion – no prizes really for guessing which mine will be. It has to be said that he also produced some terminal crap, but what the hell. He was still going strong when he was part of the Travelling Wilburys.

Mel's comment on Pete's 12. *In Dreams*

It took me till about 2013 to discover that Roy Orbison's brilliance as a songwriter is, as you point out, that his songs are a series of different melodies unrelated except for the fact that they fit together in near-perfect progressions. An obvious explanation for why so often his singles have their inexorable drive to momentous peaks. He is utterly brilliant with the technique, which is highly creative and was probably intuitive. Like no one else.

You've chosen *In Dreams*, so I don't have to. With regret I can dismiss *Pretty Woman* for exactly the same reason as you (plus the association with the dismally immoral Richard Gere – urch – film which Sue rates as one of her all-time favourites). Your alternatives are fine contenders, and I hugely like *Blue Bayou* and the quirky *Sweet Dream Baby*. Luckily we can take our choice from a wealth of material, though oddly I no longer own any recordings by him apart from those of the ambrosial Wilburys which Nick introduced me to.

13. *24 Hours From Tulsa*, by Gene Pitney (1963)

Composers: Burt Bacharach and Hal David

Single

You either like Gene Pitney's high, edgy vocal attack, which he sometimes seems almost unable to control, or you hate it. I like it, and I think many of the songs he recorded during the Sixties (some of which he wrote himself) are worthy contributions to the canon. I could have picked several of them for my top 100, but *24 hours from Tulsa* will always win my vote. I think it's a stunning fusion of words, music and orchestration, and one of the best things Bacharach and David ever did.

It tells a simple story vividly, using inventive little musical interpolations along the way (the breathless mariachi brass as the couple are dancing, for instance). You can feel the narrator's mixed emotions as he recounts the story – mostly regret at breaking up, but also a kind of guilty elation over the discovery of the new love of his life. And Pitney's dramatic delivery never falters. Finally, you get that haunting repetition in the last line ("I can never, never, never, go home again") as the melody switches to a new key: a nice musical confirmation that his life has changed irrevocably. It was Pitney's breakthrough international hit, and over the years I don't think it's been given enough acknowledgement for its special qualities.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KFuN6kyD_7E

Nick's comment on Pete's 13. *24 Hours From Tulsa*

I rather liked Gene Pitney in my youth, but I confess that I find his voice rather jarring now – a sort of "well, if that's how you feel, stop fighting back the tears and have a good old blubber" reaction. But he was a significant figure in the pop firmament of our youth. As you both doubtless know, he wrote *Hello Mary Lou* (Rick/y Nelson) and *He's A rebel* (Crystals) – not a moistening of the eye to be seen or heard. My brother had an EP with *24 Hours From Tulsa* on it and a track called, I think, *Every Breath I Take*, on which Gene Pitney sings falsetto. Strangely it's audible to humans as well as dogs.

Mel's comment on Pete's 13. *24 Hours From Tulsa*

Gene Pitney has sunk in my view since I realised he was so in love with his own voice that he always duetted with it! His main claim to fame with me now is that he died in Newport. He didn't have a bad gig. He just died there.

I joke.

He was always enjoyable, if sometimes over the top. But with a great Bacharach-David song and clever orchestration in *Twenty-Four Hours From Tulsa* it was hard to miss. Your analysis of the track gets it exactly, and I can't say much more. But I suppose that, being such a classic, it's suffered from over-exposure a bit during the last 52 years, so I don't get the same thrill from it that I once did.

14. *I'll Never Get Over You*, by Johnny Kidd and the Pirates (1963)

Composer: Gordon Mills

Single

If I'm choosing a song by Johnny Kidd and the Pirates, I realise I should choose *Shakin' All Over*, a bona fide original UK contribution to the rock canon. I quite liked it at the time, and I like it much more now, but back then I found the edgy rebelliousness of its plangent vocal, staccato guitar riff and jangling chords quite challenging to my conservative eleven-year-old world. To me it will forever sum up a visit with my parents to the summer fair in Newcastle in 1960 (the "Hoppings", as I later found it was called), during which it was played frequently and loudly on several of the rides: exciting and beguiling, yet also mysterious and slightly dangerous.

However, I must opt instead for *I'll Never Get Over You*. It came three years later, and unlike *Shakin' All Over*, which was written by Johnny Kidd himself, it was composed by Gordon Mills (later the manager/impresario responsible for Tom Jones et al). It represented a reasonably successful attempt by the band to adapt to the Mersey sound. It's a much simpler piece than *Shakin' All Over*, and I willingly accept that in some ways it's too slight to be valuable, but in a way it's the simplicity that I like about it.

Basically it's a out-and-out pop song, delivered with urgency and brevity, with compelling two-part harmonies that I've sung out over the years with anyone who would join in – including, implausibly, the barber who cut my hair prior to my father's funeral! (He turned out to be in a local band in Waterbeach.) I love this aspect, and I also like the unusual chord structure of the middle section, which rather cleverly leads back to the main theme. And I always liked Kidd's distinctive voice. Oh, and there's an appropriately simplistic guitar break by (I think) Mick Green. To me it's the epitome of a tuneful, exuberant pop song, and for some reason it's burned itself into my musical DNA. (OK, I realise that's a metaphor too far.)

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

Nick's comment on Pete's 14. *I'll Never Get Over You*

I shall now for ever see this as latter-day barber shop music. I always really liked this. For me, though, it has still got to be *Shakin' All Over*. You must be right about Mick Green, Pete. King of the Telecaster and said to be very influential on proto-punk and punk. I was always puzzled that Mick Green was the celebrated Pirates guitarist, but the guitarist on *Shakin' All Over* is obviously using what I was brought up to call a tremolo arm and now seems to called a whammy bar (*o tempora o mores*). You can get Teles with a Bigsby tremolo, but they look clumsy. Actually Mick Green joined the Pirates later. Phew.

Mel's comment on Pete's 14. *I'll Never Get Over You*

I will be discussing this choice with you when I see you, carefully and sensitively so as not to hurt your feelings!

I hear what you say about two-part harmonies. And I've nothing against the recording. I just wonder why you chose it over thousands of others.

Is it actually the evocation of funfairs in our youth? Genuine question. I could understand that. For me it's the quite different styles of Del Shannon, Dion's *Runaround Sue* and Freddy Cannon's *Palisades Park*, not that I went to many funfairs. A certain bravado and rebelliousness which can't express itself in any other context. If so, it's a personal memory which should not be questioned (I've plenty of these myself). Though not necessarily a pleasure to be shared universally?

Pete's comment on Mel's comment on *I'll Never Get Over You*

I'm desperately trying to resist saying "Well Nick likes it," but as you see, I've failed! Anyway, I'm looking forward to hearing the reasons for such strong antipathy. Until otherwise convinced, I shall stick to my view that it's simple, musical and exuberant. The lyric is clearly somewhat ridiculous – "I'll never get over you ... that is, until such time as I do ... and when I do it will be on the basis of whether she looks good" – but I wouldn't dream of claiming otherwise. Apart from that, what's not to like? As to why I chose it, as with many of my top hundred I'm tempted to say I didn't choose it, it chose me. If you can understand that, I don't need to say any more.

Mel's comment on Pete's comment on Mel's comment on *I'll Never Get Over You*

I certainly don't have a strong antipathy to *I'll Never Get Over You*. It was the nearly innocent victim when it stood in the way of a convoy of jokes based on alternative readings of the title. I just don't personally rate it. But who cares? I'm wild about a lot of stuff you don't like, or wouldn't like if I told you about it. I suppose I was interested to know why you like it, which I now do.

Not four this time – I don't want to progress too far too fast! The trouble is, I keep thinking what I'm going to say about the next batch. It's all so beguiling (and time-consuming).

15. *In My Mind a Miracle*, by The Zombies (2004) [First sent 16.8.2025]

Composer: Rod Argent

On the album "As Far As I Can See"

Having originally chosen Colin Blunstone's impressive 1972 recording of *I Don't Believe in Miracles* for this slot, I decided that despite its undeniable qualities, it didn't really have enough resonance for me; so instead I've chosen a far newer song, *In My Mind a Miracle*, also sung by the incomparable Blunstone.

This has a history. When I introduced the music of the original 1960s Zombies to my partner Helen in the 1990s she was very taken with it, and that ultimately prompted us to attend numerous concerts by the reinvented band in subsequent years. Only Blunstone and Argent remained from the original line-up, but they sometimes performed numbers from their 1960s incarnation, and proceeded to record several albums of what I've come to regard as quite splendid new music, nearly all composed by Rod Argent.

"As Far as I Can See" was the first of these, and included *In My Mind a Miracle*. Was the title influenced by *I don't Believe in Miracles* (which they perform on the album), even though Russ Ballard wrote it, not them? Well, the song also includes the line "my odyssey and oracle", an unashamed reference to the title of their famous 1960s album, so who knows? [A track from that album will appear later in my selections.]

I could have chosen various tracks from "As Far As I Can See", but *In My Mind a Miracle* is certainly one of the more memorable, with its high impact and its jazzy chords (including a nice chilling Boris Karloff chord towards the end). The message is simple enough: a new love in the narrator's life has changed and redeemed him. "In you I found my odyssey and oracle / No longer blind, I see because of you."

Frankly, it seemed a miracle to me that these two performers, already part of music mythology, were still active and still composing and performing so effectively in the 2000s. There's barely a duff track on the album, which has gained in critical appreciation in the years since it came out. And it's become part of the soundtrack of my latter-day life with Helen, so choosing it was a no-brainer.

Two postscripts to the above. 1) Chris White, an original Zombie, sang on some of the tracks on "As Far as I Can See", and Paul Atkinson, another original, was involved in the production. 2) Rod Argent suffered a stroke in 2024, but in 2025 was said to be recovering.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qepjvbBQL6c>

Mel's comment on Pete's 15. *In My Mind a Miracle*

I know this track pretty well as a result of your previous commendations, and I can't deny that it's quality rock music. The attention-grabbing rising opening bars, changes of pace, endlessly varied musical accompaniment, indispensable Rod Argent keyboard solo, high production values, and of course impeccable Colin Blunstone vocals all add up to something special. I can well understand why you rate it so highly.

I like it enough to put it on my gargantuan 300-track USB mix folder for the car. So it's a bit disappointing that I don't get as excited by it as you. It always feels as if I'm listening to something worthy in between the tracks I really want to hear. Cruel, eh? The reason is probably

in large part cerebral. The brilliant original Zombies – which I can say with pride I helped you discover! – are more raw and immediate, less polished. So this isn't them, and they excited the socks off me.

Great choice, Pete. But not one of mine.

If that seems harsh, there's perhaps another way I can pay tribute to this track. If you hadn't discovered the reformed Zombies and been fired with enthusiasm for them you probably wouldn't have set up the trip that united Nick, you and me in London to see the original band play all the tracks from "Odessey And Oracle" (the title was misspelled thus) live for the first time on the fortieth anniversary of its release. A truly memorable experience, very indirectly due I suspect to the latter-day Zombies recordings and your love for *In My Mind A Miracle*. For which hearty thanks!

Pete's comment on Mel's comment on *In My Mind a Miracle*

You did indeed help me to discover the Zombies, Mel, and in fact their "Odessey and Oracle" album will always remind me of our mutual appreciation of it back in the day. But I neglected to say that I would never compare their latter-day music to what they did back in the day. In a way we're talking about two different things, though their name and two of their key musicians were the same. But I think their 21st century material stands in its own right, and has become a constant in my more recent life.

Oh, and yes, what a wonderful thing that their original music helped reunite the three of us!

Nick's comment on Pete's original 15. *I Don't Believe In Miracles*

Well, what can I say? The Zombies were wonderful, Colin Blunstone was/is wonderful, this song is ... what's the word? ... wonderful. Colin Blunstone and/or the Zombies will feature in my list at some point. The clinching factor to me is Blunstone's voice, which I think is quite extraordinary – pure but knowing, plaintive but not self-pitying. Nuff said.

This track was a late substitute for Pete's original selection, I Don't Believe in Miracles by Colinn Blunstone, so Nick did not have the chance to review or comment on it, but his comments on the original track remain valid, so we have kept them in.

16. *America*, by Simon and Garfunkel (1967)

Composer: Paul Simon

"Bookends"

To me *America* is unequivocally one of the most accomplished pieces of work in the entire twentieth century musical canon. I can't overstate my admiration for it. Mel has warned me that if I don't pick it soon, he will, so this is my unabashed move to get there first. Actually there's scarcely any need for me to say anything about it; we all know its qualities. All I can do is offer a few comments on selected aspects.

To state the obvious, musically it embodies some pretty melodies and vocal harmonies in a clever and astute arrangement. More important, lyrically it's like the equivalent of a massive zoom back by a film camera. With economy that I can only marvel at, it provides a detailed realisation of a mundane little tale, then elevates it to the level of mythology. Moreover, it seems to do this effortlessly; you can't see the intellectual join because there isn't one. You're always there with the narrator on the bus, yet by the end you're simultaneously seeing the sweep of the continent, and the scope of the expanded meaning in the casual experience of the journey.

This dual-perspective effect seems to me to make the underlying insight even more poignant; the song is reminding us that we're all on perpetual journeys, but can never truly

arrive because the destination is a fiction. The big picture is there if we can bear to contemplate it, but maybe we're better off taking modest joy in the incidentals.

Paul Simon restated the same message later with *American Tune*, which to seems to have become more celebrated than *America*. I like that song too, but it's darker, and any sense of optimism is more subdued. Also I can't forget that the main melody is Bach's, not his. At least *America* is original musically as well as lyrically.

I don't think I can survive without more than one Paul Simon song in my list, but *America* seems a good starting point.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Eo2ZsAOlvEM>

Mel's comment on Pete's 16. *America*

You may have got there before me, but I think your description of this definitive song is a fine piece of music crit. Says it all with concision, and there's nothing I disagree with.

What's also interesting, though, is that we seem to have different emotional readings of it. (Speaking as someone who has actually counted cars on the New Jersey Turnpike, I think I can tell what this song about!!)

For me, this is about the desperate emptiness of life in the US – or just life, as we look for some direction/purpose/meaning. Not the political disillusion of the far inferior *American Tune*. The incidentals of life, even Paul and Cathy's love, are overwhelmed by vast vacuous space. Are these people going anywhere?

It's all in the line, "Cathy, I'm lost," I said, though I knew she was sleeping." The implication quickly follows: everyone's looking for America.

It's also the last scene in "The Graduate" – as the couple in the bus escape the church and their parents' crap values, bound for god knows what. Coincidence?

I'm forever moved by Simon's crystal condensation of this aspect of the human condition.

Pete's comment on Mel's comment on *America*

I was delighted to receive your comments on my latest three songs – and gratified to get your endorsement of my comments on *America*. My reaction to this song is not in fact very different from yours; I too see it as a comment on the emptiness of life in general, and I've always thought the line that you quote incredibly poignant and memorable. In my attempt at brevity I failed to bring out this aspect. As you suggest, arguably no one has ever expressed this particular take on the world better than Paul Simon. There's a paradox in it, of course, because the song itself is a delight. That's art for you.

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

Hmm. This is more difficult. Paul Simon is obviously one of the towering figures of rock/pop/folk/whatever you want to call it, and with Garfunkel he produced sublime music. Of which I have, I'm afraid, never felt this quite made it as an example, for reasons I've never got round to defining until this moment. So here goes ...

For all his manifest qualities, Paul Simon's lyrics occasionally have a ham-fistedness which I resist. An example would be some of "Graceland" – "My travelling companion is nine years old/He is the child of my first marriage": I'm afraid that to me this is too close to the oeuvre of E J Thribb for it to work, unless his intention was to make me feel like sniggering surreptitiously.

And of course Paul Simon can't escape the tendency of rock /pop /folk /whatever you want to call it to be portentous – that really just goes with the territory, so live with it or piss off. Well, yes, but to me portentousness and E J Thribbery make a really ill-assorted couple, and I am afraid I think the lyrics to *America* provide an example. To me it smacks of anecdote given a burden of significance which it can't sustain, so it ends up feeling arch – no, his bow tie isn't a bloody camera, and you know it as well as I do.

The song conveys bleakness and emptiness, but that reminds me too much of the defence of the supposedly comic scenes in "Dr Faustus", that their tedium shows what a bad bargain

Faustus has struck: the riposte is, quite rightly, there are better ways of depicting boredom than by being boring. Writing in this vein feels like overstating my case, which is more a matter of unease than dislike, but in the last analysis I rather resist this particular song, and this is as close as I can get to saying why.

Oh dear. I eagerly await the lambasting I can see coming, but there we are. The boy Simon with and/or without his descanting mate will figure somewhere (somewheres, even) in my list, but it won't be this song.

Mel's comment on Nick's comment on *America*

Nick, you're wrong.

17. *Kiss Me, by Sixpence None The Richer* (1998)

Composer: Matt Slocum

Single and on self-titled album

This song has been over-exposed almost to death on the radio and in TV commercials and film, but for me that doesn't detract from its immense appeal. I liked it the first time I heard it; in fact I may as well confess I actually bought the single as a CD. YouTube hadn't by then become the go-to source for this kind of thing, and I was determined not to let it escape me. Little did I know that whether I liked it or not, I'd be hearing frequently for the rest of my life.

Some think it bland, which I can understand: so why do I like it? Well, let me start (no doubt to Mel's amazement) with the words. A couple have maybe strayed a little way away from a party in a country garden on a warm summer night. The lyric is a deft evocation of that complete world through just a few vivid details; it's laden with atmosphere and a hint of mystery, and despite being very specific, it somehow manages to evoke parallel memories as you listen. A clever trick.

Then there's the distinctive structure. The first three lines of each verse are a musical tease – a single extended cadence that veers between major and dominant sevenths, but only finally resolves at the end of the fourth line. It's very unusual, and on first listening it's a real puzzle, but when you get the point you realise that this trick is a big part of the song's idiosyncratic and haunting quality.

And on top of all that, it's a pop song! Tuneful, with a strong beat and some nice tight instrumentation.

It was more or less a one-off hit, though the group were active for some years before and after. They presented themselves as a Christian band (their name is derived from a CS Lewis story), and some critics have attempted to find religious meaning in this song. I can't see it. It was said at the time that Matt Slocum (the group's guitarist and composer) simply wrote it about a girlfriend – though not Leigh Nash, a childhood friend and the main girl singer on the record. Anyway, I think she makes a charming job of delivering it, and it should be taken at face value.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3YcNzHOBmk8>

Postscript: The video attempts to re-create some (but not all) the thematic elements I've mentioned, but PLEASE don't watch it – not on first listening, anyway. I only saw it for the first time today, and I think it makes the group look drippy and ridiculously young, and the whole thing seem half-baked. Let the words and music paint their own picture.

Mel's comment on Pete's 17. *Kiss Me*

Well, despite its evident exposure, I can't say I've ever been aware of this song or group. So what am I to make of a clearly drippy (I did watch the video, and that of another hit song by them!) Christian pop group?

You know I'm not up to understanding its musical originality, so it sounded like a very tuneful song which is lightweight enough for me not to be interested in listening to what the lyric is about. Sorry. On the other hand, I am almost completely persuaded by your case, Pete. I accept that it's a fine bit of pop which is worth listening to and which I do find enjoyable. I may even recognise it when it springs out of something on telly in the future.

More troubling is that the band seems to identify itself as Christian. Not even Cliff and the Shadows went that far with their "faith". So my own prejudice has to dilute my appreciation. On the other hand it does open the way for me to reveal how much I am roused by that bunch of drippy Australian Christians, Judith Durham and the Seekers!

Pete's comment on Mel's comment on *Kiss Me*

I'm pleased that you liked *Kiss Me*, but disappointed that you couldn't bring yourself to listen to the words. I just recounted this to Helen, who insists you must be winding me up. She says she can't see how you know it's too lightweight if you haven't listened to it! Hm. Anyway, I'm afraid I have to demand a recount. Please follow my instructions and listen to what it's saying whilst simultaneously NOT viewing the video. (You can however stand on your head and twirl a plate with your left foot if desired.) If you like the sound of it, you certainly can't like it any less after hearing the words, and I would argue that you will like it more. No, it's not profound, but it's a joyous and vivid bit of scene-painting ... in full colour.

Nick's comment on Pete's 17. *Kiss Me*

I'm afraid I'm with Mel on this one. I couldn't place it when I saw it on your list, but of course recognised it the instant I heard it. To me I'm afraid it seems like the pictures they put on the walls (or ceilings!) of dentists' surgeries – pleasant, soothing, guaranteed not to give offence. And forgettable.

I did notice something in the video (beyond excessive evidence that canoodling is infinitely better as a participant than a spectator sport). The guitarist has a Fender 12 string, notable for the ugliest headstock ever perpetrated by Fender, who was obviously heavily under the influence of hockey stick design at the time. US Fender only made them for about 5 years in the '60s, though they were made for longer by Fender Japan. My late lamented nephew had one of the Japanese ones and sold it to the crook who ran the guitar shop he subsequently worked in for more than it was worth because he (the crook, that is) thought it was the real thing. Quite ironical. And the video also includes a concertina – not the most promising of instruments, but capable in the right hands of achieving interesting sounds. Not really here, though.

My next three choices have a common theme: sheer exuberance.

18. *Hold Me*, by PJ Proby (1964)

Composers: Jack Little, David Oppenheim and Ira Schuster

Single

I never particularly liked PJ Proby himself, and in fact didn't know much about him. My main memory is of the trouser-splitting scandal during his big UK tour, which always struck me as a stupid and unnecessary bit of publicity-seeking.

But I always thought *Hold Me* was fantastic. I even liked the OTT prelude. Then that urgent harmonica intro sets the pace, telling you immediately what you're in for. Basically it's a full-blast embodiment of what a good rocker should be. The melody ranges through some classic chord progressions, and Proby's vocal harmonies exploit the opportunities to excellent effect – not overdone, just enough. Then there's the well executed instrumental break, doing its correct job of adding expectancy and tension. The song itself dates back to 1933, but this version certainly gave it a new lease of life.

I was gratified to discover that the backing musicians included some luminaries of their day – notably Jimmy Page and Jim Sullivan on guitars and Ginger Baker on drums. The part of me that cries out for validation is vindicated! But I'd like to believe I'd be citing the record here even if all the performers were unknowns.

I quite liked Proby's similar follow-up, *Together*, and I kind of marvelled even as I squirmed at his extraordinary, mangled rendering of *Somewhere* – which at least did me the favour of introducing me to that song. But to me he never really repeated the magic of *Hold Me*.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2w5AQX2WrB4>

Mel's comment on Pete's 18. *Hold Me*

I have an entirely emotional response to this track. To me Proby is one of the first of the infinite line of execrable Elvis impersonators, and in my experience one of the very least attractive. I hated having to listen to *Hold Me* again because I vividly remember how much it repulsed me when it was a hit.

It's nothing directly to do with split trousers, because I like Jim Morrison. But my dislike is certainly related to the egotism of a man who appeared to me to be hanging on to Elvis' coat tails while at the same time pretending to be a serious artist in his own right. It all feels as a result like an indulgent cake-and-eat-it parody. I don't mind parody. Mud did a brilliant job on Elvis. But this is also odiously self-serving.

So it's impossible to shake off the 50-year-old image in my mind of his bloated sneering face while listening to *Hold Me*, and not the remotest chance of me appreciating its finer qualities.

Isn't it amazing what strong associations music can have!

Nick's comment on Pete's 18. *Hold Me*

I can't bring myself to get as aerated as you do, Mel, about this, but neither can I share your enthusiasm, Pete (*où sont les Nick Cleggs d'antan?*). I think I just always saw P J Proby as self-parodic. I seem to recall that he was spotted while making demos for Elvis. He clearly had a voice, but it seems to me that he found it too easy to showboat. Likewise in terms of image – there was a photo of him (why?) in the National Portrait Gallery exhibition of pop/rock portraits from the '60s, and he seems to be clinging to rigging wearing a baggy shirt and a pony tail – a sort of Tom-Jones-meets-Errol-Flynn effort, which says it all to me: technically a good photo,

nothing really wrong with it, but to me in truth arch, contrived and a mite pointless. And thus too with the music

Pete's comment on Mel's and Nick's comments on *Hold Me*

It's fascinating that we have three different views of *Hold Me*, strung along a spectrum that seems to run from on extreme to the other. It must tell us something, though I'm not sure what.

You both seem to have an aversion to Proby himself, which I suppose is quite reasonable, yet it's something that never would have occurred to me at the time. As mentioned, I never had any liking for him, and I agree that it's a strange life choice to spend most of your career impersonating Elvis; but *Hold Me* comes from a brief period when he actually attempted to carve a musical identity of his own. If I hadn't known about his Elvis connection, I honestly never would have identified it in this piece. It's packed with non-Elvis features such as putting vocal harmonies at its core, and using vigorous percussion and a guitar sound that's more Mersey than Memphis.

Clearly I'm not going to persuade either of you to love the song fifty years later (or Mel even to like it). I wouldn't expect to. But I'd like to have convinced you, Mel, about the aspects of it that made me put it in my top hundred. Maybe your reaction simply underlines the fact that musical appreciation will always be a two-way process.

Mel's comment on Pete's comment on Mel's comment on *Hold Me*

Let's agree that my condemnations of Proby and Queen are irrational and over the top, but are essentially saying that there are things about them that don't appeal to me. Of course, this shouldn't lead you to conclude that I don't understand or appreciate why and how you like PJ Proby. You're extremely good at making the cases for music I don't enjoy!

I mean this seriously: in Proby's case I'm an ever so slightly more rounded human being for knowing that *Hold Me* has musical qualities I was previously unaware of. The world in a very tiny way also makes more sense now, because I used to think it was utterly worthless.

19. *Oliver's Army*, by Elvis Costello and the Attractions (1979)

Composer: Elvis Costello

Single and on "Armed Forces"

The fact that *Oliver's Army* was Elvis Costello's biggest hit seems to sum up the dichotomy that sometimes exists in popular music between music and words. I suspect that the thousands of people who bought this as a single weren't buying an anti-war, anti-occupation song (as perhaps might have been the case with early Bob Dylan or Joan Baez); they were buying a brilliant pop record that happened to have some rather bizarre lyrics. When it was at the height of its chart run, I spent an evening in a pub in Manchester during which every second song played on the juke box seemed to be this one. I don't think the people who were paying money to hear it were very interested in the message.

When you do start to listen to what it's saying, of course, it becomes much more interesting. The exact meaning is moot; apparently the supposed reference to Oliver Cromwell may be a misunderstanding, and the frame of reference could be purely modern. Either way, it seems to be a rant at the way the world's foot soldiers tend to be eternally exploited in pursuit of the aims of manipulative leaders.

You could argue that it's a slightly cynical joke by Costello, who wrapped a grim message (with some nasty and quite challenging lyrics) in the outward trappings of sing-along pop song. But to me this doesn't matter. It works on any level. The infectious melody and harmonies and the driving arrangement express the exuberance that I've been talking about – backed up by inspired details such as those quasi-classical "ta-da" chords in the

linking passages – and if that’s all people get from it, fine. If you take it as a vehement political tract, that’s OK too; it doesn’t have to stop you enjoying it. Maybe it gives you leave to enjoy it more.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LrjHz5hrupA>

Mel’s comment on Pete’s 19. *Oliver’s Army*

Many thanks for this especially, you’ll be pleased to hear, for alerting me to the rather important lyrics of a song which until now has sounded to me like just a jolly ditty.

I’ve always felt slightly guilty for not properly appreciating Elvis Costello. The public consensus is that he’s an important songwriter, and I’ve never had any reason to doubt that. I’ve got a double CD of his hits but I seldom play it, perhaps because his slightly weedy voice doesn’t appeal to me much. I dunno.

There’s probably no justification for my detached response to this when I can have such passionate feelings about P J Proby. But that’s the slightly irrational way it is! Now I realise I should have been listening to the lyrics not the music! This is great stuff, and I wish I’d paid more attention to Elvis Costello in the past.

(By the way, please note the profound difference between calling yourself Elvis because you admire him and pretending you are him.)

Nick’s comment on Pete’s 19. *Oliver’s Army*

Sorry, Pete, but we saw Elvis Costello a year or so ago. Still good after all these years. Margaret actually had the LP this track came from (namely “Armed Forces”), and if memory serves it’s all pretty good. I still really like this, as well as quite a lot of his early punkish stuff. His subsequent output has had some real highlights – I always had a not entirely unpolitically motivated liking for *Tramp The Dirt Down* on “Spike”, which I think is generally a pretty good album. If he’s never quite made it as high up my list as in many ways I think he should, I’m with Mel in thinking it’s to do with his voice, but for me it’s the vibrato – I have something of an aversion to over-broad vibrato in any form of singing. It’s certainly not to do with the quality of song-writing, nor the backing: the Attractions were a very good band (as, incidentally were the Blockheads). This is a terrific song from an excellent performer. Good choice. Will Elvis C make my list? ... Dunno. Yet.

20. *Grace Kelly*, by Mika (2007)

Composer: Mika

Single and on “Life In Cartoon Motion”

Mika (rhymes with “speaker”, for the uninitiated) was a phenomenon a few years ago, on the face of it targeting the teen market, though actually his appeal crosses generations. He’s an adoptive Brit with part-Middle Eastern, part-American ancestry, who studied at the Royal College of Music. According to good old Wikipedia his real name is Michael Holbrook Penniman. Anyway, he plays to my love of four things – musicality, inventiveness, tunefulness and exuberance.

I put forward for your contemplation two songs – *Rain* and *Grace Kelly*. Or is that cheating? Anyway, I like them equally, and in both cases the production is superb. *Rain* is an energetic, driving piece, starting with an urgent verse section, then breaking into a glorious chorus that expands as the backing singers join in. The lyric picks up a long-standing thread seen in works like Elton John’s (or rather Bernie Taupin’s) *Someone Saved My Life Tonight*, but in this case it is not so specific. It’s about yearning to be liberated, and the musical exuberance expresses this admirably.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sRk4QqkTtmQ>

Musically, *Grace Kelly* goes further, which is why it's my choice. It's a witty, teasing piece with the theme "Why don't you like me?", and in it the narrator suggests various ways in which he might change his personality in order to resolve this problemette. Two specific options that he puts forward are to be like Grace Kelly ("But her looks were too sad") or Freddie ("I've gone identity mad"). The Grace Kelly allusion is backed up by fragments of dialogue from the 1954 film "The Country Girl". The Freddie Mercury allusion is underpinned by some impudent Queen-inspired harmonies within the song itself.

You could argue that it's an intellectual tour de force ... or equally that it's just a load of pretentious twaddle. To me, that's not what matters. I just love the sheer brio of it all. It has presence, tunefulness and ... yes, exuberance. The chorus, which reportedly stretches the singer's voice over three octaves, is irresistible. This is pure pop music with skill, humour and panache from someone who knows exactly how to work the medium to the full.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UHtPSmP5nLw>

As an alternative to the above, consider this (believe it or not, I quite like this video, but it's a distraction from the song):

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

Mel's comment on Pete's 20. *Grace Kelly*

Interesting how removed I must be from popular culture when the guy sells five and a half million copies of a record and I'm unaware of his existence.

When I listened to *Rain* after *Grace Kelly* I suddenly saw the source of his appeal for you, Pete. Uplifting, jolly, tuneful. If *Grace Kelly* is also these things they are crushed by the association with (and imitation of) Freddie Mercury – the worst thing about Queen. (Yes I know that's the same as saying the worst thing about the English monarchy is Elizabeth II, but it's how I feel about Mercury's essential but oppressive presence in the canon of one of Britain's greatest exports.)

My education on the issue of Mika is extended by the video which has appealing moments and certainly conveys the exuberance which I didn't feel when I first heard the song.

I don't expect I'll be going back to this singer, but I'm richer for seeing that modern pop music can be witty, exhilarating, musical and cross-generational, and doesn't have to be as odious as Kanye West.

Nick's comment on Pete's 20. *Grace Kelly*

I think that I had semi-dismissed this. I enjoyed it, but hadn't really listened to the words, basically because I assumed that it was an exercise in exuberance and there wouldn't be more to it than that. So I now get the point rather better. It has all the qualities you ascribe to it, and which I had failed to appreciate. So it's certainly climbed in my estimation, though I doubt that it'll displace Jerry Lee Lewis in my affections.

Mel – I note your heading “Finally a random selection”. Ironically, in my latest choices I’ve gone the other way. This is my jazz selection.

21. *In Your Quiet Place*, by Gary Burton and Keith Jarrett (1971)

Composer: Keith Jarrett

“Gary Burton And Keith Jarrett” (album title)

In my first year at boarding school back in 1962 I was entranced by an album featuring veteran vibraphone player Lionel Hampton. It was sometimes played by our dormitory monitor (= prefect) in his cubicle after lights-out, and I thought the ringing vibraphone sound was quite magical.

Cut to ten vibraphoneless years later, and one day I heard a track on the radio from an album by Gary Burton, who has since become almost a byword for vibraphone technique, and Keith Jarrett, the virtuoso jazz pianist. Again I was entranced, and this time I went out and bought the album the very next day. I wasn't disappointed. It's a wonderful demonstration of fusion jazz, with some extraordinary piano from Jarrett and measured, well judged vibraphone from Burton.

The track that initially attracted me was an up-tempo number called *Grow Your Own*. I love the way the tune works its way through an irresistible chord sequence, from which the ensemble wrings every ounce of impact with manifest relish. However, my selection is not this, but the slow, atmospheric *In Your Quiet Place*, again with a haunting melody and chord sequence. Each verse builds up steadily to a triumphant climax, then falls back to a reflective minor chord before starting the next ascent. Burton's subtle technique is very much in evidence in this; I love the way he bends the notes to add a sense of mystery to the piece. You also get a sense of the delight with which Jarrett executes his complex piano verse. Unlike some pieces on this album, which can veer in the direction of self-indulgence (especially by Jarrett), this one is nicely contained and to purpose.

I love this track. I think it would be one of my top eight.

Note: Two tracks are combined in the YouTube extract below. I'd recommend listening to the quiet, percussionless *Moonchild* first; it's only a couple of minutes long, and makes a nice prelude to my track. Or you can or jump to 2 minutes 14 seconds, where *In Your Quiet Place* itself starts.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qL8OneMkwBE>

Aside note: In the early 1990s I was asked to video two women friends of Helen's competing in the Devizes to Westminster kayak marathon, which takes a day and a half of continuous paddling. We followed their canoe over the entire course, filming wherever we could find access to the Thames. The video worked, but the camera got damaged part-way through, and most of the soundtrack was lost. This prompted me to edit it by adding my own soundtrack of musical pieces that seemed to fit. Mostly I chose pop songs, but I launched it with *Grow Your Own* and concluded it with *In Your Quiet Place*, so of course in the folklore of our respective family groups these tracks are now indelibly linked to that remarkable event.

Nick's comment on Pete's 21. *In Your Quiet Place*

Well, this never ceases to be interesting! It's very odd how we share so many things, sometimes agree totally on music, and sometimes diverge. All part of the entertainment, I guess.

And here's a case in point. My brother was given a Lionel Hampton EP in 1962 (see what I mean?), which was the first time I am conscious of having heard a vibraphone. And I took again the sound, apparently in perpetuity. There's something insubstantial, uninflected and, sometimes to my ears, slightly jarring about the tone which I find rather unappealing, however much I recognise the dexterity and musicianship of the instrumentalist. To me the piano is infinitely preferable, but, that said, I don't think that even here (to take your word for the excesses elsewhere, Pete) Keith Jarrett always escapes from the charge of self-indulgence. This probably rather exaggerates my reaction. I was happy to let this waft over me, but it didn't move me more than that. Bloody philistine.

Mel's comment on Pete's 21. *In Your Quiet Place*

As we keep saying, one of the great joys of this game is that we are required to listen attentively to music which we would otherwise ignore or even remain completely unaware of. I can't imagine any other circumstances in which I'd sit down and listen to something I'd been told was played on a vibraphone!

Sure enough it starts all clinky-clinky the way I expected, and my heart sank. OK it sounds highly proficient, but that can also apply to people playing the French National Anthem with recording devices up their noses. A bit later on, though I began to get a feel for the melody. Then the other instrument come in. A marvellous piano joining gently, evoking the sound of water rippling, and eventually taking over the main theme.

Suddenly it all got rather special, with the two main instruments playing off one another. After a couple of hearings of this I listened to YouTube clips of Gary Burton and Keith Jarrett each playing *In Your Quiet Place* separately, and once again it was pedestrian. Not at all like the collaboration.

I think I get it. This track is quite a find. Thanks Pete.

22. *Hi-Di-Ho*, by Blood Sweat & Tears (1970)

Composers: Carole King and Gerry Goffin

"Blood Sweat & Tears 3"

On revisiting the "Blood Sweat & Tears 3" album this week, I've realised it's one of my favourite albums of all time. Many of the tracks are priceless. I don't know why I haven't played it more frequently. Their style has been called a variety of things; probably "fusion jazz rock" sums it up. They had already been around for a few years when this album came out. Founder-member Al Kooper had been and gone, and they had a new line-up and a very specific musical form: a strong rock beat, taut and extremely precise jazz horn arrangements with ringing high parts, and gritty lead vocal from David Clayton-Thomas. Taken together, the overall sound was unmistakable.

The single *Hi-Di-Ho* was out while I was working in a hotel in downtown Cincinnati, but strangely it has never especially reminded me of that time. I seem to have brought it with me down the years. It adds a further dimension to their usual ingredients in the form of a gospel choir, which joins in as the piece builds up to a crescendo. It was actually a cover of a perfectly acceptable Dusty Springfield recording, but this takes it to a new place. I've tried to research what the song actually means, but had limited success; unconfirmed suggestions of drug references seem plausible but perhaps unlikely, but I suppose you can make what you want of it. At the risk of invoking a now-overused term, for me this piece simply has an irresistible exuberance.

I find most of the other tracks on the album just as inspiring. There are marvellous arrangements of James Taylor's *Fire And Rain*, Richard Manuel's *Lonesome Suzie* and

Jagger/Richard's *Sympathy For The Devil*, as well as an upbeat original piece by Clayton-Thomas called *Lucretia Mac Evil*. I really commend all these. To me, the album illustrates how, given the right hands, it is possible to throw unexpected and imaginative orchestration at an existing song and transform it into something very different, and yet still somehow capture and even expand on the original intent.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=t_gY82cgg4k

Nick's comment on Pete's 22. *Hi-Di-Ho*

Those of you with memories as leechlike and brains as empty as mine may remember that one of the tracks on "The Rock Machine Turns You On", which I, like casts of thousands, owned when we were students, was *My Days Are Numbered* by Blood Sweat and Tears. It was not my favourite track (Taj Mahal and Leonard Cohen probably vied for that accolade) for reasons which this recording tends to confirm, changes to the band notwithstanding.

I always thought that Blood Sweat and Tears tended to the bombastic: I'm sure this says more about me than the recording, as I had/have the same reaction to a fair number of the recordings of the time – Chicago's output springs to mind. I got to know this particular song most fully (and belatedly, given its provenance) from Carole King's "Pearls" LP, and find it hard to woo myself away from the chronic Kingolatry we generally seem to share.

Mel's comment on Pete's 22. *Hi-Di-Ho*

There's no way to butter it up: I don't really enjoy this. Not only this song or performance. I've tried hard to educate myself in and enjoy this brand of jazz rock (via Chicago mainly). But it's all a bit brash for me.

I'm not going to deny any of the qualities you attribute to it, Pete. It's just not for me.

23. *The Girl From Ipanema*, by Astrud Gilberto (1964)

Composer: Antônio Carlos Jobim. English lyrics by Norman Gimbel

Single, and on the album "Getz/Gilberto"

According to Wikipedia, *The Girl From Ipanema* is the second most recorded song of all time (after *Yesterday*), so I can understand if it evokes little more from you than a massive yawn. However, for myself I don't think familiarity should take anything away from the distinctive sound of Gilberto's vibrato-less voice or the teasing structure of the song, with its sudden apparent shifts into unexpected keys. When I first heard this at school I thought it was extraordinary and intriguing, and I still haven't changed my opinion. It's a sort of template for this kind of laid-back, beguiling bossa nova piece, with Stan Getz's saxophone nicely complementing Astrud Gilberto's husky vocal style. It's the song that all others of its kind are trying to be.

In case you don't know the folk-lore story behind this version, supposedly the trio of João Gilberto, Antonio Carlos Jobim and Stan Getz wanted to record the song in English (as opposed to the original Portuguese), and were looking around for someone in their circle who could do it. Gilberto's wife Astrud, then not a singer at all, stepped up to the plate, and the rest is history. You can believe this or not, but it's a nice tale.

The YouTube version that I've picked is a curiosity in itself. It's a colour rendering of Astrud Gilberto singing it for a film called (you'd better believe this) "Get Yourself A College Girl". The sound synchronisation is hopeless, but the clip has an intriguing period feel. She's backed by Stan Getz in a quartet that includes a young Gary Burton on vibraphone. Small world.

Incidentally, I tried a few years ago to learn all the guitar chords for this song. I made a reasonable stab at it, but there are a LOT of chords that you don't normally encounter, and I fear I've now forgotten most of them. Still, I could perhaps revive them, given the time and inclination ...

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_1uEy-n4IsU

Nick's comment on Pete's 23. *The Girl From Ipanema*

Ah, now we're talking. I thought this track was terrific when it came out (even more than *Desafinado* which I also liked), and still do. Various things to observe. Stan Getz would be well up a list of my all-time favourite sax players: I still have a double LP of his music festering in the cupboard. He had something of a day – maybe even a month – in the sun as a result of the Bossa Nova fad. He had a deliciously smooth and lyrical style which melds effortlessly with the laid back sexiness of the song.

As far as the sexiness is concerned, the song manages a curious sort of reflexiveness. When it's sung by a woman (who but Astrud Gilberto, however many times it's been recorded?), it sounds like a hymn to the capacity of a beautiful woman to float above the waves of male lust she triggers. When it's sung by a man, it sounds like a cool(ish) articulation of that male lust. This seems to me rather remarkable. And you're right about the song's structure – it's beguiling because it sounds simple when it is anything but. I've never tackled the chords. Maybe I should.

PS According to the sleeve notes on my recording, João Gilberto didn't want Astrud to sing, but Getz and Mrs Getz insisted!

Mel's comment on Pete's 23. *The Girl From Ipanema*

An interesting one. I have hazy memories of being alternately impressed and depressed by this. Impressed because it's obviously a unique composition which is very cleverly structured and delivered, and which on some listenings seems quite sexy. Depressed because I recall times when the bossa nova was an instant passport to alleged sophistication and later when it was a song to wheel out at the drop of a sombrero to elicit South America.

These things shouldn't matter when we're assessing the quality of pieces of music. But as we have already established I think, we're accounting for the music which makes us what we are. And although I respect those who make it, and admire the results, I'm probably not the guy who flips over super-cool jazz redolent of a beach in Rio which we've come to recognise through the fantasy of movies and adverts.

The recording deserves a more complimentary response from me. I do like it a lot and it's not the performers' fault that it's been so abused.

I suppose one of the tricks in a self-revelatory exercise like this is to avoid getting carried away with personal enthusiasms. The higher we “big up” the things we like, the further we risk falling if the others don’t agree with our views. But sometimes this is difficult to avoid, especially when, as here, the choices are such deeply held favourites of mine that I can’t contain the superlatives. That’s mainly why there are only two selections here. They’re more than enough.

24. Heart Like A Wheel, by Kate and Anna McGarrigle (1975)

Composer: Anna McGarrigle (in 1972)

On the album “Kate and Anna McGarrigle”

When I discovered Kate and Anna McGarrigle in the mid-1970s, I felt they were what I’d been waiting for in musical terms since the Beatles. Their music, like the Beatles’ in a way, was the result of a remarkable fusion of influences – pop, folk rock, country and western, Cajun, folk, hillbilly, and plain down-the-middle rock – with some actual Beatles influence in the mix somewhere too. Their lyrics are a frank, vulnerable take on the delicacy and fragility of relationships, and their music is often entrancing. They had a unique ability to layer their delicate vocal harmonies one on another without ever losing the clarity – building their songs into cascades of depth and vocal colour. Musically I can’t think of any other performers who have ever achieved anything quite like them.

As it happens, *Heart Like A Wheel* doesn’t have vocal harmonies all the way through; for the first couple of verses Anna sings the main melody solo, though there are harmonies in the background. But then comes that short-lived but haunting chorus (“It’s only love, it’s only love ...”), which pulls out the stops and indicates the kind of thing they were capable of. Lyrically, you might take issue with the continuity of the imagery, but my feeling is that the compelling musical totality drives the meaning. It’s a resounding heartfelt lament, and I find even thinking about it moving, let alone actually listening to it. After you get to the end, that resonant chorus simply plays on in your head.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=N8cQFdFezXc&list=RDN8cQFdFezXc>

Further reading:

* *Kiss and say goodbye:*

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=J3m9qY35xGo>

* *Fixture in the Park:*

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

PS I saw the McGarrigles twice in concert in London. Seeing these exotic Canadian myth-makers in the flesh was truly one of the highlights of my (admittedly limited) concert-going career.

Mel’s comment on Pete’s 24. Heart Like A Wheel

Again?! I recall you being incredulous at my inability to appreciate the McGarrigles some years ago when you gave me no fewer than three albums of theirs and invited me to find out how good they were.

Well they haven’t got any worse – or better. Oh yes, of course they’ve got lovely voices. And they write fabulous tunes. And there’s their guitar playing, their fellow musicians and the

production. I shouldn't forget the sensitive, thoughtful lyrics. I daresay the women were quite pretty too.

There's almost nothing to find fault with. (OK the lyrics are a bit messy, but sensitive and thoughtful all the same.) No, they're very good. Honestly.

But they still sound quite a bit like bloody country singers with a thing about god. They haven't changed, but I'm even less tolerant of bloody country singers with a thing about god than I was when I sat through those three albums trying not to get depressed about it.

I accept that god only plays a role in two of your four selections – below average I would have thought. But it's too late. I know exactly where they're coming from, even when they don't mention him. Brrrr.

Pete's comment on Mel's comment on *Heart Like A Wheel*

I see that despite my massive (and illegal!) promotional efforts, I've failed to persuade you unequivocally on either of my choices. I suppose that's the nature of this game: comment and response. It's so illuminating in so many different ways. And I have to accept your comments, except perhaps on one point: you mention the simplicity of the McGarrigles, which I understand, but I'd argue that part of their strength was in the extraordinary complexity of one aspect – the interweaving, textured harmonies. To me, they took this approach to a new level. However, I know I've had my say.

Nick's comment on Pete's 24. *Heart Like A Wheel*

I've sort-of known and enjoyed some of their work over the years, but have never been much gripped by it. So this time I've tried, and I end up enjoying it ... but still not being much gripped. The fundamental reason is, I'm afraid, that I can't hear as much in it as you do, Pete. Sparseness and simplicity have much to commend them in music (you may recall my grumbling about over-orchestration), but they are qualities which leave nowhere to hide. This can be exploited – think of Neil Young – but if it is not, it does leave things rather exposed. So I did find that the (dis)continuity of the imagery obtrusive in a way in which I have not necessarily found similar discontinuities in, say, Dylan. So I enjoyed this and the other smuggled goods, but I'm afraid that it won't have me rushing out to add them to my ipod.

25. *Brando*, by Dory Previn (1974)

Composer: Dory Previn

From self-titled album

I think Dory Previn was simply one of the most impressive, and possibly underrated, pop music talents of the twentieth century. There are some parallels with Carole King. Both had a distinguished musical career working with their husbands (Dory with André), then suffered a painful break-up, following which they exploded into a new surge of creativity. Dory Previn evidently had a worse time than Carole King (she had a breakdown), but in some respects came back with an even more remarkable burst of musical energy. Her purple patch was in the first half of the 1970s, when she released a succession of stunning albums. Her voice was arguably nothing to write home about, but was characterful and touching and exactly right for requirement. Meanwhile she and her producers assembled an array of talented musicians, and came up with some wonderfully full, intricate and satisfying arrangements.

And the songs: a torrent of poetry, anger, wit, intellect, humour and insight, supported by often intricate, invariably tuneful melodies. The sheer musicality is a constant delight, while the lyrics are exhilarating. This is a grown-up talking to us, but a likeable, vulnerable grown-up who shares our own childhood fears and angsts, and has found a brilliantly accessible, clever and rewarding way to articulate them.

I find it hard to select one song from her amazing catalogue. They vary so widely in style. In a way you need to listen to one or two typical examples first in order to establish a context for my choice, *Brando*, because it's slightly atypical. It has the melody and style of a classic love song, with a definitive kind of musical gravitas; yet the words are self-aware and gently self-mocking. To me it's a clever paradox: an intellectual, "virtual" love song, yet one that hits the spot with transcendent poignancy. I can never listen to it without feeling moved.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Rqna3lHIUVo>

Further reading: Can I also commend the following more typical examples (be aware that there's no bass on the first of these, though there's some notable electric guitar):

* *Mythical Kings And Iguanas* (reflective, allusive and haunting):

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

* *Coldwater Canyon* (satirical):

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LD4xcsHp83M>

* *Obscene Phone Call* (funny and acerbic):

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=__O3kVWbu18

Mel's comment on Pete's 25. *Brando*

Thank you, thank you, thank you. The McGarrigles sins are all forgiven. You are redeemed, Pete! Dory Previn is back.

I knew I'd once loved her. But I had completely forgotten this record. Three of your four selections are from the 1974 album "Dory Previn", which was one of my big sacrifices when I ran away from home. Barb, not being without good taste and a wicked sense of humour herself, made sure she hung on to it, and I haven't heard it since 1976.

I'd say the album is utterly sublime. But that's the experience of rehearing it. The tracks are actually as immediate and sharp as a paper cut. So clever. Only this week I've been trawling my failing memory with the question "where can I find some songs I like enough to include in the 100 which actually make me laugh?" (I may yet come up with something, but after the Bonzos I was stuck with Benny Hill's *Ernie* and there was no way that would make it.)

And here you are with the ineffable *Coldwater Canyon*. Oh joy. Beside that *Obscene Phone Call* isn't laugh out loud funny – but the wit! It's better now than 40 years ago. If you want to know how to really bring god into a song, here's the model.

Nick's comment on Pete's 25. *Brando*

There seems to me to be a lot more to this song than *Heart Like A Wheel*, musically and lyrically. I think Dory Previn has fallen in rather the same camp as the McGarrigles for me in the sense that I have been aware of her but not ever got embroiled: I often suspect this is a matter of accidents of personal history as much as anything (think of the randomness of what we did and didn't hear when we were students).

But there is a difference between these two choices which I'm finding quite tricky to pinpoint. In a field as derivative as rock/pop it would be daft to expect something new all that often. Even in classical music, the critics who get sniffy about Mozart say he wasn't an innovator but a synthesiser of others' innovations: well if that's true (and they know more than me, but I still find it hard to believe) it shows that innovation isn't everything.

So *Brando* seems to me to be more ... what's the word? radical? ... than *Heart Like A Wheel*. Having said that, the "argument" of the lyric is not exactly unfamiliar from what I can recall of 1970s feminism, and the music doesn't have a Captain-Beefheart-esque shock (thankfully as far as I'm concerned). Even so, it is intriguing and thoughtful. I shall persevere. Sorry – that makes it sound like a trial, which isn't what I mean at all. I need to do some more engaged exploring and revisiting of things I half remember.

Pete's comment on Nick's comment on *Brando*

Your comments on *Brando* are commendably within the spirit of the game in that they related specifically to the work in question, not to the body of the artist's oeuvre, which is another matter. However, I'm sure Mel will join me in urging you to find time to enjoy some of Dory Previn's other work, which is astonishing in its variety, wit and musicality. I happen to be very fond of *Brando*, but you'll find other songs by her to be much more acerbic, allusive, intellectual, satirical and teasing. By comparison, *Brando* is atypically reflective. You say you'll keep persevering with Dory Previn. I hope you do.

Mel's supplementary comment on *Brando* [September 2022]:

Apologies, Pete, for being so enthusiastic about hearing the name Dory Previn back in 2015 that I didn't say anything about *Brando*. It wasn't one of my top favourites when I originally bought the "Dory Previn" LP because, you may be surprised to hear, I didn't listen to lyrics so intently back then. And this song is such a gentle version of what could sometimes be abrasive Seventies feminism that it has to be listened to right to the end. The words are personal, direct, vivid and disarmingly honest, and yet manage to characterise a much wider uncomfortable truth about male domination which the politics still face. Thanks to you, it's now my favourite track on the two-album CD I bought immediately after hearing it again seven years ago.

OK, here are some rather obvious choices from the 1960s. I had to include them eventually, so I thought it might as well be now. Doubtless there will be more from me from this period, but these should do for the moment.

26. A Whiter Shade Of Pale, by Procol Harum (1967)**Composers:** Gary Brooker, Keith Reid, Matthew Fisher

Single

You hardly need to listen to this. It's imprinted on everyone's brain. Generally I've avoided choosing that kind of song for my top hundred. You reach a point where you've simply heard them enough. Yet with this one, I suspect I never will.

I first heard this while I was at Grenoble University in the spring of 1967. My favourite song at the time was some hit by Johnny Halliday. I no longer remember it, but I felt I was very "right on" for liking something by an indigenous French star. I distinctly remember I was listening to it in my room one sunny day when I heard the strains of *A Whiter Shade Of Pale* wafting in through the open window from a lower floor. Immediately I changed allegiance. I found it irresistible then, and I still do.

Who knows what it's about, if anything? Unlike some obscure and seemingly "nonsense" lyrics, this one does appear to be about something, though from research over the years I've concluded that no one really knows for sure what. In a way that makes it more interesting; the images are vivid and surreal, and contribute to the song's memorable aura. But that said, I mainly like the sound of it – Gary Brooker's unmistakable voice, the haunting Hammond organ, and the measured step bass (that's what Wikipedia tells me it is). Interestingly, although sages from then until now have repeatedly dismissed the melody as having been written by Bach, it seems plain to me that it's not a direct lift – it is simply *like* a Bach piece, or one might say inspired by one. And why not?

This song will always have a spine-tingling quality for me. To me it's a quintessential anthem of the late sixties, and sums up a gleaming French spring, with the prospect of interesting times to come. And wow – it was followed by Cambridge. What can I say?

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

Nick's comment on Pete's 26. A Whiter Shade Of Pale

I have been vaguely mulling over whether this would make my list. A few years back it would have done so, but now ... I doubt it, so the mulling has been about how my view has shifted. I'm with you, Pete, on everything you say – with one little addition. Bach had a short period before being given a "jazz" makeover by the Jacques Loussier Trio, and they achieved a coterie popularity or more (or is that less?): I think it was the Loussier version which was used on the Hamlet cigar ads, but can't quite summon up the intellectual curiosity to check that. But Bach was circulating in arty non-classical circles at the time.

I can't of course claim to share Grenoble with you. For me the equivalent was that this was the last track that my mate Alex and I heard as we drove out of UK radio range when we went to Italy in the Summer of 1967. So why did this track work for me then and for the next 20 years but less so now? Not because the lyrics are meaningless, or meaningful at best very spasmodically, though that may be part of it. It just seems to have palled through repetition, so, for instance, it isn't on my ipod though it could be, and I have never owned a recording of it since a single I was given some time after the event. But I still react with pleasure as well as nostalgia when I hear it.

Mel's comment on Pete's 26. *A Whiter Shade Of Pale*

You're going to think this is deliberate, but I could have predicted this from day one. Classic song, everyone loves it. You're bound to pick it. And I have a major problem with it.

Unlike some of your less attractive choices (for me), this is a track which I have always found interesting and quite enjoyable – up to a point. The point is not that the group was named after a pedigree cat in poncey Latin or that the song sounds like a Bach rip off. I loved it when it was released, and then for years I listened intently to the lyrics with increasing disenchantment.

I'll specify. Some nonsense lyrics are wonderful nonsense and deserve to be appreciated as such – *I Am The Walrus* is the prime example. Some songs have nonsense lyrics which sound profound, but the songwriter is having fun with us and we should try to enjoy the joke – *MacArthur Park*, for instance. Some songs have obscure but interesting ("poetic") lyrics which reward you when you work out what they mean – Dylan up to the early seventies; *Along The Watchtower* is one of my favourites.

Then there's overblown meaningless twaddle. This and *Bohemian Rhapsody* are both infuriatingly popular because people don't care enough about the lyrics. (I'm not including you here.) They really don't mean anything, yet they sound as if they do. And that to me is pretentious and a turn off.

Pity because it's a great sound!

27. *Somethin' Stupid*, by Frank and Nancy Sinatra (1967)

Composer: C. Carson Parks

Single, and on album "The World We Knew"

Here's another very well-known song, and curiously enough I also first heard *Somethin' Stupid* in Grenoble. It was played over the speaker system of a café in Place Grenette where I sometimes used to have lunch. You'll have to take my word for this, but I turned to the person with me (I think it was a girl called Felicity) and said I was convinced it would become a UK number one. I was right! (I made similar predictions with other songs many times over the years, but I seldom if ever pulled off the trick with such unerring success.)

To me this song is perfection. No one could have done it better – lyrics, arrangement, vocals, any of it. The lyrics are remarkable. The man is infatuated by a woman who is out of his league, and can't help declaring himself, even though he knows his pitch will probably fail. At a glance it seems that it's a connected narrative, and in a sense that's the effect; but actually it's a series of vignettes, some of them only a single line long, which skip through what could be one scene or a repeating experience.

Frank Sinatra sings it with characteristic charm, but a lot of the musical magic comes from the irresistible harmony line sung by Nancy. If you separate it out, her part doesn't range far in pitch, but against the main melody it elevates the whole piece to something inspired. And to wrap it all up, you have that soft, beguiling guitar introduction and an appropriately restrained orchestral accompaniment.

Clarence Carson Parks was evidently a one-trick pony, and never wrote anything else that came anywhere near to equalling this. I'm just thankful that Frank Sinatra decided to go ahead and record it with Nancy, thwarting Lee Hazlewood's threat to record it with her if he didn't. It could never have been the triumph it is if that had happened.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=of48fpoSEPU>

Mel's comment on Pete's 27. *Somethin' Stupid*

I think I have to agree with you here. I've always liked this, though I thought it was a bit uncool to admit it – not that my thinking includes the word "uncool" itself. Then I heard it a little while

ago (Brian Mathews probably) and came to the conclusion that it's really an understated little classic. Even if I'd realised earlier I don't suppose I would have wanted to allow the arrogant Mafioso that accolade when he was alive.

Now approaching it with my critical faculties firing, and with your help, I can see why it's so good. It's a really nice pop lyric from a slightly unusual angle. And if we are standing in Sinatra's shoes – ie from an adult perspective – the hopelessness of the situation is actually quite touching. Your observation that the lyric expresses serial embarrassment and rejection rather than just one occasion is important. The poor infatuated guy can't help himself, though the girl likes him just enough to keep going out with him. Typical bloody woman. It's almost tragic!

Note, I'm sure it's a male song despite the daughter's modest but highly effective contribution.

Great tune, engaging opening guitar and restrained orchestra. Just as you say.

There's one other reason for having affection for this song. I used to have a lot of parties at home with my mates and for the most part my parents stayed out of the way and just shouted when we went on too late. But there was one where my Mum and Dad came and joined us (I must have been a bit older by then) and started dancing, quite romantically, to *Somethin' Stupid*. A real treat to see, and something endearing to look back on.

Nick's comment on Pete's 27. *Somethin' Stupid*

Again I agree with what you say, particularly about how effective the extraordinarily monotone harmony is, but this was and remains a track that I'm happy to listen to, but which doesn't greatly engage me. I've already confessed to having a Sinatra (F, that is) blind spot.

In this case I can see that the Robbie Williams/Nicole Kidman version serves to show how good the original was. Not, I now see, the original – but then the actual original by the composer and his lovely lady wife is strikingly dreary (thanks for prompting that bit of checking). Be that as it may, the Sinatra version has never entered the not very magic circle of music I've owned or wished to own. Nothing wrong with it, just doesn't get there. It's not to do with genre or idiom or anything I can put my finger on. But if I were going to choose a duet of a not dissimilar vintage, it'd be Billy Eckstein and Sarah Vaughan singing *Passing Strangers*. But then I don't own that either.

28. *World Without Love*, by Peter and Gordon (1964)

Composers: Lennon-McCartney (actually by Paul McCartney)

Single

While we're on the subject of minor masterpieces (and we are), here's another. In my book, anyway. Why? Hard to put my finger on it. It's the totality that I like. Lyric-wise, it doesn't stand up to much scrutiny. It's that familiar story about the fantasy woman – already featured twice in my selections, I note: once in *In Dreams*, and once in *I'll Never Get Over You*. Not as effective as the former, much more so than the latter. But in any case, the overall musical impact is more important.

It's yet another song that everyone knows, and hardly needs to listen to – but do give it a whirl. I distinctly remember first seeing it on "Top of the pops", and feeling resentful that only the duo was featured on stage, even though clearly the real impact came from the treatment by the unseen backing band. The arrangement is spare and haunting – the emphatic bass, the restrained organ, the almost apologetic solo guitar – and the melodic structure, with its frequent sombre minor chords, is perfect for purpose.

The Beatles themselves didn't rate the song, and Lennon thought the "please lock me away" phrase trite. I can see all that. If you don't like the song, or don't like any song by Paul McCartney by definition – and I thought I'd better get my retaliation in first here – I'm on a hiding to nothing in talking up this one. This one is what it is, and I've always found it strangely compelling*.

Regrettably, the *Top Of The Pops* video doesn't seem to exist on YouTube, and the *Crackerjack* video is apparently a live rendering – impressive for its time, but it doesn't have the magic of the original. So I can do no better than point you to the actual single:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wGgQ4ubfVzM>

*I'm not the only one; it was included in the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame's 500 Songs that Shaped Rock and Roll.

Mel's comment on Pete's 28. *World Without Love*

We've been listening to the same Saturday morning radio programmes. When I heard this recently I was reminded of the huge impression it made on me as a teenager. And the thought inconclusively occurred to me that it could make my 100. So you don't need to persuade me to play it. I'm not so prejudiced against McCartney either that I'd ignore a record of this quality.

It came out at a time when the Liverpool Sound (no idea how to describe it, but I'd recognise it with my head in a bucket of water) was still relatively new. And here it was from the posh boys in London. You had to sit up and listen.

Their voices always seemed to work together perfectly, and the tune is superb. Those are the features which always grabbed me. Add a solid backing with some nice twiddles, and a simple lyric which doesn't mind rhyming "tune" and "moon" – McCartney's embarrassment does have some justification – and it's clear why my teenage self was entranced.

Still like it today.

Nick's comment on Pete's 28. *World Without Love*

Oh dear I'm getting repetitive. Nothing new there, I hear you chorus. I didn't much like this when it came out, I think because, for all its musicality, it was insipid compared to those records (mis)labelled "Liverpool/Mersey sound" (now there's another pretty meaningless category) that I did like. It's not simply a matter of energy: I rather disliked Gerry and the Pacemakers, who seemed to regard frenetic jollity as sufficient in itself. But I think I regarded it then as being too much like how I would view alcohol-free beer now (I don't think there was any such repellent product at the time). And listening to *World Without Love* again, that's where I still find myself – nice enough, but thin stuff. Sorry.

29. *Keep On Running*, by The Spencer Davis Group (1965)

Composer: Jackie Edwards

Single

I always thought this was a wonderful blast of inspiration – the fuzzbox guitar, those solid dominant chords between verses, and Stevie Winwood's extraordinary ringing voice. There's not a lot more to say about it. I just think it's great.

Two asides. One is an observation about just how far video technique has advanced since the 1960s. I played through the version linked below, and found myself marvelling at the failure of the camera team to pick out the interesting musical activity – the fuzz guitar and the impressive running bass. Back then, they evidently thought their main duty was just to concentrate on the lead singer's face.

The other aside is an anecdote I've trotted out many times over the years, but which, if you've already heard it, hopefully you may have forgotten. Back in 1973, having been appointed above my years to the heady role of manager of a truck depot in Tamworth, I was interviewing a young guy for the job of office junior. He said he name was Bob

Winwood, so I said, “Ah, as in Stevie?” To which he replied, “Yes, he’s my cousin.” He got the job, and was very good at it.

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

Mel’s comment on Pete’s 29. *Keep On Running*

Good song well delivered by a ridiculously young Steve Winwood (wasn’t he 16 when it came out?). I would probably have been more impressed in 1965 if I could have heard the great bass line as I can now after the range was evidently extended by electronic wizardry. Impossible at the time.

I probably danced to it, though it doesn’t bring back any particular memories, and I never employed a family member. But it is undoubtedly high quality pop and it’s nice to know that it still pleases you.

Nick’s comment on Pete’s 29. *Keep On Running*

Terrific stuff, which I liked at the time and still do. It’s interesting that this is yet another example of a UK group taking a transatlantic record and achieving a hit. I referred to Doris Troy’s *Just One Look* recently. That was occasionally – very occasionally – played at around the time in question, but I don’t recall ever hearing the original of this, though there was a bit of Ska* to be heard occasionally (similarly I never heard the original of *Go Now* until 20 or more years after the event).

Keep On Running is like a different song, as the change to the rhythm, arrangement and phrasing are so radical. And it is excellent stuff. Steve Winwood (none of whose relatives I have ever knowingly employed) has been pretty wonderful throughout his various incarnations. The bass, as you both indicate, is central to the drive of the whole track. Enough to make anyone dance.

*Ah – ska, backbeat, reggae, soca – a whole new batch of categories. Just what we all need.

This is a contribution containing one record – possibly my favourite record of all time. It needs a submission all to itself.

30. While My Guitar Gently Weeps, by the Beatles (1968)

Composer: George Harrison
Beatles' "White Album"

Why is this track my all-time favourite? I find it simply stunning. I always have, ever since hearing it in H5 at Cat's – louder, probably, than we ever had a right to play it. I can still remember my ears ringing from that penetrating Hammond organ – played, I've since learned, by George himself.

I've read various explanations of how he came to write the song, but in a way that's not the point. What matters is how it ended up. On some levels it's a *jeu d'esprit*, on others a profound take on the whole of life, seen with sorrow, resignation, cynicism, fondness. It's what you make it. I love the central idea – "I look at you all, see the love there that's sleeping" – a momentous notion, yet one couched in the context of the utterly trivial. And I especially like the line that starts "I look at you all ..." and is never completed. The narrator has already said it all.

And all this with an irresistible melody and chord sequence – that portentous, almost staccato chromatic descent, often ending in an unexpected place; and then the middle section, with its optimistic rising guitar sequence at the end of each pair of lines. Behind it, the ringing Hammond organ, and on top of it, Eric Clapton's remarkable guitar lead, which is surely the most striking single aspect of the record. It never dominates, yet it is insistent and ever-present. Such confident, inventive, well-judged and meticulously worked-out phrasing: urgent and anguished, yet in a paradoxical way also joyous. Even Clapton himself must have wondered in later years what muse had descended on him to elicit something so extraordinary. Seldom has a song delivered so fulsomely on its title.

Yes, I know I've larded the above with excessive superlatives, but when you're talking about your favourite song, what else are you going to do? You will no doubt both have criticisms of the piece and/or my view of it to bring me down to earth, or will just think it average (which is almost worse), so I thought I'd better kick off with a bang.

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

Mel's comment on Pete's 30. While My Guitar Gently Weeps

Sorry Pete, you are totally wrong. I couldn't disagree with you more. In fact some of your suggestions stretch credibility to the limit.

I speak of course of your final paragraph. No, there's definitely nothing excessive in what you say. And the rest of your critique is more than accurate and true. For me it's a revelation. You've taken one of my own favourite songs of all time and shown me why I should regard it even more highly.

Let's start with one of the more surprising aspects of your commentary: you have significantly improved my understanding of the lyric. Yes, I said that. I've always had a slightly uneasy feeling that the song is a lyrical accident – hippy goes to India and comes back with some rather trite philosophy, gets in a great guitarist... I'm not necessarily going back on that. But "I look at you all, see the love there that's sleeping" is also a momentous notion, if perhaps not George's own. Certainly worthy of the ineffable music which goes with it. There's no reason why I should have been so ungenerous until now.

Another point is more subtle. The significance of the final incomplete “I look at you all ...” had previously eluded me. But yes, yes! It means exactly what you say it does. How wonderful.

And the music. I’ve always responded to the music on an immediate emotional level. And it’s, as they say, gut wrenching. A perfect realisation of the aspiration of the lyric to enlighten us all – and the awful sadness of impossibility of doing so. On that point, give or take, I guess we are in harmony.

Now you’ve gone and told me how Harrison achieves this remarkable effect. I get the beautiful melody, obviously, and the notes soaring up and down. But as you demonstrate there’s a lot more going on than just Clapton playing the guitar as if angels existed. (You’re right, he must lie awake at night wondering if he’s ever done anything better. Interesting to reflect on the potential effect of musical geniuses inspiring one another?)

I hadn’t even considered there was a Hammond organ there. Now I can see it’s playing an integral part. I hadn’t given the least credit to McCartney’s attention-grabbing piano intro – now I can see how it contributes, along with the middle section, to the ultimately uplifting effect of the whole. And so on.

I can’t recall playing it excessively loudly in H5. But I damned pleased that I did. It’s the least it deserved.

I could go on. But it’s all a bit superfluous. As I write and edit I’m listening to the computer copy of the “White Album” track for the eighth, ninth, tenth, eleventh time in succession knowing – and feeling – it’s even greater than I’ve always thought it was. Can’t get much better than that.

Thank you so much. This is wonderful.

Nick’s comment on Pete’s 30. *While My Guitar Gently Weeps*

Always a favourite track, which has never quite penetrated my psyche to the extent it has yours, Pete. I’ve been thinking about why, and the answer is pretty mundane. When I was thinking a year ago about the rules I was going to set myself in relation to picking my 100, I decided I couldn’t justify picking records which I don’t own and/or never have owned, on the grounds that I can scarcely claim that it’s indispensable if I have dispensed with it.

This means that the content of the white album (White Album???) don’t qualify. I didn’t want to buy it as a student, because I thought that too much of the material was weak. I can’t recall giving the subject much thought since, but, having reacted to your choice as positively as I was bound to, I had a look at in HMV (oh, yes) when I was in Leeds. I still don’t want the album – too much insufficiently interesting material. We do own a version of *While My Guitar Gently Weeps*, but it’s a live one on a Harrison compilation, and doesn’t have the bite of the original, which is doubtless not permitted on copyright grounds. Well, I could have compensated for that as I have to other examples of isolated gems by buying the track for my ipod. So why haven’t I? Well, it’s just one of those oversights. So I’d better use the ipod remedy.

While My Guitar Gently Weeps is interesting. George Harrison seems to me to be a pretty uneven songwriter – capable of producing the memorable and unmemorable not quite at random, but pretty consistently inconsistently. That said, there is clearly an upward trend in his output from the early examples of his songs, and by this time he is seriously accomplished – not entirely convincingly (the main attraction of “sweeping” seems to me to be that it rhymes with “weeping” rather than any higher artistic aim) but my reaction is “who cares?”, which is a measure of how good the song is.

Clapton’s guitar always seems to me to be the tour de force here (at some point you’ll get my thoughts on him – I bet you can hardly wait), but I think the other thing that’s worth mentioning is George’s singing, which is spot on. A few years back, Brian Matthew was working through a lot of Beatles BBC archive material on the Saturday morning event, and played the Beatles’ version of a Buddy Holly track (can’t remember which one), with George on lead vocals, and he was really very good indeed. So all in all that’s a yes from me.

Right – here are three tracks to help me catch up numerically with you two. They're a mixed bag; they don't have much in common, and two of them are not necessarily widely known beyond the cognoscenti. The other is from one of the biggest-selling albums of the 1970s.

31. *If This Be The Last Time*, by Oasis (1984)

Composer: Peter Skellern

On the album "Oasis"

No, not that Oasis. This Oasis was a short-lived enterprise launched in 1984 by Peter Skellern, who recruited Mary Hopkin because she had the kind of voice he wanted, and cellist Julian Lloyd-Webber, who was enjoying a high public profile at the time. It was largely a vehicle for songs by Skellern. The album is full of gems (I think Skellern is [was] a gifted song writer, and somewhat under-rated), and to me *If This Be The Last Time* is the stand-out best piece on the album.

If you watch the video, I suppose you might baulk at the flamboyant relish with which Lloyd-Webber plays his cello score (in fact he has two solo sections in the course of the song), but to me they're an essential part of the greater whole.

What is truly wonderful to me is the third and fourth verses, which Skellern and Hopkin sing in harmony (they swap vocal lines for the final occasion). Or perhaps I should say "in counterpoint". The two voices converge and diverge in beautiful juxtaposition. I think it's sublime. I worked out both vocal parts at some point in my past, and since then have often sung the song through with anyone who would indulge me. Hm.

The lyrics are self-consciously "antique", but I don't mind that. Skellern was attempting to evoke a mood and a style, and I think he succeeded. Actually I like the whole thing, including the atmospheric introduction, the instrumental "interruptions", and the attacking cello technique. The melody and harmonies are simply inspired, and the whole thing has a magical quality to it.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ls73oeUwZ_4

Nick's comment on Pete's 31. *If This Be the Last Time*

I share your sense that Peter Skellern is underrated, Pete, and liked him from his earliest stuff (even if any song which refers to a woman as a "lady" automatically received a large minus score – "You're a lady, I'm a man" in this case). I think the last time I was aware of his output was when he was singing Irving Berlin and the like. Margaret had (and presumably still has) some of his records, and I thought they were very decent – we even went to see him at the Stables in Milton Keynes, and he was excellent. He subsequently retired to Polruan in Cornwall, where he ran a choir. I once saw him there: he was wearing a yachting cap, which shows that you can't have everything.

I think the trick with him was that he seemed like a very ordinary person, but they really worked – as if a colleague strolled over to a pub piano and suddenly revealed an exceptional musical talent you didn't know they had. Skellern's rather reedy voice isn't "good", but it is in tune and conveys emotion well; his piano playing is unflashy (J. Lloyd-Webber please note) but very skilful and so on.

I didn't know this song, but it's very pleasing. I have heard the predictable Mary Hopkin records from time to time on the radio, and have always been struck by how characterless her voice is. But, as you say, it works really well with Peter Skellern's – and seems to me to be more

characterful in the lower registers than the higher ones with which I associate her singing and which she uses here when singing solo.

Mel's comment on Pete's 31. *If This Be the Last Time*

I'm afraid my ignorance prevails here. To the extent that for a while I was confused between Peter Skellern and Peter Sarstedt. Not that this should affect my enjoyment of the track.

I think I can appreciate the qualities which you each like in this, though it doesn't really appeal to my musical tastes. You can presumably predict my response – since the lyric and its antique feel don't grab me, I'm not drawn to what is undoubtedly a very sweet and interestingly arranged and performed song. I don't dislike it. Or like it. I'm afraid it doesn't inspire me to listen either to more Peter Skellern, or Peter Sarstedt.

I am, by the way, ambivalent about Mary Hopkin for indefensible reasons. I imagine she is a reject from the bed of Paul McCartney, my least favourite Beatle, but she was for some years considered by many people to be a spitting image of Sue, or vice versa probably!

32. *Senior Citizens*, by Pete Atkin (1973)

Composers: Clive James and Pete Atkin

On the album "Road of Silk"

I was always ambivalent about the collaboration between Clive James and Pete Atkin. Just how effective, I used to wonder, were their efforts to translate Clive James's sometimes self-conscious poetry into song? And how pleasing was Pete Atkin's idiosyncratic and "unsingerly" singing style, and the rather daring lurches in some of his chord sequences? Frankly I found their more challenging songs a bit grating; there was too much "look at me" about them.

But sometimes they really succeed in hitting the spot – mostly, it seems to me, when their verbal and musical imaginativeness is slipped in subtly, rather than hitting us about the face. Among such numbers, I'd cite *Time And Time Again*, *Care Charm Sleeper*, *Road Of Silk*, even *Secret Drinker*. They're nicely observed, but they also simply sound good.

Which brings me to *Senior Citizens*, which I think is superb. First you get a long ad lib section, painting an uncomfortably graphic picture of old age; then you get a tuneful, lyrical second half, complete with full instrumental ensemble. I find the juxtaposition clever and poignant; that second part sounds like a love song, yet in fact it's full of prescient regret. In effect, it's a bleak comment on just how sodding short life is. If Clive James ever thinks about this song, he must find himself reflecting how horribly telling it was. (Ironically, the old age that he depicts is something he himself will presumably never experience.) I'm not going to argue that the poetry is of the highest order, but to me it just works. As I've said about several of my choices, this one tends to bring tears to my eyes whenever I hear it.

PS I was initially disappointed to find that *Senior Citizens* appeared to exist nowhere online, except in a recent version that Pete Atkin recorded with piano rather than guitar: interesting, but to my mind not nearly as telling as the original. Then I found that the nice Mr Atkin had made the contents of all his early albums freely available on his own web site. Go to <http://www.peteatkin.com/pa.htm>, then look for "The Road Of Silk" in the right-hand column and play the requisit-t-t-te track yourself.

Nick's comment on Pete's 32. *Senior Citizens*

Well, I'm now going to be even more irritating than usual. I was at school with Pete – he was in my brother Malcolm's class, and there was talk at one stage of the three of us and two others forming a group. So I've seen him perform (though not since he was a student) and have played with him (in a musical context, that is). I bought a couple of his LPs and then got a bit fed up with exactly the characteristics you describe – over-elaborate lyrics set to music with over-complex chord sequences. In fact I used to argue about what makes for a good lyric, and used Clive James as an example of how over-weighted the words could become in a song, to its overall detriment.

I heard this LP quite a lot a long time ago, thanks to the aforementioned brother, but not for a very long time. I don't even particularly remember this song: more fool me – it was obviously too good to make an impact on me as a callow young pillock, whereas now I'm a jaundiced old pillock it does. Here the words, music and arrangement all seem to work together as they should. Wow!

Incidentally, I was struck as I listened by the quality of the drumming. I had a look at the wonderfully comprehensive (anorakish?) website – it's the splendid Terry Cox of Pentangle unfame.

Mel's comment on Pete's 32. *Senior Citizens*

This is another of those wonderful musical discoveries or rediscoveries which make this game such a joy. I can hardly begin to enumerate the thoughts and emotions this choice provokes.

For one thing, how wonderful that Pete Atkin makes all his early records available free on line. He does so obviously because they didn't make any money even in the Seventies, but generosity is part of it. Then there's the fact that I used to have access to this album (ie yours) – till the reel to reel tape deck wore out many years ago. One of the benefits and deficits of being a cheapskate music pirate. Plus the reminder that I'm one of the people whose meanness helped his web site to take the title "Smash Flops".

I didn't play "Road Of Silk" very much, but I always got pleasure from it when I did. My reaction was probably different to yours, Pete: the music sometimes didn't live up to the admittedly self-conscious words, but I admired enormously the difficult challenge the two artists had set themselves, and was happy enough to excuse the imperfections in the results.

Having said that I have completely forgotten even hearing *Senior Citizens*, which turns out to be a rather remarkable little gem. The quiet section at the start lets the words speak for themselves. They are somewhat touching and well observed but also a bit clanky – a young person trying to capture something which perhaps lacks genuine feeling. Then when the nice melody and orchestration come in it turns into a well produced and rather moving song. (Like you Nick I was struck by the drumming.) And what's more, the raw opening verses suddenly gain in credibility, power and significance as a result of the contrast with what follows.

This is adventurous songwriting which doesn't mind taking risks. Great. Thanks for the reminder. I should have listened harder in my twenties but maybe, like Clive James at the time (as you suggest Pete), I wouldn't have recognised the subtleties of the situation.

Naturally, "Road Of Silk" also reminds me that I once read my poetry with Clive James. Admittedly this isn't quite up to playing on stage with Pete Atkins, but sure as hell it beats seeing Peter Skellern in a sailor's hat.

33. Mr Blue Sky, by Electric Light Orchestra (1977)

[First sent 16.8.2025]

Composer: Jeff Lynne

Single and on the album “Out Of The Blue”

It’s tempting, as some have done, to dismiss ELO’s music as “shiny” music: music that slides into the consciousness without being terribly demanding. I think that view seriously under-values their achievement. At any rate, it certainly doesn’t reflect the pleasure I’ve had over the years from their exuberant inventiveness. I will understand if you two both hate them, but all I can say is that I see Jeff Lynne as a major talent.

I think ELO was at its peak when the band released the double album “Out Of The Blue”, and I’m still amazed that Lynne composed it in under a month. Overall, I think he managed to progress a lot further than most arrangers and composers in harnessing the string sound and making it work in a pop idiom, adding excitement and drama to the end result. John Lennon famously said he thought ELO sounded as the Beatles might have done if they’d continued, so I’m not alone in this view.

As an aside, I thought Lynne did a brilliant job in co-producing *Free As A Bird* and *Real Love*, and could arguably be praised for helping to prise Roy Orbison so triumphantly out of retirement for the Wilburys; or alternatively reviled for helping nudge him to an early grave.

I like most of the tracks on “Out Of The Blue”, including the clever *Wild West Hero* and the portentous *Stepping Out*, but I particularly like the four tracks that make up side three, known collectively as “Concerto For A Rainy Day”. They’re powerful and “immersive”, if I dare use such a cliché, and flow naturally together; musical motifs repeat from one to the next.

I originally chose *Big Wheels* for my selected track, with it Lennonesque vocals and its insistent, syncopated strings, but I’ve switched my choice in 2025 to my instinctive favourite, *Mr Blue Sky*. Its joyous exuberance makes it irresistible, and I still feel a sense of eager anticipation whenever I hear those urgent opening beats.

The piece is full of allusions to other musical tricks and techniques, from the Beatles (many references) to Rachmaninoff, and ends up invoking not one but two choirs – male-voice and then full; and amongst all this we even get the “magic piano” vocoder. Yet it rises above all its allusiveness, emerging as something extraordinary in its own right. The planets were aligned when Lynne and the band put this together, and in my view it’s been rightly fêted over the years.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mOB3tEtpDWA>

Mel’s comment on Pete’s 33. Mr Blue Sky

Talk about the kitchen sink. This track’s got the sink, the plug hole and the entire drainage system to the point where it pours into the river. But it does help to remind me of my feelings about ELO and why I dismissed *Big Wheels* when you chose that: I have absolutely nothing against ELO so long as I don’t have to listen to them.

This statement is not one of my flippant put downs designed for my own amusement. It’s been put to empirical test and is psychologically accurate. Unusually for me, it’s been hard to persuade myself to listen to *Mr Blue Sky* or *Big Wheels* a second time. Sometimes I listen to your tracks over and over to be sure of my responses even when they’re negative. But I only need to think back to a string of innocuous ELO singles which were pleasant enough background pop music in the Seventies as it subsided into the swamp of form-over-content which inspired the punk rebellion to know how I’ll feel. *Living Thing* sounds alright but I don’t want to listen to the end. I even thought I used to like *Telephone Line*, but I must have been mistaken. And so on.

I tried to get into the groove with a Jeff Lynne concert on TV back in 2016 and turned that off in frustration before the end of the first song. It's all too self-evidently manipulative. I don't mind that from a clappy Neil Sedaka single, but not from an "orchestra" with all the tricks they have at their disposal. (I can't help recalling what fun you and Nick made of me for trying to find something meaningful in the Moody Blues' mellotron. Well, at least the Moodies didn't waste money on getting a full orchestra together!)

So is *Mr Blue Sky* any more than a good chart song? Its revival in recent years to the status of some sort of standard suggests that it must be.

Well, it drives along with a nice beat and a catchy tune. And its almost endless gimmicks, culminating in the comical drift into an entirely different song were always destined to attract attention. But mostly, I concede, its lyric is joyful and positive. If a blue sky cheers you up, so will this song I guess.

In view of Jeff Lynne's superb subsequent work with the Travelling Wilburys and the extinct John Lennon I can hardly doubt his talent. Nick must have been right when he suggested the other Wilburys' were keeping him under control. Where were they when he was recording *Mr Blue Sky*?

Pete's comment on Mel's comment on *Mr Blue Sky* (2025)

I didn't respond to your original thoughts about *Big Wheels*, Mel, but your expanded comment on *Mr Blue Sky* has pushed me into saying something. I'm tempted to rephrase your wonderfully economical reaction to Nick's thoughts on Paul Simon's *America*: "Mel, you're wrong." But I know this whole process is about subjective reactions, and I can't tell you to like something you simply don't like. I suppose I'm disappointed that I've failed to convey the sense of exultation that this and other ELO tracks give me, but that's life. We can both agree about *what* they did, but I suppose we'll never agree on the value or effectiveness of it.

Note in 2025: This track was a late substitute for Pete's original selection, Big Wheels, but Nick's comments apply broadly to the replacement track as well, so we've kept them in.

Nick's comment on Pete's original 33. *Big Wheels*

I agree with your general sentiments, Pete. It's difficult to see Jeff Lynne as a rock great, yet his music is distinctive, unfailingly listenable, and hasn't really dated. And you are right that the Wilburys are wonderful.

There's quite a striking current measure of Jeff Lynne's achievement. Radio 2 has been playing an irritating version of Elvis singing *Burnin' Love* or some such with added orchestra (the RPO, I think): this seems to me to be an exercise involving taking a bit of rather self-parodic Elvis, adding superfluous instrumentation, and hoping lots of suckers will buy it. ELO songs don't run much risk of being accused of understatement, but the arrangements are intrinsic, not some added flummery.

If I'm honest, I can't see why *Big Wheels* stands out from a lot of others, but then I only vaguely remember it from before the current hearings, and the ones I automatically associate with ELO have been washing around in the backwaters of my cranium for a very long time now. But that said, it's a good representative of ELO, and my reaction to ELO when I hear them is one of pleasure – not, I have to say, always hugely engaged, but pleasure nevertheless. What I don't think I could do is to listen to a whole album's worth, because it does seem to me that the songs tend to have a fairly stock trajectory – one of the reasons I like the Wilburys is because the excess of talent around Jeff Lynne seem to have the effect of obviating such dangers.

Pete's comment on Nick's comment on *Big Wheels*, the original selection

You're perceptive in commenting that you couldn't see much to make *Big Wheels* stand out from the rest of ELO's songs. I admit there's a "samey-ness" to them, especially on that album. I do like that track, but I'm not sure that it's my favourite either. If pressed, I think I'd probably just opt for *Mr Blue Sky* instead and have done with it. So thank you for helping me to see the error of my ways.

Perhaps we could append a new rule to this game? When (if) we ever reach our personal number 100, perhaps we could be allowed to revisit all our choices, and make a few reasoned substitutions where we have had second thoughts? Hm. This could run and run ...

Mel's intervention, 2025: And didn't it!

Postscript in 2025: As is evident, having indeed seen the error of my ways, I made the replacement.

I seem to have had "phases" of being specially interested in music over the course of my life, and one of them seems to have been in the late 1980s, which is of course when I finally took control of my life (or lost it!) and went freelance.

Anyway, I'm submitting three songs from that period, all by women, which I tend to think of as a group. You may feel that some of these don't merit deep scrutiny, but they all have something valuable for me, and the acid test is whether I still feel a sense of pleasure when I hear the opening bars. I do. Then after them is a song by another woman performer, this one from the early 1970s, which I've slotted in latterly (2025) as a replacement for my original choice, Show Me Heaven by Maria McKee.

34. *Eternal Flame*, by the Bangles (1989)

Composers: Susanna Hoffs, Tom Kelly and Billy Steinberg

Single and on the album "Forever"

If you don't know this song from the radio, I'll be amazed. It's become one of those perennials. The Bangles were an all-girl Californian group who mostly performed up-tempo numbers such as *Walk Like An Egyptian*, but they excelled themselves with *Eternal Flame*. It's a slow ballad packed with Beatles-style harmonies and progressions, and in fact according to Wikipedia, co-writer Billy Steinberg described it as "Beatles meet Byrds".

Naturally I'm making no claims about the worthiness of the band or the meaningfulness of the lyrics, or about the strange pronunciation of some words by Susanna Hoffs, the lead singer. I know that on one level the whole thing is saccharin and trite, but I don't care! To me it's just a perfect pop song from the middle period of my life. I like everything from the teasing intro to the musically unexpected middle sections and the long run-out at the end. And of course Susanna Hoffs was very pretty.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OpYNJ8DzL1Q>

Mel's comment on Pete's 34. *Eternal Flame*

Contrary to your expectation I've never heard this before (I must have been seriously avoiding the charts by 1989), though I'm aware of the catchier *Walk Like An Egyptian*. But I do get an inkling of why you like it. The engaging middle section is a massive relief after the trite and, to me, somewhat pedestrian preceding verses. And that does help to leave the impression of a quite a nice song by the end of a second and third hearing.

Meanwhile I was hunting for pictures of Ms Hoff because the prospect of looking up the kind of women you found attractive was frankly more intriguing than the song. And yes she is decorous, and so I discover is the whole group. And what a treat to discover, a quarter of a century after the event, a real girl rock band being successful in a virtually all-male world. Perhaps I missed something in 1989.

Nick's comment on Pete's 34. *Eternal Flame*

I have always rather liked *Walk Like An Egyptian*, and hadn't really registered that this came from the same stable. It seems to me to come rather too close to my grumble about overwroughtness, and I don't much like the (to my ears) rather shrill vocal. But actually I enjoyed listening to it. I was puzzled by the bass line, which seems to veer between the pedestrian and the inventive (not that all the inventive bits seem to me fully to work, but at least it's having a go). So fine, but ... I won't be adding it to my ipod.

35. *Take My Breath Away*, by Berlin (1989)

Composers: Giorgio Moroder and Tom Whitlock

Single and on the album “Everything”

Giorgio Moroder, composer and producer, single-handedly defined the musical style and content of a whole generation of American films in the 1980s – electro-pop superimposed on conventional instrumentation, usually with an up-tempo and sometimes staccato beat. Most of that music now sounds horrendously dated. He also wrote and sometimes produced hits for many luminaries of that generation, including Michael Jackson.

I think *Take My Breath Away* stands outside all this, so I was pleased to read yesterday that Moroder thinks it's his best-ever song. So he should. For me it has a magical quality – the beguiling melody, the distinctive vocals of Terri Nunn, and the strange, haunting electronic bass. (Pseud alert:) Each verse starts teasingly with a bass-line descent, threatening to turn into a rather predictable chord sequence, but then the third chord defies expectation by landing solidly and triumphantly on the subdominant. It's a musical affirmation, and gives the piece a strongly positive quality. And then ... on one occasion the melody doesn't go there. You're tricked again. Lyrically the song is all about sexual anticipation and imagination, but in a way the music confirms the expectation.

If you thought (as I did) that “Top Gun” (Tom Cruise and Kelly McGillis) was a rather shallow, glossy film with little real content, you may have formed a negative view of this song, which was not written for the film, but is used prominently in it. I hope not; I think it's quite special in its rather idiosyncratic way.

Berlin was an American group. I don't think there was any German connection. They lasted several years; this wasn't their only hit. Oh, and Terri Nunn was very pretty too. But don't assume a theme here! I never even saw the band perform in the day. I just liked the sound.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Bx51eegLTY8>

Mel's comment on Pete's 35. *Take My Breath Away*

Yes “Top Gun” is a quite spectacularly superficial film with few redeeming features [*a point of view soundly repudiated by the insane popularity of the recent “Top Gun 2”*]. So this song, which I do remember being around at the time but didn't specially associate with the film, benefits immediately from the contrast.

It's a powerful, clever and original production, with an intriguing sound. And happily it's strong and sensible enough to avoid the OTT big build ups which usually tainted and frequently destroyed slow girlie songs of the time. I find myself now listening to *Take My Breath Away* repeatedly – and happily. A little to my surprise.

Not a song I would have chosen or even thought of. But rather good pop I'll admit. So thanks for the reminder. And another quite pretty singer too!

Nick's comment on Pete's 35. *Take My Breath Away*

Happily I have never seen “Top Gun” – or to be precise, I've seen snippets of it on the telly but have never seen it all the way through. My first awareness of this song was much more sophisticated – I think it was used to advertise a Peugeot (the 305 maybe). Nor did I realise the song was the work of Giorgio Moroder, whose name is linked indelibly in my mind with disco in general and Donna Summer in particular. So unsurprisingly I can see the skill with which this has been crafted, and I think the sound is impressive. But I can't see that the song is particularly exceptional. It'd be further up the queue to get on my ipod than *Eternal Flame*. But it won't make the cut either.

36. Stop, by Sam Brown (1988)

Composers: Sam Brown, Gregg Sutton and Bruce Brody
Single

I think this is a stunning piece. The narrator's man friend has betrayed her, and this is her vehement response. Musically I don't quite know how to categorise it; on one level it's a brooding "belter", on the other hand it's a finely crafted and precise piece with an intricate and beautifully judged arrangement including electric band, strings and backing vocals. Anyway, to me it really works. It has fantastic attack, both in strings and in the percussion, yet paradoxically it also has occasional "held-back" bars with an ad lib feel, adding edginess and anticipation. These are the points where the narrator is perhaps building up to her next bout of fulmination!

Oh, and did I mention Sam Brown's voice? I love her soaring vocal style, with its unique breathy quality and controlled falsetto breaks. This was her biggest hit, and I think it's the best thing she ever did: a true tour de force. I don't know who arranged it, but Sam and her brother Pete produced it, so they may have had a hand in the arranging too. She is an accomplished songwriter in her own right (she has worked often with Jools Holland). I have a great attachment to *Valentine Moon*, a pretty ballad that they wrote together.

Apparently she has had to give up her singing career in recent years because of throat problems (no wonder, you might say after listening to this), and the last I heard of her, she was running a ukulele band. Of course. No doubt her father Joe had a hand in that. Helen and I saw her perform at the Albert Hall when we went to Joe's fiftieth anniversary concert a few years ago, and she was still in pretty good voice then. But she was never a pin-up. Honest, guv.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=736lcb9ZLdk>

Mel's comment on Pete's 36. Stop

Now this is a refreshing change.

Superficially I might guess this is because the girl has a husky rather than the squawky voice, unlike others of her ilk. (Sorry to be technical. These are terms which I usually reserve for commentary on opera vocals.)

But it's a song to make me think. Just why do I like this over the other females in this collection? It's a very good song – not lyrically profound, but rather clever and somehow more believable than the others. The opening lines about the guy making her depend on him is unfamiliar in a lyric and powerful for that. It has hefty load of repetition which could put me off and doesn't.

The reasons for the overall appeal of the song I think are the ones you give – an interesting, intricate and carefully judged arrangement. It's restrained enough to confound the sexism of the music industry of earlier decades (as cited by N Andrew, 2015), and let the vocalist do her job.

And of course Sam Brown has a great voice. I'd come across her with Jools Holland on "Later", and was impressed at the time, but I didn't realise she's previously had a hit career in her own right.

Generally an interesting addition to my awareness of the world.

Nick's comment on Pete's 36. Stop

This is a good song well sung. I remember liking it when it came out and I still do. Talking about distinctiveness in rock/pop is slightly rum – there is a tendency for most songs to run along or adjacent to pretty well-worn ruts. Likewise you don't generally look to the lyrics for new philosophical or emotional insights. But this has a certain something about it, mostly I think

because of the way she delivers the lyric – not just the voice, which as you both say is good and distinctive, but her phrasing, which adds a bit of muscle to the words. And I like the arrangement. What don't I like? Er. Um. Ah, got it – being reminded that the children of people I saw as pop stars are now old enough to be contemplating their retirement plans.

37. *Song of Long Ago*, by Carole King (1971)

Composer: Carole King

On the album “Carole King Music”

I've admired Carole King as both performer and songwriter for as long as I can remember, so it's hard to know what to pick from her vast output. I would probably have chosen the slightly unrepresentative *It Might as Well Rain Until September*, which I think is fantastic, but I'm loth to use up a song selection that's already been picked.

Instead, I considered opting for a track from her wonderful “Tapestry” album, but for me this has uncomfortable memories of a week spent cold calling while I was on a management training course: freezing wet days spent trawling around industrial estates, searching for someone who would buy into an overnight delivery service (no one did). Each night that album cheered me up, but now it tends to draw me back to a very bleak time in my life.

Therefore I've picked the next best thing – a tuneful, reflective song from the follow-up album “Carole King Music”, which was released the same year. *Song of Long Ago* is about valuing life as it is, and especially the people in it, rather than lamenting the fact that it may not have turned out as you expected. It's a duet sung with James Taylor, who has always been a dead cert in his own right for my top 100, and who provides a nice harmony line in the choruses and the final verse. It's a haunting piece, performed with exactly the kind of electric-acoustic musical combo that I love.

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

Mel's comment on Pete's 37. *Song of Long Ago*

This is interesting. An anti-nostalgia song. Hardly my scene! But how could I hold that against the brilliant Carole King?

The problem here is that the song is from that Difficult Second Album. And nothing's going to be more difficult than following “Tapestry”, so I've hardly ever listened to it, and didn't thrill to it when I did. Also, as this track doesn't appear on my oft-played *Greatest Hits* collection I'd forgotten all about it.

So much for context. As for the song, this is interesting. Though I find it fairly unexciting musically because of the very familiar “Tapestry”-like sound, the gently thoughtful lyric is rather odd. The rhyme scheme for one thing – abababab cde abababab. Who writes songs like that? Sure, Carole King is good enough to do whatever she likes. And the words seem much more intricate, less immediately engaging than I'm used to from her. “Whispering wind came uninvited” is a curiously downbeat way to start. And that's how she sings the whole song, uncharacteristically downbeat – as if she was recording it after a heavy night on the tiles. James Taylor meanwhile is lala-ing away furiously. Their “duet” is suddenly joyful and uplifting, and musically the best part of the show for me.

So is this the way she portrays her ambiguous feelings about nostalgia? It's something to think about. But ultimately I'm afraid, nice as it is, Carole doesn't make me want to think about it for too long this time.

This track was a late substitute for Pete's original selection, so Nick did not have the chance to review or comment on it. Pete's original choice at this point was Show Me Heaven by Maria

McKee, which somehow got “sucked up” from the late 1980s along with the other three choices from that period, but in hindsight wasn’t in the same league.

This is another 1980s/1990s selection, but other than that, these three have little that I can see in common. I just like them.

38. *The Incidentals*, by Alisha's Attic (1998)

Composers: Shelly Poole, Karen Poole and Terence Martin

Single and on the album "Illumina"

Alisha's Attic was the two daughters of Brian Poole, Shelly and Karen. They were quite a big deal on the pop scene for a couple of years in the late 1990s. Not that I followed them; I simply happened to discover this one song, which I thought was an absolute gem. I love the swirling multi-tracked vocal harmonies and the retro electric guitar backing, which sounds for all the world as if it was put together by Brian Poole himself some time in the 1960s. I've always found it rather charming that rather than reject the kind of music their dad produced, they actually liked it and took it on board. I also think the theme of this song is rather charming, and the acute observation of some of the "incidentals" is nicely done. It's not deep; it's not earnest; it's simply pretty and engaging, and is altogether one of the kinds of song I really like.

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

Mel's comment on Pete's 38. *The Incidentals*

How refreshing to hear female singers that aren't bellowing at you. I'd almost forgotten that it was possible for women to be gentle, subtle vocalists.

I exaggerate. But this is such a contrast to the artefacts of talent shows of the 21st Century. As you say Pete, it's not deep. And I did feel a bit irritated by the raggedness of the lyric, which sounds unfinished in places – although it is redeemed by little flashes of honesty.

It's not the sort of music I'd choose for my hundred. That said, the tune and performance are rather engaging, and I can't dispute your view that this is a little gem. I'd never been aware of Alisha's Attic before, so this is also part of my education.

Nick's comment on Pete's 38. *The Incidentals*

Ah, Brian Poole and the Tremeloes. Now there was an underwhelming band, maybe striking as the only example I can think of where a backing group were more successful after they'd binned their ostensible leader. Brian Poole was reportedly living in Milton Keynes when we were there, but I don't remember the Milton Keynes *Mirror/Gazette*/forget the name of the third[!] local rag ever reporting on his progeny.

I half agree with Mel about the vocal style – thank goodness they're not bellowing or getting their voices to break with cod emotion. But here it seems to me that the voices slide into an opposite female trait, of simpering – not as badly as some, but enough for me to feel my heels digging in ever so slightly. I agree about the retro backing (there's a 12 string in there just to add to its retroness). Overall, I enjoyed listening to it but I'm not sure I'd have given it a third thought if I'd heard it on the radio, which I may well have done.

39. *She Makes My Day*, by Robert Palmer (1988)

Composer: Robert Palmer

Single and on album "Heavy Nova"

How many writers have included the words “I seem to be unconditionally hers” in a song and got away with it? Robert Palmer does it here – and that’s just one of the achievements of this remarkable song, which I think is truly a gem. It’s a rare example of a piece that celebrates the positive – in this case a relationship – yet manages to be memorable and haunting rather than merely trite, which is so often the risk. That makes it pretty special.

The words, as you’ll gather, defy the obvious, and to me they succeed in summing up the amazed and slightly humbled perspective of a man who can’t quite believe the woman of his dreams has chosen him (unconditionally, indeed). The music is tuneful and sophisticated, with some wonderful descending jazz chord sequences, and consists of three repeating sections: proposition (“She makes her mind up in a glance”), confirmation (“I’ll never be lonely now I know her”), and chorus (“She’s all good loving at once”). The accompaniment is lush and complex, complementing the reflectively exultant words, and eventually it launches itself into a marvellous trumpet solo by a noted exponent, Chuck Finley.

I was never a big follower of Palmer, a Brit who died prematurely in 2003 (in his early fifties), so I can’t celebrate his other music here, but he was prolific, and I’ve always promised myself to explore his output in more depth. But to me this is peerless.

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

Mel’s comment on Pete’s 39. *She Makes My Day*

Robert Palmer will probably always and exclusively mean *Addicted To Love* for me, partly because of the stunning video.

I wish I could like this one too, but I don’t think I can. Oddly I can’t disagree with much of your appraisal, Pete. Interesting words. There’s a tune there. A nice bit of jazz. Decent production.

I think I get why you like it. For one thing, it starts out sounding like a less musical Crowded House track, and we both think they can be great. But the musical changes you cite are the biggest turn off for me. I find the whole thing together too busy and slightly cacophonous. A kind of including-the-kitchen-sink track. It makes me not want to listen to it.

I did try. Sorry.

Nick’s comment on Pete’s 39. *She Makes My Day*

I find myself agreeing with Mel about *Addicted To Love*. Robert Palmer is an interesting example of a minor rock phenomenon – someone who is given a level of respect which seems somewhat at odds with his output and/or celebrity. Maybe that’s what you mean about feeling he should be further explored, Pete – there’s a sense that there must be something there we don’t really know about. He started off in Vinegar Joe with Billy J Kramer’s sister, a mildly interesting band which split up when she developed a taste for lilac wine and other exotica.

I didn’t know this song, or if I’ve heard it, it hasn’t wedged itself in my cranium. I think I’m somewhere half way between the two of you – I think it’s interesting (good bass, among other things) but rather over-artful in a way which can obstruct the flow of the song. I’d happily listen to it some more, and will try to make sure I do.

40. *The Living Years*, by Mike and the Mechanics (1988)

Composers: Mike Rutherford and BA Robertson

Single and on album “Living Years”

Oh dear – this is one of those songs that is played so often on the radio that I’m truly not sure how much I like it any more. But I know I liked it at the time. Its theme is somewhat

downbeat; the narrator is lamenting the death of his father, and bemoaning his own failure to say what should have been said “in the living years”. It’s a simple sentiment, expressed in many other songs. (Another that comes to mind is David Gates’ *Everything I Own*.)

But I think this one does it particularly well, with little sentimentality. It has a solid beat, overlaid with a gospel-style backing voices, especially in the chorus; and although tuneful, it’s not obvious. In fact the melody takes some unexpected and sometimes ominous-sounding turns, faintly echoing the theme. As for the words, it strikes me that there’s an underlying honesty about them. If you chance on it at the right moment it just works, and can be surprisingly affecting, even uplifting. Well, I think so, anyway.

As an aside, I take wry delight in the fact that this song tends to crop up on “religious lite” radio programmes, as if it had some kind of quasi-spiritual theme; yet the only relevant line that I can see points in exactly the opposite direction: “It’s too late when we die / to admit we don’t see eye to eye.” It’s a bit like playing *Every Breath You Take* at a wedding.

Mike and the Mechanics was formed by bassist and guitarist Mike Rutherford while he was with Genesis. Various people, not always band members, sang lead vocals with the group, but on their biggest hits (including this one) it was Paul Carrack, a “singer’s singer” who worked with numerous other bands in various guises, and gives exactly the right flavour to this piece.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gUdiQWxps5E>

Mel’s comment on Pete’s 40. *The Living Years*

Well this is interesting.

An initial point in response to your comments, Pete: if you think this is played too much on radio, including religious broadcasts, you’re listening to the wrong programmes!

As the track started my immediate reaction was, oh no, he’s picked a Genesis clone. I didn’t know it was almost the real thing. Had me there. (My next door neighbour Mike plays me Genesis and a hundred similar bands to wind me up when we go round for a meal occasionally.) So things were not going well for Mike and the Mechanics.

Then the song started and I was immediately drawn to it. The verses don’t sound trite or sentimental at all. A pretty good message for a pop song. Then I realised you had for once chosen a song for (and chosen largely to focus your comments on) its lyrics! So we’re on the same wavelength.

The chorus lets the whole thing down of course. Silly pre-echoing choir and much more banal sentiments. But if one is listening to this for the words I think it’s rather a touching song about the death of a father, let down only by the attempt to make it *mean* something (when we all know that nothing means anything).

I’ve never heard Mike and the Mechanics before as far as I’m aware, and this might just incline me to listen to other tracks by them. Unless, that is, they sound like Genesis.

Nick’s comment on Pete’s 40. *The Living Years*

I’ve actually seen Paul Carrack relatively recently, when he was performing with Eric Clapton (I’m not sure that he doesn’t still do so). I think I was first aware of him pretty vaguely in the Seventies as the singer with Ace on *How Long Has This Been Going On*, which of course still gets played fairly frequently. But he is one of those ever-presents in British rock, and a reliably solid performer who seems to be able to turn in good and interesting performances year after year.

I’ve always rather liked this song. Thankfully it avoids being maudlin, which I think says something about Paul Carrack’s delivery, because what Mel says about the chorus seems to me to be right. I don’t make the link to god-botheration, maybe because I avoid the programmes as vigorously as I can (one of my more mockable traits is that I rush to the radio at 7.48 to make sure my bigotry isn’t challenged by listening to “Thought For The Day”, even though I can see

that I'm beyond salvation and accept that even god-botherers are capable of saying things worth thinking about, despite their superstitious foibles.

And so back to the chorus. I think it short-changes what is otherwise a very powerful song: the problem in part is that it's not very gospelly (if you can take my observation that soul applied a gospel singing style to ungodly things like lust, carnal activity and the end of relationships): the choir sounds a bit like St Winifred's School singing *There's No One Quite Like Grandma* while Paul Carrack comes over all Al Green. This creates something of a mismatch.

Ultimately for me this doesn't stop the song from working, but it's a shame that it's despite the chorus rather than its being part of the overall judgement. As for Paul Carrack, he has been known to appear at the Picturedrome in Holmfirth, and one day we hope we'll manage to see him.

At this point I originally picked three "songs from the shows", but latterly (2025) I've decided that two of them don't really have enough resonance for me to justify inclusion. So I've kept the first of the three (True Love), but replaced Climb Every Mountain and Pilate's Dream with pieces that don't have any theme at all that I can think of.

Why? Well, I freely confess I'm a great admirer of the film "The Sound of Music", and Climb Every Mountain is a worthy show-stopper, but I don't especially enjoy the voice of the mother abbess character who sings it. I still think the song is rather stunning, but I decided it was stirring rather than loveable, and too compromised to be one of my choices.

I also admire the film of "Jesus Christ Superstar", and feel that Tim Rice's deceptively simple lyrics can often have hidden depths. Pilate's Dream has Pilate reflecting on his impossible position of having to condemn Jesus against his conscience, knowing that "thousands of millions" will in future revile him. Even as a non-believer I find it effective and moving, musically and lyrically, but it's a niche pleasure, and I've realised I was deceiving myself in thinking it had great resonance in my life. It had to go.

Mel's thoughts on Pete's original selection of three show tunes

I was already beginning to feel that my latter-day efforts to become a music critic were not only feeble and pretentious but also, in this context, potentially rather cruel. Your collection of songs from the shows absolutely confirms the point for me.

What we are doing primarily is sharing our likes and loves. Only sometimes presenting songs which we want to uphold as the very best that human creativity can offer (eg my assertion that Nick was just wrong about Paul Simon's America!). I imagine that you would be astonished, Pete, if I said, "Oh yes, True Love, Climb Every Mountain and Pilate's Dream are three of my favourite songs too." The odds of that are slimmer than finding humanity in the Reform Party.

Instead we are indulging in a wonderful game of introspection and reminiscences. And by saying that I don't particularly like any of those three song is no more than confirming that I had different (but, still, possibly similar and parallel) experiences when I was growing up. Fifty years on we have learned things about one another which we didn't know before. That's a more significant joy than, say, all three of us liking the same songs from "The Sound of Music".

41. True Love, by Bing Crosby and Grace Kelly (1956)

Composer: Cole Porter

From the film "High Society"

I have a lot to say about this! First, on a factual note, the piece is unusual in having been written specifically for a film ("High Society"), rather than for a stage musical or some other purpose. In fact it was nominated for an Oscar as best song of its year, which it didn't win. It has since been recorded by many other artists. "High Society" was (I think) Grace Kelly's last film before she became a princess. It was a remake of a previous non-musical film called "The Philadelphia Story", which was made ten years before and starred Katherine Hepburn.

I find "The Philadelphia Story" an infinitely more worthy and watchable film. Its topic (according to some critics, anyway) was quite advanced for its day: a woman's fear of consummating her marriage. As the story starts to unfold, we find that this fact may have contributed to her first husband's decision to divorce her. But if this is a correct reading, it is only hinted at in the dialogue, which no doubt had to respect the sensitivities of its time.

Now she is involved in preparations for a new marriage, but we soon learn that her original husband has decided to oust the new contender, win her back and make it all work at the second attempt. The much shallower and more glossy remake, “High Society”, may have retained vestiges of this same theme, but if so the new screenplay skates well clear of the core issue, leaving inattentive viewers (and the nine-year-old that I was) completely baffled as to what the film is actually about.

Zooming in, *True Love* occurs in “High Society” in the context of a flashback to a time when Grace Kelly is still happily (but we have to assume chastely) in love with her original husband, played by Bing Crosby, and they are sailing on their yacht, which happens to be named “True Love”. (Yacht? Well this IS high society.) It’s their honeymoon, in fact: presumably last the moment before he finds out that things have gone horribly wrong. Anyway, the flashback also proved baffling for a nine-year-old. One minute people are rushing about discussing the second wedding arrangements, with Crosby tossing in curveballs to derail the proceedings; the next minute he and Kelly are proclaiming undying love on a boat. I just went with the flow.

If you watch the entire YouTube video, at the start you will see Crosby with pipe in his mouth and silly sailor hat on his head, gazing wistfully at the horizon and looking rather ridiculous, not to mention old enough to be Grace Kelly’s father. That was another aspect that passed me by as a nine-year-old. However, fairly quickly the song itself starts ... and I thought it sublime. It was so charming and romantic: that pretty orchestral arrangement with the squeezebox solo, and the clever tune, which finally breaks into beguiling two-part harmony. Music-wise, I have always loved the change you get between the chord on “do” (as in “with nothing to do”) and the dominant chord that follows it and leads into the chorus. Priceless. In other words, I like the song as a song, not just because of what it is saying. Cole Porter sure knew how to compose a melody.

But here’s my problem. This song, and others like it, helped to corrupt me into a profound belief in romantic love ... nay, an expectation of romantic love, and all that apparently went with it, including a beautiful and compliant woman (well, I hadn’t read the script) and a song like this. How could life do anything but thwart me in attempting to recreate it? Arguably it’s not sex and violence that kids need protecting from, but indoctrination like this.

I jest. I would never want to banish the celebration of love in song. But you get my drift. Anyway, despite its manifest drawbacks, I still think *True Love* is a wonderful piece. Regardless of the back story, the song itself has more than stood the test of time. Obviously it’s schmaltzy and it doesn’t say a lot; it even talks about a guardian angel, which I’m not very happy about (but I think it just *might* be a metaphor). The very notion of people “giving” true love to each other is rather peculiar in the first place. But I like it! It’s an indelible part of my history, and will always have a special place for me.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8CuP2YQTUIE>

Mel’s comment on Pete’s 41. *True Love*

This is quite a touching little song. You’d probably agree, though, that Cole Porter wrote better (Nick and I have nailed our colours already).

But I’m much more interested to hear the back story about “The Philadelphia Story” and how you were duped when you were nine. Your brief analysis of “which is more dangerous, sex and violence or true love” is revelatory for me, and sets off all sorts of thoughts which the song was never going to do. For what it’s worth, the damage was done to me much later while listening to the love songs of Cliff Richard.

The lyric, we’re agreed, is tosh. The melody is nice. I like the bit where Grace Kelly joins in. But I’m not going to go out of my way to hear it again. Instead I will be pondering the subject of censoring material which young people have access to.

Nick's comment on Pete's 41. *True Love*

It'd be hard to pretend that this is Cole Porter's greatest song – not as good as *I Get A Kick Out Of You* or my choice (wait and see) – but *True Love* is one for which I have always had a weakness. "High Society" was the Crucible's musical a few years ago, and very good fun, if more or less entirely vapid. I don't think that even then I got the point about what was going on, so either I am being even thicker than usual or the key to the supposed plot is very carefully disguised (not, I know, mutually exclusive possibilities).

So this is the sort of song which will always give me a gentle surge of pleasure for the sort of reasons that you give, Pete, and with similar reservations. But there are other songs in Cole Porter's oeuvre which I think have much more substance musically and dramatically. Be that as it may, it's good that he's getting multiple appearances in our lists.

As a digression, there is a story that David Niven was asked who was the best lover of the various actresses with whom he'd had a dalliance and he started to reply by saying "Grace ..." before he realised Prince Rainier was present, at which point he changed his reply by hastily adding "...ie Fields".

42. *Good Vibrations*, by The Beach Boys (1966)

[First sent 16.8.2025]

Composers: Brian Wilson (music), Mike Love (lyrics)

Single and on the album "Smile"

In 2025, panic about the validity of my music choices prompted me to slot in a Beach Boys track in replacement for one of my original selections. I'd always liked their tunefulness and their multi-part harmonies, and had realised they had to be included in my list.

Initially I chose *God Only Knows*, but then I changed my mind for a second time, and have substituted *Good Vibrations*. Why? Well, I asked myself which track's opening notes gave me a greater frisson of pleasure, and there was no contest: it had to be *Good Vibrations*.

Admittedly, I think *God Only Knows* is extraordinary from a musical point of view, with its unresolved chord sequences and mysterious lurches in key, all brilliantly disguised in an apparently simple form. I've come to appreciate it more and more over the years, despite its over-exposure in the closing sequence of the film "Love Actually".

But *Good Vibrations* was much more a part of my life at the time it came out. It was meant to be extraordinary ... and it was. It was still recognisably a Beach Boys song, with their familiar vocal harmonies, but it was much more. Its changes in style, pace and mood were extraordinary. In hindsight, I'm not sure that all the artifice actually *meant* anything very profound, and I now see the piece as slightly showy and overblown, but I don't mind; it had enormous impact at the time. It opened up new possibilities in the pop music form.

I won't try to dissect it here or bang on about its musical aspects, though I will say I particularly liked (and still like) the slow section that starts "Got to keep those good vibrations happening ...". The voices face, leaving just the instruments playing that haunting figure with its keyboard lead; then a burst of vocal harmony introduces the final chorus.

I've never considered that the Beach Boys offered anything that remotely compares to the range or depth of the Beatles' collective output, as some have suggested, but they provided part of the essential musical backdrop of my early years, and I feel this song stands out above the rest.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Eab_beho7HU

Mel's comment on Pete's 42. *Good Vibrations*

As my own Beach Boys choice *I Get Around* testifies, I've been happy enough since the Sixties with the simple early stuff that buzzed along mindlessly with a good beat and some unusual harmonies in songs about a semi-mythical America – *When I Grow Up*, *Surfin' USA*, *Help Me Rhonda*, *California Girls*, *Little Deuce Coup* (whatever that was), and so on. All good fun. When I was 17, before I grew up, I even thought that *When I Grow Up* was lyrically interesting. Later their songs just bewildered me: what's the point of *Barbara-Ann* and who's interested in a ship called Sloop John B? I mention this to only illustrate the mutual immaturity of the relationship between the Beach Boys and me.

Then I wasn't the one who started making comparisons between the Beach Boys and the Beatles. That was Brian Wilson. This is the range and depth of what the Beatles were releasing in 1966: *Taxman*, *Eleanor Rigby*, *Tomorrow Never Knows*, *Here There and Everywhere*, *For No One*, *Got To Get You Into My Life*. And the Beach Boys came up with *Good Vibrations*, basically a song about feeling good - which is the root of the problem. They made impressive sounds and dressed them up to seem profound. But the emotional and intellectual content of the songs never really got beyond fun, fun, and more fun.

I know that *Good Vibrations* is very clever pop music and enjoyable enough to listen to provided you don't take Brian Wilson's claims too seriously (as is *God Only Knows*, incidentally). It is infinitely more complex than almost anything we were listening to in 1966 apart from the Beatles. I thought it was OK until I started to detect something hollow at the heart of it. Then when the group released the grotesquely over-produced follow-up *Heroes and Villains* nine months later I realised they were pulling my leg and no longer deserving of my attention (not until many years later when I sheepishly bought their best-of double CD, anyway).

Yes it was a great band. The fun lives on. But my life would not have taken a different course if I'd never heard *Good Vibrations*.

PS Your now deleted erudite analysis of the amazing structure of *God Only Knows* was a welcome education. But my comments wouldn't have treated that any more kindly than *Good Vibrations*.

This track was a late substitute for Pete's original selection, so Nick did not have the chance to review or comment on it.

43. *My Life*, by Billy Joel (1978)

[First sent 16.8.2025]

Composer: Billy Joel

Single and on the album "52nd Street"

It's dawned on me that I've been a long-time admirer of Billy Joel, and that I need to include a track by him in tribute to his long career and its place in my life. And what better song to do it than the exuberant, up-tempo *My Life*? So this is a late replacement for the track I originally chose at this point.

The song is a rebellious blast at people who want to dictate how to live one's life. It starts with a description of someone who found the strength to follow his dream, and then continues in a more general way to assert the right to make one's own choices. The inference is that someone in the narrator's life is trying to constrain those choices for him, but we're not told who or how.

It's a simple message, but it's conveyed in an infectiously tuneful piece. In my terms this is "proper music". Specifics? Take the opening line. "Got a call" is on the key chord, which is how many songs start, but then "from an old friend" takes us immediately to a first inversion of the chord. Changes like that tell us subliminally that the piece has a properly crafted and worked-through harmonic structure; it's going to be something more than obvious: which it is.

Plus, there are vocal harmonies in the bridge passage, and in my book they always tend to lift a song. Admittedly they're not sung by Joel himself, which would be a rarity. They turn out to have been provided by Peter Cetera and Donnie Dacus of Chicago.

Joel's music ranged over many musical styles over the years, and I enjoyed almost all of them, from the classic *Piano Man* through the complex multi-section *Scenes From an Italian Restaurant* and the rocker *Uptown Girl* to the reflective *Honesty* and *Just the Way You Are*. He had multiple influences, but essentially ploughed his own furrow to great effect.

In recent times, amazingly, he gave concerts *monthly* in Madison Square Garden for *ten* years before calling a halt through illness in 2025. He later reported that he was recovering.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HVX8oUpMPDI>

Mel's comment on Pete's 43. *My Life*

It seems I've led my life curiously immune to Billy Joel. I know *Piano Man* and *Uptown Girl*, but couldn't have said who sang them, and can't recall the other tracks you refer to.

My Life is vaguely familiar, and quite likeable. As you say this is exuberant upbeat stuff with an infectious tune. There's a nice positive lyric which is difficult to argue with. I rather like the driving arrangement with the bright thumping piano which packs in loads of variation.

I do find the tune a bit jangly in repletion, but this is largely redeemed by its energy, and the contrasts provided by backing singers and the changing pace of the instrumentation. I've got to say that the fade at the end is plain awful.

I find *Piano Man* a more interesting song, with a more enjoyable tune. But this is only to say that Billy Joel turns out to be a purveyor of rather better pop music than I'd imagined. Nice.

But am I excused for again finding your perspicuity in analysing the music the most striking aspect of this selection?

This track was a late substitute for Pete's original selection, so Nick did not have the chance to review or comment on it. Pete's original choice at this point was Pilate's Dream by Barry Dennen.

This time the broad theme is harmony groups of the past, with the accent on female singers. You will surely have noticed by now that of the three of us, I seem to be the most focused on pretty melodies, attractive harmonies and overall production, so this time I thought I'd let it all hang out. None of these choices says much that's profound – it's all about how they sound.

44. Monday, Monday, by the Mamas and the Papas (1966)

Composer: John Phillips

Single and on album "If You Can Believe Your Eyes And Ears"

To me, the Mamas and the Papas made a unique contribution to the pop canon. Nobody before or since has sounded quite like them, which is a pretty amazing achievement, although elements of their sound have echoed through other music ever since. By the mid-1960s, you might have thought that harmony groups were so well established and varied that there was nothing more to add to the concept: Everlys, Beach Boys, Beatles, Four Seasons, Searchers, Hollies, Byrds. Then along came John Phillips, fusing folk with Beatles and introducing his own take on lahs, yehs, chanted counterpoints and multi-voice harmonies – with Cass Elliot's voice contributing that unmistakable richness and warmth. To me all this added up to a compelling mix – even the off-pitch elements, of which there are plenty.

I could have picked almost any of their big hits, especially the inspired *California Dreaming*, which I think has fantastic impact, or *I Saw Her Again*. But *Monday, Monday* was the song that introduced me to them, and I particularly like the clever melodic structure, which gradually expands outwards from the simple proposition of the opening lines, adding increasingly intricate harmonies. In terms of lyrics it doesn't say much at all – it's just a comment about the ambiguous quality of Mondays (or one in particular); yet it conveys its limited message with such panache that it turns into a celebration.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YG_3lyJfbAc

Mel's comment on Pete's 44. Monday, Monday

It's been on my mind to pick this one. Much as I love the evocative atmosphere of *California Dreaming*, its omnipresence this last 40 years has worn off a little of the shine. But I still recall the utter thrill of first hearing *Monday, Monday*.

I learned later that my excitement was to an extent manipulated by the ever rising notes seeming to make my heart race (much as military marches were supposed to do before soldiers went off to kill people!). But you're right about the harmonies – I find them just breathtaking, and likewise the ways the male and female voices interweave throughout. Fantastic to listen to repeatedly even now.

I don't care that the lyric is limited and runs counter to the uplifting sound. It has a sad consistency about it which appealed to my teenage and older selves.

Now I might have to find a different Mamas and Papas song for my 100. But as you point out that won't be difficult.

Nick's comment on Pete's 44. Monday, Monday

The Mamas and Papas will have to make my selection at some point, but I haven't got quite as far as deciding which of their oeuvre will get the dubious accolade. But whichever it is, I think there are things which make them an essential part of my top 100, as yours. I think it's interesting that we all hold them in such esteem. They don't seem to me to have dated for rather

the same reason as Roy Orbison, I'd say – they were clearly of their time, but contrive to have qualities which mean they don't date in the way that say Stevie Wonder has in my view.

What qualities? Not just musicality, because S. Wonder is clearly musically inventive (too inventive?). Well, there are clearly two things to point to. Cass Elliot and Denny Doherty had very good and perfectly matched voices. John Phillips was generally an imaginative and distinctive songwriter (I draw a veil over the ghastly "If you're going to San Francisco be sure to wear a flower in your hair". I regret that I have never heard his "Wolf King of LA" album, which I have seen receive high praise (and the suggestion that the cover photo on *Desire* is – almost literally – tipping its hat to the cover photo). So, yes, a terrific song by a terrific group. Nice to think there's more to come.

45. *Goodbye To Love*, The Carpenters (1972)

Composers: Richard Carpenter and John Bettis

Single and on album "A Song For You"

I'm neither a Carpenters lover nor hater. They've been hyped to death and beyond, and Richard Carpenter has apparently spent much of his life reliving the memories of what he did with them. But credit where it's due – he wrote some memorable tunes, and skilfully arranged many others. A lot of their material can seem saccharin and slight, but within the constraints of their style, I think they produced some accomplished and worthwhile work. I rather like *Close To You* (a Bacharach and David song), *We've Only Just Begun* and even the off-the-wall *Calling Occupants Of Interplanetary Craft*. However, the inspired fuzzbox solo guitar of *Goodbye To Love*, which apparently was Richard Carpenter's idea, provides an unusual counter to the pretty melodies in this one, and takes it to another place. Given that I also like the song itself – the chord structures, the unexpected melodic swerves, the taut harmonies – it has to be on my list.

There are two guitar solo passages (in the middle, then more memorably at the end). They were played by Tony Peluso: apparently someone who had no connection to the Carpenters until they called him up for this record. It turns out to have been the most memorable thing he did in his musical life.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jixeE8gkT-s>

P.S. Yes, Karen Carpenter had a remarkable voice and was a gifted performer, but to me that's a separate issue.

Nick's comment on Pete's 45. *Goodbye To Love*

I have a rather strange relationship with the Carpenters. I sneered – fairly gently – at them at the time, but now find myself rather enjoying the songs that still get played. I can't see that I got it wrong the first time round, but think that they are a perfect example of how nostalgia can soften judgement (or even the entire brain). Ironically in view of its lyrics, *Yesterday Once More* is one such song, but I can't see that it stands up to close scrutiny for its musical skill.

Goodbye To Love similarly seems to me to remain too schmaltzy for all its evident craftsmanship, but it's interesting to listen to it more closely than I have for years, if not ever. I can see all its positive qualities (I think ...), but to me the guitar solos are the best thing there, despite seeming at odds with the tone of the song's other elements. Compare and contrast James Burton's solos on many of Elvis Presley's later offerings. Burton is one of my favourite guitarists, but seems to be going through the motions, with his habitual skill, on a lot of late Presley dross. Nonetheless, it has to be said they fit in (musically, that is, not as dross).

I expect I'll probably go on having a surge of nostalgia when the Carpenters come on the radio, but to me that's where they stay.

Mel's comment on Pete's 45. *Goodbye To Love*

Well at least I like the guitar solos!

You were never going to enthrall me with the Carpenters. I do appreciate their talent, intellectually. But that's different from enjoying their saccharine sound and frequently sentimental lyrics (which I'm not even sure they avoid with the more arresting *Calling Occupants*). So yes, I'm with the gang who runs for the off button when they come on.

This is not one of my blind prejudices. It's a matter of taste. This is actually a well constructed, well-performed and well-arranged record which compared with a lot of stuff that got into the charts certainly deserved to be a hit. I don't even think less of people who enjoy Carpenters music! Sue is one of them, though I have astutely never upgraded her greatest hits tape to CD. It's just that I don't really want to be in the room with it for more than a song or two at a time, and then perhaps only at intervals of six months or more.

Pete's comment on Mel's comment on *Goodbye To Love*

My choice from among the Carpenters' music was very specific; I especially like the guitar solo on *Goodbye To Love*, and the contrast it strikes with the smoothly polished vocal chorus behind it. To me this aspect singles it out from everything else they did. But I agree that liking for them would have to be a matter of taste. You make a very fair point. I myself certainly don't "like" them (whatever that means) in the same measure as, say, the Hollies. It's a matter of degree.

46. *Waterloo*, by ABBA (1974)

Composers: Benny Andersson, Björn Ulvaeus and Stig Anderson

Single and on album "Waterloo"

I might also have picked *Fernando* or *Thank You For The Music*, but *Waterloo* trumps them all. Such attack. Such inspiration. Such a pretty singer (no, not her – the blonde one). We can't write ABBA out of our lives, and I decided long ago that the best alternative was to embrace what they achieved, and celebrate the best of it. They ploughed their own furrow remarkably effectively, and I can't help admiring (and enjoying) a surprising amount of what they did.

You don't have to listen to it. Just pretend you did.

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

Mel's comment on Pete's 46. *Waterloo*

Now you're talking! I never got hugely excited about *Waterloo*, good as it is as pop music. But there's plenty of other Abba material which still fills me with joy.

Sue seems to think I should feel ashamed that I enjoy watching "Mama Mia" whenever she puts on the DVD. It's for the girls apparently. But the music is captivating (slightly less so is the plot of the clanky film).

Waterloo has a wonderful driving beat and a compelling arrangement with punctuation from the sax and the piano. The tune is uplifting – with those ever-rising notes, which as far as I'm concerned were the secret of their phenomenal success. And the vocals are just a joy.

I can't speak from certain knowledge but I think that the pulsing bass is another component of Abba's clever musical mix. I know that recording techniques in the Sixties couldn't capture bass sound effectively. But by the time Abba came along we could hear sounds which simply didn't exist on record before, and they exploited them to the full.

However, the trouble is *Waterloo*'s rather silly lyric which, try as I do, I can't help hearing. My own Abba selection will be something else equally depthless, but slightly less embarrassing.

Nick's comment on Pete's 46. *Waterloo*

I have a similarly convoluted relationship with Abba. I enjoy their songs (or most of them: *Thank You For The Music* actually seems pretty ghastly to me – I can never forgive the clumsiness of "...for giving it to me"). *Waterloo* was of course the first song I heard by them, and I thought then that it was tuneful and preferable to anything emerging through the Eurovision Song Contest before or since, not that I can claim any encyclopaedic knowledge.

It isn't, though, my favourite Abba song. At their best I am rather intrigued by the juxtaposition of jaunty tunes and pretty sombre words, but *Waterloo* is relatively straightforward, well done of course, but without much bite, unlike Pearl Carr and Teddy Johnson performing *Sing Little Birdie*, which I think is my earliest memory of Eurovision.

As for *Mama Mia*, well I enjoyed it too when we first saw it, in the cinema no less, and since very occasionally on DVD. It's good fun, but I suspect will pall very rapidly indeed when I get to hell and it's on a perpetual loop – Piers Brosnan proving he has no voice for all eternity sounds pretty much like hell to me. But now I know it's a girlie film, I'll make sure I'm wearing a suitable frock for any future viewings, in hell or not.

This selection is my homage to John Barry. I've always been fascinated by the fact that his work respected and enhanced the Bond films (whether they deserved it or not), but also had merit in its own right. A nice example outside the Bond series is his theme for The Ipcress File, which I think is wonderfully atmospheric.

In later years I have to say I felt Barry's orchestral film music became very "samey", but I thought his score for the cult film "Somewhere in Time" was magical. (I know some critics dismiss the film itself as shallow romantic twaddle, but typically I like it.)

I like other Bond themes in addition to those I've chosen – especially Carly Simon's Nobody Does It Better. I've even developed a late fondness for Live And Let Die, believe it or not. Call me populist.

47. James Bond Theme, by John Barry Orchestra (or ensemble) (1962)

Composer: Monty Norman (allegedly), but with major contributions by John Barry
In the film "Dr No", and in numerous subsequent films

I've always found this piece utterly riveting. You have the relentless urgency and focus of that famous guitar riff (Bond getting on with his task against the odds), which then explodes into musical colour and syncopation, suggesting frenzied activity, pace and romance. Then it's back to the day job again. It sums up the entire Bond ethos, yet it's much more than that. It's threat, mystery, excitement, raunchiness and overall "presence," all in one.

For years there was a dispute over who wrote the piece. Monty Norman, who wrote the score for "Dr No", claimed to have based the Bond theme itself on a song for an earlier uncompleted work of his. However, the producers weren't happy with his arrangement of it, and brought John Barry in to write a more arresting version. Barry proceeded to change it almost out of recognition, adding significant original sections (including all the jazzy parts), so he thought he had a right to assert that he had written the whole piece. I tend to side with him, and if you listen to Norman's source material, you'll probably think his claim seems as laughable as I do. Yet he won the case, so it's his name that is put against the piece.

Apparently the piece has been re-arranged and re-recorded for every new Bond film, so you have to pick the right version. To me none of them betters the original. However, apparently there are differences between the version in the film, which featured lead guitar by session guitarist Vic Flick, and the single version, which didn't. Nothing in the music world is ever simple. (Vic Flick played the lead guitar on *Hit And Miss* and *Silhouettes*, among others, and I've just found that he also played the twelve-string on *World Without Love*. Well well.)

Listen to this for the true film version (but the theme stops at 1 minute 36 seconds):

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

Or listen to this for a pretty decent and authentic version of the whole thing:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=61eiph6FfMM>

Mel's comment on Pete's 47. The James Bond Theme

This is challenging stuff. Just when do you sit down with the specific purpose of listening to the *James Bond Theme*? Its rightful place is while you're settling down to a disappointing Friday evening's telly or, worse, prematurely gorging the popcorn at Cwmbran's eerily empty multiplex.

So, never in fact.

Hence it was quite interesting to pay more attention as you have directed. The first thing that struck me is that there is much more repetition than I imaged. The various dramatic mood changes don't occur till you are thoroughly familiar with the current one. I found myself feeling, "I get this bit, now please move on." A case of familiarity literally breeding contempt I suspect.

Having got the bitchiness out of the way, I have to concede that this is undeniably a striking and effective piece of music for the reasons which you elegantly specify, Pete. The very fact that it's still being used for its original purpose after more than half a century is a testament to its power and capacity to evoke a whole series of moods.

It hadn't occurred to me till you pointed out that each contrasting section works because it is so good in its own right. We've had scores of films and TV series over the years which use the same dramatic tricks in their theme tunes. But they are usually limited to a repeated (and occasionally catchy) tune with bits of noise in between. Barry has no extraneous links. Each change of mood is self-contained and compelling in its own contrasting way, as you say.

I won't go out of my way to listen to this because I know it'll crop up on TV till the end of time, and each time I'll be able to hear it in solitude to the echo of a door closing behind Sue as she retreats at speed. I won't be moved because I'll know how bad things will get when the theme finishes. But thanks to you I'll be hearing it with greater understanding and admiration.

Nick's comment on Pete's 47. *The James Bond Theme*

It's quite difficult to be objective about this, because both James Bond and John Barry, separately or together, have been around in our musical lives for so long – I think the first time I was aware of John Barry was as the driving force behind Adam Faith (not maybe the highest of accolades) even before the Bond theme. But this is a much more appropriate tribute to John Barry, whatever Monty Norman may or may not have contributed. I think it's fantastic, for exactly the reasons that you give. Having said that, the two transitions in the first of the links are incredibly clunky! I was made very aware of how much this music has permeated our psyches when we went to see "Skyfall". I thought the title song made very clever use of the Bond chord sequence, but found myself sitting there thinking "why on earth don't they play the bloody theme music" ... until of course they did, as he appeared in the Aston Martin. Whatever the manifold failings of the film, that moment was a sheer delight.

Vic Flick was, as I recall, the guitarist with the John Barry Seven, so presumably responsible for another inescapable memory of our youth, the guitar on the theme tune of Juke Box Jury. The National Portrait Gallery exhibition of Sixties rock/pop portraits had a photo of the John Barry Seven with Vic Flick touting a Telecaster. Your choosing this has made me think about his guitar, because the Bond theme sounded to me like an acoustic or semi. And it is – I can't resist the description on Flick's website: "big, blonde f-hole Clifford Essex Paragon Cello-Bodied guitar, fitted with a DeAmond Volume Pedal into a Vox 15-Watt Amplifier". 15 Watts: those were the days.

Incidentally, I think I've identified another spectrum – something to do with the instruments of choice. NONONONONO.

48. *You Only Live Twice*, by Nancy Sinatra (1967)

Composers: John Barry and Leslie Bricusse

From the film "You Only Live Twice"

This was written by John Barry for the fifth Bond film, with lyrics by Anthony Newley's long-time writing partner Leslie Bricusse. Cleverly, Bricusse took the somewhat meaningless phrase "You only live twice", and concocted a coherent theme out of it – living out one's most dangerous dreams and being prepared to take the consequences.

Musically and performance-wise, I think it sums up this tension rather well; it's deceptively accessible, but is laden with sinister musical overtones. Barry effortlessly

incorporates the kind of sombre chords that came to represent the quintessence of spy films of the day (e.g. on “Who’ll beckon you on ...”), but juxtaposes them with warmly positive cadences and progressions. He did something similar with *Goldfinger*, but there the contradictions are more sharply drawn by the percussive arrangement and by Shirley Bassey’s dramatic delivery, whereas here it’s much more subtle. The warmth of Nancy Sinatra’s voice and the rich orchestral arrangement give the decadent underlying message a kind of siren appeal, and on a good day I still find it spine-tingling. It deserved a film more worthy of the proposition.

By the way, my choice is the film soundtrack version arranged by John Barry, which in my opinion is far superior to the single version later arranged and recorded by Lee Hazlewood. Note that the YouTube clip finishes at 2 minutes 46 seconds, and is followed by a repeat from the end of the film.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hs8uYxTJ530>

Mel’s comment on Pete’s 48. *You Only Live Twice*

I have to agree that *You Only Live Twice* atypically provides scope for an imaginative James Bond title lyric that isn’t completely silly. So the song is potentially rather interesting. The trouble for me is that I recognise but don’t feel any of the things which you point to. So the song is rather pleasant, with nothing to object to at all. But I won’t listen to it three or four times as I did with the main Theme.

The problem is with me and the song’s context. Judging by the recurrence of questions about Bond-related music in quiz programmes, the readiness of quizees to answer correctly, and the attention paid to performers when a new film comes out, there appears to be a widespread James Bond theme fetish. It’s as if a song from one of these many films has some special quality which necessarily sets it apart. My reaction, as with most aspects of popular culture, apart from the “Big Bang Theory”, is to repudiate it or at least ignore it. So I’m in no position to make a balance assessment.

Give me *Nobody Does It Better*, a song that clearly stands on its own and I’ll be much happier.

I’m not suggesting that you are one of these fetishists, by the way Pete. The grouping of these three pieces of music together may well be a sign of a tidy mind rather than evidence of mania! I hope so.

(Sadly all this Bond-age talk provides me with a cue for a long-restrained rant – about McCartney’s diabolically lazy lyric in *Live And Let Die*, which is just one of the many nonsense songs he produced during his solo career. “... The world in which we live in” is one of the most blatant abuses of the English language in popular music – an ungrammatical tautology which screams “I’m Paul McCartney. I can say what I like.” Well, a head of Broccoli should have shut him up this time.)

OK I did just listen to *You Only Live Twice* a third time and I’ve revised my judgement. It is very pleasant.

Nick’s comment on Pete’s 48. *You Only Live Twice*

Nancy Sinatra has never been my *tasse de thé*, because the voice you describe as warm has always seemed to me pretty characterless (Shirley Bassey, by contrast, seems to me to be so hell-bent on being characterful that she forgets about details like consistently singing in tune). I think this is a clever piece of music qua music, but I think you’re a bit charitable about the lyrics. Listening to it now it still doesn’t do a lot for me. The choice of singers of Bond themes was often rather strange – Shirley Bassey and Tina Turner in one corner, Sheena bloody Easton in the other. Leslie Bricusse was, by the way, yet another alumnus of the Cambridge Footlights Club. Blimey.

49. *We Have All The Time In The World*, by Louis Armstrong (1969)

Composers: John Barry and Hal David
From the film “On Her Majesty’s Secret Service”

Forget the fact that it’s a crap film – this is an extraordinary and (to my mind) wonderful song. Nicely orchestrated without being overdone, and warmly and impeccably delivered in Armstrong’s unique style. (I’m not especially a fan of his voice, but that’s not the point.) Superficially it appears to be an unremarkable celebration of love and life (apparently it’s a popular choice at weddings), but it’s actually quite complex and is laden with irony – both in terms of the film’s doomed love story, and in the fact that Armstrong was approaching the end of his own life when he recorded it. But we don’t need to know any of that. The irony is there in the song itself, in the delicate wistfulness of Hal David’s apparently optimistic lyric.

Barry’s musical structure strongly underpins the ambivalence. I’ve always been intrigued by the way he incorporated cross-film musical allusions in his Bond themes, and here you get it for instance in the references to the brooding *You Only Live Twice* (among others). He uses some quite sombre minor chords to establish a surprising tension. “It’ll all work out,” the words and the accompaniment seem to say. “Maybe not,” says the music itself. I find that clever and compelling.

The bridge passage (“Every step of the way / you’ll find us ...”) is especially interesting. Armstrong manages to deliver it as though it were easy and obvious, but actually it’s a mysterious musical diversion away from the main part of the song, with a surprising downward melodic swerve in the middle. We rejoin the main tune via an impudently effective transition, and we’re told again that we have all the time in the world. The optimism shines through, but it’s a qualified optimism, and to me that’s what makes the song great.

Pseuds’ Note: This song is remarkable for TWO surprising second-inversion chords: a rare minor second inversion on “We have all the time in the **world**”, and a standard second inversion on “Leave the cares of the **world** far behind us”. Again, to me spine-tingling.

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

Mel’s comment on Pete’s 49. We Have All The Time In The World

I can only imagine that I have always ignored this song on the grounds that it has a desperately sentimental, trite and repetitive lyric. Simple to the extent of meaninglessness. I also think I appreciated the irony of Armstrong dying after releasing it.

But you have introduced an entirely new set of criteria for appreciating it. I doubt that I will end up revering the song, though I can see you have a point, quite a few points in fact.

It’s another example of the enlightenment which this game constantly provides. Thank you.

Nick’s comment on Pete’s 49. We Have All The Time In The World

I have another kind of problem here. In my teenage years I listened to a fair amount of jazz, including early Armstrong recordings, and I absorbed the dogma that his early recordings showed his artistry and the later stuff was an Uncle-Tommish effort to commercialise him at the expense of his extraordinary artistry. I have to say that I still think there is more than a grain of truth in this.

Be that as it may, I have never really listened to this song much, in part maybe as a hangover from the dogma. I think I end up thinking that John Barry was really even more remarkable than I thought, for the reasons that you identify, but I don’t think that the lyrics, notwithstanding an irony as subtle as a flying mallet, rise above the hackneyed. So interesting as ever to listen to this (and *You Only Live Twice*) more carefully than I have previously, but I can’t imagine adding either of them to the music on my ipod.

Pete's comment on Mel's and Nick's comments on *We Have All The Time ...*

I sometimes get the feeling that I'm possibly the most immersed of the three of us in the innate musical aspects of the pieces that I choose. Or is that a misreading?

We Have All The Time In The World is an ideal example of how this affects my response to things. The lyric on its own, I agree, is bland and insubstantial. If it were offered at face value it would be merely trite, and I certainly wouldn't go out of my way to defend it. It only becomes interesting because of the music in which it's wrapped – the singular melody and unexpected harmonisation, and in the way they simultaneously underpin and contradict the words.

I suppose this is the point where pure poetry and music diverge. The back-stories about Armstrong and the film itself will always be there in the background to this particular song, but to me it's the words/music combination that is the key aspect here.

I think I've already included one Lennon/McCartney song in a previous submission, but now I'm choosing three more Beatles songs. This is still not nearly enough from their catalogue, and as you'll see, two of these are somewhat out of the ordinary; but as Nick says, I can listen to all the rest any time I like. And these three are particular favourites of mine.

I will almost certainly submit yet more Beatles songs later, but this is enough to be going on with.

Mel's preface on these three Beatles items

Perhaps the most striking thing for me about these three songs is that, like few if any of other hundred you and Nick have chosen so far, these three had a huge impact on me at the time of their release, and it's an impact that I still vividly remember. Part of it was stunned amazement, similar each time: "What?!!! This is not what pop music does." Another part was the sheer joy of realising that this is indeed something it could do.

50. Please Please Me by the Beatles (1963)

Composers: "McCartney/Lennon", but largely a Lennon song
Single and on "Please Please Me" album

This was my first exposure to the Beatles – and what a fantastic way to begin. I was mesmerised by the juxtaposition of McCartney's held top note with Lennon's descending melody. So unusual. I now read that they were inspired by *Cathy's Clown*, though there's no similarity in the actual melody. Other details that fascinated me were the "interrupted rhythm" between verses, Lennon's harmonica, the "chant and response" effect ("Come on / come on"), the repeated pounding bass notes – and of course the harmonies.

I liked it the first time I heard it, but then someone at my school told me, "They play all their own instruments, you know." I was amazed – and I liked it even more! I'd had no conception back then of what was going on in the rock band world, and still associated all recorded music with studio backing tracks performed by men and women who (when occasionally seen) usually looked old enough and boring enough to be my parents. That single moment in time marked my induction into the emerging world of the singer-songwriter and the Mersey Sound, and seemed to herald exciting musical times to come. And I wasn't disappointed.

I still think it's a frisson-inducing piece, and one of the most impressive rock songs ever recorded.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=czw8eqepir8>

Mel's comment on Pete's 50. Please Please Me

I first heard *Love Me Do* on Radio Luxembourg under the covers – somewhat dangerously on a valve radio I think. It was a curious personal pleasure. A strange song, like the name of the group. (I couldn't know there was an "a" in it.) But too plodding to be exciting. Then out into the daylight with *Please Please Me*.

I was managing the class's weekly sweepstake at the time, betting on the top ten places in the charts. In from nowhere at 17, and next week to our collective astonishment a sound like nothing we'd ever heard was number one. No one saw that coming. We were watching history being made.

Cultural conservative that I am, I liked it a lot but it was shocking and I was uneasy for a while about this weird new music. It took *From Me To You* to turn me into a lifelong devotee. (And we all predicted a number one for that.)

I soon came to relish the energy and excitement of *Please Please Me*, though. The driving rhythms, the harmonies, the extraordinary harmonica. The instant thrill of it, like every succeeding single up to *All You Need Is Love*, where it took me a little while to get the joke.

But it all started with *Please Please Me*.

Nick's comment on Pete's 50. *Please Please Me*

I too can recall the ... not quite shock, but something akin when I first heard this. It had a ballsiness about it which had been homogenised out of most rock by the time. I don't think it's accidental that the Beatles and other bands of the time so often looked to the US race music charts for their inspiration, because that was where something different could be found (there and in Buddy Holly's work, of course). I think it was the top harmonic line, which was such a striking exception to the norm of singing thirds or fifths, which grabbed my attention.

I confess that I didn't immediately like it hugely – I suppose my ear had to adjust, as it did in turn when the exotica of the late Sixties appeared. As an aside, it's odd how often I find myself thinking "Why did I think this was a radical departure when it came out – it sounds conventional": the wonders of post-hocery, obviously. As with what I said about the Hollies' *Just one Look*, I suppose it was the sheer energy which is so striking. You are of course right, Pete, about where what contributes to the energy, but listening to it again, it's the energy which comes across so strongly. Ah those were the days. Where's my zimmer frame?

51. *Eleanor Rigby*, by the Beatles (1966)

Composers: Lennon/McCartney

On "Revolver"

I've always thought this song quite amazing. It may be pop music, but not as we know it. The images conjured up by the lyric are remarkable, and of course it's an extraordinary series of vignettes for a pop song, depicting a lonely woman and a frustrated priest. All the more surprising, perhaps, that it wasn't the work of an individual, but (according to what one reads, anyway) a collaboration in which Paul wrote most of the words, but John provided some input, and even Ringo injected one or two phrases.

Yet the result is consistent and vivid, and George Martin's attacking string arrangement is simply stunning. It's unlike anything else I can think of. Martin had used strings on *Yesterday*, but not like this. This took the idea to a new level. Among its many striking features is the contrast between the downbeat lyric and the urgent, jagged accompaniment. The words describe the lonely couple quietly going about their limited and separate lives, yet the delivery implies frenzied activity. It seems to me to succeed in representing the world's indifference to the participants as something active and almost violent – as if storms are crashing around the characters as they live out their meagre lives. As a result, despite the absence of conventional conflict, the outcome is still cathartic. It's very clever.

If you look it up on Wikipedia, you'll find it's written in Aeolian and Dorian minor modes (though presumably McCartney didn't know this) – yet another strange feature of this very strange song. I think it comes over with extraordinary impact, and lingers like a resounding exclamation mark.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HuS5NuXRb5Y>

Mel's comment on Pete's 51. *Eleanor Rigby*

We'd had the introspective *Nowhere Man* on "Rubber Soul". Otherwise pop music – Dylan excepted – was still all about love. We knew that "Revolver" would be wonderful, probably more edgy, gritty, real even than "Rubber Soul". But who could have predicted that tracks 1, 2 and 3 would have been an acerbic attack on taxation, a song about lonely nowhere people, and one about insomnia?!

And here was the greatest band in the world abandoning their own instruments again in favour of strings. Not the accompaniment to a sweet but vacuous love song like *Yesterday*, but tugging at real emotions with a piece of social observation. What Ray Davies could do superbly, The Beatles could do even better.

No wonder every day in the Sixties seemed new and exciting. It really was new and exciting.

Nick's comment on Pete's 51. *Eleanor Rigby*

This is an extraordinary song. I had never checked out its provenance, but had assumed that the dominant hand must be McCartney's. But clearly it avoided the tweeness and/or mawkishness which has bedevilled him, and to which Lennon was often an antidote. Musically it is quite remarkable. George Martin's influence (and success) is probably clearer here than anywhere else, but he of course needed something to work on, and he got it in trumps. As far as the Aeolian and Dorian minor modes go, I can offer a possible explanation. These terms were unknown to me till I bought a book of bass guitar scales, and there they are. So if McCartney had a book of bass guitar scales, he would presumably have known what they were. Be that as it may, it is a song which hasn't lost its power over the years. Wonderful stuff.

52. *She's Leaving Home* by the Beatles (1967)

Composers: Lennon/McCartney

On "Sergeant Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band"

This song, also a Lennon/McCartney collaboration, is another with only string accompaniment, and I've always thought it inspired. The story is perfectly and economically drawn. It wasn't a new idea – it was a familiar tale of an everyman (or rather everygirl) throwing off the fetters of the family constraint. But it's told neatly and observantly, using some surprising melodic swerves and some clever word play, and I think the string arrangement is wonderful. Apparently George Martin wasn't available to score it, so McCartney went behind his back and asked Mike Leander to do it, offending Martin in the process. But Martin's loss is our gain, because I think the result is up to anything he could have done.

As just one instance of the details I like about it, listen to the agitated, querulous, anticipatory strings on the line "Waiting to keep the appointment she made", followed by the emphatic "reveal" chords on the following line, "Meeting a man from the motor trade". Fantastic.

And of course there's irony in the outcome. The girl has escaped – but to what? To a man from the motor trade. Make what you will of it: that's the overriding message. The music is warm and positive, yet the conclusion is equivocal. It says, "Be grateful for the small victories in life."

I admit that I've always had a small issue over a thematic inconsistency in the "Greek chorus" part sung by John Lennon. In all verses except the last, he's parroting the platitudes uttered by the girl's parents, but in the last verse the point of view switches, and he sings, "Fun is the one thing that money can't buy" – an insight which, presumably, the parents themselves would never have had. But I can live with that.

Apart from the innate qualities of the song, for me the whole album sums up that optimistic summer of 1967.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VaBPY78D88g>

Mel's comment on Pete's 52. *She's Leaving Home*

I recall being devastated that I couldn't get hold of "Sergeant Pepper" until three days after its release. The wait was all the more agonising because Johnny Walker had played every track on Radio One a Saturday or two earlier. (I can't remember any other time when BBC radio has played an entire rock album.)

The album was all remarkable, of course, even *Within You Without You* which I liked and still like, but which is customarily disregarded by the wimps who also don't like *Revolution Number 9*! But *She's Leaving Home* was a standout track. Not in the same way that *Day In The Life* chilled the soul, but still spine tingling. Sad music without having to say you're sad.

And you're right, Pete. One of its great strengths is that it's an escape episode which is not properly resolved. Like the end of "The Graduate" with the stony faces of the heroes on the bus, we're left feeling uneasy about the girl's future with some man who sells cars. A job or something else rather seedy?

I'm glad you pointed out the deviation in John's final Greek chorus line. I think I must have felt it was misplaced without quite knowing how. Yet in the context of the girl's uncertain future it's dripping with irony. Frankly I don't think she was going to have much fun. But fun is not actually what the urge to escape one's shackles is about.

So much depth and such a lovely tune.

Nick's comment on Pete's 52. *She's Leaving Home*

This song had an immediate impact on me when I first heard "Sergeant Pepper". It took us away from the world of pop and into something more familiar from the BBC's *Play For Today* or the like. It seemed to me then, and seems to me now, to sit rather oddly in the LP as a whole, given its concept album pretensions, but what the hell. I don't rate it as highly as I did in my earlier listening (compare and contrast *Eleanor Rigby*), but it is still a very accomplished piece of work. Incidentally, I vaguely recall McCartney being interviewed and saying that most of the naughty interpretations found in Beatles lyrics were wrong (pull the other one), but the exceptions he admitted to, pretty disingenuously, one would have thought, were the "fish and finger pie" in *Penny Lane*, and "meeting a man from the motor trade". Whether this means that it is more than seedy sounding, I don't know, but compared to a lot of Beatles lyrics it would seem superficially literal, and works fine on that basis. Any experts on scouse slang out there?

Pete's comment on Mel's and Nick's comments on Pete's Selections 50-52

We've really struck some chords with our latest selections (metaphorically and also physically, though you probably didn't hear mine from where you are). It's great to read such positive responses to my Beatles choices. So there really are points of correspondence in what we value. Rather fitting that it should come around the half-way mark in the whole process.

Look forward to much more overlap and diversity in the second fifty ...

Here are my TV and film theme choices. I was tempted to name this selection "In which Rowlands finally acknowledges his irredeemably weird and frequently shallow taste". However, if that's your reaction, you should see the songs I've rejected! They include the themes from Cheers, Friends and even Happy Days. All these lift my spirits, truly: perhaps not to the extent of making the final cut of my top hundred, but be afraid; be very afraid ...

Then go figure!

53. From A Distance, by Tilda Swinton and ensemble (1990)

Composer: Julie Gold

From the TV series "Your Cheatin' Heart"

God is watching us ... from a distance. That's the message. The point, of course, is that as far as I'm concerned god isn't watching us, close up or from anywhere else. The version of this song that I'm offering you is the only one I've heard (among many) that picks up this irony. Quite simply, I find this one of the most moving renderings of a song that I've ever come across: perhaps not altogether intrinsically, but in context, and with thought. The woman who composed it was apparently a believer, but accepted that the song could be read in many different ways, and I thoroughly endorse that.

So although in some ways apologies are demanded for the version that I'm giving you, for me it's partly the performance itself that gives it such power. Anyway, I've trawled the internet in the past, and never found a complete uninterrupted rendering, so you simply have to tolerate the intro and an annoying break in the middle. *[But my MP3 version has been edited down to a complete uninterrupted performance. See note below.]*

The TV series it appears in was a curious combination of ironic humour and violence, and took as its backdrop the Scottish country and western scene. In this advanced episode, the main characters unexpectedly overcome their differences and sing this song together. It's a truly magic moment, and the context gives this version of the song a lot of extra impact.

I think Tilda Swinton's rather "unsingerly" vibrato-less voice is perfect for the job – augmented by Eddi Reader and actress Katy Murphy, plus John Gordon Sinclair doing his best to look as though he's actually playing the steel guitar. Ignoring the presentation of the song, I love the raw, "live" feel of the guitar accompaniment. Tilda Swinton appears to be playing the correct chords, and even Sinclair makes a creditable attempt.

Many singers have tried to appropriate this song – most notably Bette Midler, who had a big hit with it – but they mostly seem to treat it literally and sentimentalise it. What I find so beguiling about it is that it's ambivalent, and suits whatever belief system you have. In one sense it's a bleak picture of needless and perennial strife, yet in another it suggests that there would be enough of everything to go round if humanity just stopped bickering. Cleverly, the words don't say an external god needs to do anything to bring this about, though they could be taken that way. The god in the song is merely watching; the "hope of hopes" presumably belongs to the people themselves.

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

Note on MP3 version of From a Distance

The version of this song in my MP3 compilation is an uninterrupted composite performance. I took the version from the TV programme as the basis, then patched in

fragments of a separate solo recording of the song by Eddi Reader at points where the TV show version's audio is compromised. I also cut out the interruption in the middle. Amazingly, Reader's record features the same original backing track that was used in the TV series. The vocal lead in my version is 95 per cent Tilda Swinton, but you hear Reader's voice singing the lead once or twice, notably near the beginning.

Nick's comment on Pete's 53. *From A Distance*

I missed "Your Cheatin' Heart" when it appeared, which is odd given that I thought that its predecessor "Tutti Frutti" (which we have on DVD) was wonderful. 1990 was the time I was working in London – it was obviously even more disruptive to my life than I realised. I did, though, know the song, which for some reason sneaks onto a "Byrds Greatest Hits" CD. I dismissed it as a gate crasher on the CD (and the Byrds were at that stage a rather weird self-tribute band at any rate). Certainly I had not seen the song as having the ironical depths you detect. But I'm afraid that I still think I was right. It is doubtless ironical in the context of "Your Cheatin' Heart", but then any work can be used ironically, and that doesn't mean that the irony was in the originator's mind – the use of *Silent Night* by Simon and Garfunkel might stand as an example. So I can see that this is a powerful and affecting performance, but that serves more to make me want to see "Your Cheatin' Heart" than to continue to listen to the song. Tilda Swinton is a splendid actress, Eddi Reader is one of the stalwarts, and Katie Murphy was truly wonderful in "Tutti Frutti". I shall have to investigate "Your Cheatin' Heart" further. And yes, I did listen to your edited version even if my brain was struggling with how you'd done it.

Despite my devout atheism, I don't have any problem with the notion of religious music being of an equal (or greater) but opposite devoutness. But to me the song, stripped of the (post-hoc) dramatic context, is ... ok (but I have always taken the Byrds CD off before it gets to that track).

Mel's comment on Pete's 53. *From A Distance*

You put up a very good case for a song which I was initially going to dismiss out of hand on account of its lyric.

The song and its performance obviously move you, and even if I knew the context as you do, nothing I could say would have much bearing on that. Anyway, I absolutely appreciate the idea that a piece of music can take on its meaning and impact from the situation it was and/or you were in when you heard it. Many of my selections have that in the background, and a few in the foreground. For the reasons you give, the director of "Your Cheatin' Heart" must have been inspired to play it here and in this way in his production. You convince me completely (although I'm not sure the song does).

Setting aside that I have today discovered your hitherto hidden penchant for country and western – a genre which on an earlier occasion I tried to run permanently out of town – there is also a case for admiring the immediacy of its performance, and the sweetness of the voices and the harmonies. It's pleasing to hear that a piece of music pleases you so much, though I ain't gonna say I'm pleased that it's C&W! (I joke: some country and western is rather good if you ignore that it's country and western, as you recommend.)

Pete's comment on Mel's comment on Pete's 53. *From A Distance*

Your approach of considering what I think of these songs, rather than what you think, is interesting, and I think it's very useful. But that being said, I think that up to a point this song really does withstand my interpretation of it. From the moment I first heard it, I never once considered that the lyric was asserting belief or faith, even though I can see exactly why it could be taken that way. That's partly because I don't have such thoughts myself, I suppose; but put simply, I have to warm to any song that raises questions about a god who tolerates the ills of the world because he forgot to put on his glasses!

Whilst an unashamedly devotional song might leave me cold (apart from its musical aspects, of course, which still might thrill), I find a song with this kind of ambiguity much more beguiling. Partly you could see it as an exercise in wishful thinking, but it's also a

lament that faith has been found so universally wanting. “God is watching us,” says the lyric; but it doesn’t say God is *helping* us. I find that both moving and quite chilling.

54. *Chancer Theme*, by Jan Hammer (1990)

Composer: Jan Hammer

From BBC TV series “Chancer”, and single

I suspect I’m never going to persuade you to like this if you don’t already know it, though hopefully you won’t *dislike* it. All I can do is ask you to listen so that you know what it is. And what it is is the theme tune for a TV drama series of long ago, starring Clive Owen just before he became an international star. He plays a financier who decides to commit to rescuing a failing sports car manufacturing company (like Morgan, dare I say?). I found it surprisingly compelling.

The composer, Jan Hammer, played keyboards with the Mahavishnu Orchestra, then later went solo. One of his most famous pieces is the theme from “Miami Vice”. I love the way the melody of the *Chancer Theme* spills into unexpected dominant sevenths, pulling you inexorably into it; and I love the relentless beat. I actually bought the single of this piece, but it’s different from the version used in the TV series, and I prefer the latter, which is why it’s the one I’m presenting here.

[Originally I provided a link to the entire first episode, in which you could jump to one minute’s uninterrupted version over the closing titles at 41:30 minutes. This has since been taken down from YouTube, so the link below is to the single record version.]

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oIj7ihHZUko>

Mel’s comment on Pete’s 54. *Chancer Theme*

I can’t say much about this as I’m not even sure I’ve actually heard it. I’m afraid the drama on screen was a bit more absorbing than the tune, and the interruptions were too much for my failing powers of concentration.

One thing of note is that there was a time, long ago, when theme tunes with TV series were very important to many of us. They regularly reached the charts. TV was new and powerful enough to demand big dramatic and memorable themes which provided a rallying cry for their programmes. I remember this even as late as “The Professionals”. But for the reasons above I can’t actually get why you like this one, though your description suggests it may be in the intricacies of the composition, which went right over or right past my head while I was trying to follow the action.

Nick’s comment on Pete’s 54. *Chancer Theme*

This similarly passed me by at the time. I’m afraid that several listenings have not persuaded me that it is as good as the “Miami Vice” theme. That is not of course to say that “Miami Vice” had anything else to commend it, any more than Lalo Schifrin’s theme for the preposterous and grotesquely irritating “Mission Impossible” has anything else to commend it. Jan Hammer is clearly a brilliant musician and this is skilfully crafted stuff, but coming to this music cold it hasn’t really grabbed me.

September 2022: Pete’s postscript on *Chancer Theme*

The cars used in the TV programme were JBA Falcons, rebadged as fictitious Douglas Leopards. In real life JBAs were built in Norwich, but the factory seen in the series is thought to have been the former Velocette motorcycle works in Hall Green, Birmingham. Nick might have been intrigued by that.

55. *Stayin' Alive*, by The Bee Gees (1977)

[First sent 16.8.2025]

Composers: Barry, Robin and Maurice Gibb

Single, and on the album “Saturday Night Fever”

Oh dear. Have I really picked a disco song featuring three men singing in a strangled falsetto? What’s gone wrong?

The fact is that the Bee Gees were part of my life for decades, and I want to celebrate them; and this track, for all its quirkiness, is arguably their most memorable. I knew the group from their early *Massachusetts* days, of course, and rather liked their pop ballad style. I still think *I Gotta Get a Message to You* is fantastic. Then they disappeared for nearly a decade, and were suddenly reborn as disco singers (in fact their music virtually defined the form), and I feel this is their stand-out song from that period.

Stayin' Alive is of course almost inextricably linked to the film “Saturday Night Fever”, which I’ve always admired, and which features several Bee Gees songs. It’s hard not to hear this one without seeing John Travolta strutting his stuff along 86th Street in the opening sequence. The official video of the song, showing the three Gibb brothers striding through a decaying urban landscape (actually a film set), has also become a visual cliché, and has often been parodied.

I think the song survives all this cultural clutter because it’s so well executed: solid bass, swirling strings, and falsetto vocals that are sung with supreme conviction, defying any attempt at mockery. The line about the singer being “a woman’s man”, delivered in a high falsetto, has always struck me as a potentially risible contradiction, yet somehow *they got away with it!*

The writing credits are given to all three brothers, but it was Barry Gibb who did most of the group’s songwriting over the years, and I feel he hasn’t always been given adequate credit for his contribution to the musical canon. He wrote some marvellous songs for other performers besides the Bee Gees, including Diana Ross (*Chain Reaction*) and Barbra Streisand (*Woman in Love*) – in both cases almost single-handedly reinvigorating their careers.

I wouldn’t want to hear *Stayin' Alive* every day of the week, but I still find it strangely compelling.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fNFzfwLM72c>

Mel’s comment on Pete’s 55. *Stayin' Alive*

Great choice, and I agree with almost all of what you say about the Bee Gees.

Even if I didn’t like quite a lot of their music I’d have to admire their longevity. They were the first band to clock up number one hits in the Sixties, Seventies and Eighties, and I was always amazed at their capacity to reinvent themselves for their times. I don’t know what they sounded like in Australia, but their UK album “Bee Gees First”, which I still occasionally play, was a bid to emulate the style of later Beatles songs while creating a sound of their own. Then came the dreary ballads with the vocals sounding like a tortured sheep. After a lull they emerged as accidental superstars of the disco era, and after that died away they returned years later with the fine pop hits *Tragedy* and *You Win Again*.

I think this strange trajectory results from them being song writers who performed, rather than a band which also wrote their own songs. It explains how they could unerringly latch onto the disco boom and produce *Jive Talkin’*, *Nights on Broadway*, *Night Fever* and *Stayin' Alive* overnight and from nowhere. Not *Mining Disaster*, *Massachusetts*, or *First of May* territory at all. I liked the disco hits, though I’m sure I was among those who derided the pervasive falsetto

voices for their dubious manliness. Ignoring their ballads during this period, *Night Fever* is the best of the bunch musically. But I could do with a break in its unrelenting falsetto, which we do get briefly with *Night Fever*. They both have contagious tunes and an irresistible beat, not that I ever did any disco dancing.

Night Fever is also lyrically much more interesting and “authentic”: *Stayin’ Alive*, which was knocked together in a couple of hours, definitely does not contain within itself why it is so and not otherwise. Though I have to say that I gave up looking for logic and consistency in Bee Gees lyrics back in the Sixties. They’d bung in anything if they thought it sounded good or helpfully filled a gap. (Famously, there are no coal mines in New York state, certainly not in 1941.) But who cares? They could write a tune and employ a good arranger.

If I had to choose a favourite Bee Gees track – and I nearly did – I’d skip the ovine ballads altogether, and go for something pacey. It would be a toss up between the two late contenders *Tragedy* and *You Win Again*.

Pete’s comment in 2025 on Mel’s comment on Pete’s 55. *Stayin’ Alive*

I’m delighted that you like *Stayin’ Alive*. I was seriously worried that you might think it shallow or otherwise flawed. I also agree with you that *Night Fever* is in some ways more interesting. I debated which of the two to choose, and decided there wasn’t much in it.

I think your conclusion that the Bee Gees were songwriters first and foremost is interesting, and I’m inclined to agree with you. That’s partly why they proved so adaptable and ultimately enduring.

By the way, I still like my original choice for this slot – Eddie Rabbitt’s *Every Which Way But Loose* – but I’ve come to the conclusion that I chose it on a whim, not because it was truly important to me, so I had to replace it.

This track was a late substitute for Pete’s original selection, so Nick did not have the chance to review or comment on it. Pete’s original choice at this point was Every Which Way But Loose by Eddie Rabbit.

Three more for consideration. This time they're themed in two ways. They're all up-tempo songs from the 1970s / early 1980s that used to make me crank up the volume and grab my guitar to join in: not to great effect, but simply because their exuberance was so irresistible. And in addition, they have serendipitous personnel overlaps, though I didn't necessarily know this at the time. More of that below.

I know I've chosen a McGarrigles record previously, and indeed forced a rather unseemly debate about the merits of their music, but I've realised that this song in particular merits its own place in my celestial selection.

If you can handle it (and if you actually like these items), please listen to all three of them as loudly as you can endure! Then you'll get more of a sense of the exuberance they deliver as far as I'm concerned.

No – LOUDER!

56. You're No Good, by Linda Ronstadt (1975)

Composer: Clint Ballard

Single and on album "Heart Like A Wheel"

In the day, Linda Ronstadt slipped under my radar. I was vaguely aware of her, but I wasn't really paying attention. I didn't know in the early 1970s that she was emerging as pretty much America's biggest female rock star of her day. In my defence, maybe it was because she didn't make as much impression in the UK as over there.

Anyway, I felt I made amends when I bought an album of her greatest hits. I thought it stunning, and I still do. It contains four or five of what are among my favourite up-tempo rock performances of all time, sung with that distinctive voice – strong, sometimes even strident, yet controlled and always somehow feminine. I think she was superb. In addition to *You're No Good*, may I also commend

That'll Be The Day (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Voj4h9ajtgg>) and

When Will I Be Loved? (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9iBgTqz_-vY)

As you can see from all these titles, some of her best output involved re-workings of sixties classics, but always in imaginative new versions. I can't actually decide which I like best ...

Lyric-wise, *You're No Good* is a lament by someone who is about to leave her unworthy partner ... or is she? She knows that she in turn let down her previous partner, but is that knowledge enough? We never find out. The Swinging Blue Jeans made a neat job of the song, but here the lowering arrangement, the heavy minor chords and anguished delivery elevate it to a new level.

Other things to know about Linda Ronstadt: Peter Asher was her producer for many years, and she worked with Andrew Gold on some of her biggest hits (Peter Asher also produced for him). I think Gold's guitar interpolations on *You're no Good* are spine-tingling. Ronstadt also worked with the McGarrigles, and had a big hit with one of their slow numbers, *Heart Like A Wheel*, which I've already picked in their own version for my top hundred.

Linda Ronstadt was also, perhaps unexpectedly, a close friend of Dolly Parton and Emmylou Harris, performing and recording some wonderful harmony songs with them over the years. And Emmylou Harris worked with Mark Knopfler on an album called "All The Roadrunning" [see my choice #90]; so there are links here to both my other choices below. Oh, the connectedness of it all ...

Sadly, Linda Ronstadt now has Parkinsons, and can no longer sing. Life is good like that.
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eovJNp5asqc>

PS When the reckoning comes at the end of this game, I'm going to propose some sort of arrangement that will allow us to switch a small proportion of our choices to different pieces. If the Board sanctions this significant move, I may substitute *That'll Be The Day* for *You're No Good*. I urge you to listen now and get ahead! (See link above.)

Mel's comment on Pete's 56. *You're No Good*

I always thought Linda Ronstadt was some kind of country and western singer, and naturally ignored her completely. Now I discover to my surprise via YouTube that she has set out to improve on all the best recordings from the Sixties.

That was not what excited me about your selection of *You're No Good* though. That started the moment I got your email. The Swinging Blue Jeans version has always been one of my favourite records from the "Sixties beat era". Then one of the last things I remember from Brian Matthew before he was booted into touch by the BBC was him playing a version by, I think, Betty Everett. It was beautiful – it knocked my socks off.

I felt pretty certain, then, that I was also going to enjoy Linda Ronstadt's effort whatever it was like. And it has exceed all expectations. It's utterly fabulous – Beatles apart, probably for me the most memorable of your 58 to date. I like absolutely everything about it apart from what seems to be a slightly over-compressed digital recording on the YouTube clip. (Either that or my hearing's deteriorating faster than I thought.)

I agree with all you say about the recording, but I'm going repeat it anyway.

It's a great song. The multiple recordings suggest there's wide agreement on that. Ronstadt's voice achieves the almost impossible feat, especially by current hit parade standards, of being sweet, musical, powerful, controlled and expressive all at once. She would have done a good job with any one of those qualities, but this is obviously a standout performance of the first order.

Above all, the musical arrangement is emotional manipulation at its cleverest. Admittedly the record producer seems to have manically included everything he could find in the studio, but he used all the bits sparingly to evoke a consistent mood. There's a dull ache in the stomach which I associate with love going wrong, and this backing seems brilliantly to find music equivalents to that, from the first drum beat and haunting electric piano and the girl group to what sounds like a series of Clapton and Harrison-inspired guitar breaks. But the sound goes on evolving past the false ending and through the searing drawn-out note from the strings to the unresolved fade out.

It's perfect for the song and the singer, and makes for gripping listening. So many thanks for introducing me to it.

Now to your reprehensible suggestion that, having selected this amazing record, you immediately want to change the rules so that you can include something very good but clearly inferior in its place in your 100. The Board will vigorously resist the amendment if this is the kind of abuse you intend!

Nick's comment on Pete's 56. *You're No Good*

I remember this of course from the Swingin' Blue Jeans. I even used to attempt to sing it. However, I didn't know this version, though in the '70s Linda Ronstadt used to be around in whatever the auditory equivalent of peripheral vision is. As I recall, I thought of her material as pleasant, tuneful, but the musical equivalent of the artworks in the dentist – pleasant, designed to please everyone and give offence to no one. So listening to this has made me revisit that view.

I am afraid that I remain of the same mind. I would hasten to add that I think I hadn't allowed for the unquestionable musicianship of the backing band, but all in all it didn't involve me greatly. As I was listening to it the first time, I was interrupted about two minutes in (by a man from Porlock, of course). When I resumed I found myself wondering why the track was so long. It's a tight little song, so why feed it on carbo? Overall, an amiable enough listen and then

happily I'll move on to the next one. Or maybe not: as for the other two you refer to, I just find myself thinking "why would I listen to these recordings rather than Buddy Holly and the Everlys respectively?"

57. *Lonely Boy*, by Andrew Gold (1977)

Composer: Andrew Gold

Single

Andrew Gold was one of those talented musical polymaths; he worked as a session musician with many other performers, then made a name for himself in his own right. Among his biggest successes was *Never Let Her Slip Away*, a hauntingly reflective slow number that you probably know.

Lonely Boy is something else altogether – an up-tempo number with fantastic attack and an endlessly teasing rhythm, in which the accent seems to be on the first beat of the bar, yet keeps appearing to conflict with the stress in the vocal line. The uncertainty of this adds urgency and a sense of uncertainty to the whole thing, and I've always thought it immensely clever.

The words are unusual – they describe a cycle of lost parental love that continues over two generations (the long instrumental break in the middle separates the generations). According to Wikipedia it wasn't autobiographical, but we can make our own minds up about that. On its own, one could argue that the lyric is selfishly self-pitying, but perhaps that's the point? I just think the piece is a stunning musical statement. Particularly beguiling is the repeating line beginning "Oh, oh what a lonely boy", which settles for a moment on an anguished diminished chord (on "boy"), then continues into a nicely evolved chord sequence on the way to resolution. The narrator may not be happy, but the music has that effect on us.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=boAv-Bu4MrI>

Mel's comment on Pete's 57. *Lonely Boy*

Sorry, but I've always regarded the lyrics of this not as indulgent but as nonsensical, and so lacking in logic that I never wanted to find out what Gold intended to say. So I've pretty well dismissed the recording as a whole.

Now you're pressing me to listen to it – and loudly – I readily concede its energy and exuberance. And, in view of its musicality I can easily understand why it's one of your favourites, Pete.

I can't tell whether the YouTube version is the original record, a re-recording or a live performance. But what I certainly can't remember from the single is the spectacular backing of this version. I could do without Gold's silly vocal and probably enjoy this track a great deal more. It's fantastically enjoyable.

Nick's comment on Pete's 57. *Lonely Boy*

I remember this from when it was kicking around the charts or whatever when it first came out. I think I had it down as one of a plethora of singer/songwriter/pianist products of the time, Billy Joel being the longest lived (and Randy Newman being perhaps the forefather and in my view the most interesting of them, though he of course also has ancestors). The arrangement on this is excellent (though as a digression I have to say that Bigsby tremolos on Les Pauls always look like abortions to me: not as bad as they look on Teles, but they should really be limited to Gretsches). The song – well 's alright. Rather an exercise in self-pity, like any number of pop/rock songs. But to me not as engaging as the arch self-pitiers. Maybe blaming fleeing or unfaithful lovers is more effectively maudlin than blaming parents. Twice.

Incidentally, how does he pull the stroke of changing clothes and instruments at about 3.40 without missing a beat? Now that's what I call talent.

58. *Love Over And Over*, by Kate and Anna McGarrigle (1982)

Composers: Kate and Anna McGarrigle

On album "Love Over And Over"

OK, well to me this is simply one of the most exciting and hypnotic pop songs there is. You've got that urgent driving rhythm, the fantastic McGarrigle harmonies, and Mark Knopfler's wonderfully imaginative guitar. As with the others in this set of three, it only makes sense if you play it at max vol. It doesn't actually say anything very remarkable. "What did they know, or anyone know, about love?" But it says it with such panache.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=R_mqt_q-7yg

Mel's comment on Pete's 58. *Love Over And Over*

My mean-spirited prejudice against the McGarrigles is well-established, and I'm clearly too old to shed my bigotry. So I'd need something very special from them to make me change my mind. Not this.

It's a perfectly fine jaunty tune by a folk couple, very much enlivened by Knopfler's guitar, as you say. For someone who likes the McGarrigles this, I can well imagine, is a record they would like!

No, it's fine, really.

Nick's comment on Pete's 58. *Love Over And Over*

Of these three songs, this is certainly the one I'd be most likely to replay unprompted by friends, lists etc. I like the sound (well, I'm a sucker for tunes, and of course for vintage Knopfler) The McGarrigles have never really come onto my radar, though I have of course been aware of them for a goodly time. I enjoyed this a lot. I think it falls rather in the camp of the sort of music we hear in concerts and thoroughly enjoy, but don't buy the CD because we're not sure we'd ever play it.

Nick's reflections on swopping our choices

Just as a passing observation on the idea of introducing a repechage process at the end. Since I have consistently flouted rules on length of observation and number of choices per go, I can scarcely say anything but that the rules were carved in tablets of soap not stone (or even soapstone). That said, I don't really want to contemplate alternates because I rather like the rigours (huh) required by having to ask myself, "Is A more important to you than B, or do you use up 50% of the whole choice to include them both?" We'll see.

I've decided to have a shot at re-invigorating the music game, and I'm doing it with some rather obvious but utterly essential tracks. These are not songs of great profundity, but I can't imagine life on my desert island without them, so they have to be included.

Now you know more about my music taste than is good for me. But you already did.

You probably won't be able to think of much to say in response to these, other than that you like or don't like them. But anything you do say will be carefully considered!

Enjoy.

59. Hello Mary Lou, by Ricky Nelson (1961)

Composer: Gene Pitney (and others)

Single

Every time I hear this I'm uplifted. It's quintessential turn-of-the-sixties music. I love everything about it – the cowbell introduction, the solid jingling guitar accompaniment, Rick Nelson's likable voice, the two-part harmony throughout, and the memorable guitar solo by James Burton. Nelson never did anything better.

I've only just discovered that Gene Pitney was sued for plagiarism over this song by a band called the Sparks, who wrote and recorded a song called *Merry, Merry Lou* in 1957. I've just listened to it, and it's vaguely similar, but not very. Nevertheless, they won the suit. Whaddaya know?

The record strongly evokes my childhood prior to the rude awakening of boarding school. I also associate it, in common with *Shakin' All Over*, with a visit to the massive fairground on Newcastle's Town Moor that year. In the context of my life (and music of the time), it was backward-looking rather than forward-looking ... but who cares? We had a copy of the single, which I still have now. It looks a lot like the picture that appears with the YouTube video.

Total magic.

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

Nick's comment on Pete's 59. Hello Mary Lou

Curiously I'd have dated this rather earlier than it actually is. It feels late-50ish (which is right for the first Ricky Nelson song I remember, *There'll Never Be Anyone Else But You*, 1959), but that probably shows how pop had started to stagnate before the Beatles and the belated acceptance of music by black artists into the mainstream. I find this difficult to criticise with any objectivity because it's always been there, and was one of the earliest songs I ever tried to sing and play when I started to play the guitar (mainly because it's basically pretty simple, of course). It still makes me feel good. Can't really say much more.

Except about James Burton – if he hadn't existed it would have been necessary to invent him. He's one of those wonderful ever-presents, from R. Nelson via the later Elvis to the black and white Roy Orbison concert (of course he played the guitar on *Pretty Woman* too). I have a CD called "James Burton – The Early Years" which I really like. Curiously on the cover of the CD he's playing what looks like a Gibson Super 400 (as favoured by Scotty Moore among others), and on the live performance which YouTube offers he's playing a Fender Jaguar. He was famous though for playing a Fender Telecaster with three pickups rather than the standard two: always seemed curious – why not just use a Strat? Be that as it may, however tasteful his guitar-playing is, the same is not true of the finish of the Tele, which was available in a Paisley pattern, now superseded by a sort of flame pattern. On the whole I'd even prefer Fender's famous MOTS* finish, but only just.

*MOTS is I think officially recognised by Fender as the designation for this white faux mother of pearl finish. Stands for mother of toilet seat. I saw a MOTS Strat once. It is ... er ... not a finish I'd choose.

Mel's comment on Pete's 59. *Hello Mary Lou*

If there's anything negative to say I'll say it in this first sentence: this is not among my favourite songs of this era. But so what? The musical production seems more complex and interesting than a lot of the contemporary tracks which might excite me. And you're right in everything you say about it. It's a joy and it's wonderful to be reminded of it.

Its real importance, like so many of my own choices, is that it's music set at a personal point in time. You've mentioned the fair on Town Moor before, and I get that (I can't hear Dion without remembering the fairs on Maidenhead's rather smaller North Town Moor which my mother strongly disapproved of.) But I can't remember you ever referring specifically to the point in time of the "rude awakening" of boarding school. The phrase doesn't sound as bad as it might have been, but it's interesting you've not previously mentioned it. Now I want to hear more about what the awakening was like for you!

Thanks to you and YouTube I've now been reunited with a whole batch of thoroughly enjoyable Rick Nelson songs which are part of the fabric of our lives but which, like *Hello Mary Lou*, I was personally not fully aware of when they were first issued. But there's one other which deserves particular mention, the lovely *Garden Party*. It sounds like classic Rick Nelson, though it was actually written a decade later after he'd apparently been booed off stage for singing new material at a big concert. I've always thought its gentle maturity reinforced his output and reputation in a way the Sixties songs couldn't quite manage on their own.

The chorus of *Garden Party* is "If you can't please everybody you've got to please yourself." Could be an anthem for our current occupation!

60. *Things*, by Bobby Darin (1962)

Composer: Bobby Darin

Single and on album "Things And Other Things"

In many ways this is very similar to *Hello Mary Lou* (see above). Similar accompaniment, with the addition of background girl singers and something that sounds like a marimba, but no harmony in the lead vocal. I like it for more or less the same reasons. It was simply part of my life at the time.

Bobby Darin was an interesting performer; everyone seems to have their own version of him in their mind's eye. Here he was a pure pop singer, and he recorded various other songs of this ilk ... but what about *Mack The Knife* and *Beyond The Sea*, in which he was reckoned to rival Sinatra? Being a chameleon probably helped him to become a legend (no doubt his premature death played a part too).

We also had a copy of the single of this song.

Essential.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GVRl5vQRStM>

Nick's comment on Pete's 60. *Things*

Some years ago (or reflection probably 30 or so by now) Radio 2 did a series of biographical programmes about various singers, of whom Bobby Darin was one. In the same way that obits of the lesser political lights are often more informative than those of ex-prime ministers or whatever, it was actually about the most interesting of the whole lot.

As you say, Pete, he seems rather to have tried to be all things to all men (or persons as we say now). I was first aware of him singing *Splish Splash* (no comment), and *Dream Lover* was

another of the songs to fall victim to my early efforts on the guitar. I had an EP of his, which included *Beyond The Sea* and *Up A Lazy River*, both presumably aimed at a market rather older than I was at the time. But then there was that awful version of *Clementine* too. And of course he, like Ricky Nelson, tried his hand in films. A weirdly unfocused career, which at its best was pretty good. He could sing.

Having said which, I thought and still think that *Things* falls in the same camp as *Multiplication*, of him rather going through the motions – thoroughly amiable, but undemanding (if happily not as arch as *Multiplication*). But, as you say, part of our lives. Again, it feels good to listen to it.

Mel's comment on Pete's 60. *Things*

I'm ashamed to admit that hearing this again has instantly reminded me of the blatantly racist *Speedy Gonzales* which I secretly liked at the time and mistakenly attributed in my mind to Bobby Darin (it was Pat Boone of course).

Things is a great track. This is part of the tidal wave of American music I experienced at night on Radio Luxemburg during 1961 and '62. A memorable year or so for me as I was discovering pop for the first exhilarating time.

As you and Nick both point out, Darin had a musically varied output. Some of it I couldn't stand, and at the time I liked *Things* as much as any of the rest of the repertoire. But he had a good voice and a canny manager. So I agree that this puts him in a class apart among all the other Bobbys, Johnnys and Richies.

Another of his songs that come crashing back to mind is *Multiplication*. Nick refers to it as "arch". I used to think that, for its time, it was also quite naughty, and had an embarrassed fondness for it. That obviously says a lot more about me than Mr Darin though.

61. *Hey Baby*, by Bruce Channel (1961)

Composers: Margaret Cobb and Bruce Channel

Single and on album "Hey! Baby"

Quintessential. That harmonica (played by Delbert McClinton) and the sharp percussion by Ray Torres, whoever he was: wonderful. The structure and style of the song were straight out of Brill and all that. It's just another landmark in the period of my awakening to what music had to offer.

It featured memorably in the 1987 film *Dirty Dancing*, which I'm not ashamed to admit that I like. So sue me.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ik9dxkKriVo>

Nick's comment on Pete's 61. *Hey Baby*

Not quite a one hit wonder – there was also *Keep On* from our student days. But this is the one we will remember. I didn't like it at the time for reasons which now defeat me. It wouldn't/won't make my list, but again I enjoyed listening to it again. Is that just the softening effect of nostalgia? Dunno. And actually who cares?

Incidentally, Ray Torres was Mr and Mrs Torres' boy. I hope that helps.

Mel's comment on Pete's 61. *Hey Baby*

Same again. All part of my not-so-rude pop-musical awakening at night with Radio Luxemburg. It's odd that I can vividly remember listening to this. But I have no mental picture of the chunky transistor (or was it a valve radio?) I must have been sharing my bed with.

This song has the simplest sound of your current four, and seems to depend almost exclusively on the combination of a high singing voice and the harmonica. It's not actually that great. Except ... it's so distinctive and so memorable.

Another very good choice.

62. *Sealed With A Kiss*, by Brian Hyland (1962)

Composers: Peter Udell and Gary Geld

Single and on album "Sealed With A Kiss"

Yet more of the same, really. Harmonica, solid guitar backing, two-part harmony for most of the song: I loved it. I thought the middle eight, with its tight harmony and anguished progress to the line "Darling, you won't be there", was superb. I even liked the obvious key change towards the end. And of course, like *Might As Well Rain Until September*, it presented an ongoing puzzle to British audiences. We had no knowledge of the strange American habit of banishing kids during the summer to faraway places where they were separated from their friends and would-be girl/boy friends, so the whole context was a bit of a mystery.

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

Nick's comment on Pete's 62. *Sealed With A Kiss*

How on earth could you pick this from the immense Brian Hyland oeuvre when it is so clearly overshadowed by the magisterial *Itsy Bitsy Teeny Weeny Yellow Polka Dot Bikini*????

Again, I didn't much like this at the time, I think because I thought it had a rather jarringly plaintive tone. I think I can see why – it's a very trebly sound, doubtless made worse by the speakers on my radio of the time, which were made of old cocoa tins. But it doesn't bother me as much now that I've passed beyond my cocoa tin period. Again, I really enjoyed listening to this and the others, but this is actually probably the one I'd be least likely to return to. Another digression (not guitars or gigs for once) – I never thought about the significance of Summer camps: they must actually have been pretty fraught for adolescents in the throes of pubescent lust and allied emotions.

As a desiccated follower of fashion, I noted that between the time the publicity shot for the single cover was taken (if Wikipedia is to be believed) and the time of the YouTube film, our Brian had affected a genteel version of a Beatles haircut. Hmmm – takes a bit more than that, Brian.

What a nice way to spend half a dreary morning!

Mel's comment on Pete's 62. *Sealed With A Kiss*

Here I probably diverge from you and Nick somewhat. *Sealed With A Kiss* is by far the best constructed record of your four, and in my limited experience of the distaff side, the song with the greatest and longest lasting impact on the collective psyche. Any girl or woman I've known well enough to converse on the subject of Sixties pop is a fan of this. And at the risk of sounding a girlie myself, I rather like it too. My 14-year-old self definitely did.

It has a deep rich sound, compelling harmonies, a (more subtle) harmonica and what you tellingly describe as anguish in the middle eight. Just listen to the attention-grabbing way it opens, and the way the harmonica haunts the backing. This is carefully crafted pop which knows literally just how to hit the right notes.

It also had the distinction of being the song that everyone said surely couldn't have been done by the same bloke who did that stupid song about a small bikini. There's a message: become known for some indescribable crap and what you produce afterwards is bound to sound superior.

I like your reminder, Pete, of *It Might As Well Rain Until September*, one of my own favourites from this time. Part of the mystique of all this early US pop was that it sounded accessible but could actually be about quite alien experiences. The video with this brings out another peculiar alien feature: how is that so many American girls have such extraordinarily big mouths?

A suitable finale to a fabulous bunch of memories. Thanks.

The first track in this selection of four is a replacement made in 2025, and is not connected to the other three.

63. *Under Pressure*, by Queen and David Bowie (1981) [First sent 3.8.2025]

Composers: Roger Taylor, Freddie Mercury, David Bowie, John Deacon, Brian May
Single

Both Queen and David Bowie have been part of the soundtrack of my life, so this song allows me to include them both at the same time.

I have to admit I've never fully understood Bowie's music, though I've frequently enjoyed what I've heard. Today I replayed the famous "Top of the Pops" video of *Starman* (the one where guitarist Mick Ronson shares the mic with Bowie), and I was bowled over as ever by Bowie's confident, charismatic performance.

I know more of Queen's music, and considered numerous tracks of theirs, including *Killer Queen*, but something about *Under Pressure* has nagged at me over the years, demanding attention and respect, and I now see it as a rather extraordinary piece, and an inevitable choice.

The attack of the song is stunning: that haunting bass figure; the insistent percussion and handclaps; the diverging and overlapping vocal lines; and the contrast between David Bowie's measured half-speed reflective passages and Freddie Mercury's rapid-fire vocal interpolations. And at some points the bass note is held at a constant pitch across more than one chord, taunting listeners by refusing to deliver a more settled and predictable musical experience.

As a result of all this, every verse feels somehow "held back", repeatedly teasing us with the promise of some sort of musical resolution ... which, in fact, is finally and triumphantly delivered each time with the emphatic line "Pressure on people, people on streets". At that point we're hit with a solid dominant chord, and the relentless rhythm relaxes just for a moment. Those bits alone sells the song for me.

You might argue that the lyric on its own is pretty simplistic, consisting of a collection of more or less unconnected assertions that feel as if they were thrown together with a bit too much haste. "Life is hard, and can be nasty," it seems to be saying, "but give love a chance." The message is not exactly new or even entirely coherent.

However, the track's urgent, almost mesmerising musical quality magically elevates it (in my mind, anyway) to something much greater, ultimately giving it unexpected emotional punch. The piano provides a satisfying final cadence, though it doesn't actually take us back to the key chord; but the finger clicks carry relentlessly on. Seldom has a song delivered so convincingly on its title.

Disappointingly, Bowie never performed the song live with Queen, although they made it part of their own stage act. But after Freddie Mercury died, Bowie apparently performed it frequently. There's a collage video on YouTube where performances by Bowie and Queen have been woven quite cleverly together, so I've provided this as the link.

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

Mel's comment on Pete's 63. *Under Pressure*

You make a fine case for the musical qualities of this recording, and I am not equipped or inclined to challenge a word of it, Pete. It may be, objectively, pretty damned good. But I'm

afraid it collides with possibly my most powerful rock music prejudice: Queen are not to be entertained at any cost.

I bought their first big hit album “Sheer Heart Attack” on the strength of the excellent Killer Queen, not realising in 1974 that the self-referential title was the start of a career based on preposterous stomach-churning strutting over-performance. This reached its zenith in the ludicrously lauded and execrable, not to mention plain silly, *Bohemian Rhapsody*. Queen are one of the few bands I’ve seen live (I was sent to review their rain-soaked performance at Cardiff Castle by the Western Mail) and I witnessed early versions of the overblown stage tricks which now seem obligatory for Glastonbury headliners. But I was more moved by the precipitation.

Now watching the video of *Under Pressure* brought it all back: David Bowie in a smart suit and tie standing at a mike like a serious rock star while his antithesis Freddie Mercury storms around the stage topless looking as if he’s having an orgasm. I’m ready to rebut claims that my discomfort demonstrates homophobia, and more than willing to argue that his performance might provoke it, which probably isn’t far from Mercury’s intention.

In contrast, although I don’t prostrate myself at Bowie’s feet as a succeeding generation of rock fans have done, I do have considerable respect for his talents.

I don’t much like *Under Pressure*, though as you can see I’m totally unwilling to give it a fair chance. I’m enlightened by new insights into the way some rock music works, but unable to feel it working on me.

Pete’s comment on Mel’s comment on Pete’s 63: *Under Pressure*

Since you admit to a “rock music prejudice” in respect of Queen, and acknowledge that you haven’t given this track a fair hearing, I’m left with little to defend my selection! However, that doesn’t stop me from feeling I must challenge your assertion that Queen “can’t be entertained”. Yes they can. *I* entertain them!

I can easily understand why you never liked Freddie Mercury’s posturing live performances, but they have nothing to do with my enjoyment of this track (or any of Queen’s other music). I like its tunefulness and vitality, and have to admire Mercury’s remarkable voice, though I recognise that it’s an acquired taste. When I hear this track, I don’t think of the stage performance; I simply hear a remarkable song, which to me seems more Bowie than Queen.

But it’s another case of *Chacun à son goût*, and I fully accept that I can’t make someone enjoy something they simply don’t like.

This track was a late substitute for Pete’s original selection, so Nick did not have the chance to review or comment on it. Pete’s original choice at this point was Sun Arise by Rolf Harris, dropped with disappointment when the extent of Harris’s past abusive behaviour towards women and young people became clear.

A salute to George Martin: *The theme I hit on for the following three selections – Slow Train, I Like It and You’re My World – is songs produced by George Martin that are not Beatles records. What continues to amaze me is that I was aware of his work (without knowing his name) long before the Fab Four came on the scene. In some respects it formed an inescapable accompaniment to our early lives. He produced Mandy Miller’s Nellie the Elephant, which I secretly liked (though you’ll no doubt be relieved to hear is not on my list). He also produced Right Said Fred for Bernard Cribbins and My Boomerang Won’t Come Back for Charlie Drake. Oh, and Goodness Gracious Me for Peter Sellers and Sophia Loren. Well, someone had to.*

I have to admit a nostalgic fondness for all these, but they certainly wouldn’t make my top hundred. However, it’s fair to say that this has been a cue for me to present some of my more off-the-wall choices. But those I’ve picked are there because they’ve earned their places individually, not because of the George Martin connection.

64. *Slow Train*, by Flanders and Swann (1963)

Composers: Michael Flanders and Donald Swann

From the cabaret show “At The Drop Of Another Hat”

Back in the day I was never a big fan of Flanders and Swann. It's only with the benefit of hindsight that I've realised they were talented and rather interesting. So I don't remember when I first heard this particular song; I just became aware of it over the years. Initially I didn't pay it special attention, so it doesn't have any specific point of reference in my life. It just lodged itself surreptitiously in my consciousness.

Interestingly, the piece was recorded at a live concert, and at one or two points you can hear faint sounds of the audience showing that they're ready to laugh at the singers' trademark humour; but it's not there, and you can feel them gradually settling down as they realise the song is delivering something more profound.

It's a little lament for rural railway stations that were about to be axed by Beeching in the 1960s cull, and I find it incredibly poignant. I can't really explain why, but whenever I hear it I feel almost moved to tears. And I have to say that the collage of old black and white railway prints in the YouTube video makes a sympathetic backdrop. The very British sound of the two voices – partly ironic, partly nostalgic, not always completely in sync – perfectly sums up the warmth of the lament; and the haunting melody and subtle but insistent piano accompaniment underpin the emotional “hit”. One or two of the people who have left comments on the YouTube upload page have summed up its effect as eloquently as I could hope to.

If you look up the song, you'll find that the writers were a bit unlucky in some of the railway stations they picked. A few were not closed after all, some were reinstated later, and some became stations on preserved railways. However, that doesn't matter. The point was made. This is not just about railways, it's also about nostalgia for a passing world in general. And in a way it sums up a big part of this whole top one hundred process. John Lennon hit the spot with *In My Life*, but in a strange way this achieves a surprisingly similar result.

By the way, it's quite short, so to get the idea you might want to listen to it twice ...

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=U6OHD2uCpfU>

Nick's comment on Pete's 64. *Slow Train*

Ah, now we're into family history territory. My old Dad bought “At The Drop Of A Hat” presumably about when it came out, and I could probably recite the lyrics of, or, if you were really unlucky, try to sing an awful lot of, Flanders and Swann songs. And I think one retains a sort of not very considered affection for such things, rather as I do for some of my great aunts. I haven't heard any Flanders and Swann for even longer than I haven't heard Rolf Harris (I think – I'm afraid my non-existent diary is painfully remiss in this regard). But this song wasn't on Dad's LP, and I don't recall hearing it before. I enjoyed it. When I started listening I thought it used a folk tune, but I think it's just rather reminiscent of *The Ash Grove* and such things that we sang in music lessons when we were 10 or 11 – how appropriate. It then struck me that it was a bit curious that they sing in unison almost throughout – I guess that's what they did, but I never thought about it at the time.

There are of course lots of songs which exploit the evocativeness of place names, but I can't help thinking jingoistically that we have the drop on “Route 66” in that regard when the cards are down. But of course the nostalgia goes beyond place names- cats, milk churns, but for some reason not John Major in his MCC tie dozing at a cricket match. It's very amiable – that really isn't meant to sound like damning with faint praise. Amiable rather than stirring, like cocoa on a winter evening rather than a shot of something a bit less unalcoholic.

Mel's comment on Pete's 64. *Slow Train*

Nick, you have reminded me of the fondness I had for "At The Drop Of A Hat", owned by the parents of a friend. A wonderful collection. Flanders' and Swann's occasional TV appearances were always a welcome diversion from the prevailing style and content of the box.

Back then I relished the comedy songs – *Transport Of Delight* was a particular favourite, you'll be pleased to hear Pete. Yet the gentle nostalgia of *Slow Train* was not only alien to my temperament then; it seemed pre-packaged and out of time because many soon-to-be lost branch lines were still operating while Flanders and Swan were delivering this elegy. I felt it was a second league contribution, like the one Swansea is just rejoining and Cardiff is leaving.

But now ... If the dreadful selection of photos in the accompanying video slide show can be forgiven (it's all LMS, not a trace of GWR, LNER or SR, despite the song's wide-ranging geographical references) this distinctive and original piece just suits me fine. Presumably for the same reasons you like it, Pete, I knew as soon as I saw it on our list that I would find it a joy, and I do.

Nick, you're absolutely right about the superior redolence of English place names when they're spoken aloud. All that names on Route 66, 67 etc have to offer us is the sense that they're far apart. With comparable lists of places in England we are delving into the origins of our community and even the language. And I can just about remember sleepy stations in summer sunshine like the ones described in the lyrics. They are a world away.

A perfect old song for me to have grown to enjoy. Lovely.

65. *I Like It*, by Gerry and the Pacemakers (1963)

Composer: Mitch Murray

Single and on umpteen albums

I could (perhaps should) have picked *How Do You Do It*, the band's first big hit – also written by Mitch Murray. I just happen to prefer the follow-up. The exuberant four-bar introduction never fails to make me smile, and to me the song delivers on that promise. The Beatles famously recorded *How Do You Do It* before Gerry & co took it on, but they made it completely their own, and here they started out with new material.

Parenthetically, I have to say that when I first heard *How Do You Do It*, I remember thinking to myself, "Is this pop music?" I thought Gerry's husky voice and slightly banal delivery surprisingly un-pop-like. I first heard it on a stand-up Portadyne radiogram dating from about 1950, which we had in our front room. It had a single large speaker behind a hatched grille, creating a rich but slightly booming sound. I still have now – in storage somewhere in Eastbourne (I haven't seen it for twelve years).

Anyway, I got over my initial misgivings, and realised this band was a classic example of the emerging Mersey sound, which I wholeheartedly embraced. They were unusual, though, in not using any vocal harmony in their first two singles, unlike almost all other Mersey bands apart from Billy J Kramer and the Dakotas. The vocal impact relied purely on Gerry himself. They were also very unusual in having a piano in their group (an upright). The solo on *How Do You Do It* is quite accomplished.

Incidentally, secretly I can't help liking *You'll Never Walk Alone*, which I thought inspired when I first heard it, and in a way still do: such a clever reworking of a song sung written in an entirely different rhythm and mood. Liverpool supporters can't claim all of it, because a small part of it belongs to me.

However, the spirited attack and tunefulness of *I Like It* have swung my vote in favour that, so it remains my Top 100 choice.

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

Nick's comment on Pete's 65. *I Like It*

Now this of course I recall all too vividly. I had an almost-but-not-quite girlfriend who liked it and was pissed off with me for not liking it (how unapt) along with other things which I'm sure pissed her off even more and which in aggregate account for the almost-but-not-quiteness. Aye, but that was in another land [well, no – ed.] and besides the wench is dead [how would you know? – ed.].

So I come to this with entirely fresh ears, he lied. When I was a callow almost-swain to Ms Bell, I think I didn't like its jauntiness and jangliness: more like Freddie and the Dreamers than the Beatles or the Stones. So what do I make of it now? Much the same, I'm afraid. If I were to pick a Gerry and the Pacemakers song (which I ain't) it wouldn't be this or *You'll Never Walk Alone* (on which, apart from anything else, I find his problems in holding some of the notes pretty distracting): it'd be *Ferry Cross The Mersey*. We were actually on the Liverpool ex-docks 10 days ago ... but didn't go on the ferry.

Mel's comment on Pete's 65. *I Like It*

Having attended a Gerry and the Pacemakers concert, I'd like to think of myself as something of an expert on this Sixties rock combo. As it happens I'm not. But your selection of *I Like It*, Pete, gives me the chance belatedly to establish which is the best of their much-of-a-muchness bunch of upbeat songs.

Interestingly it's not the first hit *How Do You Do It*, which is rather more than formulaic. It's repetitive. It's not *You're The One*, which has distinctive qualities, and perhaps better musicianship by that later stage. It's the second single *I Like It*, which wins through on the basis of its – yes I'm surprising myself saying this – musical variety. It's got a longer lyric ("more interesting" might be over-egging it). In particular it's got changes in pace and key which create little surprises to keep engagement going. And it is an engaging little tune, with an infectiously simple idea to drive the lyric along.

Eminently dismissible, enjoyable and well-crafted pop.

I always found the ballad records just a bit pretentious in contrast with these bubbly songs. That's just my blind prejudice, because *Ferry Across the Mersey* has a nice tune to counter the sentimental words, and someone was inspired to take *You'll Never Walk Alone* out of Carousel and give it to a cheeky Scouser with a gravelly voice.

Of course none of that stands for anything when you're at a G&P concert with hundreds of other exuberant geriatrics. Then all the songs are great.

Additional comment by Pete [October 2022]

This choice presented me with a puzzle that I'd already experienced with others, and which was particularly challenging here. *How Do You Do It*, rather than *I Like It*, stands out in my memory as a landmark song. It was my introduction to a specific form of the Mersey sound, complete with the various features I mentioned in my opening comments. In a way it begged to be my song choice from Gerry and the Pacemakers, which is why I talked a lot about it above. It undeniably has more resonances for me than *I Like It*.

But which song would I prefer to listen to on my desert island? That seems to have been the decisive question for me in making my choices. And the answer in this case is *I Like It*. It's more cheerful and more impactful. And I like it!

66. *You're My World*, by Cilla Black (1964)

Composers: Umberto Bindi and Carl Sigman (English lyric)

Single

Stunning. What else can I say?

Actually this was another tough call. I also greatly admire Bacharach and David's *Anyone Who Had A Heart*, Cilla Black's original number one. I narrowly came down on this one. It's not that I generally like "all stops pulled out" production numbers like this, but I think this one works rather well. That teasing violin introduction is inspired, and it all gathers impact from there. The recording features the Johnny Pearson orchestra, plus the Breakaways (remember them?). Wikipedia says the lead guitar was played by Judd Proctor, whom I don't know, and the essential percussion was by jazz drummer Kenny Clare.

Everyone has a view about Cilla Black's voice. Strident? Screeching? Uncontrolled? Varying too much between quiet and "belted"? All true. In a way her edgy delivery was part of her appeal. You never quite knew what you were getting. But here I think she uses her various different vocal styles to good effect. It's not uncontrolled, it's quite subtle.

Anyway, Cilla was always going to feature somewhere in my top hundred, so this is it. Actually, I've always had a great fondness for *Love Of The Loved*, the Paul McCartney song that was Cilla's first single. That really does evoke the raw Mersey sound, and is delivered at uncompromising max vol all the way through. But I only discovered it after the event, so somehow I feel it doesn't count.

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

ADDITIONAL READING

I could have picked numerous other George Martin songs, but I don't want to use up too much of my allowance! Here are a few contenders (or alternatives to those above) – three of them by Lennon-McCartney:

Bad To Me

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

Hello Little Girl

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CzYK2U1xhmU>

How Do You Do It

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AQD-m2AQoXc>

Love Of The Loved

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

Nick's comment on Pete's 66. *You're My World*

Ah, the pre-rhinoplasty Cilla. With the benefit of hindsight, I now think of Cilla Black's two speed vocal gearbox as rather like the approach of the man who did Thatcher on "Spitting Image". The simper I can generally take (except when it is used throughout as song as I think it was on *I Can Sing A Rainbow*, but the fishwife voice – forgive the sexism – I find pretty hard to listen to, more now than when it was current. And I can't see that the gear-change at "... with your hand ..." at 54 seconds can merit the term "subtle" other than as in the usage "subtle as a flying mallet".

Curiously, I don't have the same aversion to *Love Of The Loved*, which I rather like. The voice there is obviously strident, but in a more ingenuous way, and I don't think it's the full-bore fishwife, though the recording quality makes it hard to be sure (had she been taking singing lessons by *You're My World*, I wonder?). If it were to come down to Cilla vs. Dionne Warwick, I'm afraid I'd be in Dionne's camp, not that I can imagine her making the cut in my list either.

Sorry if this sounds a bit sniffy. I've enjoyed listening to all of these, and any sniffiness is a consequence of trying to articulate reactions which would normally pass by beneath the surface

of the congenial retrospection they all involve. And herewith also an opportunity for you both to lambast my folly, crassness and general lack of taste.

Mel's comment on Pete's 66. *You're My World*

Well I must say I'm closer to the N Andrew interpretation of Ms P White's performance than the forgiving Mr Rowlands. As she starts her big build up, the line "With your hand resting in mine" sounds so aggressive that it's surprising to find it's not followed by "I'm going to rip your arm off".

To endorse what appears to be the almost universally prevailing view that Cilla lacks subtlety, I seem remember hearing of a famous occasion when Burt Bacharach came over from the States specially to record Cilla singing *Alfie*. She failed so persistently to do what he wanted that the session went on for hours with take after take being rejected. It's not confirmed, but my view is that in the end Bacharach got the performance he liked only when she was too exhausted to shout any more.

Having said that, I had no such qualms in the heady days of the Liverpool Sound. I liked most of her records, this one in particular. *Anyone Who Had A Heart* had more impact because it was the first, but then it was all too easy to compare it with the superior version by the always superior Dionne Warwick. Anyway, we could take Cilla blasting out the words of *You're My World* through a megaphone because what do 16-year-old boys know about subtlety and sensitivity?

Nice tune, sung by a friend of the Beatles, jammed into our ears at high pressure so that we couldn't miss it. Pop was all like that for a while.

Nowadays I wouldn't go out of my way to listen to any of Cilla Black's songs. On the other hand when they go out of their way to find me I usually enjoy them, partly for old time's sake, but also because for a brief period she really wasn't that bad an entertainer. (Later she was absolutely dire!)

Further reading [postscript from Mel]:

Well this is interesting. I listened to *How Do You Do It* anyway as part of my in-depth research into *I Like It*, but I wouldn't want to touch the Cilla track because it might spoil *You're My World* for me.

And the other two tracks are absolute blasts, definitely more fun than Harris, Black and Marsden. *Bad To Me* is one of those tracks which says: "When you can't get any more of the Beatles there's always the Rutles, or Paul Weller, or Oasis, or ...". Wonderful tuneful pop, for fairly obvious songwriter credit reasons.

Likewise with the Fourmost. One of their songs is hovering just outside my 100. They weren't that great a group, but they knocked out some fantastic tracks, sometimes with songwriting help from their friends from the Cavern of course.

By the way, you know how little live music I get to see. Well I managed to follow up our Gerrymarsdenfest only this week with a trip to Abergavenny to see the Rutles, with an audience which was only marginally more capable of making the stairs. Magnificent stuff, some of which deserved hit status in its own right. Clever man Neil Innes.

Can this be true? More song choices? Yes! But only three (got to draw the line somewhere), and I'm slightly equivocal about the third. I simply wanted to get something in motion.

These could loosely be grouped as "my 1980s choices", but I'm aware that I've dipped into that era before, so it's all a bit random really. I've realised that if I were honest, I could build a list of at least fifty songs purely from the 1960s, so I'm trying to force myself to be a bit more broad-ranging than that, and include material from the decades since then. And the first two of these three really are up there among my all-time favourites.

67. This Is Love, by George Harrison (1988)

Composers: George Harrison and Jeff Lynne

Single and on album "Cloud Nine"

I have great fondness for George Harrison's 1988 album "Cloud Nine". I felt that after he'd failed for years to live up to the achievement of the "All Things Must Pass" album, this one marked his return to top form. I ascribe part of the credit to Jeff Lynne, who produced it (and is given a partial songwriting credit), but in fairness the album's hallmarks are much more Harrison than ELO.

This Is Love is on side 1, and is by far my favourite track. I'll admit that the message is extremely simplistic; it's saying life is bad, but a bit more love would mitigate this. Yep, it's that trite. To me the achievement of the song is all about the way the message is delivered in music. The urgency and promise of the opening bars tell us, "This is going to be something special," and to my mind it delivers in full.

There's an infectious tune, a full instrumental backing with vocal harmonies, a driving lead guitar pumping out those melodic runs to underpin the theme, and Harrison's understated vocal lead. And then we're launched into a compelling instrumental break with a different guitar sound – another of Harrison's trademarks.

There are lots of nice references to Harrison's life in music, but they're unobtrusive. There are swirling hints of the Indian musical idiom that was his trademark, but they're just floating in the wind, not forced down our throats. There's his distinctive lead guitar sound. And later in the song, there's a little tongue-in-cheek "come-a-come-a-come-a" tribute to the likes of Neil Sedaka. We're reminded that at the centre, it's a pop song with a long and varied heritage.

Ah, and I've missed out one of the key features. Each verse seems to be written in a major key, complete with its strongly positive chord sequence, but ends in a minor key. I find this structure clever and teasing: the ending of each verse leaves you craving for the positivity of the next one, but the motion is circular; we always come back to an atmosphere of mystery, of uncertainty. This is love," it seems to be saying, "but don't expect it to be all sweetness and light, because it won't be."

I find it utterly haunting.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5HD-ygMaz-s>

Mel's comment on Pete's 67. This is Love

I gave up on George Harrison's albums quite a bit earlier than 1988. After "All Things Must Pass" I'd spent a few pounds on LPs that I seldom took out of their sleeves. Then suddenly there was the number one hit remake of Got My Mind Set On You in 1987 – a great one-off pop single. Or so I thought. It's now revealed to me as the first single release from "Cloud Nine".

[Incidentally, the release of “Cloud Nine” seems to be 1987, not 1988. Sorry for the pedantry, but if Nick can get away with colour comparisons of electric guitars, I can correct a significant date error (see below)!]

I didn’t know *This Is Love* at all, and I have to agree it was a hundred times better than the dreary intervening music. I’m not an ELO person as you know, but I recognise that Geoff Lynne could write a good happy tune – which self-evidently was the missing ingredient in what George Harrison was turning out while I was still buying his records.

So here is an uplifting tune with a throbbing beat and the Harrison guitar tricks we’d come to love. I agree with all you say about its musicality. A really lovely record.

It would be churlish to pick holes, but you would miss it if I didn’t try. There are some tiresome electronic tinkles in there I could well do without, and I did feel by the end that the lyric hadn’t developed very far and the song seemed to sound much as it did at the start. This had been a most enjoyable trip round the block rather than a musical adventure.

In anyone else I’d have nothing to complain about. However, you’ve already chosen the ethereal *While My Guitar* and cited the incomparable “All Things Must Pass” LPs. Inevitably it falls short of them, so I can’t help a twinge of disappointment.

Then of course in 1988 George Harrison pulled off the amazing feat of getting Dylan and Orbison to sing with him and together as The Traveling Wilburys. Their first release eclipsed a very large chunk of the solo Harrison, and is one of my most played albums. And I value his genius for making the Wilburys happen probably more than his musical contribution to their records.

So *This Is Love* doesn’t feel like a career highlight. And yet I would have remained a poorer soul if you hadn’t introduced me to it. Hence, thank you Pete.

Nick’s comments?

We haven’t been able to find Nick’s comments on This is Love, and suspect he may never have supplied them.

68. Better Things, by Ray Davies and Bruce Springsteen (2010)

Composer: Ray Davies

On album “See My Friends”

Originally performed by the Kinks (1981)

Single and on album “Give The People What They Want”

Wow! I just find this a fantastic example of pop music the way I want it. Great melody, great two-part vocal harmony in the chorus, electric band in full flow; and it actually means something quite interesting. I love everything about it. Like another in my current selections, *This Is Love*, it tells you right from the urgent introduction that you’re in for a treat (well, it tells me that), and it doesn’t disappoint (me, anyway). A measure of its impact on me is that a few weeks ago I had it CONTINUOUSLY on my brain for FOUR DAYS.

Ray Davies wrote it in 1981, and the Kinks recorded it back then. The original version is sparer in accompaniment than the reworking that I’ve chosen, and much more like the Kinks in their heyday. For instance, the chromatic harmony line towards the end of each verse is more evident. It reminds me of *Waterloo Sunset*.

You may well prefer the “real” record, but I only got to know the song through the more recent version, and I immediately latched on to its high-impact instrumental arrangement and fulsome attack. It features as the opening track on a 2010 album of Ray Davies songs, which are performed by him with a various guest stars. Some pieces have musical arrangements that are quite different from the originals, but this one is very similar to the Kinks’ version, apart from the more emphatic accompaniment. Oh, and of course there’s

the addition of vocals by Bruce Springsteen. I have to admit he almost sounds like a parody of himself – but not quite! I think he brings a rather interesting new dynamic to the piece, and gives a nice edge to the harmonies.

And so to the meaning. This I find rather intriguing. Superficially, the narrator seems to be telling someone (friend? wife? partner?) that he hopes that person has “better things” in future than the bad times they had in the past. All very altruistic – even bland. But what if that person is a partner/girlfriend, and they are splitting up? Suddenly the words have a lot more meaning. Is the narrator genuinely wishing the other person well, or speaking in deep irony? Is there an unspoken element of self-doubt, of embittered reproach, of rather poignant resignation? It turns out that Davies wrote it while he was breaking up with his then-wife, which says a lot; but I don’t think you need to know that to appreciate it. The teasing ambiguity is there if you look for it.

And even if you don’t, it simply sounds great!

My choice: the new version with Ray Davies and Bruce Springsteen:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hCc88cwd61k>

Original 1981 Kinks version:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nhzY86sC7Qo>

Mel’s comment on Pete’s 68. *Better Things*

Well I like both versions. A lot. Not enough to take to Mars on a USB stick with the other 99. But the song is all you say it is. Springsteen’s voice brings an added dimension because Ray Davies’ is, we would all presumably admit, usually rather weedy. Not that this adversely affects the Kinks recording. Both versions sound well sung and thoroughly upbeat and positive to match the words. Unless...

I thought I was the one who speculates dangerously about the real life context of song lyrics. Maybe you have reasons to think that Ray Davies really didn’t want his estranged wife to have better things in future. If he didn’t, this jolly-sounding song is really very cynical indeed. So for once I’ll opt for the nice interpretation and imagine that he’s wishing someone a better life after the extremely hard time he’s given them. (That sounds more like Ray Davies, surely.)

I like both the artists, find the tune catchy, and the records a bit of a blast overall. Good choice.

Nick’s comments?

We haven’t been able to find Nick’s comments on Better Things, and suspect he may never have supplied them.

69. *Karma Chameleon*, by Culture Club (1983)

Composers: Boy George, Jon, Moss, Mikey Craig, Roy Hay and Phil Pickett
Single, and on album “Colour By Numbers”

Well, who’d have thought you’d find this here? You’ll probably hate it, and I won’t be upset if you do, so don’t hold back the contempt. It’s just that it really was a landmark for me. It summed up my happy realisation in the early 1980s that we were not after all doomed to descend into an endless cycle of New Wave musical deconstruction – which threatened to leave us with a combination of latter-day punk, “un-singerly” vocals and techno plinking and plonking (as I rather ungenerously saw it). “Proper” pop music like this was still being created as well.

It's the production and arrangement that I like here, and the irresistible melody. I like the background girl harmonies, the harmonica (by a man called Judd Lander), and in fact the instrumentation in general. There's a fresh liveliness that I find irresistible. I smile whenever I hear the introduction unexpectedly, and that's my acid test of whether a piece is important to me.

I originally thought the lyrics made this an AC/DC song along the lines of Lola. I assumed it was about a chameleon who couldn't decide which side to come down on. Finally I listened to the words properly, and realised it wasn't that at all. It appears to be about relationships in general, and the problem of never being able find harmony among vacillating opinions and loyalties. Well, maybe it's about that! It's all rather slight – but then, I never looked for any deep meaning here.

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

Mel's comment on Pete's 69. Karma Chameleon

I'm afraid I disagree with an awful lot of what you say about this song.

First, I was dreading having to listen to it because, rather than smile when it comes into earshot I usually cringe.

It feels to me very much part of its synthetic time. I did even doubt the harmonica, but I am prepared to be corrected. There must be a few other pseudo-instruments playing along here though. It still sounds like the period when people gave up guitars and drums in favour of keyboards and toys.

I don't think the lyric is about relationships in general. I'd never bothered to study them before, but they were thrown up on the screen when I played the video, and it struck me immediately, and to my surprise, that they were written directly to a lover. This is Boy George in a tempestuous relationship. They're rather tough lyrics for this bouncy tuneful song, in fact. There's nothing to suggest this is a "gay" song, of course, but from what we know of Boy George there can't be any doubt that he's addressing another guy (his drummer, it turns out).

Another quibble: although the lyric is partly gobbledegook, I get the sense of something much more complex and thoughtful than in the other two songs in your selection. Again a bit of a surprise. I used to think the title was just a bit of smart arseing. But the song is entirely consistent, and there's some genuine pain running through it. The lines "Every day is like a survival / You're my lover not a rival" are as seriously meant as they are direct and memorable.

(Incidentally, Pete, you win no points for the unhappy accident that this track was followed by the terrible *Bohemian Rhapsody* when I listened on YouTube!)

That's where I differ from you.

Where I agree, to my utter astonishment, is that I'm suddenly reminded of the joy of hearing this song at the time of its release. Distinctive, tuneful, engaging. Not at all the recollections of a failing pop singer who wouldn't give up, or his endlessly regurgitated antics – which are the inevitable associations of the past 30-odd years.

A really interesting choice. You might have difficulty with it as a permanent accompaniment to life on a desert island or an unvisited space station on another planet. But definitely worth a listen once in a while.

Nick's comments?

We haven't been able to find Nick's comments on Karma Chameleon, and suspect he may never have supplied them.

I'm submitting another batch of "recent" records this time (it's a relative term). That's about the only thing these have in common – except for the fact that collectively, they reassure me that I didn't stop enjoying new music in 1970 (a possibility that sometimes worries me). As recently as 2000, or even later, I was taking on board new or newly-discovered music that became important enough to me to include in my top 100. I realise I've chosen other "modern" music before, but I don't think I've raised this point in quite this way until now.

70. Chan, by the Buena Vista Social Club (1997)

Composer: Company Segundo (Máximo Francisco Repilado Muñoz Telles)

On the album "The Buena Vista Social Club"

If you already know, or know about, the Buena Vista Social Club, you probably don't need to hear much more about it from me. It's everything you know (or thought you knew) about Cuban and Latin music in general; it's a distillation of the mythology of the place; and it's a touching swansong from a group of musicians who captured the spirit of a culture and a generation, and were approaching the end of their days. Yet it's also more than all that – its' a unique musical *tour de force*. We latched on to it when it first came out, and I think it's totally wonderful. I could have picked any number of tracks from the album, many of them more upbeat and cheerful than this one, but *Chan Chan* is atmospheric and haunting, and opens the album with immense panache.

It was all down to Ry Cooder, as you no doubt know. He was in Cuba on another errand that fell through, and ended up assembling a group of old-time local musicians to perform a selection of songs in traditional Cuban style. The singers sound as old as they were (most of them have since died), but the music is precise and meticulously worked out, and the beautifully balanced vocal harmonies compensate for the weakness of the individual voices. Ry Cooder took what they were already doing, changed it very little, yet managed to add a tautness and an edge that elevated it from the purely professional to another level. He has reportedly said it's the greatest work he's ever been involved with.

The meaning of this particular song is apparently quite trite; a man called Chan Chan is watching his wife gyrating as she sifts sand that they're going to use in building their house. I have to say this is one instance where I feel, "Sod the meaning, just let the sound engulf you." The song is written in a minor key and has just four repeated chords throughout, but the voices and assorted instruments soar over them, and those relentless chords have an almost hypnotic quality. The effect is simultaneously celebratory and mysterious, and for me it's positively frisson-inducing.

Try not to be distracted by the video in this link, which is based on a Wim Wenders documentary that was made some time after the original recording; it's nice but it's not necessary. Listen to the music, and let it wash over you!

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tGbRZ73NvLY>

Alternatively, here's a version with no video:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=o5cELP06Mik>

Mel's comment on Pete's 70. Chan Chan

This is marvellous. I don't have many reference points to provide a critical appraisal. But it's just so relaxed and yet constantly surprising, the kind of track which embraces you with its sheer musicality.

Perhaps what gets to me is the sense of extraordinary control in such a rhythmically and musically complex performance. Even if I hadn't been predisposed to like them by the glowing publicity which accompanied the Buena Vista Social Club's emergence on our musical scene, I'd probably recognise the maturity and musical dexterity of this track. It's impossible to imagine writers and record producers dictating detailed instructions from the control room in the vein of a Latin anti-capitalist Stock Aitken & Waterman. This was just the way the guys in the band were going to play it. Scintillating.

I can't say I've been to a BVSC concert – and for once I'd be surprised if you have either, Nick! But Sue and I have been in someone's living room in Cuba's second city Santiago where a band was playing and sinuous women were dancing spontaneously to mellifluous music for their own pleasure. ("Public" performances may not have been banned, but they certainly weren't approved of when we were there.) And that was enough to turn me on to the rhythms and instruments. I brought back a CD attributed to the Buena Vista Social Club, though it had inevitably been produced solely for tourists as it cost the same as an ordinary Cuban earned in a week, and it probably wasn't by them at all. Now nearly twenty years later the music can still be entrancing.

Finally a comment on the gritty video you warned us not to watch. It's atmospheric and a pleasing reminder. Old American cars and crumbling architecture are part of the scene, of course. But this is a highly selective outsider's view of a remarkable country which has stood up to the US and survived. I'd like to think that copies of Buena Vista Social Club albums with tracks like *Chan Chan* are a bit more genuine.

Nick's comment on Pete's 70. *Chan Chan*

Just to ensure my reputation for being an irritating pillock remains intact Mel, we have seen the Buena Vista Social Club. Twice, once in Havana in the pretty dude-ranchish bar-cum-performance-space where they normally performed after the Cooder event, and once in the Bridgewater Hall. Both times they were splendid, though increasingly there were fewer of the originals, who had a tendency to die. In fact in Manchester there was only one of the singers featured on the CD, Imara Portuondo, who was splendid.

Chan Chan appears about the most popular BVSC song, to the point where it seems almost to be their theme tune. I see the song slightly differently from you, Pete. The bottom-wagging is in the past, and it seems to be an old man (?) recollecting a moment of lust while travelling, and being overcome, hence his need to sit down. Be that as it may, it is just wonderful stuff and brings back terrific memories. I need to sit down. Oh, I already am.

71. *Other Side Of The World*, by KT Tunstall (2005)

Composers: KT Tunstall and Martin Terefe

Single and on the album "Eye To The Telescope"

KT Tunstall leapt to fame after she delivered a one-man-band performance on Jools Holland's *Later*, stamping her foot on a loop pedal to build up a multi-layered self-accompaniment tape in real time. Clever stuff; in fact it inspired us to buy her debut album, "Eye to the Telescope". And what a delight it turned out to be: packed with tuneful, well-crafted and often insightful music (e.g. *Black Horse And The Cherry Tree*, which she sang on *Later*, and *Suddenly I See*). And her style of backing – a classic acoustic rock band ensemble – is exactly the kind of thing that ticks every box for me.

Other Side Of The World is my favourite song from the album. Those distinctive opening bars always grab me with a sense of pleasurable anticipation. On the face of it, it's about the difficulty of maintaining a long-distance relationship ("the fire fades away"), but I see it as an eloquent little comment on the tendency of relationships in general to flare and then fade. The punch line, "You're on the other side of the world to me", seems to underline the metaphorical intent.

On a point of detail, I like the way the two parts of the middle section are separated from each other by a repetition of the same four-bar instrumental riff that introduces each verse. It's a novel and clever idea, and if you don't know the song well, you need to hear it a couple of times to appreciate the structure properly. The whole piece is beautifully worked through.

Before you say it, I too used to cringe at the phrase "tired excuses" – in which the rhythm requires the accent to be put incorrectly on the third syllable of "excuses". OK, it's a minor weakness, but it's one I'm happy to live with. By contrast, consider the neat way she adapts the melodic structure in the second verse to put emphasis on the word "move". That's skilful song writing. There's nothing very profound about the piece, but it makes its point in a memorable way, and sounds great.

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

Mel's comment on Pete's 71. The Other Side Of The World

I saw KT Tunstall creating that remarkable live accompaniment loop for *Black Horse And The Cherry Tree* on "Later", and was completely bowled over by it. Having bought the "Eye to the Telescope" album on the strength of this, I was bowled along even further. What an extraordinary collection of songs. And of course *Other Side Of The World* is one of the most wonderful on it.

Afterwards I determinedly didn't buy or even listen to the follow up album because there was such a slim chance that she could replicate that level of creativity.

I'd go further than you and describe *Suddenly I See* much more favourably than "well crafted and insightful". It's a stunning piece of pop, as all the TV programmes, films and adverts that picked it up tend to confirm. It would be in my 100 but for its over-exposure. I may well go for *Black Horse*, to remind me of the first glorious TV performance.

Everything you say about *On The Other Side Of The World* is right. It's tuneful, lyrically on the nail, cleverly constructed and inventively produced. Absolutely right, down to the jarring "tired excuses". Why did she have to do that?! But a great choice all the same. It's interesting, as you hint, that she came to attention with a song performance which was so self-contained that no other musicians were needed. Yet once she was in the recording studio there was a solid backing band behind her to make the very best of her songwriting.

There was another impressive thing about KT Tunstall at the time: in early TV appearances she wore minimal makeup and looked like what she was, an unpretentious, articulate performer who'd emerged on the scene as a fully mature artist after years of trawling round clubs perfecting her act. It was so refreshing to see and hear among all the dolled-up hyped-up bimbos we're usually served.

Nick's comment on Pete's 71. The Other Side Of The World

I confess that KT Tunstall is not someone who I have given the attention she doubtless deserves. I didn't know this song, or if I have heard it, I have contrived to forget it. So my reaction on three or four hearings now is that is a good song, and much more interesting than *Suddenly I See*, which seems a much more conventional piece of pop, however good an example it may be of the genre. The only thing I'd add to the accumulated comments is the intriguing shift from third to first person, which seems to me to be effective.

Misplaced stresses. Very irritating. Purcell took the piss out of them in "Dido And Aeneas", where there is a chorus which runs "Fear no danger to ensue/The hero loves as well as you", with the stress consistently on the wrong syllable. Mostly people get away with it (as Ms Tunstall does with "easily" in this song), but it's irksome when it's as obtrusive as on the tired excuses. Another case in point for me has been *The Boxer* – "I was so lonesome I took some comfort there". If he'd sung "I was lonesome so I took ..." the stress would have been OK but the line would have been weaker – I suppose you pays your money ...

72. *Shine*, by Take That (2007)

Composers: Mark Owen, Gary Barlow, Howard Donald, Jason Orange and Steve Robson
Single and on the album “Beautiful World”

I can already hear you saying, “A boy band? Why on earth would you pick that?” What can I say? It’s one of those records you repeatedly hear playing in the background, then suddenly realise you like. So I decided to embrace the unthinkable and actually get to know it, and I wasn’t disappointed. It appeals to the side of my personality that responds to tunefulness, musical inventiveness and exuberance.

Actually I would argue that it’s not typical boy-band stuff at all – it’s a rather remarkable one-off, with some quirky and surprisingly inventive chord progressions, especially in the opening verse part; and it’s very professionally executed. In a way it’s a homage to other music from the past. Its insistent beat owes a lot to Electric Light Orchestra’s *Mr Blue Sky*, and its swirling vocal harmonies are straight from the Beatles’ song book. Like much modern music it’s over-produced and over-orchestrated, but I can live with that; it doesn’t spoil my enjoyment.

The lead singer is Mark Owen, and the composing credits are given to all four members of the band, plus music producer Steve Robson. In terms of meaning, the song is simply telling someone to buck their ideas up and enjoy life. Reportedly it was aimed at ex-band member Robbie Williams, who was fighting drug addiction at the time, but to me that’s irrelevant; it stands in its own right as a blast of musical optimism.

By the way, I admire the chorus as well as the verse. Its structure, although apparently simple, makes full use of the box of harmonic tricks to embody the upbeat character of the piece, and the rising chord sequence breaks the bounds of expectation as it delivers its simple message. This kind of thing is easy to take for granted, so I’m raising a flag in modest tribute.

Sadly, you may know the song from its over-exposure in a series of TV advertisements for Morrison supermarkets. Clearly the massive revenue the group must have netted from the song itself wasn’t enough for them. I don’t care. When I hear it strike up, I always find it uplifting.

I’d like to have given you the YouTube link to the version that simply shows the lyrics: not because they’re particularly impressive (they’re not), but to avoid distraction. But the audio quality on that version is poor, so my link is to the official video. It’s actually rather fun, though of course watching it will probably colour your impression of the song itself. Try to avert your eyes.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JwC1Ctrj6Xk>

Mel’s comment on Pete’s 72. *Shine*

What are the chances that I’d like all three of your selections?

The best that I can say about this is that Sue knows *Shine* and, being a closet Take That fan, likes it. I also know a tiny bit of what I’m talking about – I quite often get into her car to find that the “Progress” concept double album starts up on the CD player. (I know. A boy band with a concept?) So I’m aware of what they are capable of as a band.

I’m even prepared to acknowledge that four fifths of Take That have considerably more talent than might have been imagined when five fifths were present. But *Shine* isn’t my type of music at all. One of its more obviously distressing features is that, after being quite tuneful throughout almost all the overlong performance, they start screaming raucously at the end for no apparent reasons. If I list any further reasons for not enjoying the song this commentary might end up

being gratuitously rude. And there's no justification for that because it's definitely no worse than a lot of other pop I don't like.

But I will add, to pursue your comparison with the Beatles, that the video recalls the poor McCartney joke for *Your Mother Should Know* in "Magical Mystery Tour", and it's even more embarrassing than that was.

Nick's comment on Pete's 72. *Shine*

I have never listened with any great care to Take That until now. The outcome is that I am with Mel on this one, I'm afraid. I can see the validity of the comparison with ELO, but with ELO tongues never seems a million miles from cheeks, whereas this just seems to me to be an undiluted exercise in jauntiness. I can see it is skilful and well crafted, but then so are an awful lot of things that still aren't to my taste. I have heard *Chan Chan* goodness knows how many times over the years, and happily listened to *Other Side Of The World* several times on the trot. I'm afraid I'm stopping at one hearing on this.

These tracks are all by women, and date approximately from the 1970s. Mel has this belief that I embarked on a female singer splurge during that period, and in a way it's true, so I wouldn't want to disappoint. There were others, but these will do for now.

I've been reflecting on the kind of music I like, and an analogy has occurred to me. I read Lucky Jim, my favourite novel, around 1966, and found it the funniest and most engaging book I'd ever encountered. No need to tell me it has flaws: I know that. My point is that for the rest of my life, more or less, I've been searching for another book that I liked as much – and have never found it. With music, I realise I've been searching in a similar way all these years for the Beatles to come round again.

Of course they haven't, but I've always warmed to key elements of their musicality when I've heard it in other people's work. Which is why one of the choices below, Marshall Hain, is here. They adapted Beatles harmonies and rhythms to fit into an entirely different kind of music, and I loved them for that. And in a way it's also implicit in Janis Ian's work. And for that matter, it's inherent in many of the pieces I've already picked over the past few years. I love tight structure, vocal harmonies, and intricately worked-through melodies. So here are some to consider.

73. *I Remember Yesterday*, by Janis Ian (1981)

Composer: Janis Ian

From the album "Restless Eyes"

Janis Ian was around for some years before she came up with this album, but in my book it's fantastic, and *I Remember Yesterday* is one of the best songs on it. The message of the song is "We've got a good thing going, but don't mess it up by promising more than you can deliver." It consists of two long verses, each of which gradually builds up to "chorus" section, finally delivering the musically exuberant line, "I believe in tomorrow, but I remember yesterday." Then the run-out brings in a new thought: "Don't fade away." The whole thing is deliciously contradictory.

Just listen to the edgy musical attack from piano and guitar at the start of each verse; it's fabulous, and it underlines the message, which merges through the song from indignation to imprecation (I can cliché with the best of them). Ian herself plays the very inventive piano part on the track, while bass is by now-veteran Lee Sklar, and the taut guitar is by legend Buzzy Feiten.

Oh, and for musical nerds like me, note that in the climactic final line in both verses, the phrase "I believe in ..." is on the minor second chord, but then when the phrase is repeated twice at the end, it's delivered on the subdominant chord instead: much more emphatic and decisive. It's a nice added touch. As far as I'm concerned, the song has to be played VERY LOUDLY, and then played again!

If you don't know the album and you're tempted to try any of the other tracks, I recommend *Restless Eyes*, *Under The Covers* and *Get Ready To Roll*.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Cq685o3sCGc>

Nick's comment on Pete's 73. *I Remember Yesterday*

Just so that you know this is not being written by an impostor (well, it is of course, but by the same impostor as all the other contributions), yes, we did see Janis Ian in Sheffield in maybe

2006. She was splendid. I can't claim to have ever gone into her music, as for instance by buying an album by her, but she is one of those figures who have been around my musical life without ever quite coming into focus.

This is a thoroughly nice song. As you say, musically it has a pretty good pedigree. The lyrics are interesting. I checked what I made of them against the lyrics on her website, and the two long verses differ only in the first six lines, so actually the emotional impact comes rather more from repetition than innovation – maybe that has a bearing on the effect you attribute to the “don't fade away”, Pete – the tone is different, though I'd see it more as a corollary to the song as a whole than as a contradiction. I like it.

Mel's comment on Pete's 73. *I Remember Yesterday*

You can't do anything but dispute this, but there were enough differences between the song I listened to and your description of it that for a few minutes I honestly thought you'd sent the wrong YouTube link!

This was partly my inattention while waiting for the first very long verse to make its point, and partly your interpretation of the lyric. You may be right that it's saying, “don't mess it up by promising more than you can deliver,” though that's not what I got from it at all. In fact for quite a while I didn't get very much of any interest, though talking through one's hat is unusual in a pop song.

Then I realised this is about something absolutely basic in relationships which I can't really remember being said as vividly by others. Specifically: “You had a relationship before this one, and that was actually pretty good and fulfilling. So obviously love doesn't last forever, and you shouldn't bullshit me by saying it does.” It's a reality that great to hear expressed. And for that reason I think the song's rather good.

I also liked being introduced to Janis Ian. Back in the late Sixties and early Seventies there were so many women singers with names beginning “J” that I just couldn't take another one, so I never listened to her at all. (You may not know that I was so overwhelmed by “J” first names that in 1970 I gave them to all the characters in “The Goldfish”, except Gerry who could at a pinch have been spelt with a “J” anyway.)

I thought the performance was accomplished, but not riveting. And I could just about see why you might like the musical composition. So not for the first time, I liked your selection but not necessarily for all the right reasons!

Sept 2022: Pete's comment on Mel's comment on *I Remember Yesterday*

I was aware of the prior relationship theme, and failed to mention it in my piece. Honest, guv! I think the song is about that *and* about the current relationship, which makes it extra-clever.

74. *Free Ride*, by Marshall Hain (1978)

Composers: Julian Marshall and Kit Hain

From the album “Free Ride”

For me, the album “Free Ride” is one long blast of exuberance. I suppose you could call the style an accessible kind of jazz funk with vocals, but most of the songs have an added element that had me completely sold the first time I heard it: Beatles-inspired multi-voice harmonies. Often you have to wait until the middle eight of the song in question to hear it, but it's always worth it.

I've chosen *Free Ride* because I find the triumphant harmony/string section absolutely irresistible. You'll know what I mean when you come to it. However, for a purer Beatles-based passage, try *Real Satisfaction*, which was originally going to be my choice, or *You Two*. I love them all. And there's a memorable slow song on the album too: *Coming Home*.

In *Free Ride*, girl goes to fairground and is beguiled by roundabout attendant who offers her a free ride in exchange for ... well, the same thing. It sounds tawdry, but turns out to be charmingly romantic.

Kit Hain (I don't know what Kit stands for) was a bass player (relatively unusual for a woman), though as far as I know she didn't play bass when performing songs from this album. Julian Marshall was a keyboard player. They had a brief flowering of success in the late 1970s, following a hit single called *Dancing In The City*, which is on this album. You might remember it from the very mannered electronic bass sound, which was in vogue at the time. What? You detest it? I can understand that, but to me it's an intriguing burst of history, and I don't mind it at all.

Here's a curiosity. In 2013 Kit Hain tried her hand at publishing a fantasy novel, and Janis Ian is now well known as a science fiction writer. Well well.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-gT2BwPHf-Y>

[*Real Satisfaction*: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mvrZQaLaoso>]

Nick's comment on Pete's 74. *Free Ride*

I remember *Dancing In The City*, but otherwise I think I have hitherto been a Marshall Hain-free zone. I hadn't realised they were British, so assumed that the city they were dancing in was New York rather than Peterborough. I tried to find the lyrics to *Free Ride* on the web, but drew a blank. Maybe not the largest hole in my education from what you say, but it does make it difficult to pronounce judgement with all my usual bigotry. I quite like the backing (and think she's a decent bass player despite the frock). I don't go for her voice, and can't say I get a lot out of the song, nor can I say that it fills me with a warm romantic glow. If it was played on the radio I wouldn't rush to turn it off, but I can't quite see it making my top 1,000.

If Christopher Marlowe was known as Kit, I imagine Ms Hain was Christine. Good enough for Christine Perfect/McVie, but then ...

Mel's comment on Pete's 74. *Free Ride*

What? Pete's chosen a disco record. This cannot be. It's as unlikely as me including something by James Brown, or Nick going for Cliff Richard.

But it's OK. Everything in 1978 sounded like disco or punk, such is the human instinct for following fashion, and this musical partnership soon manages to shift into all kinds of other more interesting and challenging sounds. Even so, it is extremely illuminating, Pete, to discover you liking this music. I understand from your description why this be so, but only after hearing *Real Satisfaction*.

It's unfortunate that I very often have problems with enjoying the crossovers between pop music and jazz. Not consistently: it's not one of my enduring prejudices. But despite trying really hard by giving this five or six hearings – which I reckon is a fair go – this doesn't stir me at all. I can appreciate it intellectually as good quality pop, but the theme of the lyric doesn't get me excited, and the singer's rather sweet voice doesn't either. I ought to love the guitar solo at the end because I usually do. But, in common with other features of the track, I find it rather shrill and a bit empty.

Having no conscious knowledge of these performers, I even listened to *Dancing In The City* which you mention as the hit single, and I knew instantly why I was unaware of them. It's dire, and brings back memories of some of the reasons I'd stopped listening to chart music by the late Seventies. The other tracks you cite are far better than this, and suggests that you might have made quite a clever discovery if the single was their calling card!

Sorry, Pete. Quite good quality. But not for me.

75. *Carey*, by Joni Mitchell (1971)

Composer: Joni Mitchell

From the album “Blue”

I’ve always thought “Blue” was a wonderful album, and I know Nick has already picked a song from it. Well, this is my choice, and I think it’s fantastic. Something that’s always unsettled me about the album is that it alternates between songs sung with a very spare accompaniment, and songs performed with a full ensemble (including bass, and yes – vocal harmonies). *All I Want* is one of the latter, and so is *Carey*. I have to admit, in fact, that I’ve always prized the fact that this song follows the rather mournful *Little Green*, and comes with an invigorating celebratory blast. I suppose that contrast shouldn’t in itself be a reason for liking it, but I can’t entirely dismiss it.

So what do we have here? A fond farewell to a bohemian lifestyle in Crete that she found appealing, but knew she couldn’t sustain. “I miss my clean white linen,” she says. Yet for tonight, she’s meeting her friends in the bar, and the wind is coming in from Africa. It gives me a frisson just to write those words! It’s simultaneously a paeon and a lament for the simple life we all think we yearn for, and at the same time a nostalgic glance back at something wonderful but fleeting.

And that dulcimer! It was her chosen instrument for the album, and infuses the whole thing with such a distinctive sound. I love the solo opening bar, with its promise of what is to come.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wfZJ6sHeA6k>

Nick’s comment on Pete’s 75. *Carey*

Well, as you say I have already chosen a track from “Blue”, which I would say is the best of Joni Mitchell’s albums. And this is another terrific song. Joni Mitchell has a tendency to be over-mannered – I have grit my teeth a bit when she sings the swooping *Canada* on *Case Of You*. Here happily she is as unmannered as she gets, and it is of course lovely.

Matala is, if I remember rightly, on the Southern side of Crete, and was very undeveloped when we went there in the 1980s – I think even then it was a bit on the alternative side, so was doubtless even more for the freaks in the ’70s. And I remember it being very hot and that the wind, rather than cooling you, felt like a hair-dryer on full blast. So I find it pretty easy to identify with that side of the song’s sentiments. That said, it’s interesting that, while she longs for clean sheets and cologne, it’s not “home” she wants to go to – it’s just time to move on. Just as in *Case Of You*, the emotions are not conventional or straightforward, and the music is a perfect vehicle for them. Wonderful.

Mel’s comment on Pete’s 75. *Carey*

Ah, the queen of the “J”s.

As I said when Nick chose *Case Of You*, I wish I’d paid attention to “Blue” at some stage of my life. It’s like deciding not to go to a party I’ve been invited to only to hear everyone say afterwards how great it was.

The reason is plain to me. After the glories of “Clouds”, Joni Mitchell was always a musical wonderwoman, but just a bit too difficult for an easy listen from what I knew of her later recordings. There’s my mistake. “Blue” is an array of insightful and accessible pop songs. I shouldn’t have been so timid, and I should have bought it that day I stood hovering over the record racks wondering.

I already knew *Carey* of course, but not to listen to. Now thanks to your brief exposition of the context it suddenly leaps to life in the ways you describe. A moving, bittersweet farewell to a life that doesn’t quite fit her. Wonderful economy of words and ideas. Superb scene painting of a life-changing crossroads. This is fabulous.

And how pleasurable it is now to go through, and even to catalogue myself going through, the discovery of meaning in a great song. Now someone tell me that lyrics don’t matter!

I've just got to drop in to Amazon this minute and buy "Blue". ... And, done.

I've harked back to older and simpler times with these; they're my Graham Gouldman collection. He wrote some pop classics in the 1960s (for performers such as the Yardbirds, the Hollies, Herman's Hermits and Wayne Fontana), then became a key member of 10cc. In my book he's a bit of a legend. We were due to see him in concert at the Union Chapel in Islington this spring, but surprise, surprise, covid intervened, and it never happened.

The first choice, Look Through Any Window, was a no-brainer for me. I found it hard to decide which album tracks to pick for the other two.

76. Look Through Any Window, by the Hollies (1965)

Composers: Graham Gouldman and Charles Silverman

Single

I always thought, and still think, the Hollies were a marvellous band, and have been consistently underrated in accounts of the music from their time. They had a unique sound, which they somehow managed to retain even after the departure of Graham Nash, who had introduced their trademark high penetrating harmonies. They evolved over their career, but their singles were always carefully and meticulously worked-out. They made good use of songs by other people (Graham Gouldman in this case), but also wrote some very interesting songs of their own (for example *On A Carousel* and *King Midas In Reverse*).

I probably would have picked *I'm Alive* as my first Hollies choice, but Mel has already nabbed that [*Subsequent edit: this was not true. He just nearly chose it.*], and in any case it would have been a toss-up between that and *Look Through Any Window*, so I'm happy to take the latter. As Wikipedia succinctly puts it, it was distinctive for "its 12-string guitar riff, soaring harmonies and Bobby Elliott's explosive drumming". I relished all those things. The ringing guitar intro launches straight into a piece that's full energy, yet is also packed with detail (handclaps, continuing riff). And that harmony! It gradually builds through the main section, then rises in a triumphant climax in the middle section with "You can see the little ladies in their gowns ..." Wow!

Does it mean anything much? Not really. It is what it says on the tin. Does that matter? Not in my book. It's a wonderfully exuberant piece, and that's good enough for me. Graham Gouldman was apparently still in his teens when he wrote it, but was clearly learning fast.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CQp1IDVZdCg>

Mel's comment on Pete's 76. Look Through Any Window

I went for *I Can't Let Go* back in 2015 (yes that long ago). But it was an agonising choice between that and your other favourite *I'm Alive*. It could have been *Look Through Any Window* too, for the same reasons I gave then.

In fact, I love this for exactly the reasons you give now. We are for once almost perfectly at one on a song!

In which context it is obviously nit-picking in the extreme to say I also agree with you that this is based on pretty trivial subject matter, and to add that I just don't like the line about little ladies in their gowns. It jars for me for its unnecessary Americanism and the image it conjures images of repulsively precocious little girls. But that's me, not the nearly impeccable Graham Gouldman.

This is the “musical” Hollies at their greatest. It’s also one of the songs of my 300-track “party tape” that I still play all the time.

Pete’s comment on Mel’s comment *Look Through Any Window*.

Apologies, Mel, for the fact that I hadn’t realised you didn’t pick *I’m Alive* after all. I wonder if I really would have picked it if I’d known? It would have spoiled my Graham Gouldman theme, wouldn’t it? Clint Ballard jnr wrote it – and also wrote *You’re No Good*, the wonderful Linda Ronstadt song that I picked a while ago. Small world.

Nick’s comment on Pete’s 76. *Look Through Any Window*

I agree wholeheartedly about the Hollies. The one thing I’d add is recognition of Tony Hicks, a consistently good guitarist and important part of the Hollies’ sound, who somehow never seems to get much recognition. Much better than many more lauded guitarists, I’d say.

This song isn’t one of my absolute favourite Hollies songs, but I do of course like it (though I’d have to say that the line you quote, Pete, sounds distinctly voyeuristic – but then *Stop Stop Stop* appears to be about being thrown out of a strip club after becoming ...er ... over-stimulated, so maybe it’s a sign of the times).

Graham Gouldman is of course one of the seriously significant figures in British rock. I think I’d have to say I appreciate his work rather than loving it, but I can’t really say why – I suppose it feels a mite contrived to me (but then what isn’t?). However inadequate and question-begging that may be, that’s the nearest I can come to why my Hollies choice was *Just One Look* rather than one of the later and better crafted songs. Still, the nice thing is that having to make choices for this exercise doesn’t mean that I can’t enjoy *Look Through Any Window*, *I’m Alive* and *Just One Look* when I play my Hollies CD. Whenever I do, I just think what a tonic they are. In the sense of gin and tonic, of course.

Pete’s comment on Nick’s comment *Look Through Any Window*.

That line in *Look Through Any Window* about the “little ladies” is somewhat voyeuristic if you attach any real depth to the song. Incidentally, I also agree with Mel’s comment that the use of the word “gowns” is a little odd, although I have to say I always rather liked it. To me it evoked a street scene from some Jane Austen novel set in a quaint English village.

77. *The Things We Do for Love*, by 10cc (1976)

Composers: Graham Gouldman and Eric Stewart

Single and on album “Deceptive Bends”

I never had any albums by 10cc, but I bought their greatest hits album at some point, and it’s been one of my favourite compilations ever since. The songs are packed with invention and surprise, and there’s not a duff track to be found among them. Admittedly, you have to like the “prog rock” material of Kevin Godley and Lol Creme (stuff like *The Dean and I* and the prescient *Rubber Bullets*), with its pastiche of references to other styles – but I do like it. However, there are also songs with the Beatles-influenced musicality of Eric Stewart and Graham Gouldman, which I’ve opted for in my song choice.

I have to say I was tempted to pick *I’m Mandy, Fly Me*, which is clever and arresting. It was actually written by Gouldman and Stewart plus Kevin Godley, which explains its multi-layer structure. I also nearly picked *Dreadlock Holiday*, which I think is a fabulous jeu d’esprit, and curiously haunting. But in the end I’ve gone for *The Things We Do For Love*. It’s almost a Beatles tribute, but by this point in their career Gouldman and Stewart had learned something from Godley and Creme (who had already left the band), so it has an interesting and varied structure. And it’s pretty and upbeat. What’s not to like?

I never saw 10cc in concert, but my claim to fame is that I actually met them ... sort of. My firm was employed to do publicity for TIP Trailer Rental, and the group's management hired a trailer from them to use on the album cover of their "Live and Let Live" album in 1977. I was deputed to go to Docklands and photograph them being photographed (by a real photographer) leaping out of the back of it. There was inevitably loads of hanging around doing nothing while things were being set up, so I got to chat (briefly) with most members of the band: not about anything interesting or significant, I'm sorry to say, but it was a memorable occasion all the same.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Porf3_viTzk

Mel's comment on Pete's 77. *The Things We Do For Love*

First the bad news. This is the dullest of any of the many singles which were hits for 10CC. The lyrics amount to little more than a pedestrian list with little spark of originality. The tune is bouncy and inconsequential. Musical performance and record production can't redeem it for me.

The good news: This is a judgement against the extraordinary high standards 10CC set over several years in the 1970s at a time when other pop music was going steeply downhill. They were giants. Who cares if I don't like this one when your standby *I'm Mandy Fly Me* would be in my top 100 if I hadn't forgotten about it till now? [I've subsequently allocated to round about 107.]

That in contrast is a quite brilliant record with a lyric like nothing else I can think of – a man seduced by the picture of a woman in an airline poster and rescued by her from the sea after an air crash. They don't write songs like that any more. Never did! Then, the musical production and instrumentation. An utterly delicious concoction of sounds. Stunning. Thank you so much for reminding me of it by not choosing it. I'm currently playing it repeatedly.

I like practically all their other singles, almost all of them on quirky or off the wall subjects and with great tunes. The most memorable of all, *I'm In Love*, is a musically complicated masterpiece with a simple, universally recognisable lyrical idea (though it's a little over-exposed to be favourite listen). *Dreadlock Holiday*, which you mention as well, is an absolute hoot, which I was heartily singing along to in my head only last week when it turned up somewhere. (But I do remember being slightly embarrassed by the "blacking-up" of the vocal performance even in 1978.)

I don't own the greatest hits album, but if I did I would find the whole thing a joy. And I might sometimes skip *The Things We Do For Love*.

Oh, sorry, perhaps it is rather good after all. But it's not *Mandy*.

Nick's comment on Pete's 77. *The Things We Do For Love*

See above. 10cc would seem to me to be the major claim to celebrity (in the proper sense rather than its current debased form in which a celebrity on any telly programme is someone I've never heard of who once appeared in a programme I can't conceive of watching) of all four of the people you talk about. I have never felt compelled to buy a CD or equivalent by them, though, I suppose because the music seems a bit arch. But my response is not exactly consistent – when I hear this or other songs on the radio, I find myself going "ah, yes ...". I always find this song and the others you mention interesting and thoughtful. Seriously well crafted always. I don't think this song would be my first choice from their oeuvre, but it is of course a pleasure to listen to it.

Ah, the Rickenbacker bass. Never played one. Don't suppose I will now. What a loss to the world.

78. *This Will Be Our Last Song Together*, by Neil Sedaka (1973)

Composers: Neil Sedaka and Howard Greenfield

Single and on album "The Tra-La Days Are Over"

Maybe you'll dismiss this as froth. I'm already imagining you listening to it on sufferance. What can I say? I just like it. It's not my favourite song or anything, but it contains a lot of what I'm about, musically speaking. What do I like? Well, apart from liking the type of band that's playing it, in a way I like the obviousness of it – the expectation fulfilled. Each verse presents a steady build-up, with a continuous "drone bass" countering the harmonies in the first line to build up the tension, then an emphatic and tuneful chorus.

I liked Neil Sedaka in his original guise (and I may have to pick one of his earlier songs eventually), so when he "came back" in the early 1970s I was intrigued. This song was on his second come-back album, which is full of similarly tuneful stuff. I found out later that it was recorded at Strawberry Studios in Manchester, which was effectively run by Eric Stewart, Graham Gouldman, Kevin Godley and Lol Creme. In fact they were the backing band – so in a way this track is by 10cc plus Neil Sedaka: a strange thought.

If you read the histories, you will be told that this song is about the ending of the co-writing partnership between Sedaka and Howard Greenfield, who had written the lyrics to many of his songs up to that point. Apparently they'd fallen out with each other after their years of working together. That interpretation is certainly backed up by the song's various references to Sedaka's musical history, but to view it solely in that light seems to me simplistic. I've no doubt that the two of them cleverly intended it to be understood in that light by those in the know; but in itself it's simply about any relationship break-up. I didn't know about their partnership break-up until years later, and the song didn't lose anything for me as a result.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Aa-gTpdu3Gg>

Mel's comment on Pete's 78. This Will Be Our Last Song Together

Oh god, I thought, invoking a non-existent deity in the futile hope of being spared the unkindness of rubbishing another one of Pete's choices where art and/or excitement has been subjugated to musicality which I don't appreciate. Sedaka from his washed up period. This first thought on seeing the title of your 78th choice seemed validated immediately I read your opening words: "Maybe you'll dismiss this as froth. I'm already imagining you listening to it on sufferance." Well, Pete, spot on.

Until I played it.

This is super stuff. What a great tune. Nice arrangement. Jogs along like a good pop song should. Pity about the words.

But wrong again. The lyrics are not that bad at all. Not in the least sentimental. Just a matter-of-fact statement about a decision to deal with a break up in a matter-of-fact way. Neat idea for a song. Not great, but certainly nothing to complain about.

So I settled in to listen with real pleasure to a track which I remember now I never disliked at all, and just hadn't really listened to before. Good choice, and I agree with your reasons. Plus an interesting back story to add piquancy!

Nick's comment on Pete's 78. This Will Be Our Last Song Together

Blimey, I can't remember when I last listened to this. Neil Sedaka's career was rather odd, wasn't it – the early incarnation when he rapidly realised that he was more plausible singing *Happy Birthday Sweet Sixteen* than *I Go Ape*, and then the modest reincarnation around this time, when I think he also had a hit with *Solitaire*. You're quite right about the importance of the harmonies, though – I'd have thought him singing without backing vocals seems about as appropriate as him performing without his trousers.

Anyway, this song. I always rather liked it and enjoyed listening to it again. I think I'd put it higher up the list but in the same category as the Carpenters (who I curled my lip at in the '70s but accept somewhat more readily now – tuneful and skilfully done, but still too wallpaper). This is of course well crafted and executed, though there's a rather half-hearted and anomalous guitar in there and some pretty ham-fisted drumming. I listened to *Solitaire* too – blimey, a

funeral cortege would seem speedy by comparison, but if his tuning hasn't been aided artificially he could certainly hold a note.

I have to admit that I've been struggling to think what to pitch in at this stage of the music game. It's not that I can't think of any more songs to include, it's just that so many of them vie for attention. Helen asked me today if I'd chosen a Queen number so far. When I said no, she said why not? It's a fair question. They're part of the soundtrack of all our lives, and I like many of their songs. I suppose they just don't jump out at me as essential content for my desert island list.

Anyway, I've been debating which Rolling Stones song to have, and in the end I've copped out by grabbing three Beatles songs instead. They were bound to be included some time, and it saves me thinking any further.

79. I Want To Hold Your Hand, by the Beatles (1963)**Composer:** Lennon-McCartney

Single

I've just realised this song was always going to be in my top 100. The wonder is that I haven't picked it before. According to Wikipedia, an American journalist has called it "the most joyous three minutes in the history of human noise". I might not go that far (and anyway, it's barely two and a half minutes long), but he was on the right lines. This was the song that totally converted me to the Beatles. I loved *Please Please Me*, but I wasn't quite sure what to feel about the next couple of singles. Then this. I was captured forever.

What's particularly significant in my life story is that this record had a million advance orders in the UK alone – a fact that was much publicised at the time. I remember thinking that nothing could possibly justify that kind of anticipation. I was wrong. The record was everything I could have wished it to be and more. I was amazed, and I've always thought since then that the experience reinforced my optimistic take on life. I've discovered over the years (surprise, surprise) that experience seldom lives up to expectation, but this was one occasion when it did.

What do I like about it? Everything! The high-impact opening bars, the attack, that high minor chord on "I want to hold your hand", the explosion of harmony at the end of each verse (and in the second bridge passage). It's full of Beatles trademark guitar sounds and vocal tricks. It's a quintessential Beatles rocker. I was reminded on Radio 4 this very morning how Lennon and McCartney wrote it together at Jane Asher's family home in London (this was in a reading from a new book called *One Two Three Four* by Craig Brown). It was a true collaboration. The words aren't exactly profound, but it doesn't matter – they're not meant to be. What counts is the overall effect.

I don't think there's any more to say. I've been using lockdown to learn more about the musicology and music theory of pop songs, so I could bang on about the Rickenbacker and Gretsch sounds on this record or the sixth chord Lennon slots in at one point ... but I won't.

Oh, and one final comment. I've never been able to grasp where the downbeat is in those opening bars. Intellectually I know how it works, but I still keep hearing the first chord as the first beat in the bar, even though I know it isn't. I suppose it's part of the mystery of the thing.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=v1HDt1tknTc>

Mel's comment on Pete's 79. I Want To Hold Your Hand

You won't be surprised to learn that I took a quite different view to you on the progression of their singles up to this release. So how can I possibly agree with you about *I Want To Hold Your*

Hand? I had been intrigued by *Love Me Do*, enthusiastic about *Please Please Me*, utterly bowled over by *From Me To You*, and mesmerised by *She Loves You*.

Then all that hype and anticipation, as you say. So big disappointment coming.

No. I just went bonkers. As the man said, this really was the most joyous music I'd ever heard.

It wasn't just that it made me feel so good. It was also that I couldn't believe that anything could make me feel that good. (Admittedly, I could conceivably have had an inkling about sex! and holding hands was a slightly less remote prospect.) In fact, your description of the song's impact on you precisely matches the impact it had on me. I mean exactly. Except that you can explain it in terms of music rather than blathering euphoria.

I've always remembered the party I was at just before Christmas 1963 when I first danced to this. (Who this might have been was with is infinitely less memorable and significant.) And although there were obviously many other notable points in my adolescence, this always felt pivotal for some reason. Thanks to you, Pete, I may have recovered the reason.

Nick's comment on Pete's 79. *I Want To Hold Your Hand*

This was not really on my radar for this process, but it is of course salutary to listen to it with more concentration than I have for some time. The main thing that struck me was its sheer joyous energy, which to me exceeds that of *Twist And Shout* by a goodly margin. That comparison is an interesting one in that *Twist And Shout* was a cover, and typical in that regard of much of the early output of the British groups of the time. This is an interesting illustration of the gloriously successful transition from covers to originals.

Only two other comments to add to what you've already said. One – McCarney's bass playing is still pretty rudimentary but there are one or two glimpses of where it will go. Two – Grace Slick memorably denounced the song by saying "he doesn't want to hold her hand, he wants to dick her" [sic]. Fairish comment, Grace, but so what? Terrific stuff.

80. *We Can Work It Out*, by the Beatles (1965)

Composers: Lennon-McCartney (probably more McCartney than Lennon)

Single

I remember first hearing this and the flipside, *Day Tripper*, on the same day in the end study at my school, played on one of those Dansette-type turntables. I can't remember whose study it was, or whose record, but I was amazed. A double-A side: two very different songs, yet I was immediately a major fan of both.

We Can Work It Out is full of invention – the swelling harmonium chords, the triplets in the bridge passage – and we've moved forward to the period when the Beatles wrote more probing, unsettling lyrics. The song is a plea for reconciliation, but the tone is equivocal. The verse is written in confident major chords, yet it's not confident, it's almost bleak. "Do I have to keep on talking till I can't go on?" is a pretty desperate comment. Then the bridge section is altogether more anguished. The final sung line is "We can work it out", which ought to be optimistic, but it ends on a dominant chord. The sentiment is unresolved. Finally two instrumental bars provide the sought-after concluding tonic chord. Musically it sounds like resolution ... or is it resignation? That's the clever part – we don't know.

This was another genuine collaboration between Lennon and McCartney, and I think it profits from the joint input. Oh, and George Harrison is credited with suggesting the triplets.

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

Mel's comment on Pete's 80. *We Can Work It Out*

By the time this came out I was prepared to acknowledge its competence and listenability within the wider oeuvre. It would have been taboo to compare it unfavourably with any other Beatles single, so I think I quietly turned it over more often than I played it.

I do remember, though, thinking how grown up the lyric was. The music also felt more grown up than I was used to, more intricate and complex. Not surprisingly. It was released on the same day as “Rubber Soul”, which confirmed us to be in an entirely new era of pop music – when all writers and performers were licensed to express what they actually felt rather than what old men thought teenagers were feeling. Sometimes they could do it with poetry even if they weren’t Bob Dylan.

My early equivocation about *We Can Work It Out* on this cusp was the first stage of a big adjustment for a gangly-looking gangly-thinking 17-year-old. Though by the time I’d worn out the reel to reel tape that “Rubber Soul” was copied onto (to preserve my LP), I think I understood that *We Can Work It Out* was also different.

Obviously, my subsequent enjoyment has been muted by the knowledge that it was mostly Paul McCartney who wrote it! But I can still admire it, and like it all the more for your technical interpretation – which chimes perfectly with my emotional response to the music.

Nick’s comment on Pete’s 80. *We Can Work It Out*

I find myself in the Lennon side of the Lennon vs. McCartney camp when sides get taken, but it would be foolish to allow this to dominate one’s judgements. McCartney seems to me to slide too easily into tweeness, archness and a lazy populism. But this isn’t true of everything he did; this is a good song, and does indeed sound like collaboration (G. Harrison obviously loved his triplets – remember *All My Loving*). It manages to be melodious and plaintive without overdoing either.

Again, only a couple of things to add to your comments. It is a wonderful reminder about how fantastic L&M sound singing harmonies together. The point about, say, the Everlys is that their voices are very similar (Don’s a bit lower than Phil’s but clearly the same gene pool). The point here is the difference between the two voices. Second: no drums as far as I can hear, only a tambourine. The bass provides the rhythmic drive.

81. *Day Tripper*, by the Beatles (1965)

Composers: Lennon-McCartney (mostly Lennon)

Single

Wow. I’ve just played this through, and it’s as fantastic as ever. That amazing guitar riff is peerless. There have been plenty of others like it, but for me this one simply hits the spot.

Musically, it’s beautifully crafted. Two guitars launch the riff in unison, then the bass joins them, followed by the tambourine and finally the drums: a marvellous build-up to the vocal entry. And just listen to the way the second verse starts: back comes the riff, then a more frenzied tambourine adds to the sense of anticipation. And as for the bridge section – amazing! A steady crescendo of harmonies, finally plunging off the end and into that inexorable guitar riff, with another urgent tambourine flourish to keep driving everything forward. It’s positively hypnotic.

Oh, and did I mention Ringo’s rather good drumming?

Day tripper? Whatever. Wikipedia bangs on about drugs, which you can hardly ignore, but there’s also a simple theme about the uncommitted “teaser” against whom the song is railing. It’s a great example of the Beatles’ style and techniques evolving over their career.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2IbPn5j2YKk>

Mel’s comment on Pete’s 81. *Day Tripper*

Am I right in thinking this is the Beatles' hardest rocking single? By comparison all the others feel as if they were holding back a little to retain the integrity of the music (with the exception of *I'm Down* which sounds as if McCartney was just trying a little too hard to be hard). As you say, *Day Tripper* has the most extraordinary energy. There are hints of the crescendos on their most compelling of all rockers *Twist And Shout*, combined with the musical maturity to keep it controlled and harmonious.

I suspect the title is a teasing Lennon pun. The Beatles were new to LSD in 1965, so I've always taken the title to be a druggy allusion rather than experience. It sounds to me more like Lennon's own acid tongue dealing with a frustrating non-relationship with a woman than the acid trips which started to influence his lyrics from "Revolver" onwards. So: just the right degree of pent-up aggression to make the words fit the sound deliciously.

As for all the other armchair interpreters of their lyrics and lives, it's interesting that a lot of stuff that's written and screened about the Beatles nowadays is produced by people who quite literally don't know what they're talking about. It increasingly comprises second- and third-hand regurgitations drawn from people who were actually alive at the time. Rather like the way The Bible came to be written. But maybe that's as it should be.

I'm not going to grade the Beatles singles. (OK, I'll make an exception for *The Long And Winding Road*. Errrughhh.) But for me *Day Tripper* remains one of the most enjoyable individual songs among one of the most enjoyable collections of songs I'm aware of.

Sadly, I can't remember what I was doing when it came out. Possibly because I was then in paroxysms about the 14 amazing tracks on "Rubber Soul". I suppose we can't have everything.

Nick's comment on Pete's 81. *Day Tripper*

Day Tripper is probably the furthest from my preferred Beatles tracks of these three, but that is not to deny for a moment that this is seriously classy stuff. Again, the pair of you haven't left a lot for me to say. Except this. You refer to the "guitar riff", Pete, but actually the riff is on both guitar and bass, and it is fascinating to see which holds sway when their paths diverge. Sometimes the bass is subordinate, but at other times the bass has the more powerful line. By this time, McCartney is a seriously good bass player. And Ringo's drumming is indeed very good.

Pete's comment on Nick's comment on *Day Tripper*

Just a brief correction of what Nick says above: at the beginning of this track, the famous riff *starts* with just two guitars and no bass. They "launch in unison," as I said in my piece. Then after a couple of bars the bass joins in. So for most of the song, Nick is quite right in saying that guitars and bass converge and diverge; but the opening bars provide a more spare and enticing version of the riff, as does the recapitulation at the end.

My accompanying notes look rather long. What can I say? These selections seemed to demand anecdotes to explain them. I've managed to find two overlapping themes for the three items. The first and second are instrumentals, and the second and third are taken from the soundtracks of films. And if I'm honest, the second and third also probably reflect the tendency I had in back in the day to yearn after unattainable women instead of finding attainable ones.

Lusting after Goldie Hawn? It seems hard to imagine now, but don't forget this was fifty years ago, and I did rather like her.

82. Apache, by The Shadows (1960)**Composer:** Jerry Lordan

Single

In 1960 my father took our family for a summer holiday at Butlin's holiday camp in Skegness (the reasons for which I won't go into now). Picture a flat-roofed brick building not far from our chalet, with a café on the corner of the first floor. This seemed reserved for moody teenagers with attitude, so none of us ever set foot in it, but the music from its jukebox was fed to two speakers mounted on the outside of the building (think Tannoy), and was blasted out over the surrounding area all day long.

That's how I got to know *Apache*. It was played to death throughout our stay, alternating occasionally with the flip side, *The Quartermaster's Store*. I remember sitting or standing under the trees on the grass near the building, listening in awe. The two tracks felt like the ultimate in edgy modern pop; and after all these years, they still have the power to evoke a brooding bad-boy atmosphere for me. I particularly responded to the heavy, relentless beat of *Apache*, along with Hank Marvin's jangling guitar and the slightly sinister minor-key melody with its flourishing bursts of major-key exuberance. The Shadows may have been limited in what they did, but they did it very well.

What amazes me now is that this was their first hit. Back then I assumed it was the latest in a long line, but no – they more or less launched themselves into the world with this (discounting a couple of previous singles that failed to achieve any traction). Even at the time I found it hard to imagine how they could better it, and I don't think they ever did, though they came up with some more marvellous singles over the years. Interestingly Jerry Lordan, who wrote *Apache*, also wrote *Wonderful Land*. I never considered that on a par with *Apache*, yet it was the first single I ever bought.

I also thought *The Quartermaster's Store* was wonderful, by the way. I was never troubled by the fact that it was a simple traditional melody. The Shadows made it seem cool and compelling.

I have mixed memories of that holiday now – “free” films at any time of day, wacky Redcoats, indifferent food, and the fact that you had to get a special pass if you wanted to leave the site temporarily during your stay. It amazes me that anyone would submit to a holiday regime where you were effectively a prisoner. But above all it gave me the Shadows and *Apache*, and that compensated for a lot.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ocOySHo6RZ4>

Nick's comment on Pete's 82. Apache

Ah, the Shadows. Curious how they must have had a more radical move from ubiquity to relative invisibility than almost anyone else I can think of (leaving aside the one or two hit wonders).

This came out a shortish time before I started playing the guitar, and some of my earlier efforts were trying to play this very tune.

To me this is the key to its attraction: it was (at the time) pretty novel, yet as a novice I could have the sense – or delusion – that I too could do it. My brother had a Shadows EP with *Apache*, *Man Of Mystery*, *FBI* and another track, which the wonders of the internet now reveal was called *The Stranger* (of which I have no memories). The EP cover shows they were already fully Fendered, though only Hank has the trademark red Strat.

I remember there being one such in the window of Millers in Cambridge for £129, which must have been a fortune at the time. All part of the allure. *Apache* was a rather curious title – apart from a bit of cod native American style drumming at the start it's not obviously much to do with Apaches – maybe it reflects the success shortly before of Johnny Preston's *Running Bear*?

Be that as it may, for different reasons I share the sense that this was a core part of my earlyish experience of pop or rock. But then I was led astray by the Ventures and subsequently they were both washed away by the Beatles, Hollies, Stones, Yardbirds et al. So why the change?

I think it's because the trademark sound became a liability rather than an asset. My late lamented nephew could instantly set up a Fender amp to sound like the Shadows (though they of course used Vox amps – another part of the “brand”). While other bands experimented with dual leads and a variety of other sounds, they continued to produce a pretty consistent version of whatever came their way – I remember when they did a version of the theme from *The Deerhunter*, presumably in the '70s, and it sounded just like the EP, or insufficiently distinct for my reaction to be other than “Blimey are they still at it?”.

Not entirely fair, and certainly an inadequate response in terms of what they represented at one time in my musical life. Listening to it now, I enjoy it, but it doesn't really make me want to rush to listen to *Kon Tiki*, which was my favourite at one point, still less to *Wonderful Land*.

Mel's comment on Pete's 82. *Apache*

This is as good as it gets. Old men discussing what they were doing nearly 60 years ago and what they liked about it. I never went to Butlins, apart from a day pass at Minehead when the children were small (and I've completely blanked my memory on that). But there was no need to go that far for the Shadows.

I spent much of the first half of the Sixties listening to them with a cluster of friends. Towards the end of the period this involved enormous conviviality, quite a lot of cider and a few bottles of Sauternes (which was affordable and repulsive). *Apache* was always there.

So it remains, evocative of my mate PEA's Dansette in his tiny living room – because he owned all the records. That's literally every Shadows single and album up to at least 1966. We'd stack them 10 at a time and play them one after another while we discussed the nature of black holes before they had been discovered and how to get girls, before inviting Mormons and Jehovah's Witnesses in for a chat because weird things interested us. The Shadows were the backdrop to it all. An indelible and essential part of the scenery.

Another friend Dave Williamson whose Elvis interest I've referenced elsewhere, was also one of the bedroom guitarists who could render a credible version of *Apache*. I rather got the impression that you weren't a proper teenager if you didn't play the Shads and quote from numerous Bert Weedon songbooks. (Good god. I've just noticed you can see Bert playing *Apache* on YouTube.)

And so to a minor dissent. As an obligatory aficionado I am equipped to report that *Apache* was not where the Shadows started, but a freak hit after a string of dubious and sometimes dire vocal records which no one bought despite the well-established Cliff Richard association. In a way this helps to underline how strikingly unusual and innovative *Apache* was. After that nothing was the same.

You're kind of right, Nick, about the curious un-demise of their later career. After the hits finished they recorded endless albums which amounted to little more than high quality muzak. But their repeated “farewell” concerts to rapturous audiences still conjure indulgent nostalgia on FV Channel 11. And it's impressive to hear rock legends like Mark Knopfler describe Hank Marvin's influence on their playing.

I'm afraid *Quartermaster's Stores* was one of my least favourite Shadows tracks since it referred back to pre-*Apache* days and lacked the contrived moodiness of almost every hit that followed. But that didn't stop it from being played when we turned the stack over and went through all the B-sides.

83. Theme From Les Aventuriers, by François de Roubaix (1967)

Composer: François de Roubaix

Main title theme from film soundtrack

This is another instrumental, and existed for a large part of my life as a memory rather than a repeated experience. You might recall that in 1967, prior to joining you at Cambridge, I spent a term Grenoble university, and while I was there I frequently went to the pictures. Cinema was a big part of French culture, and there were dozens of picture houses in the city. The film that stands out most clearly in my memory is "Les Aventuriers", which featured two of the biggest French stars of the day, Alain Delon and Lino Ventura (who was actually Italian). Oh, and a Canadian actress called Joanna Shimkus.

I found the film haunting and unforgettable. Three people down on their luck team up in search of sunken treasure, and go through various spirited adventures before the story takes a darker turn. The main theme tune, as you will hear, has passages that conjure up a sense of urgency and threat, but they are juxtaposed with a reflective melody. That melody so impressed itself on me that I remembered it almost note for note for the next twenty-five years, even though I never heard it again. Then in the early 1990s the film was shown on UK television, complete with dubbed English dialogue, and when I heard the melody again I was amazed to find I'd remembered it almost exactly for all those intervening years. Suffice it to say that it had struck a chord with me.

Incidental factoids: (1) Joanna Shimkus plays a wannabe sculptor, and in the opening credits, which you will see, she's searching a car dump for found objects that she can use in her work. (2) In real life she married Sidney Poitier in the 1970s and gave up acting. Guess who came to dinner. (3) The closing parts of the film feature the characters diving for treasure. In real life, the music's composer, François de Roubaix, died very young in a diving accident.

There are cover versions of the theme, but they don't have the same magic as the original, which is why I'm sending you a link to the opening titles of the film. My recommendation is to stop at around 2 minutes and repeat; the rest of the video (after a long silent pause) is the closing titles, which feature a rather mournful rendering of the tune on piano and organ. This does however have a rather remarkable key change towards the end.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hhyhA3EL7Xo>

Be ready for jarring soundtrack noises at scrapyard.

Note in 2024: I have now created an mp3 version of the track in which the jarring noises have been suppressed by an AI extension to Audacity. Much better! Never let it be said that AI is all bad.)

Postscript: The long silent section that comes before the closing credits was remarkably powerful in the context of the film. It reflected the sense of shock that the audience was feeling in the aftermath of the closing scene, and I've seldom seen this done better. The location is in fact the nineteenth-century Fort Boyard, which featured many years later in a TV game show of the same name.

Nick's comment on Pete's 83. Theme From Les Aventuriers

I suspect this is a classic example of how music's capacity to evoke moods and memory can override almost anything else. That's absolutely not a criticism of the music, which certainly evokes the moods you describe, Pete, but it leaves me ... tepid, I suppose. It did seem to me to be typical of the time in good and bad senses – camera angles, graphics, and so on.

The visuals reminded me, I'm afraid, of the Python sketch which in my memory has Terry Jones talking to Carol Cleveland in a junkyard, and after various pleasantries he says "*Je vois que vous avez un Webbs Wonderful*" [according to the internet versions it's un choux, but my memory is clearish and I don't think I'm capable of the invention necessary to substitute a particular lettuce for generic cabbage].

Mel's comment on Pete's 83. Theme From Les Aventuriers

We hardly need to comment on music which has such a deep personal resonance – any more than you need to think I was crazy listening endlessly to the Shadows. It's in the fabric of our memories and a part of who we are. So what a wonderful rediscovery it must have been for you when the film re-emerged on UK TV. I can imagine your delight.

That said, your enthusiasm isn't misplaced. While this isn't *The Good, The Bad, And The Ugly*, it's pretty evocative film music that sets up an intriguing scene. I do like the foreboding which progressively creeps into the opening theme, which already has an unsettling sense of urgency. Alternating this with close-ups of a pretty woman and whistling isn't going win awards for originality. But it does the job.

You didn't expect us to go away to buy the film soundtrack or put this on our i-Somethings. But you might have hoped we'd enjoy listening to it two or three times. And I really did. So thanks for sharing it.

A couple of side issues. There must be plenty of other tracks we could cite which would be improved by adding the sound of breaking up old cars. And how the hell is she going to get that door home on her bike?

84. Miss Me In The Morning, by Mike D'Abo (1971)

Composers: Mike D'Abo and Nicky Chinn

Single and main title theme from the film "There's A Girl In My Soup"

I won't be surprised when you dismiss this as slight and unmemorable. It was nowhere on my shortlist, but I remembered about it recently, and realised it held a special magic for me. Stand by for another anecdote. In 1971 I joined British Road Services as a management trainee, and over the next few months I was despatched to various parts of the country, including Whetstone, north London, where I had to spend two weeks at the company headquarters. Whilst lodging there above a pub I made several evening forays into central London, and on one of them I treated myself to seeing the film version of Terence Frisby's West End comedy "There's A Girl In My Soup" in a cinema in Tottenham Court Road. *Miss Me In The Morning* is the theme tune.

Why do I like it? Partly it's because the film and the music quickly became fused together in my mind. This was a rather grim period of my life, and they became indelibly associated with the notion of better times. Goldie Hawn made her feature film debut opposite Peter Sellers, and the whole confection had a kind of post-swinging sixties *joie de vivre* about it that resonated with me.

I saw the film again recently, and was reminded that it's fairly shallow, and despite its redemptive hints and satirical overtones, can't quite escape the very questionable underlying value system. But that was never really the point. I now realise that I've always

liked the record for itself. It's a nicely structured, tuneful and musically adept, with an exuberant chorus that has me humming it every time I hear it.

Have you ever seen Mike D'Abo in performance, Nick? He seems to have had a disappointing career after his early promise in the 1960s (Wikipedia is pretty uninformative on the subject), but anyone who could write *Handbags And Gladrag*s has earned his place in my pop music hall of fame. However, this is the song I want, not that. Go figure.

I'm sending you a link to the opening credits of the film, which end after two minutes. There was a different single version of the song, but this version has brass and strings and an instrumental section, and I prefer it.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ao6BbnSI4wE>

Nick's comment on Pete's 84. *Miss Me In The Morning*

Last things first. Yes, I have seen Mike D'Abo in action. Ahistorically, he appeared with the Manfreds at the Penistone Paramount a few years back. A very good gig. "Ahistorical" because among the Manfred Mann alumni strutting their stuff was Paul Jones, who of course was replaced by Mike D'Abo (Manfred himself of course wasn't in evidence).

A further bit of background drivel. He was originally in a group called "A Band of Angels" and co-wrote songs with the lead guitarist, one John Baker who was later a bit of a friend when he was lecturing in Maths at the OU. I'd say D'Abo is a pretty decent singer – the Dylan versions they did and *Semi-Detached Suburban Mr James* are pretty good – but his songwriting, with the exception of *Handbags And Gladrag*s, isn't going to win too many prizes.

I'm afraid you are not far off the mark in terms of my reaction. If you hadn't singled it out, I don't think I'd have paused if, say, it had been played on the radio. This is partly an effect of the conventional arrangement – too much like wallpaper – and, listening to it cold, the faux joviality rather sets my teeth on edge. Too much Leonard Cohen, obviously.

Mel's comment on Pete's 84. *Miss Me In The Morning*

Talk about disappointments! Peter Sellers, the funniest man in the cinema, in a film based on what I gathered had been one of those racy (for the times) London theatre sex comedies. I haven't seen the film since, but I'm fairly sure there was no sex and virtually no comedy.

I do sympathise with you, Pete, for finding the theme tune uplifting. You were living a pretty soulless existence as we both now recall. So anything that cheered you up must have had some value.

There it ends! Please don't take this personally, but the song reminds me of all those other largely forgettable Sixties films about being "liberated" in England. Just fake. The seedy middle-aged man's not very liberated version of what it was like to be young at the time. I also find the song's matching jollity as vacuous as the many ditzy film characters played by the actually rather intelligent Goldie Hawn. I hate it.

Fortunately, you've conjured loosely connected recollections for me of the optimism of Goldie Hawn and superlative construction and rendition of *Handbags And Gladrag*s. If you feel less positive about my appraisal I'm sorry for trampling so brutally on your memories.

The theme this time (if there is one) is songs that have cheered me up whenever I've heard them. Two are ancient, one is very recent. There's also an extremely tenuous link between the first and third items; the performers in the third apparently like the performers in the first!

85. This Will Be Our Year, by the Zombies (1968)

Composer: Chris White

On the album "Odessey And Oracle" [album title famously misspelled thus]

Hard to pick an individual track from this amazing album, but I've always had a fondness for *This Will Be Our Year*. I like so much about it – the steady, emphatic rhythm, the nicely executed descending chord sequence, the restrained but pervasive electric piano, the trumpet descant. And then there's the optimistic theme, which characterises several of the songs on the album: the idea that things have been tough, but they're getting better.

And I really like Rod Argent's instrumental break, which starts by appearing to follow the melody, but then breaks out in increasingly fulsome and complex chords, ending on a teasing dominant (which in fact isn't resolved, because the song then goes up a semitone for the final verse). And all this is done in a really tight, controlled way. My only frustration is that the whole thing is too short!

Incidentally, while selecting the YouTube link I spotted a recording that the present-day Zombies made of the song at Abbey Road Studios last September. It's remarkable how well they replicated the original sound – missing only the trumpet. Colin Blunstone was still in fantastic voice.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kI2lTwYoJx8>

Mel note: I hope you realise that for me this entire album will always and forever be tinged with faint memories of sunny summer days in Cookham, Marlow, Taplow and Burnham Beeches, and sporting with Amaryllis in the shade (or rather, smiling at the notion of it).

Mel's comment on Pete's 85. This Will Be Our Year

I will return shortly, Pete, to the utterly glorious outbreak of nostalgia in your commentaries. But, immediately, I am astonished and delighted by your apparently vivid recollections of Amaryllis and the rural outskirts of Maidenhead. I don't remember specific visits to the places you mention. But I do intensely recall our lovely summer afternoon at Virginia Waters with Amaryllis and one of her friends who had replaced any earlier interest she had in me with a brilliant line in withering venom!

As for *This Will Be Our Year*, you may not be aware that, though I discovered the album, you taught me to love this song. Along with its musicality, you were always so exhilarated by the positivity of the lyric that I was permanently sold on both.

Want to know how much? Now whenever it comes on my memory stick of the 300-Songs-Without-Which-My-Car-Won't-Run, Sue and I automatically and simultaneously quote the "Ahhh" from the end of *Friends of Mine*.

The sound of the track which you've unpicked here seemed a bit over-the-top to me in 1970 when I was mostly craving psychedelia. But its exuberance completely transcends the ordinariness of pop music.

It's high spot in a timeless and unforgettable album. I can't say more.

Nick's comment on Pete's 85. This Will Be Our Year

As I was intimating when I included *She's Not There* in my list, it gets really difficult to handle music like this where the music is inseparable from its association with memories. The LP as a whole is a tour de force, and it's difficult to select one track as an adequate embodiment of its qualities and the emotional luggage it carries with it.

But this will do nicely. I like the way it drives along: it's a good example of the art lying in hiding the art – it sounds like a straightforward song, but the straightforwardness is achieved through a fair amount of musical complexity and of course skill. Colin Blunstone's voice is of course extraordinary, and Rod Argent is ... well, Rod Argent (which I regard as a Good Thing, whatever my reservations about his solo in *She's Not There*). But the others are equally impressive: when we all saw them, it reminded me of how good Chris White was (when Margaret and I saw them twice subsequently he wasn't playing – replaced by Jim Rodford, also of Argent and the latter-day Kinks). Delightful stuff – not a lot more to say really!

86. *You're A Lady*, by Peter Skellern (1972)

Composer: Peter Skellern

Single, and on the album of the same name

I've hesitated until now to include this song here, but finally I've realised my reticence has been sheer cowardice. I was worried you would consider it drippy, or over-romantic, or clichéd, or generally over the top. But then I thought, sod it – I like it. Not only that, but I also think it's a truly remarkable piece – one that ought not to work, yet does.

The narrator is building himself up to declare his love; and the opening scene is vividly and economically evoked with just a piano accompaniment. But the elaborate musical arrangement that follows simply shouldn't make sense – a brass band, a pop combo, and a choir. It seems bizarre, yet it works. The brass instruments bestow a haunting, atmospheric quality, and then the choir (which comes in after a fractional, frisson-inducing hesitation) adds a further rich overlay. By the end, the narrator's efforts at confidence-building have expanded into an all-stops-pulled-out musical extravaganza.

And that's the paradox. What he wants is incredibly simple, yet somehow at the same time vastly important; and the song catches that momentous sense of anticipation. Will she say yes? Does she feel the same? We never find out, but after such a build-up it's hard to think she could resist. And all the way, Peter Skellern's understated singing voice helps to maintain the integrity of the thing.

Imagine a 22-year-old Rowlands, cast adrift in Wolverhampton in a job he was totally unsuited to, and with no apparent prospect of love on his own horizon, driving home to Newcastle through the dark for periodic visit in a car with no built-in radio, straining to hear this song on a portable radio lying on the passenger seat, and being reminded that despite the bleakness of life at the time, wonderful things might perhaps be possible after all.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MA2pc2BdhDk>

Things to know or forget:

- * The band was the Hanwell Band (long since defunct).
- * The choir was actually a short-lived choral pop group called The Congregation, formed by Rogers Cook and Greenaway.
- * Peter Skellern became a deacon shortly before he died in 2017.

Nick's comment on Pete's 86. *You're A Lady*

One of my many bigotries is that any pop/rock song which refers to a person of the feminine sex as a Laydee is going to be crap. Irritatingly there are exceptions, and I have to admit to always

having a rather shame-faced liking for this (and for John Sebastian's *She's A Lady*). Not great stuff, but engaging in a rather mawkish way, and interesting musically. There is a brass band on *I Want To See The Bright Lights Tonight*, but that is a couple of years later, and is used to evoke a street scene rather than being intrinsic to the music as it is here.

We are of course surrounded by brass bands where we live (the Thurlstone band rehearsed in the carpark of the church next door during lockdown, so we were gardening in June to a sound track of rather under-rehearsed carols). As a total non-expert, I'd say that Peter Skellern manages to use the conventions of brass bandery very effectively. I can't say it's in any danger of getting into my 100 greatest, but I enjoyed listening to it again.

We saw Peter Skellern in MK – the Stables in Wavendon, to be precise – when he went through the phase of singing Irving Berlin and the like. It was very jolly. I also saw him after his retirement to Polruan, walking around wearing one of those silly faux-naval caps that yachtsmen affect. He was by then running the local church choir, so I think he may have been suffering from a dose of God for longer than your comment suggests. I also recall him describing Oasis (as in the Gallaghers rather than the ensemble you chose earlier, Pete) as “scum”. Not very Christian.

Mel's comment on Pete's 86. *You're A Lady*

Absolutely right. I consider this song to be all the awful things you've imagined I would ascribe to it, and possible more.

There are two things which wholly redeem it though. (In the abstract, I mean. I hope you don't intend that I should actually listen to it again!)

One is your cogent case for appreciating it as a radical piece of art that breaks the rules of pop music and comes out as something honourably original. I'd never thought of it in this light. But it holds up. I'm also grudgingly prepared to see it as something unique in view of the fact that Johnny Mathis and Telly Savalas have each been persuaded to make cover versions.

There's another, hopefully more generous, reason for accepting your praise for the track, so please don't misread this for cynicism or disparagement. Your account of the 22-year-old Rowlands on the road is both compelling and touching. I can't remember you previously introducing such painful personal experiences into your musical recollections. So these stand out as rather special. If this song means this much to you, it really means this much – irrespective of what others like me might feel.

87. *That's Life*, by the Monalisa Twins (2017)

Composers: Mona and Lisa Wagner

Single and on the album “Orange”

Yes, I've surprised myself by including this, given that I've only known it for about a year. But it sums up so much of what I'm about, musically speaking, that it has to have a place in my top 100.

I discovered this act when I was trawling around on the internet, looking for modern-day musicians who performed and apparently respected music from our day. I reported this to you a while back, so really I'm just restating my enthusiasm. These two women grew up in Austria with their music-industry father, and launched themselves into the music scene via the internet when they were only about twelve. Their speciality is performing Beatles songs – not trying to replicate the sound in slavish detail, but respecting the spirit of it. Lisa in particular is an accomplished guitar player who seemingly manages to deliver anything the music demands. They did a two-year residency at the rebuilt Cavern Club (100 performances altogether), which seems to indicate an extraordinary commitment to the cause.

That's Life is an original song, and I love it. It's a pastiche of various musical tricks evoking the sixties and other eras, yet it has energy and musicality of its own – an

inventive, swooping melody; rich vocal harmonies; touches of musical and verbal humour; and a clever lyric about accepting the life's knocks and making the best of things. It's a ringing reminder of so many elements that have been discarded from recent pop music; and it's plain from comments by the duo themselves that they are very much aware of being on a mission to deliver an antidote to some of the failings of the musical mainstream. And it's uplifting! Did I mention that?

Oh, and by the way, they are major fans of the Zombies.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZSvEPYy9pmA>

Further reading – a reminder:

The group's version of *You're Going To Lose That Girl* is a beautiful demonstration of their take on Beatles material. As it happens it doesn't show off Lisa's guitar playing expertise very well, but at least you can see them at work.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lj8LEL4gbQU>

For an older and better demonstration of their guitar-playing skill, try this:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=E3XVSykA7Ws>

Nick's comment on Pete's 87. *That's Life*

Thanks for introducing us, Pete – I had predictably never heard of them. This music involves a fair dollop of nostalgia, especially listening to the actual Beatles songs, but it's very good fun and absolutely worth listening to. That said, I think I'd put it in a category which we find has expanded dramatically over the last few years, say since I retired. If the Monalisa Twins were to perform somewhere appropriate (not too big, preferably with the appearance but not reality of a touch of sleaze) and accessible, as it might be at the Picturedrome in Holmfirth, I'd jump at the opportunity. Would I buy an album to play at home? No.

As you have gathered, we go to rather a lot of live music of all sorts, and sometimes we buy a CD there and then, partly because it supports the musician rather than Mr Bezos. Mostly though we don't, not because we don't like the music or haven't enjoyed the performance, but because live performance is different from playing music at home, and some acts seem to me – or us – intrinsically to be about performance. So my reaction to this is that I enjoy it enough to be sure I'd like to see them live, but I don't think I'd play a CD or revert to the YouTube proxy.

It's curious seeing what these choices have triggered between you. I vaguely remember a young female person called Ammi (my effort at a phonetic spelling to distinguish it from Amy) but nothing beyond that. I do of course share memories of riding around on a Zundapp: the BSA Bantam was actually a bit of war loot, liberated by our brave lads at the end of the war. But the reminiscences are all part of the process, aren't they?

Mel's comment on Pete's 87. *That's Life*

What an absolute delight.

I started by thinking this is a rather nice off-the-wall piece that I'm going to enjoy against my better judgement. And ended up hunting down their excellent Beatles covers.

That's Life is witty in parts, but not profound. Obviously the music is a determined act of recycling. But I think they pull off a kind of triumph by getting so many of the subtle and unsubtle instrumental resonances absolutely right. Less blatant than the magical Rutles, but from the same loving source.

I can see how, while the women were learning to look and sound polished and professional on The Cavern stage, Dad Wagner was working musical wonders in the studio so that this and the other tracks would enthral us with their nostalgia. I also get the fine guitar work you mention.

By the way, almost the whole of the time spent writing this lot I've had the Twins playing the *Orange* album and beyond.

An excellent find, Pete. Congratulations.

Mel's postscript on the batch: As you know, I'm always strongly in favour of bringing back nostalgia. And these three selections are steeped in it – a couple of blond girls who sound more like the Beatles than the Beatles, memories of Amaryllis at 16 or 17, and Peter Skellern. It's heroic. Respect!

There isn't really a theme here – just two very different Beatles tracks, plus one that has nothing to do with them. So this preamble probably won't make the edit! [It did.]

88. Here Comes The Sun, by the Beatles (1969)

Composer: George Harrison
On the album "Abbey Road"

When I first played "Abbey Road" all the way through, something slightly unsettling struck me: the most accomplished and "finished" songs on it seemed to be *Something* and *Here Comes The Sun*, both of which had been written not by Lennon or McCartney, but by George Harrison. I'd always admired his work, so I was pleased to find him finally stepping to the fore, although it was strange to think he'd outshone the others.

Initially I accepted the general view that *Something* was the more accomplished of the two songs. I still feel it's a truly wonderful piece, and Harrison's amazing guitar solo is rightly praised as one of his most impressive pieces of playing. Yet I had a lingering affection for *Here Comes The Sun*, and now I'm not afraid to argue that it's the more achieved and important of the two. After his experiments in Indian music, he returns here to the power of simple but subtle melodies and chord progressions to create a piece of extraordinary affirmation.

There's complexity, of course, behind the apparent simplicity. The time signature keeps changing in the middle section. The arrangement is rich and subtle. The Moog synthesiser adds a kind of tentative optimism to the overall sound. And above it all, there's that crisp, clear Harrison sound, underpinned by the acoustic guitar accompaniment.

Being positive without sounding trite is a difficult trick to pull off, but here Harrison shows how it's done. Apparently George Martin called it one of the greatest songs ever written. I won't disagree.

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

Mel's comment on Pete's 88. Here Comes The Sun

So what more can I say about this? *Something* is pretty damned good, but I'm always embarrassed that it starts off sounding like a song sung by Shirley Bassey years earlier. You've already chosen *While My Guitar Gently Sleeps*, so whichever I say is the best song George Harrison ever recorded you've nailed it.

I think one can judge the power of *Here Comes The Sun* by the reaction it gets from so many people when they hear the first tingling notes. It's a song about optimism, full of optimism, which seems to create instant optimism in listeners. That's extraordinary in itself. Then the recording goes on to be the immaculate piece of music which you describe.

And yes, it works on me every time.

89. Hey Jude, by the Beatles (1968)

Written by Paul McCartney
Single

In a way I wish I didn't like this song, but I do, and that's all there is to it, so I'm afraid you're going to have to read this and listen to it. But you can bail out when the run-out starts.

I'll never forget the first time I heard *Hey Jude* in that famous television broadcast. I sat there hoping against hope that it would rekindle the delight I'd felt when those early Beatles singles had been released. And it did! McCartney sat there singing a melody that had a strange and magical inevitability about it.

And then as if that wasn't enough, Lennon joined in! Forget all the bad press about their massive arguments; he was still prepared to sing a harmony line with McCartney in the last verse (and in the backing throughout), elevating the whole thing to another place. The Beatles lived.

Not only is the melody wonderfully resonant; it also underpins the message of optimism and encouragement contained in the lyrics. There's a pervading sense of maturity and acceptance in both words and music; it's a bit like *Let It Be* without the religiosity. Despite the folklore of the period, it's not a message of sympathy for Julian Lennon when his parents split up, although that might have been the original spark behind it. In the event it emerged as a universal love song – one which, very unusually, is presented in the third person. It shouldn't work, yet it does.

As for the run-out. I can take it or leave it. Sometimes I wish it simply wasn't there, or ended after thirty seconds. Perhaps I should edit a version where it does.

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

Mel's comment on Pete's 89. *Hey Jude*

What I like about this? The outro is the Beatles' ultimate version of what my mate Roger once characterised as their inability to contain a song within its proper boundaries – a musical *Eight Days A Week* syndrome. That exuberance and breaking of barriers is what lives on for me in *Hey Jude*.

It also always brings back affectionate memories of my very good and almost entirely platonic friend Judy whose intellect I always underrated back in the Sixties, although she eventually became Master of an Oxford college. I didn't call her Jude very much before the record's release, but I certainly did afterwards.

Of course, it's a great piece of music. But that doesn't mean I have to like it. In fact I like it much less now than when it came out.

Stripping away the Julian Lennon connection, which clearly doesn't fit the song, its lyric is rather pedestrian. When McCartney tried to take out the meaningless line "the movement you need is on your shoulder" Lennon reassured him it was the best in the song – probably wishing for more such sparks of inventiveness. As well as the pedestrian lyric, the sound is rather plodding, only enlivened in the lengthy outro by the emergence of a jaunty cross rhythm which seems to excuse any possible over-indulgence.

This leads me to speculate that it's not the outro that people find boring. They are already bored by the time they get there, and that's why they want to skip to the end!

Worse than all this is the number of times I've subsequently heard Paul McCartney sing it really badly – as if the existence of the song is enough to please the fans and the performance doesn't matter. He's wrong.

Will I want to keep on listening to it? Of course I will. It's the Beatles and it's wonderful in its way.

90. *Beyond My Wildest Dreams*, by Mark Knopfler and Emmylou Harris (2006)

Composer: Mark Knopfler

On the album “All The Roadrunning”

If there's going to be any protest about hints of country music, switch off now.

You're still here? Excellent. Because this isn't country, it's in a style all its own. It's on an album recorded by Mark Knopfler and Emmylou Harris over a seven-year period, and to me it's the stand-out best song on it by, dare I say, a country mile.

And here's why I like it. Despite being a slow song, it's exciting! The reflective melody is haunting in itself, but it's also used as the platform for a steady and relentless build-up. The first verse is sung with just echo and a softly strummed guitar accompaniment. Then the bass comes in for the chorus, along with Emmylou's unassuming harmonies. The next verse brings in a heavy, emphatic snare drum, then the second chorus launches those spine-tingling reverb guitar chords. And in the final verse Emmylou also sings harmony during the verse. The whole thing gradually weaves a transcendent magic – and it should be played LOUDLY.

What's it about? Well, it's the reflections of a long-distance trucker. Maybe he's looking forward to getting home to his lover (simplistic analysis). More likely in my book, he's imagining the lover he would like to be going home to. That interpretation makes it a piece about unconquerable optimism (or whimsical hope?) in the face of the grind of daily life ... or something like that.

Knopfler doesn't enunciate the words well, but the YouTube clip that provides lyrics breaks off just before the end with some jarring musical irrelevancy, so do look up the lyrics somewhere. They're not the greatest of poetry, but in context they do the job, and there are some neat observations (e.g. “These are the restless roads \ Every one a war”). Anyway, it's the overall impact that matters.

We owe our knowledge of this album to Helen's brother Paul, who recommended it to us a few years ago when we knew nothing about it.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IrmzUU1ocio>

PS And there are some rather marvellous second-inversion chords in this to avoid repetition and add urgency.

Mel's comment on Pete's 90. *Beyond My Wildest Dreams*

I often wondered what could have happened to Mark Knopfler. A towering talent like his couldn't just disappear, could it. This track perhaps explains seven of the missing 27 years since the end of Dire Straits if that's the time he took on the album with Emmylou Harris.

You'll understand, given my general scepticism about C&W, that I know nothing of Ms Harris. But, as you say, *Beyond My Wildest Dreams* fortunately isn't country – it's cross-country. (Sorry.) And her voice fits in very well with what we have to concede is Knopfler's mumbling.

Great track though. I like the odd lyric reference to the trucker's life on the road. Knopfler always had an engaging way of dramatising his songs with imagined situations and people. So this says just enough to present a recognisable scenario and allows him to bring out what seem to me to be genuine emotions of loneliness and longing. (My guess is that they refer to his unhappiness on the road with Dire Straits.)

I buy your suggestion that his longing is for no one in particular, just an imagined someone who can make the aching go away.

Then the music nicely does the job of realising these feelings. The build up through the song which you vividly describe is excellent too. It all sounds very-well conceived and well-produced without the excesses which this kind of record often falls prey to.

I'm compelled to say it's still a fair distance from the greatest that Dire Straits achieved. Most rock music is. But this is a worthy adjunct to it. I'm very glad to know of it.

Here's an additional McGarrigles' track. I've been slightly constrained in my choice by Mel's dubiousness about any "spiritual" connection in their lyrics, so in this choice I've made a point of avoiding lyrics that might be deemed to have such a connotation, even where such a thing would be unremarkable if this weren't such a weighted dialogue. I've picked one which is a bittersweet lament for a moment in the course of a now-collapsing relationship.

91. Stella By Artois, by Kate & Anna McGarrigle (1978)

Composer: Kate McGarrigle

From the album "Pronto Monto"

I've frequently praised the McGarrigles for their remarkable and intricate multi-part harmonies. This is an exception; it's a solo by Kate McGarrigle, who wrote it. However, by way of compensation it has a wonderfully rich and inventive musical arrangement with a haunting solo clarinet part. You really should listen to it more than once, because it's slow, and on the first hearing you may not have the chance to build up a mental "map" of the structure of the melody.

As you'll see, it's a vignette – a moment in time – followed by a reflection on it. The narrator, who is in Europe on a music tour (or it could just be a holiday), has found herself in a hotel in Rotterdam with her prospective partner, and the song describes the night they consummate their relationship:

"The boys in the band / Gave me a candle / Matches to light it for my bedside table / And I let you light it for the first time that night."

However, the memory is bittersweet. When we switch to the present day, the relationship is failing; and by extension, this is a lament for every lost love, and for the lost romance that goes with it, summed up in the resonantly nostalgic line: "as we did from the south of France / Clear through to Galway...".

I enjoy so much about this: the economical evocation of place and time, the use of the "light" image, and the clever musical arrangement – one moment urgent, the next moment reflective. I find it remarkably moving.

A lot of the McGarrigles' writing is equally poignant, combining an awareness of the fragility of relationships with a wish that things were otherwise. And of course most of their songs have their distinctive harmonies to add yet another dimension.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=R7z_AevuNkg

PS Illogically, Kate is shown on the right on the Pronto Monto album cover. Oh, and Pronto Monto is "*Prends ton manteau*", in case you wondered. Take your coat.

Mel's comment on Pete's 91. Stella By Artois

It took me a while to get to grips with what this song's about. For the first and second hearings I wasn't entirely sure, but happily when I read your take on it, there was no difference between us. Sad, bitter-sweet. I get it and like it.

I must add, though, that if lighting the candle is the image I think it is, I'm left wondering what part "the boys in the band" might have been playing!

Musically it's very interesting, as you say. Extremely sweet-sounding, and extraordinarily complex. I wonder whether the music was initially distracting me from what was being sung, not that this is a complaint. It easily deserved the third hearing I gave it. If this is in any way representative of the three albums I've refused to listen to over the years (well I did try once or

twice) I can see why you have three albums by the McGarrigles. I can get an inkling of what I might have been missing.

It goes without saying that I been unfair in my persistent repudiation of the sisters. I don't even think my objection to religious references was reasonable. Some of these are almost certainly part of the linguistic shorthand and clichés we all use, but probably ought to be wary of. (To bring the point home, I've only once used the word "soul" in a poem to mean a soul. Every other time, especially in my youth, I was just being sloppy.) So occasional criticism, but not outright rejection, is probably justifiable.

Happily, *Stella By Artois* presents no such challenges. It's a delight, and I'm grateful that you eventually forced me to listen to it.

Pete's Selection 31: 92-94

First sent 13.1.2023

The three songs in this selection share an imaginative use of melody and harmony, which are harnessed to work in close combination with the words. They are "proper songs", with rich harmonic development that doesn't always take you where you first expect to go. They also all use interesting devices such as extended lines or a slowing of verbal pace to encapsulate thought or achieve emphasis.

92. The Closest Thing to Crazy, by Katie Melua (2003)

Composer: Mike Batt

Single and on album "Call Off the Search"

This is my tribute to Mike Batt, of whom I'm a great admirer. He composed, arranged, conducted and played keyboards on this track, which launched Katie Melua to fame, and I haven't yet found a song by her that I like as much as this.

Unlike many simplistic pop songs, Mike Batt's tend to run through beguiling sequences of chords, making liberal use of first or second inversions (sorry!) to draw the listener along. Structurally this one has a marvellous inevitability about it, yet there are also surprises (for instance, the unexpected line "on my own" in the chorus). And the full and resonant production on this recording is superb.

Lyrically, it's an evocation of an enticing but perhaps exploitative relationship between a young woman and an older man – and of her inability to extricate herself from it. I find it interesting that a much older man was able to write about this subject with such insight and empathy – although in fact Batt composed it when he was only around 40, more than a dozen years before Katie Melua recorded it.

Katie Melua is/was a phenomenon in her own right: a Georgian/British singer-songwriter who, in addition to her talent, is quite spectacularly pretty! (I know my track record on such things, but surely I'm not the only one to have noticed?) Her delivery of this song is just right. There's feeling, but also subtlety; nothing is overdone.

Somehow, I fear that any response to this comment is going to talk about the Wombles, or perhaps to disparage Batt on other grounds, but I simply take each work on its own merits, and I think this one is great.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=C-BnRZ52jHs>

Here are two other impressive Mike Batt songs that you ought to know:

*Beggars And Kings**, by Linda Lewis (1979)

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_8ST5mhoN4A

Caravan Song, by Barbara Dickson (1978)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=M8giBu9IxJE>

* *Beggars and Kings* is a two-verse song with a full orchestra operating on steroids, but despite the grandiosity of the arrangement, it's bleak, atmospheric and trenchant. It bursts out of nowhere, evoking a complete background in just a few phrases – a matin bell ringing, farmers scratching a living, a temple where they pray. The setting perhaps suggests some sort of Mediterranean drama, and in fact the piece focuses on violent personal loss. Some unspecified individual has been “cut down” prematurely, and the singer is commenting bitterly that everyone will die eventually – including the killer. It's an extraordinary tour de force, and I'll be surprised if you don't find yourself playing it at least a second time, just to get the measure of its ambition.

[It's only fair to note that Mel was unable to find much to recommend *Beggars and Kings*, which he found overblown and unconvincing. See his postscript below to my selections 92-94. It just goes to show how different our reactions can be to these things.]

Mel's comment on Pete's 92. *The Closest Thing to Crazy*

Of course you know that Mike Batt was responsible for turning Steeleye Span, a promising folk-rock group, into a poppy band that wasn't worth listening to. In contrast with this crime, I reckon he elevated the Wombles from trivia to high art.

I jest just a little. But he certainly redeemed himself with *The Closest Thing To Crazy* which spurred us to buy “Call Off The Search” and the following two albums.

Katie Melua has a lovely voice which sadly ends up being just a little too sickly if you listen to her for long. She is also, as you say, very pretty (though I still prefer Judith Durham!). And Mike Batt really did know how to make a star of her. Admittedly, I don't play the albums any more because the saccharin gets to me, and the only song of hers that is still played here is the much lighter (and geographically and astronomically flawed) *Nine Million Bicycles*.

That's all by way of preamble. *The Closest Thing To Crazy* is a superb bit of pop music which I should not have set aside. As you say, a self-evidently complex song with a tune that exquisitely draws the listener along. Now at risk of getting it wrong, I'd say the tune seems to develop in a sequence of highly satisfying linked but individuated steps, which is repeated just once. The “chorus” is all the more powerful as a result, and allows the song to come to what feels like the only possible conclusion.

And that's only the tune. The lyric bowls along with its own inevitability, constantly bringing in perceptively fresh ideas when we might have been expecting repetition. Again, the chorus is so much more engaging, and the song's resolution so much more compelling as a result. Bloody great! The subtle and restrained orchestration is another winning feature.

How come you waited till number 92 to re-enlighten me with this?!

93. *Don't Know Why*, by Norah Jones (2002)

Composer: Jesse Harris

Single and on album “Come Away With Me”

This song and *Closest Thing To Crazy* were released around the same time, and I can't help associating them with each other in my mind. This one, again, is beautifully produced, with a spare, haunting jazz ensemble featuring prominent piano, which is played by Norah Jones herself. I particularly like the musical structure of the piece, which is evocative of the way Mike Batt works, using a cascade of chords that lean irresistibly into each other. They're beautifully delivered by the piano and guitar. The middle section cleverly maintains the same rhythm as the verse, but spreads the words over more beats, adding emphasis to the thought: “My heart is drenched in wine.”

The song is a lament by someone who has just resisted being drawn into a relationship, but is now regretting an opportunity missed. It's nothing astounding, but it works.

Norah Jones, as you probably know, is the daughter of Ravi Shankar, but grew up as an American in Texas. This was her debut single, and has turned out to be her most successful recording to date. I like her husky voice and thoughtful delivery, which is backed up in the video (which I'm sure you'll watch) by a remarkably expressive performance. I thought at the time that she would go on to achieve more than she apparently has, but she's still out there making records.

Jesse Harris, the composer, has worked regularly with Norah Jones over the years, and also with many American other jazz performers.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tO4dxvguQDk>

Mel's comment on Pete's 93. *Don't Know Why*

Confession time. I own this record and have probably never listened to it, certainly not enough to recognise it let alone appreciate it. The CD "Come Away With Me" was a gift from Geraint who obviously saw more in Norah Jones than I did.

This lack of interest is possibly explained by the fact that although the album is beautifully produced, and Norah Jones performs extremely well, her voice hasn't seemed distinctive enough to me to bring me back.

However ...

Don't Know Why is another excellent pop record. It doesn't grab me like the Katie Melua song, but it's well worth a proper listen, for all the reasons you've given. I really like the relaxed unobtrusive jazzy arrangement, and the tune has proved amazingly enjoyable on multiple successive hearings.

Also, although you say the idea in the lyric is not astounding, it's certainly not a common theme, and it's treated in a proper grown up way which definitely makes the song stand out from the crowd. Yes, you've got to love the line "My heart is drenched in wine." This is no lightweight.

You've chosen a track or two from the charts in the past which have left me wondering why you would remember it years later. I don't have that reservation about this one. It's a gem.

94. *Sweet Baby James*, by James Taylor (1970)

Composer: James Taylor

Single and on album of the same name

James Taylor had to figure somewhere in my list, and although he produced some other wonderful songs, I decided on this one, even though I don't remember it from back in the day. I just got to know it over the years.

Taylor has a unique, clear voice and an unmistakable musical style. Helen and I often refer to "the James Taylor chord" (a suspended dominant A7, if you want to know). It occurs again and again in his songs, but I don't hold it against him. It's a sound full of warmth and promise.

This song has a two-part structure: verse plus chorus twice. The first half is a kind of cowboy song, where the narrator invokes images of mysterious moonlight ladies who he wants to lull him to sleep at the camp fire. In the second verse the narrator is driving east from Stockbridge to Boston in the present day, reflecting on the cold and solitary nature of the journey, with "ten miles behind me, and ten thousand more to go." I've checked the map, and Stockbridge is definitely not ten thousand miles from to Boston – honest, guv. We are in the realms of Metaphor.

That extends to the conceit about "rockabye sweet baby James". Literalists suggest that the song was written in celebration of the birth of Taylor's nephew (also called James).

That might have been the trigger for it, but in the context of the song it simply seems to combine a nostalgic evocation of childhood with the idea of renewal. (How's that for a bit of pseud's corner analysis?)

In short, the lyric has a mystical quality, and seems to say more than the words themselves. For me the combination of vocal style, melody, arrangement and teasing message give it surprising poignancy. Oh, and if you look at the lyric, you'll find a complex and strictly observed rhyming scheme. Taylor thinks this is the best song he's ever written.

Mel, I remember your scepticism about James Taylor when the BBC massively over-promoted him around 1970. At the time I tended to agree with you, but I hope you accept that the quality of his output and his impressive staying power have turned out to validate at least some of the hype. And guess what – we went to see him live at the Albert Hall many years ago, and he was excellent.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iSkaEP2ZqbY>

Mel's comment on Pete's 94. *Sweet Baby James*

How wonderful for James Taylor to feature in our collective hundreds. He's not a large enough presence in my own listening heritage for me to think of including him, and I've never owned any of his records, though I obviously should have. That said, the TV concerts we've seen with him and his mate Carole King have always brought on a huge rush pleasure. It stimulates a kind of "how great that he's still around to remind us how good he is" response.

His voice is so distinctive and richly pleasing that I honestly wouldn't have minded which song you picked. I'm aware of *Sweet Baby James*, which is as beautifully tuneful and atmospheric as I could hope for. The lyric, if I've listened to it, is clearly too complex for me to have appreciated on a casual hearing.

So your thoughtful gloss is welcome and invaluable. As you suggest, the juxtaposition between the cowboy's campfire, the car journey and the lullaby feels inexplicably poignant – even without my understanding it. A good case for *not* analysing the words?

YouTube's uncontrolled plunge into his Greatest Hits after *Sweet Baby James* finished playing has reminded me of *Fire and Rain*, which I might have cited as my favourite James Taylor track. But the reference there to Jesus has to rule it out. *You've Got A Friend* is brilliant, but he didn't actually write it (that's a Carole King song of course).

So I'll be guided by you. *Sweet Baby James* does the job fine. I am deliciously transported by your choice, which yet again provides overwhelming evidence of the life-changing impact of your game! Marvellous.

I have no recollection of complaining about James Taylor's over-promotion 50 years ago. Some exaggerated claim for his music must have evoked scepticism so strong that you remember it to this day – and this cynic does admittedly sound like me.

Mel's general comment on Pete's 92-94: Hey Pete, do you realise that you've chosen a batch of three tracks that I *really* like? That's all of them. I've played each of them at least half a dozen times. Without tiring. Producing a glorious, gentle, wistful late night pleasure I had no reason expect. Thank you.

Unfortunately, I can't say the same for your cheeky inclusion of the two Mike Batt supplementaries! *Beggars and Kings* is overblown in both arrangement and lyric. I don't like Mike Batt when he's trying to be cleverer than he really is. I prefer *Wombling Merry Christmas*. *Caravan Song* is nice enough, but not gripping.

As if to put my response into context, YouTube immediately followed *Caravan Song* randomly with the greatest rock single of all time. I speak of course of Dylan's *Like A Rolling Stone*. More of which soon...

95. *Don't Talk to Him*, by Cliff Richard (1963)

Composers: Bruce Welch and Cliff Richard

Single

How could I pick a Cliff Richard song from his enormous output? Almost impossible. I've chosen one that I really like, but I could have opted for numerous others.

Why do I like this? Well, it embodies so much of what I enjoyed in the music of Cliff's early years: simple Shadows accompaniment; inventive up-tempo melody by Bruce Welch (as with so many of his songs); and unexpectedly, a more than adequate lyric by Cliff himself, pleasantly delivered. In fact I reckon he excelled himself. The tune runs and runs, yet he manages to provide words that also run and run without turning into a gabble. Quite a feat.

The theme is one of insecurity about a long-distance relationship; it's an assertion of love, tinged with a warning to the recipient not to listen to anyone who challenges it. But is there any truth in the rumours the narrator thinks people are spreading about him ("walking round with Sue and Jean")? We're not told. It's neatly done in the appropriate idiom, complete with its smattering of obligatory clichés. It's a song-by-numbers, but one effectively wrought.

Musically speaking, I have to say I wasn't always a fan of the multi-voice harmonies Cliff sometimes used after his early solo years, but I feel that this approach is not overdone in this one; it's just right. And to stray briefly into pseud's corner, I always get a frisson on hearing the line "Let your **love** for me grow **strong** while we ... [are far apart]". The word "love" is sung on a minor chord, but "strong" is on the parallel major chord. Neat and satisfying.

Oh, and do try playing this at least once while listening to the drums: fulsome and punchy, yet never overdone. I particularly like the textbook rolls between verses. And there's a nice resonant bass throughout (tighten your earphones if you're not getting it).

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

Alternative reading:

Gee Whiz It's You

The Young Ones (Yes, truly)

Summer Holiday (Ditto)

The Next Time (Ditto) ← Soundtrack version, not the more formulaic single version.

Mel's comment on Pete's 94 *Don't Talk To Him*

Flabbergasted. There was I thinking myself to be a Cliff Richard aficionado of the early-to mid-Sixties and you pick one that had slipped through my mental calendar completely. I was sure this came from the *Devil Woman*, *We Don't Talk Any More*, *Wired For Sound* era when he did seriously good songs with great arrangements. That must tell you something.

Don't Talk To Him isn't as good as these, but it is a distinctive and rather self-assured song, which sets it apart from the endless ballads that followed the charts, and the quirky stuff written by the Shadows for the films and pantomimes. (Obviously I loved many of them at the time, but I'm trying to be a discriminating adult.)

The lyric doesn't sound as clever to me as it does to you – it's a pretty tired theme even for 1963. But as you say, Cliff makes it feel interesting by cramming so much in.

I'm glad you mention the immaculate Brian Bennett's wonderfully controlled drumming. I was made to love his work by my fanatical mate Pea (who I suspect you never met), and who first

helped me to realise that the drums are a real instrument rather than something for tapping out the rhythm.

You mention the Shadows' "simple" accompaniment too. On the face of it this verges on inspired simple-mindedness. But there's a lot going below the surface – the bass as you say, and Hank Marvin's somewhat suppressed but inimitable snatches of joy. Without the Shads this record wouldn't be worth talking about.

It's terribly hard to pick a single favourite, isn't it. There's too much to choose from. I made the same point when I chose the silly but pleasing rocker *On The Beach* as my consciously "representative" (rather than definitive) Cliff track. But I am glad you didn't go for *Bachelor Boy* which is one of the naughtiest things he did without God and Christmas getting involved. And *Summer Holiday* now sounds like a parody of itself – which of course is impossible unless you believe in time travel.

In truth, even with its ethereal strings and banal sentiments, *The Young Ones* still give me the greatest kick – the first 45 I ever actually touched.

Pete's comment on Mel's comment on Pete's 94. *Don't Talk To Him*

I must just give an emphatic cheer in response to Mel's comment on *The Young Ones*. I too loved it, in spite of those strings and the silly lyric. And yes, it still gives me a kick to this day. You can't legislate for a spontaneous emotional reaction to something like this; you just have to go with the flow.

I should also add for clarification that I don't actually think the lyrics of *Don't Talk To Him* are any more profound than Mel does; I think I outlined the meaning mainly to prove I'd actually listened! My thoughts are summed up in my conclusion: "It's a song-by-numbers, but one effectively wrought."

96. *I Know Where I'm Going*, by Allan Gray (1945)

Composer: Allan Gray. **Conductor:** Walter Goehr

Film theme

I thought long and hard before including this, and consulted with my surviving board member as to its eligibility, but in the end I had to have it.

This is the main theme to a 1945 film called *I Know Where I'm Going* by Michael Powell and Emeric Pressburger, who were at the top of their game at the time; and it's my favourite film of all time. (It ousts *The Third Man*, which I may have given that accolade previously.) It stars Roger Livesey, whom I greatly admire but never thought of as a leading man, and Wendy Hiller, whom I never thought particularly attractive. Amazingly for me, I was able to look beyond these shallow prejudices and recognise a true masterpiece when I saw one.

The film is about a headstrong young society woman (Hiller) who heads off from Manchester to the Hebrides in the middle of the war to marry the much older businessman who owns the factory where she works. However, we never meet him; fog, and then a storm, prevent her crossing from Mull to her island destination, and while she's waiting she reluctantly falls for a young naval officer (Livesey) who is on leave there.

The rousing orchestral accompaniment was composed by Józef Żmigrod, an emigré Polish musician who had adopted the name Allan Gray, and it's splendid. Just before the end of the main theme it hauntingly hits the same note three times on different chords. This seems to me a wonderful parallel to the woman's floundering attempts to stay on track with her intentions, while having to make repeated adjustments to accommodate her new feelings.

Also featured in the film is a version of the Scottish (or Irish) folk song *I Know Where I'm Going*, with a very unusual choral arrangement by Robert Farnon. It's performed by the Glasgow Orpheus Choir.

There's apparently no concert performance of the score as a continuous connected piece, though a diligent fan has extracted all the music from the film in a remarkable YouTube tour de force. I've assembled some bits of that, and prefixed it by part of the film version of the folk song. (Actually the film opens with the orchestra, and the song only comes in later.)

Obviously, if you're coming to this music cold it will mean absolutely nothing to you. You'd need to see the whole film to get the point. To me it's dripping with nostalgia and wonderfulness on too many levels to express. All I can ask is that you listen, and discover something that is important to me.

Two routes to hear this: Watch film opening here (up to 2 mins 23 secs):

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oha_ww5Jexg

Or play my composite MP3, which is less than 2 mins long, and just gives a flavour.

Mel's comment on Pete's 96. *I Know Where I'm Going*

I'm sure you won't mind me saying that for this one you had to be there – and I wasn't. I don't know the film, and perhaps I should. But the theme leaves me absolutely cold, despite (because of?) listening to your extract many times over.

I watched the film through the credits and into the start of the plot. Still nothing. It's not even something that I can find cause to object to, unlike one or two of your earlier choices!

My response is irrelevant of course. All that's needed to be said is that I now know you were deeply impressed by a film which helped your enjoyment of its theme music, and probably vice versa. This is not surprising, but it's a dimension of your musical appreciation I was only faintly aware of before.

And this is exactly what you asked of me.

Pete's comment on Mel's comment on Pete's 96. *I Know Where I'm Going*

I fully accept and respect Mel's overall reaction to this selection, though without wishing to protest too much, I have to point out that the opening of this film gives no clue at all to its true qualities. It contains a succession of uncharacteristic scenes that don't even hint at the magical and haunting quality of the rest of the film. You have to watch the whole thing; then your life will be transformed. Maybe.

97. *The Last Time*, by The Rolling Stones (1965)

Composers: Mick Jagger and Keith Richards

Single

I had to have a Rolling Stones song in my top hundred, and someone else has picked *Honky Tonk Woman*, so I've fallen back on one of my earlier favourites. I hesitated slightly, because I'm aware that *The Last Time* has a somewhat dirge-like quality, but I could never resist that compelling chorus. At occasional parties and dances back in my youth (and in fact since then), that chorus has never failed to lift my spirits. You have to mouth the words when they come up, don't you? It's infectious.

In fact it's the verse, with Brian Jones's mesmerising guitar figure, that helps to build up the tension in anticipation of that exuberant chorus, complete with its two-part harmony. You can't wait for it to arrive ... and then it's gone again.

Which is all very paradoxical, because the theme of the song is rather bleak. A relationship is about to break up because the narrator is fed up with his girlfriend's attitude. We're never told what she did wrong or whose fault it was, but that's often the magic of a clever lyric; we're given hints, and we build out the story to suit ourselves. In this case, the speaker perhaps seems a shade self-centred. "You don't try very hard to please me," he says, but he doesn't mention how hard (if at all) he tries to please her.

In pursuit of due diligence, I've examined reports that the writers were influenced by a 1954 gospel song by the Staple Singers called *This May be The Last Time*; and yes, it's true that the end of its chorus, "May be the last time, I don't know", uses the same chord sequence as the Stones' song. But the feel of the earlier song is totally different, as is the Stone's verse.

[The YouTube video below, by the way, has a very clever and elaborate way of presenting the lyrics.]

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

Mel's comment on Pete's 97. *The Last Time*

Yes *Honky Tonk Woman* was my No 90. So we share an appreciation of the Stones, even if we had to squeeze them in late in the day.

I've subsequently listened to their earliest singles more intently (and incidentally still love *Come On* which seems universally dismissed). There are some great songs there, and my favourite would be *It's All Over Now*, which was a great companion piece to the Beatles *I'll Cry Instead* in the days of the initial friendly rivalry. But *The Last Time* would definitely come second among that first wave.

It has a great jangly intro and then a tremendous insidious drive, with plenty of interest from Brian Jones, as you say. I like the tune, the changes of pace, the climactic end and even the relentless fade out. A great pop single, though I suppose serious Stones fans might regard it as a bit lightweight.

Not that serious Stones fans have ever engaged in debate with me about the merits of their heroes. They just tend to assert their superiority with a sneer. Rough lot.

Mel's general comment on Pete's 95-97: There's an uncanny synchronicity with your choices in the fact that the last two CD collections I bought (yes, still buying the hard stuff) are the greatest hits of Cliff Richard and the Rolling Stones. You should attach less significance to the fact that, as of this moment, the last film I have watched for three minutes is called *I Know Where I'm Going*. But two out of three ain't bad.

98. *Canço del Lladre*, by Helen Swansbourne (2023)**Composer:** Miguel Llobet Solés

YouTube upload

What a memorable sight. That sun-dappled sitting room, and my partner Helen playing a haunting guitar piece by Spanish musician and composer Miguel Llobet (that's his paternal surname). Seeing and hearing such pieces played has been part of my life in the ten or twelve years since she took up the classical guitar, so they've earned a place in my top hundred. This piece isn't necessarily my favourite, but it's very beautiful, and I've chosen it because it sums up so much of what I like about many of them.

The title of this particular piece (pronounced "Canso..") translates as *Song of the Thief*, and has its roots in the eternal fight for Catalan independence. Llobet himself was Catalan, and composed this in 1899, when he was only 21. But you wouldn't pick up any of that from the piece itself. To me it's simply charming, wistful and slightly melancholy.

I'm told the piece is more difficult to play than it probably sounds, and Helen says the performance I've picked isn't the best demonstration of her prowess, but I think it works. There are two passages played on harmonics, which is particularly tricky. That's where you don't press the string right down to the fretboard – you just lightly touch it and pluck it, creating a much higher note than the fret would give you. Finding the right fret for each harmonic is very unintuitive!

Some Spanish guitar music can be a little formulaic – especially pieces set in a minor key. This isn't like that at all; it follows its own charming path, and lingers in your head long after you've heard it.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DIaiK3iMquI>

Mel's comment on Pete's 98. *Canço del Lladre*

Well this is nice. But whether I have the knowledge, capacity or audacity to comment usefully is questionable.

This is light and superficially undemanding on my untrained ear: whispily enjoyable. I can't say in honesty that I absolutely like or dislike it because, apart from a few recordings of flamenco guitar which I listen to occasionally, I have virtually nothing to compare it with. I'd have to study and steep myself in this performer's debut album to get a hold of the genre. You'll send me the release date?

Having said that, its variations in tone and pace certainly make it look and sound like a really difficult piece to play, for which the artist deserves high praise. (Then, I can make just picking up a guitar to count the strings seem difficult.)

What strikes me is less than the music itself is Helen's remarkable facility with the guitar. It seems only a year or so ago I learned about her taking up the challenge and heard live her early stumbling and embarrassed steps to stick notes together. Now Helen's good enough to be all over the internet. To me her dedication is dumbfounding.

Perhaps I shouldn't find this altogether unlikely. Sue recently showed me a photo on some social media platform of a musician in America called Swansbourne who looks an awful lot like Helen. Talented family!

99. *All You Need Is Love*, by The Beatles (1967)**Composer:** Lennon-McCartney (actually John Lennon)

Single

I was delighted when the Beatles were selected to deliver the UK's contribution to *Our World*, the first-ever multi-national satellite TV link-up, which was broadcast live on 25 June 1967. The fogues who wanted the country to present something earnest and "worthy" had been outvoted. It was yet another reflection of the increasingly prevalent view that culturally speaking, the Beatles represented something truly significant. And I felt that *All You Need Is Love* fully lived up to the expectation placed on it. It was tuneful, musically compelling and exuberant.

I clearly remember a question that was flung at the Beatles prior to the performance by one of the TV presenters of the day, though sadly I can't find it anywhere on YouTube. In my memory the man in question was an actor called Adrian Cairns, though I can't imagine why he would have been involved. More probably it was Cliff Michelmore. The question was "Do you realise that some of the bars in this song miss a beat?" or words to that effect.

What an understatement! It misses beats all over the place, especially at the end of each opening line ("Love, love, love...") and at the end of each line of the verses. Take a look at the Wikipedia entry if you want the detail. At the time, this was quite extraordinary. The chorus ("All you need is love...") is more regular, but here two beats are *added* each time near the end (around the line "Love is all you need").

I've heard the song so often since my first encounter with it that I don't even notice these timing oddities now, but when it was new they were a real surprise, and something of a brain-teaser. But what was the purpose? Well, although the pace is slow, the omission of a beat after each line cleverly hurries you forward to the next one. It's as if a narrator keeps interrupting himself in his determination to make his point:

"There's nothing you can do that can't be done [missed beat here] – oh, and by the way
Nothing you can sing that can't be sung [missed beat here] – and did I mention this?
Nothing you can say, but you can learn how to play the game ..."

That being said, I'm not sure that the song says anything very profound, although its simple message is conveyed compellingly enough. I don't think anybody took the meaning terribly seriously, although obviously nobody would argue against it either. It reflected John Lennon's growing sense of having an artistic voice, and tapped into the optimistic flower power spirit of the day. And I suppose the musicality of the piece added weight to words.

In a way the track anticipated Lennon's *Imagine*, which – despite its worldwide renown – has never quite hit the spot for me. Clearly the lyrics of *Imagine* are more earnest and charged than those of *All You Need Is Love*, but somehow I've never been quite convinced by them, and I find its musical structure slightly flawed. To my mind he made the same point much more simply and effectively in *All You Need Is Love*.

By the way, I also love the musical arrangement of *All You Need Is Love*, with the agitated strings and those raunchy syncopated brass chords that come after "All you need is love". The Beatles and George Martin threw everything at it, and for me it all landed in the right places. And being a fan of vocal harmonies, I always enjoy the fact that the final chorus and its repetition are sung in harmony, where prior to that we just hear Lennon's voice.

The run-out at the end? I don't mind it. It's part of the package, and inventive in its own way. But those opening bars from *La Marseillaise* still give me a frisson whenever I hear them. I believe the French were slightly indignant at having them hijacked, and maybe they were right to be. To this day, when I hear the real thing being played I want it to be *All You Need Is Love*!

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_7xMfIp-irg

Mel's comment on Pete's 99. *All You Need Is Love*

How remarkable that we should have such contrary responses to a Beatles song. Your commentary on *All You Need Is Love* plays on all the right issues, but for the wrong reasons!

I had no particular expectations of the great satellite link-up, but when I heard the Beatles' contribution to this serious global cultural exchange I was slightly appalled. It wasn't that other nations were making earnest points about population control while Lennon seemed to be advocating its abolition – that was the non-conformity we wanted from him. I just couldn't believe this raucous chant was a Beatles song. What had they done?

Then in the aftermath I began to unpick what we'd seen and heard. Surely the greatest band in the world had not simply jumped on the bandwagon of a still relatively obscure aspect of American youth culture – the hippies. It's a possibility, but more likely cynical old Lennon was paying respect while also making fun of it. (A more famous equivocation comes later in *Revolution*, so this surmise is not unreasonable.)

Then you compare *All You Need Is Love* with *Imagine*. This contrast is, surprisingly, new to me, I suppose because I see *Imagine* as a slightly flawed masterpiece which was magnificent in its day but whose valid vision was just too optimistic to stand the test of time. Meanwhile *All You Need Is Love* is a song of questionable logic performed by a bunch of people straining to make it sound like fun. All that brass, *She Loves You*, the *Marseillaise*, the kitchen sink. What!

OK I'm exaggerating grossly to make a point. (And where would we be without the even more questionable logic of *I Am The Walrus*?) *All You Need Is Love* is a hoot. I love its stupid irreverence. It does sound like fun because I saw everyone on screen having fun. Sadly, the "remastered" version on YouTube plays down the atmosphere by overly cleaning up the sound of the (not entirely) live recording. But I don't have to listen to that.

I'm grateful for your illumination on the missing beats. Of course I was aware of their impact without having any sense of what was happening. We live on and learn.

Ultimately I think *All You Need Is Love* is a vital, quintessential component of the Beatles canon. It's stunning and brilliant. We would be poorer without it. But there are too many questions about the message and its delivery for my top 100.

Pete's comment on Mel's comment on Pete's 99. *All You Need Is Love*

Raucous chant? Raucous chant? No! I take your point, but to me the measured, layered vocal harmonies of *All You Need Is Love* are smeeeeooth! Talk to me about *Helter Skelter* if you want to talk raucous. Seriously, though, I can see that our different reactions to music may never allow us to reach a consensus on this song. I'm simply happy that you like it.

That said, in defence of the extremely spare lyric perhaps I should point out that according to some sources, the Beatles were actually briefed to deliver something pretty basic for the satellite link-up – something that wouldn't tax the comprehension of non-English speakers. Interestingly, an alternative candidate for the job was apparently McCartney's *Your Mother Should Know*, whose bland and more or less pointless lyric had always puzzled me until I discovered this fact. Unfortunately, knowing this hasn't made it into a better song as far as I'm concerned! Catchy, yes; fulfilling, no.

100. *A Day In The Life*, by The Beatles (1967)

Composers: Lennon-McCartney

On the album "Sgt Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band"

In the end, this was a no-brainer. What else could I pick for my hundredth selection? Mel, you chose the Beatles' *The End* for your hundredth – a perfect conclusion to the album and to your selections – and this has reminded me of my fondness for its precursor, *A Day in the Life*, which ends the "Sgt Pepper" album. This was less complex than *The End*: just two interwoven song fragments, rather than the succession of pieces in the full sequence that

concludes “Abbey Road”. But in my book it had, and still has, extraordinary power to arrest and amaze.

I have to be honest: to some extent my liking for it reflects the time in my life when it was released. I’d left school, I’d just finished a term at a French university, and I was preparing for my first term at Cambridge. It was a summer full of potential. I was enthused by everything around me – new architecture in my home city, innovative drama on TV, challenging books to read and films to watch, the new people I met in my vacation job, and exciting new music from the Beatles on the “Sgt Pepper” album. My world seemed to be opening up.

And every time I hear *A Day in the Life*, there are moments when I’m reminded of those feelings of anticipation and promise.

Which of course has nothing to do with its intrinsic qualities, so let me get on to those.

Well, the John Lennon section is musically intricate and haunting, and lyrically teasing. It’s made up of a disconnected sequence of reflections on passing news events, which range from the mundane to the shocking and the bizarre. These are driven by precise and relentless percussion and some inspired bits of melody. Just reflect on the phrase “the lights had changed”: musically jarring and inventive.

In fact I find the whole piece so compelling that its message seems to be much more than just the words. It’s shot through with an aura of mystery. Some would say this reflects the background to its LSD-fuelled composition, but to me that’s irrelevant. What matters is the way it conjures up such a deeply unsettling atmosphere, and puts a new slant on simple everyday events.

And that theme continues in the up-tempo McCartney section, which conveys the sequence of getting up and going to work or school with vivid intensity, and endows mundane actions with special and mysterious importance. Nothing of significance happens; no conclusions are drawn; but it somehow shouts, “This matters!” Again, the musical arrangement is intricate and precise, and contributes strikingly to the overall impact of the piece.

By the way, I’ve just been admiring the clever sequence that immediately follows the McCartney section. John Lennon sings wordlessly over a kind of mini-chorus, while underneath him a simmering orchestral arrangement gradually takes over, then reaches a climax as it launches him into his final verse (the one about the four thousand holes). Spine-chilling.

And then the finale. What can I say? George Martin seems to have summed it pretty well by saying it sometimes struck him as “a bit self-indulgent”, and at other times as “bloody marvellous”. As one more pretentious critic put it, it’s “a forty-second meditation on finality”.

Or to put it another way, the end.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YSGHER4BWME>

Mel’s comment on Pete’s 100. *A Day In The Life*

Order returns to the universe. We are in harmony again. I could easily have chosen this. Just mainstream Beatles knock-your-head-off genius.

They may have welded parts of songs together earlier in their careers, but never to this awe-inspiring effect. As you say, a slice of everyday normality from McCartney is spliced into Lennon’s slideshow of weird images. But the song works the other way round too. Lennon’s strangeness is almost deadpan and drawn from real life and the press, while there’s a unnerving panic in the McCartney’s thudding wake-up and run for the bus – and just having a smoke takes us off into musical euphoria. (It works even better if you *don’t* think it’s a joint!) Talk about

music manipulating our emotions. Before this was there anything remotely similar or comparable?

George Martin's orchestrations of the crescendos and the chord on multiple pianos are breath-taking, even now 56 years after we first heard them. And who said Ringo Starr couldn't play the drums? Don't they totally underpin the whole track? It's a pity he was feeling his contributions were so trivial during all the months recording "Sgt Pepper".

Like you, I was bowling along with the optimism of youth and our times in the summer of '67. And the exuberance and completely revolutionary sounds of *A Day In The Life* were both a confirmation and an inspiration. Anything really did seem possible. Oddly the song is rather dark, not at all optimistic, and the end plainly doomful. But the SOUND of it – wow!

The overall construction is near-perfect. I don't know whether they understood what they were doing. But this must be the nearest thing to a symphony we'll find in five minutes of rock music.

As for you choosing this as number 100, Pete, I think the end of a day in the life – or seven years in ours – just marginally upstages *The End*. Good on you.

PETE'S LIST

No	Track	Artist	Sent	Batch
1	Magic Moments	Perry Como	16.1.15	1
2	Torn	Natalie Imbruglia	16.1.15	1
3	Dancing In The Street	Martha and the Vandellas	16.1.15	1
4	Let Me Down Easy	Ralph McTell	11.3.15	2
5	Don't Dream It's Over	Neil Finn	11.3.15	2
6	Apple Cider Re-Constitution	Al Stewart	3.8.25	2
7	Da Do Ron Ron	Ronettes	11.3.15	2
8	The Third Man Theme	Anton Karas	29.3.15	3
9	If I Fell	Beatles	29.3.15	3
10	Crazy Dreams	Paul Brady	29.3.15	3
11	I Remember You	Frank Ifield	5.5.15	4
12	In Dreams	Roy Orbison	5.5.15	4
13	Twenty Four Hours From Tulsa	Gene Pitney	5.5.15	4
14	I'll Never Get Over You	Jonny Kidd and the Pirates	5.5.15	4
15	In My Mind a Miracle	Zombies	3.8.25	5
16	America	Simon and Garfunkel	14.5.15	5
17	Kiss Me	Sixpence None the Richer	14.5.15	5
18	Hold Me	P J Proby	26.6.15	6
19	Oliver's Army	Elvis Costello & the Attractions	26.6.15	6
20	Grace Kelly	Mika	26.6.15	6
21	In Your Quiet Place	Gary Burton & Keith Jarrett	18.8.15	7
22	Hi-Di-Ho	Blood Sweat and Tears	18.8.15	7
23	Girl From Ipanema	Astrud Gilberto	18.8.15	7
24	Heart Like A Wheel	Kate and Anna McGarrigle	21.9.15	8
25	Brando	Dory Previn	21.9.15	8
26	A Whiter Shade Of Pale	Procol Harum	29.10.15	9
27	Somethin' Stupid	Frank and Nancy Sinatra	29.10.15	9
28	A World Without Love	Peter and Gordon	29.10.15	9
29	Keep On Running	Spencer Davies Group	29.10.15	9
30	While My guitar Gently Weeps	Beatles	11.15	10
31	If This Be The Last Time	Oasis	13.12.15	11
32	Senior Citizens	Pete Atkins	13.12.15	11

33	Mr Blue Sky	Electric Light Orchestra	13.12.15	11
34	Eternal Flame	Bangles	21.1.16	12
35	Take My Breath Away	Berlin	21.1.16	12
36	Stop	Sam Brown	21.1.16	12
37	Song of Long Ago	Carole King	3.8.25	12
38	The Living Years	Mike and the Mechanics	23.5.16	13
39	She Makes My Day	Robert Palmer	23.5.16	13
40	The Incidentals	Alisha's Attic	23.5.16	13
41	True Love	Bing Crosby	16.7.16	14
42	Good Vibrations	Beach Boys	3.8.25	14
43	My Life	Billy Joel	3.8.25	14
44	Monday Monday	Mammas and Papas	15.9.16	15
45	Goodbye To Love	Carpenters	15.9.16	15
46	Waterloo	Abba	15.9.16	15
47	The James Bond Theme	John Barry Orchestra	14.11.16	16
48	You Only Live Twice	Nancy Sinatra	14.11.16	16
49	All The Time In The World	Louis Armstrong	14.11.16	16
50	Please Please Me	Beatles	30.11.16	17
51	Eleanor Rigby	Beatles	30.11.16	17
52	She's Leaving Home	Beatles	30.11.16	17
53	From a Distance	Tilda Swinton and ensemble	18.6.17	18
54	Chancer theme	Jan Hammer	18.6.17	18
55	Stayin' Alive	Bee Gees	3.8.25	18
56	You're no good	Linda Ronstadt	5.9.17	19
57	Lonely Boy	Andrew Gold	5.9.17	19
58	Love Over and Over	Kate and Anna McGarrigle	5.9.17	19
59	Hello Mary Lou	Ricky Nelson	3.3.18	20
60	Things	Bobby Darin	3.3.18	20
61	Hey Baby	Bruce Channel	3.3.18	20
62	Sealed with a Kiss	Brian Hyland	3.3.18	20
63	Under Pressure	Queen and David Bowie	3.8.25	21
64	Slow train	Flanders and Swann	13.5.18	21
65	I like it	Gerry and the Pacemakers	13.5.18	21
66	You're my world	Cilla Black	13.5.18	21
67	This is Love	George Harrison	12.11.18	22
68	Better Things	Ray Davies, Bruce Springsteen	12.11.18	22
69	Karma Chameleon	Culture Club	12.11.18	22
70	Chan Chan	Buena Vista Social Club	22.9.19	23
71	Other Side of the World	KT Tunstall	22.9.19	23
72	Shine	Take That	22.9.19	23
73	I remember yesterday	Janis Ian	25.3.20	24
74	Free Ride	Marshall Hain	25.3.20	24
75	Carey	Joni Mitchell	25.3.20	24
76	Look Through Any Window	Hollies	7.10.20	25
77	The Things We Do For Love	10cc	7.10.20	25
78	This Will be Our Last Song Together	Neil Sedaka	7.10.20	25
79	I Want to Hold Your Hand	Beatles	23.2.21	26
80	We Can Work it Out	Beatles	23.2.21	26
81	Day Tripper	Beatles	23.2.21	26
82	Apache	Shadows	13.7.21	27

83	Theme from “Les Aventuriers”	François de Roubaix	13.7.21	27
84	Miss Me in the Morning	Mike D’Abo	13.7.21	27
85	This Will Be Our Year	Zombies	14.1.22	28
86	You’re a Lady	Peter Skellern	14.1.22	28
87	That’s Life	Monalisa Twins	14.1.22	28
88	Here Comes the Sun	Beatles	16.8.22	29
89	Hey Jude	Beatles	16.8.22	29
90	Beyond My Wildest Dreams	Mark Knopfler + Emmylou Harris	16.8.22	29
91	Stella by Artois	Kate and Anna McGarrigle	23.9.22	30
92	The Closest Thing to Crazy	Katie Melua	13.1.23	31
93	Don’t Know Why	Norah Jones	13.1.23	31
94	Sweet Baby James	James Taylor	13.1.23	31
95	Don’t Talk to Him	Cliff Richard	23.7.23	32
96	I Know Where I’m Going	Allan Gray / Walter Goehr	23.7.23	32
97	The Last Time	Rolling Stones	23.7.23	32
98	Canço del Lladre	Helen Swansbourne	21.9.23	33
99	All You Need is Love	Beatles	21.9.23	33
100	A Day in the Life	Beatles	21.9.23	33