Let It Be (song)

For the cover by Ferry Aid, see Ferry Aid. For the song by Benny Benassi, see Hypnotica (Benny Benassi album).

"Let It Be" is a song by the Beatles, released in March 1970 as a single, and (in an alternate mix) as the title track of their album *Let It Be*. At the time, it had the highest debut on the *Billboard* Hot 100, reaching number 6. It was written and sung by Paul McCartney. It was their final single before McCartney announced his departure from the band. Both the *Let It Be* album and the US single "The Long and Winding Road" were released after McCartney's announced departure from and subsequent break-up of the group.

The alternate mix on their album "Let It Be" features an additional guitar solo and some minor differences in the orchestral sections.

In 1987, the song was recorded by charity supergroup Ferry Aid (which included McCartney). It reached number 1 on the UK Singles Chart for three weeks and reached the top ten in many other European countries.

1 Composition and recording

See also: Jim and Mary McCartney

McCartney said he had the idea of "Let It Be" after he had a dream about his mother during the tense period surrounding the sessions for The Beatles ("the White Album") in 1968. According to McCartney, the song's reference to "Mother Mary" was not a biblical reference.^[2] The phrase has at times been used as a reference to the Virgin Mary, the mother of Jesus Christ;^[2] in fact, the words "let it be" are a direct quote from the Prayer of the Annunciation, Mary's response to the Angel Gabriel in Luke 1.38. Nevertheless, McCartney explained that his mother - who died of cancer when he was fourteen was the inspiration for the "Mother Mary" lyric.^{[3][4]} He later said: "It was great to visit with her again. I felt very blessed to have that dream. So that got me writing 'Let It Be'."[5][6] He also said in a later interview about the dream that his mother had told him, "It will be all right, just let it be."^[7] When asked if the song referred to the Virgin Mary, McCartney has typically answered the question by assuring his fans that they can interpret the song however they would like.^[2]

The first rehearsal of "Let It Be" took place at Twickenham Film Studios on 3 January 1969, where the group had, the previous day, begun what would become the *Let It Be* film. During this stage of the film they were only recording on the mono decks used for syncing to the film cameras, and were not making multi-track recordings for release. A single take was recorded, with just Mc-Cartney on piano and vocals. The first attempt with the other Beatles was made on 8 January. Work continued on the song throughout the month. Multi-track recordings commenced on 23 January at Apple Studios.^[8]

The master take was recorded on 31 January 1969, as part of the "Apple studio performance" for the project. Mc-Cartney played Blüthner piano, Lennon played six-string electric bass, George Harrison and Ringo Starr assumed their conventional roles, on guitar and drums respectively, and Billy Preston contributed on organ.^[9] This was one of two performances of "Let It Be" that day. The first version, designated take 27-A, would serve as the basis for all officially released versions of the song. The other version, take 27-B, was performed as part of the "live studio performance", along with "Two of Us" and "The Long and Winding Road". This performance, in which Lennon and Harrison harmonised with McCartney's lead vocal and Harrison contributed a subdued guitar solo, can be seen in the film *Let It Be*.

The film performance of "Let It Be" has never been officially released as an audio recording. The lyrics in the two versions differ a little in the last verse. The studio version has mother Mary comes to me ... there will be an answer, whereas the film version has mother Mary comes to me ... there will be no sorrow. In addition, McCartney's vocal performance is noticeably different in both versions: in the film version, it sounds a rough in certain moments since he is not using anti-pop on his mic; there are also a couple of falsetto vocals performed by him (extending the vocal 'e' on the word 'be'), for instance in the 'let it be' line that precedes the second chorus. Finally, the instrumental progression featured on the middle of the song after the second chorus (that descends from F to C), which is played twice on all released studio versions, is played (or at least is shown being played) only once in the film.

On 30 April 1969, Harrison overdubbed a new guitar solo on the best take from 31 January.^[10] He overdubbed another solo on 4 January 1970. The first overdub solo was used for the original single release, and the second overdub solo was used for the original album release. Some fans mistakenly believe that there were two versions of the basic track – based mostly on the different guitar solos, but also on other differences in overdubs and mixes.^[11]

1.1 Single version

The single used the same cover photographs as the Let It Be album, and was originally released on 6 March 1970, backed by "You Know My Name (Look Up the Number)", with a production credit for George Martin. This version includes orchestration and backing vocals overdubbed on 4 January 1970, under the supervision of Martin and McCartney, with backing vocals that included the only known contribution by Linda McCartney to a Beatles song.^{[11][12]} It was during this same session that Harrison recorded the second overdubbed guitar solo. The intention at one point was to have the two overdub solos playing together. This idea was dropped for the final mix of the single, and only the 30 April solo was used, although the 4 January overdub can be heard faintly during the final verse. Martin mixed the orchestration very low in this version.^[11]

The single mix made its album debut on the Beatles' *1967–1970* compilation album. Original pressings erroneously show the running time of 4:01 (from the *Let It Be* album), and not the single version's running time of 3:52. This version was also included on *20 Greatest Hits, Past Masters Volume 2* and *1*.

1.2 Album version

On 26 March 1970, Phil Spector remixed the song for the Let It Be album.^[13] This version features the "more stinging" 4 January 1970 guitar solo, no backing vocals (except during the first chorus), a delay effect on Starr's hi-hat, and more prominent orchestration.^[14] The final chorus has three "let it be ..." lines, as the "there will be an answer" line is repeated twice (instead of once as on the single) before the "whisper words of wisdom" line to close the song. On the album, as the preceding track "Dig It" ends, Lennon is heard saving in a falsetto voice, mimicking Gracie Fields: "That was 'Can You Dig It' by Georgie Wood, and now we'd like to do 'Hark, the Angels Come'." Allen Klein brought in Spector to mix the album without telling McCartney or asking for his agreement, because McCartney had not signed Klein's management contract.[15]

1.3 Anthology version

An early version of the song also appears on *Anthology 3*, which was released on 28 October 1996. This version, take 1, was recorded on 25 January 1969. It is a much more simplified version, as McCartney had still not written the final verse yet ("And when the night is cloudy ... I wake up to the sound of music ..."). Instead, the first verse is repeated. The song also features studio talk between Lennon and McCartney prior to another take:

John: Are we supposed to giggle [or per-

haps 'get (a) little'] in the solo? **Paul:** Yeah. **John:** OK. **Paul:** This'll – this is gonna knock you out, boy.

Also, following the end of the recording, Lennon can be heard saying, "I think that was rather grand. I'd take one home with me. OK let's track it. (Gasps) You bounder, you cheat!" (This is a reference to the no-overdub policy that the Beatles had adopted for the *Get Back* project – "tracking" refers to double tracking the vocals on a recording.) The running time of the *Anthology* version is 4:05.

1.4 Let It Be... Naked version

Still another version of the song appeared on the Let It Be... Naked album in 2003. This version contains a different piano track than the one on the studio and single version; it can be noted that in the intro, McCartney plays an extra A bass note during the A minor chord (very similar to the way he plays the intro in the film version) and also plays a standard A minor chord in the piano at the first beat of measure two in the last verse (on the lyric "mother", also like in the film version), while the other versions have a different piano harmonisation which can be easily interpreted as an unfixed mistake. The backing vocals in the chorus of this version are similar to those in the single version, but are stripped back significantly, while still retaining a reverb-heavy, choral effect. Starr disliked Spector's version where his drumming was augmented by Spector's "tape-delay-effect" to his hihats during the song's second verse and added shakers, so Let It Be... Naked features his original "stripped-downapproach" drumming. Also departed were the tom-tom overdub rolls, heard after the guitar solo during the third verse. The guitar solo used in this version - similar to the single version - was taken from the subsequent take as seen in the film "Let It Be". Starr also commented that after the release of Naked, he would now have to listen to McCartney saying, "I told you so", when talking about Spector's production.^[16] The song's running time on Let It Be... Naked is 3:52.^[17]

1.5 Unused mixes

Glyn Johns mixed the song on 28 May 1969 as he finished the mixing for the *Get Back* album. This version was never released.^[18] He used the same mix on 5 January 1970, which was an attempt to compile an acceptable version of the LP. Again, this version of the LP was never officially released.^[19]



Main piano theme

2 Piano theme

The piano introduces the song, through a series of chords in the right hand over single notes in the left hand.

3 Critical reception

In his review of the single, for the *NME*, Derek Johnson admired McCartney's performance and the lyrics' "pseudo-religious" qualities. Although he considered that the melody paled beside some of the band's previous singles, Johnson added: "As ever with The Beatles, this is a record to stop you dead in your tracks and compel you to listen attentively."^[20] John Gabree of *High Fidelity* magazine found the lyrics "dangerous politically", but viewed the song as possibly "the best thing musically that Mc-Cartney has done".^[21]

In 2010, *Rolling Stone* magazine placed "Let It Be" at number 8 on the Beatles' 100 Greatest Songs.^{[22][23]} *Mojo* magazine ranked it at number 50 in a similar list, compiled in 2006.^[24] AllMusic said it was one of "the Beatles' most popular and finest ballads".^[1] Ian MacDonald disagreed, writing that the song "achieved a popularity well out of proportion to its artistic weight" and that it was "Hey Jude', without the musical and emotional release".^[25] Former *Creem* critic Richard Riegel included it on his 1996 list of the ten most overrated Beatles tracks, saying that, like Simon & Garfunkel's "Bridge over Troubled Water", the song "cater[ed] to the lowest-commondenominator emotional stasis of its listeners. 'Let It Be' left the Beatles *no* artistic choice but dissolution."^[26]

Lennon also commented disparagingly on "Let It Be". Prior to a take during the 31 January 1969 recording session, he asked, "Are we supposed to giggle in the solo?"^{[9][25]} (This is a similar quote to Lewisohn's "The Complete Beatles Recording Sessions" (p. 170) but Lennon says "during the solo" not "in the solo" as quoted here.) In Lennon's *Playboy* interview in 1980, he disavowed any involvement with composing the song.

As MacDonald explained, Lennon was wrong about "Bridge over Troubled Water" being McCartney's inspiration. Although Simon & Garfunkel's ballad charted just ahead of "Let It Be", the latter was recorded approximately six months before "Bridge over Troubled Water" was written and a full year before Paul Simon's song was released.^[25]

"Let It Be" holds the top spot on "The Fans' Top 10" poll included in *The 100 Best Beatles Songs: An Informed*

Fan's Guide by Stephen J. Spignesi and Michael Lewis. The song is ranked third on the 100 Best Beatles Songs list, behind "A Day in the Life" and "Strawberry Fields Forever".

4 Live performances

Film of the Beatles performance was shown on the Ed Sullivan Show on February 15, 1970.

Although the song is performed regularly during Mc-Cartney's performances, there are a few notable performances.

- On 13 July 1985, McCartney performed "Let It Be" as one of the closing acts of the Live Aid charity concert in front of an estimated global television audience exceeding one billion people. It was beset by technical difficulties when his microphone failed for the first two minutes of his piano performance, making it difficult for television viewers and impossible for those in the stadium to hear him. As a result, previous performers David Bowie, Bob Geldof, Alison Moyet and Pete Townshend returned to the stage to back him up. He later joked about changing the lyrics to "There will be some feedback, let it be". He re-recorded his vocals afterwards for future home video releases.
- Along with a 700-strong congregation, McCartney, Harrison and Starr sang "Let It Be" during a memorial service for Linda McCartney at St Martin-inthe-Fields church in Trafalgar Square, in 1998.^[28]
- McCartney also led a crowd rousing rendition as part of the finale of the Concert for New York City, a benefit concert he organised, featuring many famous musicians, that took place on 20 October 2001 at Madison Square Garden in New York City in response to the 11 September attacks.
- In 2003, before playing his concert in Moscow's Red Square, McCartney performed a private rendition for Russian president Vladimir Putin in the Kremlin.^[29]
- On 18 July 2008, McCartney performed "Let It Be" with Billy Joel and his band to close the final concert at Shea Stadium in Queens, New York before its demolition.
- On 4 June 2012, McCartney performed the song as part of his set during the Concert for the Queen, celebrating the Diamond Jubilee of Queen Elizabeth II.

5 Personnel

The Beatles

- Paul McCartney lead and backing vocals, piano, maracas, bass (final takes)
- John Lennon six-string bass (early and movie takes), backing vocal
- · George Harrison lead guitar, backing vocal
- Ringo Starr drums

Additional musicians

- Billy Preston organ (except anthology release), electric piano (on single and album releases only)
- Linda McCartney backing vocals (on single and album releases only)
- Peter Halling cello
- Phil Kenzie saxophone and brass arrangements (for two trumpets, a trombone and three saxophones)

6 Singles charts

The Beatles:^[30]

- Release: 6 March 1970
- Tracks: 7" single (Apple) "Let It Be" b/w "You Know My Name (Look Up the Number)"
- Producer: George Martin and Chris Thomas
- UK chart position: number 2
- US Hot 100 chart position: number 1 (2 weeks)
- US easy listening chart position: number 1 (4 weeks)^[31]

On the US charts, the song set a number of milestones.

- 1. The song gave the Beatles their seventh consecutive year charting a number 1 hit, sharing the all-time record, at the time, with Elvis Presley.
- The song gave George Martin his seventh consecutive year producing a number 1 hit, sharing the alltime record, at the time, with Steve Sholes (who produced Presley).
- 3. The song gave Lennon and McCartney their seventh consecutive year writing a number 1 hit, an all-time record at the time.

(see List of Billboard Hot 100 chart achievements and milestones)

7 Cover versions

"Let It Be" has been covered numerous times by various artists:^[32]

- 1970: The first recording of the song to be released (even before the Beatles' version) was a cover by Aretha Franklin, in January 1970, on the album *This Girl's in Love with You*, along with her cover of "Eleanor Rigby".^[33]
- 1971: Joan Baez included "Let It Be" on her album *Blessed Are...*, and released the song as a single. The song also appears on her live album *Diamonds & Rust in the Bullring*, and she performed it at the Isle of Wight Festival 1970, as captured in the film *Message to Love*.^[7]
- 1987: Ferry Aid covered the song as a charity single raising money for victims of the Zeebrugge Disaster. Notable featured artists included McCartney, Boy George, Mark Knopfler and Kate Bush as well as an ensemble chorus made up of media personalities and musicians.^[34]
- 1991: Australian rock band Noiseworks covered the song on their 1991 album *Love Versus Money* and as a live single from their 1992 album*Greatest Hits*.
- 2007: Dyme Def used a sample of the original "Let It Be" in a significantly different hip hop version, also called "Let It Be", on their album *Space Music*.
- 2013: British EDM artist Jimmy Rotten sampled the song's intro on the track "Let Joy Be Unconfined".

8 Charts and certifications

9 Notes

- [1] Unterberger 2009.
- [2] A Lesson on Text Criticism and the Beatles' Let it Be Jeff McLeod, Catholic Stand, 30 July 2013, Accessed 9 February 2014
- [3] Miles 1997, p. 20.
- [4] Spitz 2005, pp. 73-76.
- [5] Spitz 2005, pp. 88–90.
- [6] The Beatles 2000, p. 19.
- [7] Sold on Song 2009.
- [8] The Beatles Bible 2007.
- [9] Lewisohn 1988, p. 170.
- [10] Lewisohn 1988, p. 175.

- [11] Lewisohn 1988, p. 195.
- [12] Lewisohn 1996.
- [13] Lewisohn 1988, p. 198.
- [14] Lewisohn 1988, pp. 195-198.
- [15] Spitz 2005, p. 851.
- [16] The Observer Music Monthly 2003.
- [17] Apple Records 2003.
- [18] Lewisohn 1988, p. 176.
- [19] Lewisohn 1988, p. 196.
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- [21] Gabree, John (August 1970). "Review: The Beatles Let It Be; Paul McCartney McCartney; Ringo Starr Sentimental Journey". High Fidelity. p. 110.
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- [24] Alexander, Phil; et al. (July 2006). "The 101 Greatest Beatles Songs". *Mojo.* p. 80.
- [25] MacDonald 1994, p. 270.
- [26] Riegel, Richard (December 1996). "We Can Work It Out: The Ten Most Over- & Underrated Beatles Songs". *Real Groove*. Available at Rock's Backpages (subscription required).
- [27] Sheff 2000, p. 202.
- [28] CNN 1998.
- [29] BBC News 2003.
- [30] Calkin 2000.
- [31] Whitburn 1996.
- [32] Second Hand Songs 2007.
- [33] Wexler 2007, p. 13.
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11 External links

- Alan W. Pollack's Notes on "Let It Be"
- Lyrics of this song at MetroLyrics

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12.1 Text

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