

# I love Paul McCartney's sappy-ass songs

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I'm gonna come out and say it — I love “When I’m Sixty-Four”, I love “Ob-La-Di, Ob-La-Da”, I love “Penny Lane”, I love all those sappy-ass Paul McCartney songs that are the one thing keeping the Beatles from being as cool as the Stones or the Who or whatever leather-clad edgelords they had to compete with. I even love some of the sappy John songs, like “Good Night”, and I love them because they tap into a primal, happy part of my brain. When I hear these songs I feel the way I imagine animals feel finding food after a long (cold, lonely?) winter.

I was dismayed to see how despised “When I’m Sixty-Four” is in the retrospective think-pieces about how *Sgt. Peppers* isn't as great as it's been anointed to be. [[We didn't run one of those.](#) – Ed.] It seems to be, by and large, the black sheep of the official Best Rock Album Ever Made. It's probably towards the middle of my personal *Sgt. Pepper* rankings, but I can see why it's so loathed. It doesn't rock. It's what John called “granny music” — literally, as it's about getting old. You don't listen to it and feel badass. You feel like you should be eating chicken in a rustic inn in the country. You know, granny stuff. (“I would never dream of writing a song like that”, Lennon grumbled to *Playboy*.)

But it's great. Those sappy Paul songs impart a feeling in my brain I can't quite get anywhere else, though the music of the great Swedish songwriter Jens Lekman comes close. It's the feeling where the auteur pursues their vision to the end of schmaltz, where they think of a fantastic idea and push it beyond good taste into rarified realms occupied only by high school glee clubs and Shirley Temple. It's schmaltz in the service of power. Primal schmaltz, not the manipulative kind exemplified in later Paul concoctions like “Ebony & Ivory” (aww, everyone's equal and happy!) but a kind that sets off the serotonin in your brain and helps you levitate.

Let me cite a few examples in the pop songs of Paul McCartney. The moment when the “ho ho, hee hee, ha ha” comes in on “Ob-La-Di, Ob-La-Da” and brings us to the inevitable “happy ever after.” The part in “Yellow Submarine” where Ringo sings the line and a jolly, red-cheeked old sea captain shouts his words back to him through a megaphone, drunk with laughter. There's so much laughter in Paul's songs — his own and others'. How about on “Penny Lane” when he sings “it's a clean machine” and that fire bell comes bounding into sight like a dog down the stairs? These are moments where the song achieves liftoff. On “When I’m Sixty-Four”, it's those bell hits—DING, dun-dun, DING—before that ridiculous little clarinet brings the song full circle.

I can understand why these songs are so loathed. We like edgy. John liked edgy — even his sappy songs were sardonic, like “Good Night” and the way Ringo whispers, no, hisses the title through acres of cottonmouth. What is interesting is that these songs are singled out in the catalog of a band whose discography is mostly sappy. Even their gnarliest music is. “Helter Skelter” is about riding a kids' carnival slide, for fuck's sake. On “Blue Jay Way”, one of the most mind-melting psych songs of the '60s, George talks about his *bedtime*. John's songs might have been acrid, especially on *Rubber Soul*, but they're no one's idea of raw, badass, chain-smoking rock 'n' roll. If you want the Beatles, you have to take the silly love songs. It's a package deal.

I've had enough antiheroes and angst for a lifetime. I wish there was more art that enthralled, exhilarated, made me feel genuinely happy. A lot of the time you just can't get that with nuanced, “serious” adult art. Something like *The Sopranos* gives you a lot to chew on as far as the depths of human nature are concerned — and that's fine, when you want that. But I suspect many people deny themselves great experiences through cinema or music because they feel art that aims to inspire true, primal happiness is somehow shameful, dishonest, artless, or insipid.

Recently I watched *Happy Feet* with a good friend and her cantankerous hipster boyfriend, who couldn't stop mocking it. “I don't remember how this movie goes”, said the friend. “The penguin gets addicted to meth”, sighed the boyfriend. He wanted to watch *Fight Club*. Confronted with art that didn't confirm his masculinity, all he could do was

crack edgy jokes to make himself feel better about the fact he was watching a movie for kids, who don't lift weights or read Bukowski.

Imagine the art we could enjoy if we just got those silly preconceptions out of our heads. I think pop culture is moving away from them. Pop music is being taken more seriously than ever in critical discourse. The moody heroin malaise of the '90s is falling out of favor; instead of morose Dark Knights, our heroes are wise-cracking Chris Pratts and wholesome Wonder Women. Even rap, macho for so much of its existence, now embraces warmth and goodness. D.R.A.M. sings "I choose you like a Pokemon." One of our rap heroes is a candy-colored sprite named Lil Yachty who samples the Rugrats. Admittedly, his mouth is fouler than Mamet's, but so be it.

One of my favorite artists on the web is named [Ben Montero](#). You might know him for his art for the Australian band Pond. His art isn't dark, thought-provoking, or even funny but tends to simply show a bunch of cartoon animals having a great time together. The first comic from him I ever saw showed a bunch of critters making a stew together. "I have eggs!" shouts one. "I have carrots!" shouts another. "I have nothing", cries a guilty little frog. "You have a spoon!" his friends respond. "You have a bowl! There's enough for everyone!" Cut to everyone eating together.

His art's been called communist propaganda, and maybe it is, but it didn't make me want to go out and start a class war. It made me genuinely, animalistically happy, in the same way the music of Paul McCartney does, and it's a feeling I wouldn't trade for anything in the world.

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