Help! (song)

"**Help!**" is a song by the Beatles that served as the title song for both the 1965 film and its soundtrack album. It was also released as a single, and was number one for three weeks in both the United States and the United Kingdom.

"Help!" was written by John Lennon and credited to Lennon–McCartney. During an interview with *Playboy* in 1980, Lennon recounted: "The whole Beatles thing was just beyond comprehension. I was subconsciously crying out for help".

1 Composition

The documentary series *The Beatles Anthology* revealed that Lennon wrote the lyrics of the song to express his stress after the Beatles' quick rise to success. "I was fat and depressed and I *was* crying out for 'Help'," Lennon told *Playboy*.^[2] Writer Ian MacDonald describes the song as the "first crack in the protective shell" Lennon had built around his emotions during the Beatles' rise to fame, and an important milestone in his songwriting style.

In the 1970 *Rolling Stone* "Lennon Remembers" interviews, Lennon said it was one of his favourites among the Beatles songs he wrote, but he wished they had recorded it at a slower tempo. In these interviews, Lennon said he felt that "Help!" and "Strawberry Fields Forever" were his most honest, genuine Beatles songs and not just songs "written to order". According to Lennon's cousin and boyhood friend Stanley Parkes, however, "Help!" was written after Lennon "came in from the studio one night. 'God,' he said, 'they've changed the title of the film: it's going to be called 'Help!' now. So I've had to write a new song with the title called 'Help!'."^[3]

According to McCartney, he was called in "to complete it", providing the "countermelody" arrangement, on 4 April 1965 at Lennon's house in Weybridge.^{[4][5][6]}

2 Recording

The Beatles recorded "Help!" in 12 takes on 13 April 1965 using four-track equipment. The first nine takes concentrated on the instrumental backing. The descending lead guitar riff that precedes each verse proved to be difficult, so by take 4 it was decided to postpone it for an overdub. To guide the later overdub by Harrison, Lennon thumped the beat on his acoustic guitar body, which can

be heard in the final stereo mix. Lead and backing vocals were recorded twice onto take 9, along with a tambourine. A reduction mix was applied to the two vocal tracks, taking three attempts (takes 10 to 12), freeing up a track for the lead guitar overdub.^[7] This was the group's first use of two 4-track machines for "bouncing".^[8]

The vocals were re-recorded for the film during a session on 24 May 1965 at CTS Studios, a facility specializing in post-synchronisation.^[9] In addition to attempting a better vocal performance, the session might have been done to eliminate the tambourine (which had been on the same track as the vocals) since no tambourine appeared in the film sequence.^[10] With the new vocals, a mono mix was created at CTS Studios which was used for the film soundtrack. Mixes for record releases were prepared on 18 June. For the mono version, Martin decided to use a mix of the opening chorus of take 12 edited to the remainder of the CTS film mix.^[9] Because all instruments were combined on a single track for the CTS session, it could not be used for a stereo mix, so the stereo mix was made from take 12.^[10]

New mixes were created for releases of the *Help*! CD (1987), the *Love* album (2006), and the *Help*! DVD (2007).^[7]

3 Releases

"Help!" went to number 1 on both the UK and US singles charts in late summer 1965. It was the fourth of six number one singles in a row on the American charts; "I Feel Fine", "Eight Days a Week", "Ticket to Ride", "Help!", "Yesterday", and "We Can Work It Out".^[11]

The song appears on the *Help*! LP, the US *Help*! sound-track, *1962–1966*, the *Imagine: John Lennon* soundtrack, *1*, *Love*, and *The Capitol Albums, Volume 2*. The mono version (with different vocals and no tambourine) was included on the Beatles' *Rarities* LP and in *The Beatles in Mono* collection.

The American soundtrack album included a James Bondtype introduction to the song, followed by a caesura just before the opening lyric. No such introduction appeared on the British soundtrack album, nor was it included in the released single in either country.

4 **Promotional films**

The Beatles filmed the title performance for the movie *Help!* on 22 April 1965. The same footage (without the darts and credits seen in the film sequence) was used as a clip to promote the release of the single. It was shown starting in July 1965 on programmes such as *Top of the Pops* and *Thank Your Lucky Stars*.^[12] They made another promotional clip of "Help!" on 23 November 1965 for inclusion in the year-end recap special of *Top of the Pops*. Directed by Joseph McGrath, the black-and-white clip shows the group miming to the song while sitting astride a workbench. Starr holds an umbrella overhead throughout the song, which becomes useful as fake snow falls during the final verse.^[13] The November 1965 promo was included in the Beatles' 2015 video compilation *1*.^[14]

5 Live performances

The Beatles performed "Help!" live on the 1 August 1965 broadcast of *Blackpool Night Out*, which was included in the *Anthology 2* album and shown during *The Beatles Anthology* documentary.^[15] On 14 August, the group recorded a live performance of "Help!" and five other songs for *The Ed Sullivan Show*, broadcast the following month;^[16] the show is available on the DVD *The 4 Complete Ed Sullivan Shows Starring The Beatles*.

"Help!" was included in the set list for The Beatles' 1965 US tour. The 15 August performance at Shea Stadium was seen in the 1966 documentary *The Beatles at Shea Stadium*, although the audio for the song was re-recorded prior to release.^[17] The group's 29 August performance at the Hollywood Bowl was chosen for the 1977 album *The Beatles at the Hollywood Bowl*.^[18]

6 Use in advertising

In February 1985, "Help!" became the first Beatles song licensed for a US television commercial. The Lincoln–Mercury division of Ford Motor Company paid \$100,000 for the rights to the song, but not for the use of the original Beatles' recording.^[19] The song was re-created by a sound-alike group with assistance from George Martin.^[20] The US electronics and appliance chain hhgregg used a cover version of the song in their ads starting in 2012. The song was once used in a Halifax advert.

7 Personnel

- John Lennon double-tracked vocal, acoustic twelve-string rhythm guitar
- Paul McCartney bass guitar, backing vocal

- George Harrison lead guitar, backing vocal
- Ringo Starr drums, tambourine

Personnel per Ian MacDonald^[21]

8 Charts and certifications

9 Cover versions

- 1965 The Newbeats on their album, *Run Baby Run*.^[37]
- 1968 Deep Purple cover version on the 'B' side of their first album *Shades of Deep Purple*.^[38]
- 1970: The Carpenters recorded a cover version for their album *Close to You*.^[39]
- 1970: The Muppets sang a cover version of this song on *Sesame Street* in episode 135.
- 1975: Caetano Veloso released a cover on his album, *Jóia*.^[40]
- 1976: Henry Gross covered "Help!" for the musical documentary *All This and World War II*. John Lennon once stated that this was his favourite version of the song; George Harrison and Paul McCartney are backup vocalists.^[41]
- 1976: The Damned covered the song on the B-side of "New Rose".^[42]
- 1979: Dolly Parton included a bluegrass version of "Help!" on her *Great Balls of Fire* album.^[43]
- 1980: John Farnham released the song as a pianobased ballad at a much-slower tempo - the first artist to do so.^[44] His version peaked at No.–8 on the Australian Kent Music Report Singles Chart.^[45]
- 1982: South African rock group Hotline, featuring PJ Powers, released the song as a single.^[46]
- 1984: Tina Turner released a ballad version of the song (recorded with The Crusaders) that peaked at number 14 in the Netherlands, number 25 in Belgium and number 40 in the United Kingdom. The song was included on European editions of her album *Private Dancer*.^[47] It was a staple of her live shows for a time, and appears on her double album *Tina Live in Europe* and the Private Dancer Tour concert film.
- 12 June 1985: Roy Orbison performed a shorter version of the song at much slower tempo for the television documentary *Everyman: John Lennon "Journey In The Life*".^[48]

- 1988 Kids Incorporated covered "Help" in the Season 5 episode "The Guitarist".^[49]
- 1989: The song was recorded by Bananarama (with French & Saunders and Kathy Burke) and released as the Red Nose Day single to raise money for Comic Relief. French, Saunders and Burke were credited as "Lananeeneenoonoo"^[50] (a parody of Bananarama, whom they imitated in the French & Saunders television programme). This version reached #3 in the UK charts, and was featured on the 1989 Christmas episode ("The Jolly Boys Outing") of Only Fools and Horses.
- May 1990: Kylie Minogue performed her band's arrangement of the song before a crowd of 25,000 at the *John Lennon: The Tribute* concert on the banks of the Mersey in Liverpool. Also was included in her 1991 tour Rhythm Of Love Tour^[51]
- 1991: Waltari covered "Help!" on their debut album, *Monk Punk*.^[52]
- 1995: Little Texas recorded a version of the song for the Beatles tribute album *Come Together: America Salutes the Beatles*.^[53]
- 1995: Swedish pop group Roxette recorded an acoustic version during their session at the Abbey Road Studios, where three of their own songs were also re-recorded. It would not be commercially available until 2006, when it was finally released on *The Rox Box/Roxette 86-06* box set.
- 1998: The Punkles recorded a punk cover of the song for their first album.
- 1999: Claire Martin recorded a slower version on her album *Take My Heart* (with Noel Gallagher on guitar).
- 2000: Tsunku covered "Help!" on his Beatles cover album, A Hard Day's Night.
- 2003: Art Paul Schlosser recorded a parody of "Help!" ("Smelt"), which appears on his *Words of Cheese and Other Parrot* CD.
- 2004: Westlife covered the song on their Turnaround Tour.
- 2004: McFly cover the song on CD 2 of their 2004 single Obviously. The cover also appeared on their 2008 EP Lost & Found: McFly Uncovered.^[54]
- 2006: Bebi Dol covered the song on her album, *Čovek rado izvan sebe živi*.^[55]
- 2010: The Trans-Siberian Orchestra began using a slowed-down, rock-ballad version of the song as part of their "Gutter Ballet Medley" in live performances (which also includes the Savatage song "Sleep" (from *Edge of Thorns*) and a short sample of the "Eleanor Rigby" chorus).

- 2010 Vanilla Sky, an Italian punk rock band, covered this song on their "Punk is Dead" cover album.
- 2011: Cloud Cult covered "Help!" for the Minnesota Beatle Project, Vol. 3.
- 2011: Alvin and the Chipmunks and The Chipettes covered the song as a bonus track on the Target limited edition of the soundtrack *Alvin and the Chipmunks: Chipwrecked: Music from the Motion Picture*.
- 2012: American boy band Big Time Rush covered the song (and other Beatles songs) as part of their Big Time Movie and soundtrack.
- 2013: British invasion band Hipsters covered the song as part of their first EP and resulting nation-wide tour.
- 2013: Blaine Anderson (Darren Criss) and Sam Evans (Chord Overstreet) covered the song in *Glee's* fifth season premiere episode "Love Love Love" and the album *Glee Sings the Beatles*.
- Silverstein released a cover version on their fourth album, A Shipwreck in the Sand. "Help!" has also been covered by Michael Stanley, dc Talk, Alma Cogan, Rick Wakeman, Howie Day, Fountains of Wayne, John's Children, Marc Bolan and Peter Sellers. The Rutles' song "Ouch!" is a parody.
- 2016: Dutch cover band MUCK released a cover of "Help!" on the 27th of april 2016 after winning publics favorite award at the "Clash of the Cover bands BENELUX".

10 Cultural references

- The song featured in "Cutting It Close", an episode of *Full House*, when Jesse Katsopolis breaks both of his arms in a motorcycle accident and has to adjust to a life in which he always needs assistance.
- The song was also used in commercials for defunct phone company GTE, during the 1990s.
- The lyrics are quoted in the film *Yellow Submarine*; when Young Fred knocks on the Beatles' door, he says, "Won't you please, please help me?"
- In the *Only Fools and Horses* episode "The Jolly Boys' Outing", Mickey Pearce sings "Won't you please, please help me?" to a sleeping Albert, prompting Albert to tell him to "Get off, you noisy little git!" The version playing on the radio as Mickey sings is the Bananarama cover version rather than the original.
- Several Major League Baseball teams (notably the New York Yankees) play the song when the opposing manager/pitching coach go out for a mound visit.

11 Notes

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13 External links

• Full lyrics of this song at MetroLyrics

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14.1 Text

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