

I MAY APPEAR TO BE IMPERFECT: THE BEATLES' "WORST" SONGS

Getting into lists of "worst" anything is a tricky business, doubly dangerous if you're talking about the Beatles. When a large group gathered on August 5, 2007 at the Chicago Fest for Beatles Fans to make suggestions on this topic, the opinions flew fast and furious, causing sympathetic nods, Amens, cries of objection, and even (at least after the suggestion of "Old Brown Shoe") gasps of disbelief.

The authors do not necessarily endorse the choices listed below. We chose ten nominees that generally have been considered among the group's "worst" songs, even though each of us (Rob and Stu) actually enjoy a few of the ten "worst" selected, as well as many of the other nominees.

Here are those audience members who wished to be identified...thank you, and the others who didn't give their names, for your input!

Annette Molitor, Portland, OR
Felicia Reilly, Chicago, IL
Regi Mezydlo, Elmhurst, IL
Joe Norwood, Burlington, WI
Sara Slonaker (Starshyne), Alton, IL
Elizabeth Hindman, Schaumburg, IL
Bob Purse, Prospect Heights, IL
Lynn Schmidt, Elmwood Park, IL
Karen Jackson, Chicago, IL
Cara Carpenter, Chicago, IL
Sheila Spica, Chicago, IL
Kathy Baum, Lombard, IL
Craig & Terry
Charles Pekow, Bethesda, MD
Cecilia Garibay, Chicago, IL
Suz Magerlein, Chicago, IL
Rita Rossi-Foulkes, Riverside, IL
Rich Foulkes, Riverside, IL
Rob & Janet
Wally Podrazik, Chicago, IL
Robert Rodriguez, Elmhurst, IL
Stuart Shea, Chicago, IL

TEN "WORST BEATLES SONGS" NOMINEES

"BLUE JAY WAY" (1967)

George's sole production on the *Magical Mystery Tour* soundtrack accurately conveys the foggy, drug-induced state he, and the other Fabs, were in for much of 1967. Forsaking Indian instrumentation for electric organ and heaps of electronic "phasing," Harrison turned out a song perhaps not up to his standards of the past 18 months. He would return to form with early 1968's "The Inner Light," a lovely tune used as the b-side to the "Lady Madonna" 45.

"DR. ROBERT" (1966)

Despite its bouncy guitars, compact structure, and menacing overtones in the bridge, "Dr. Robert" seems to be a lost opportunity. The guitar parts seem overly choppy and far from focused, and Ringo's beat lacks subtlety and just doesn't rock hard enough.

Lennon's tale of a drug distributor was originally thought to be either a New York quack who shot up celebrities or the dentist who supplied John and George their first LSD, but later Lennon admitted it was about himself as much as anything. Given his prodigious drug intake at the time, this seems plausible.

"I WANNA BE YOUR MAN" (1963)

Ringo Starr's second lead vocal on a Beatle record is the only group original he'd get his hands on until *Rubber Soul*. John and Paul weren't wasting much time writing songs for the drummer, letting him instead have some of the covers that they themselves had earlier handled on stage.

This rocking R&B-influenced cut ended up as one of two songs ("Money" the other) recorded by both the Beatles and the Rolling Stones. While Ringo simply sang his heart out on this rollicking version, Mick & Co. gave it a more bluesy edge, with Brian Jones playing slide guitar.

"MAXWELL'S SILVER HAMMER" (1969)

Paul's weird homicide narrative became the subject of much consternation during the *Abbey Road* sessions.

Pulling out all the stops to make his brainchild a single, Paul spent hours on overdubs of synthesizer, guitar, and even anvil (!)...but as Lennon later said, "he did everything to make it into a single and it never was and it never could've been"—not only the subject matter, but for its fussy, cloying sweetness. Lyrics aside, this song, and perhaps "Hello Goodbye," are the closest the Fabs ever got to a "bubblegum" sound

"MR. MOONLIGHT" (1964)

Back in the Hamburg days, this Dr. Feelgood & the Interns chestnut served as one of the Beatles' wildest stage numbers. (Proof that they could rock up any song is found on the Star-Club album.)

Unfortunately, when the time came in late 1964 for the Fabs to record a new album for the Christmas rush, they were exhausted from a summer of touring. Having discovered the effects of pot, they were not overly excited about getting back to the grind.

Among the six "cover" songs on *Beatles For Sale* is "Mr. Moonlight." For some inexplicable reason, the band decided to add some "drama" to the proceedings with exotic percussion, a slower tempo, and Hammond organ, both of which helped transform "Moonlight" into a plodding, almost comical piece.

"REVOLUTION 9" (1968)

There exists little middle ground among Beatles fans concerning Lennon's "White Album" sound collage; either you like it or you don't. And those who don't are vociferous in their criticism. It's not for everyone—not that Lennon ever did things to please everyone. Recall that during the 1965 *Blackpool Night Out* television appearance he introduced "Help!" as being either their latest record "or our latest electronic noise, depending whose side you're on."

"SHE'S LEAVING HOME" (1967)

And for every Beatles fan who can't stand John's far-out tendencies, someone else can't stand McCartney's more unctuous inclinations.

While "Yesterday" and "Eleanor Rigby" featured strings with sympathetic, spare arrangements (courtesy of George Martin), the frankly syrupy and sentimental chart written for "She's Leaving Home" by Mike Leander rubs a lot of people the wrong way. It is debatable whether a string arrangement written by Martin himself would have helped make the song much better; a lot of Beatles fans simply don't like the song itself.

"WHAT'S THE NEW MARY JANE?" (1968)

John's screw-you state during the sessions for *The Beatles* led him to experiment with avant-garde techniques as much, arguably, to piss off his bandmates as to tread new territory.

Lennon, not satisfied with having "Revolution 9" on the album, wanted "Mary Jane"—a not-quite-song featuring atonal whistles and cries from Yoko Ono, George Harrison, and others—to be issued as a single. Showing uncommon agreement for the time, the other

three Beatles balked. Frankly, the idea that this loony creation could ever have been a 45 simply boggles the mind.

“WILD HONEY PIE” (1968)

Paul’s solo excursion sits between “Ob-La-Di, Ob-La-Da” and “The Continuing Story of Bungalow Bill” on side one of the “White Album.” Clocking in at just 1:02, “Wild Honey Pie” is about 62 seconds too long for a lot of Beatles fans, who wonder about the entire point of this loosey-goosey piece of fluff. Apparently, however, it was a favorite track of Pattie Harrison’s. (This number is not to be confused with side four’s “Honey Pie,” another Macca track disliked by a large legion of Beatle people.)

“YOU KNOW MY NAME (LOOK UP THE NUMBER)” (1970)

Recorded in 1967 and finally let out of its cage in 1970 as the flip side to the “Let it Be” 45, “You Know My Name” began as a Motown pastiche, with Lennon banging out piano chords that reminded him of those on a Four Tops record. Choosing fairly early on to go the comedy route, the Fabs turned it into a Goons-type showcase for silly voices, sound effects, and a sax solo from the Rolling Stones’ Brian Jones. The unedited version, issued for the first time on *Anthology 3*, either prolongs the agony or helps explain the whole enterprise, depending on your point of view.

OTHER “WORST SONG” NOMINEES

“A Taste of Honey”

“Anna”

“Boys”

“Chains”

“Devil in Her Heart”

“Everybody’s Got Something to Hide Except for Me and My Monkey”

“Helter Skelter”

“Her Majesty”

“Honey Pie”

“Maggie Mae”

“Michelle”

“Old Brown Shoe”

“Savoy Truffle”

“Sgt. Pepper’s Lonely Hearts Club Band”

“The Long and Winding Road”

“There’s a Place”

“While My Guitar Gently Weeps”