

Yellow Submarine (song)

For other uses, see [Yellow Submarine \(disambiguation\)](#).

"**Yellow Submarine**" is a 1966 song by the Beatles, written by Paul McCartney (credited to Lennon–McCartney), with lead vocals by Ringo Starr. It was included on the *Revolver* (1966) album and issued as a single, coupled with "Eleanor Rigby". The single went to number one on every major British chart, remained at number one for four weeks, and charted for 13 weeks. It won an Ivor Novello Award "for the highest certified sales of any single issued in the UK in 1966". In the US, the song peaked at number two on the *Billboard* Hot 100 chart and became the most successful Beatles song to feature Starr as lead vocalist.

It became the title song of the animated United Artists film, also called *Yellow Submarine* (1968), and the soundtrack album to the film, released as part of the Beatles' music catalogue. Although intended as a nonsense song for children, "Yellow Submarine" received various social and political interpretations at the time.^[1]

1 Composition

McCartney was living in Jane Asher's parents' house when he found the inspiration for the song:^[2] "I was laying in bed in the Ashers' garret ... I was thinking of it as a song for Ringo, which it eventually turned out to be, so I wrote it as not too rangey in the vocal, then started making a story, sort of an ancient mariner, telling the young kids where he'd lived. It was pretty much my song as I recall ... I think John helped out. The lyrics got more and more obscure as it goes on, but the chorus, melody and verses are mine."^[3] The song began as being about different coloured submarines, but evolved to include only a yellow one.^[4]

In 1980, Lennon talked about the song: "'Yellow Submarine' is Paul's baby. Donovan helped with the lyrics. I helped with the lyrics too. We virtually made the track come alive in the studio, but based on Paul's inspiration. Paul's idea. Paul's title ... written for Ringo."^[5] Donovan added the words, "Sky of blue and sea of green".^[5] McCartney also said: "It's a happy place, that's all. You know, it was just ... We were trying to write a children's song. That was the basic idea. And there's nothing more to be read into it than there is in the lyrics of any children's song."^{[3][6]}

2 Recording

Produced by George Martin and engineered by Geoff Emerick, "Yellow Submarine" was finished after five takes on 26 May 1966, in Studio Two at Abbey Road Studios; special effects were added on 1 June.^[5] Martin drew on his experience as a producer of comedy records for *Beyond the Fringe* and *The Goon Show*, providing an array of zany sound effects to create the nautical atmosphere.^[7] On the second session the studio store cupboard was ransacked for special effects, which included chains, a ship's bell, tap dancing mats, whistles, hooters, waves, a tin bath filled with water, wind, and thunderstorm machines, as well as a cash register, which was later used on Pink Floyd's song "Money" (1973).^[8]

Lennon blew through a straw into a pan of water to create a bubbling effect; McCartney and Lennon talked through tin cans to create the sound of the captain's orders; at 1:38-40 in the song, Starr stepped outside the doors of the recording room and yelled like a sailor, acknowledging "Cut the cable! Drop the cable!", which was looped into the song afterwards; and Abbey Road employees John Skinner and Terry Condon twirled chains in a tin bath to create water sounds.^[5] After the line, "and the band begins to play", Emerick found a recording of a brass band and changed it slightly so it could not be identified, although it is thought to be a recording of Georges Krier and Charles Helmer's composition, "Le Rêve Passe" (1906).^[5] The original recording had a spoken intro by Starr, but the idea was abandoned on 3 June.^[5]

When the overdubs were finished, Mal Evans strapped on a marching bass drum and led everybody in a line around the studio doing the conga dance whilst banging on the drum.^[8]

"Yellow Submarine" was mixed on 2 and 3 June, and finished on 22 June. The mono and stereo versions differ significantly in three parts: the beginning of the track, the "waves" sound effect at the end of the instrumental break, and John's "echoing" vocals on the last verse. In the mono version, the guitar starts at the very beginning ("In the town..."), the waves fade out quickly, and John begins the echo vocals at "a life of ease". In the stereo version, the guitar begins on the word "town", the waves fade out more gradually, and the echo vocals start at "Everyone of us...".

3 Release



Original US release single

The “Yellow Submarine” single was the Beatles’ 13th single release in the United Kingdom. It was released in the UK on 5 August 1966 as a ‘double A side’ with “Eleanor Rigby”, and in the United States on 8 August. In both countries, the album *Revolver* (which also featured both songs) was released on the same day as the single.^[9]

4 Reception and interpretations

The single went to number 1 on every major British chart, remained at number 1 for four weeks and charted for 13 weeks.^[5] It won an Ivor Novello Award for the highest certified sales of any single issued in the UK in 1966. No promotional film clip was made, so some TV programmes (including the BBC’s *Top of the Pops*) created their own clips from stock footage.

In the United States, the single reached number 2 on the *Billboard* Hot 100, number 1 in *Record World*, and number 2 in *Cashbox*, where it was held off number 1 by the Supremes’ “You Can’t Hurry Love”.^[5] The single was released during the controversies about the “Butcher Cover” (the *Yesterday and Today* album cover)^[5] and Lennon’s remarks about Christianity,^[10] which are cited as part of the reason the song failed to reach number 1 on all US charts. It sold 1,200,000 copies in four weeks and earned the Beatles their twenty-first US Gold Record award, beating the record set by Elvis Presley.

Although intended as a nonsense song for children, “Yellow Submarine” received various social and political interpretations at the time; music journalist Peter Doggett wrote that the “culturally empty” song “became a kind of Rorschach test for radical minds.”^[11] The song’s chorus was reappropriated by schoolchildren, sports fans,

and striking workers in their own chants. At a *Mobe* protest in San Francisco, a yellow papier-mâché submarine made its way through the crowd, which *Time* magazine interpreted as a “symbol of the psychedelic set’s desire for escape”.^[11] American poet Amiri Baraka criticized the song as an arrogant, solipsistic boast of White people’s isolation from the real world. A reviewer for the *P.O. Frisco* wrote in 1966, “the Yellow Submarine may suggest, in the context of the Beatles’ anti-Vietnam War statement in Tokyo this year, that the society over which Old Glory floats is as isolated and morally irresponsible as a nuclear submarine.”^[11] Writing for *Esquire*, Robert Christgau felt that the Beatles “want their meanings to be absorbed on an instinctual level” and wrote of the interpretations, “I can’t believe that the Beatles indulge in the simplistic kind of symbolism that turns a yellow submarine into a Nembutal or a banana—it is just a yellow submarine, damn it, an obvious elaboration of John [Lennon]’s submarine fixation, first revealed in *A Hard Day’s Night*.”^[11]

During an interview on *The Howard Stern Show* on 2 May 2014, Donovan describes his interpretation of the meaning of the song, having been with McCartney during the song’s inception: “it’s not really a submarine, it’s really about the life that they had been forced into living inside their own lives in the white tower called ‘Beatle fame’ and not really having any contact with reality out there anymore, and we all live in a yellow.. we are insulated from the outer world.”^[12]

5 Personnel

- Ringo Starr – drums, lead vocals
- Paul McCartney – bass, backing vocals, shouting
- John Lennon – acoustic guitar, backing vocals, shouting
- George Harrison – tambourine, backing vocals
- Mal Evans – bass drum, backing vocals
- George Martin – backing vocals, producer
- Geoff Emerick – backing vocals, engineer
- Neil Aspinall – backing vocals
- Alf Bicknell – sound effects (rattling chains)
- Pattie Boyd – backing vocals
- Marianne Faithfull – backing vocals
- Brian Jones – backing vocals, sound effects (clinking glasses)
- Brian Epstein – backing vocals

Personnel per Ian MacDonald^[13]

6 Charts and certifications

7 Tribute



The Yellow Submarine sculpture

A 51 feet (16 m) long yellow submarine metal sculpture was built by apprentices from the Cammell Laird shipyard, and was used as part of Liverpool's International Garden Festival in 1984. In 2005 it was placed outside Liverpool's John Lennon Airport, where it remains.^[28]

In 2016, for the 50th anniversary of the song's release, the popular die-cast toy car brand Hot Wheels released a 1:64 scale edition of the Yellow Submarine, as well as a six-car series with packaging and decorations based on the film inspired by the song.

8 Popular culture

The song itself is not in the video game *Grand Theft Auto V*, but the submarine in the game is yellow, in reference to the song.

9 Cover versions

In 1966, the Finnish humourgroup "Simo & Spede" made a cover recording named "Keltainen Jäänsärkijä" ("Yellow Icebreaker"), Scandia KS 664, and spent several weeks locally at number 1.

A Swedish cover entitled "Gul gul gul är vår undervattensbåt" ("Yellow yellow yellow is our submarine") was recorded by Swedish singer Per Myrberg in October 1966. In 1998, a rock group called Hjalle & Heavy recorded another Swedish cover, entitled "Gul ubåt" ("Yellow submarine"). This version was sung in a northern Swedish accent with the lyrics being a direct translation, with little to no attention being paid to rhymes and rhythm.

Mrs. Miller included a cover version on her album, *Will Success Spoil Mrs. Miller?* (1966).^[29]

In 1966 the Spanish band Los Mustang ("The Mustangs") recorded a cover entitled *Submarino Amarillo* ("Yellow Submarine"), selling more than 130,000 copies just in Spain. The song and their yellow home kit inspired the eponymous nickname for Spanish football club Villarreal CF.

In 1968, Apple Records issued a single by the Black Dyke Mills Band, which featured a cover version of "Yellow Submarine" as the B-side. In 1966 both Maurice Chevalier and Les Compagnons de la chanson recorded a version in French ("Le Sous-Marin Vert");^{[30][31]} this translates to "The Green Submarine". The song also was covered by Roots Manuva in 2002, in a rap-style single and on his *Badmeaningood 2* album.^[32] It has entered popular usage as a children's song, such as in *Fun Song Factory*, when it was once combined with colourful props and actions, and on *Sesame Street*, where a group of Anything Muppets sang the song inside a yellow submarine (resembling the one from the animated movie). Raffi sang this song on the album, *Let's Play*.

In 2006, Soiled contributed a version of "Yellow Submarine" to BBC Tees celebration of the fortieth anniversary of *Revolver*. Other contributors included The Chapman Family, Das Wunderlust.^[33]

The Royal Philharmonic Orchestra also covered the song, as they have many other famous pop and rock songs, but unlike other songs they have covered, they have also included the lyrics.^[34]

Polish football team Lech Poznań uses a cover of the song translated into Polish as its anthem.

New York-based soul/funk outfit, Revelation, recorded a "Nile Rodgers"-style cover on their album *Feel It* (1981) on Handshake Records (side B, track 2).

9.1 Protester adaptation

The tune of the song has been used in Britain and America by those protesting government actions, with the lyrics changed to "we all live in a Fascist regime".^{[35][36][37][38]}

10 Notes

- [1] Doggett, Peter (6 May 2009). *There's a Riot Going On: Revolutionaries, Rock Stars, and the Rise and Fall of the '60s*. Canongate U.S. pp. 107–108. ISBN 1-84767-193-4.
- [2] Miles 1998, p. 106.
- [3] Beatles Interview Database 2008.
- [4] Turner 2005, p. 109.
- [5] Fontenot 1999.

- [6] Gilliland 1969, show 39, track 2.
- [7] "74 - Yellow Submarine". *100 Greatest Beatles Songs*. Rolling Stone.
- [8] Spitz 2005, p. 612.
- [9] Spitz 2005, p. 629.
- [10] Spitz 2005, p. 627.
- [11] Christgau, Robert (December 1967). "Columns: December 1967". *Esquire*. Retrieved 6 January 2013.
- [12] <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BEyD4v7BjTo>
- [13] MacDonald 2005, p. 206.
- [14] "Yellow submarine in Australian Chart". Poparchives.com.au. Retrieved 17 July 2013.
- [15] "Austriancharts.at – The Beatles – Yellow Submarine" (in German). Ö3 Austria Top 40.
- [16] "Ultratop.be – The Beatles – Yellow Submarine" (in Dutch). Ultratop 50.
- [17] "Yellow submarine in Canadian Top Singles Chart". Library and Archives Canada. Retrieved 17 July 2013.
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- [28] Icons of England 1999.
- [29] "Will Success Spoil Mrs. Miller?!". *Allmusic*. Rovi Corporation. Retrieved 2013-01-28.
- [30] Database.cd 2008.
- [31] Allmusic 2009.
- [32] MTV 2008.
- [33] "Revolver album resurrected on Teesside". BBC Tees. BBC. 18 August 2006. Retrieved 17 February 2013.
- [34] YouTube 2008.
- [35] Robert Booth (April 29, 2011). "Royal wedding: police criticised for pre-emptive strikes against protesters". *The Guardian*.
- [36] Carl O'Brien (July 7, 2005). "Three Irish mummies in vanguard of demonstration". *The Irish Times*.
- [37] Philip Marsh (May 15, 2015). "No One Would Riot for Less: the UK General Election, "Shy Tories" and the Eating of Lord Ashdown's Hat". *The Weeklings*.
- [38] Rachel Campbell (January 21, 2005). "Feeling blue about the inauguration". *The Journal Times*.

11 References

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12 External links

- Lyrics of this song at MetroLyrics

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13.1 Text

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