

# Sirius or Not Sirius

(August 2024)

The following lines were published recently by an otherwise outstanding writer and entertainer, whom the author of this short commentary respects and appreciates undividedly (footnotes added):

"It was on this day (August 20) in 1977 that Voyager 2 was launched by NASA to explore the planets of our solar system and to take the first up-close photographs of the giant planets Jupiter, Saturn, Uranus, and Neptune <sup>1</sup> .

Just before the Voyagers took off, a committee of scientists, led by Carl Sagan, decided to put on board each Voyager a message from Earth in case extraterrestrials ever found them <sup>2</sup> . At the time, the Cold War was at its height, and some members of the committee considered that these spacecraft and their contents might be the last traces of the human race left in the universe after a nuclear war. The Voyagers were each equipped with a gold-plated phonograph containing a variety of earthly sounds <sup>3</sup> , including a heartbeat, a mother's kiss, wind, rain, surf, a chimpanzee, footsteps, laughter, the music of Bach and Mozart, and the Chuck Berry song "Johnny Be Good" <sup>4</sup> . Carl Sagan said, "The launching of this bottle into the cosmic ocean says something very hopeful about life on this planet." <sup>5</sup>

Today, the Voyagers have traveled farther from Earth than any other human-made objects in history. Both have gone well beyond Pluto, the farthest planet <sup>6</sup> from the sun. Voyager 2, which launched on this day in 1977, is currently approaching <sup>7</sup> the outer limits of our solar system <sup>8</sup> , headed toward Sirius <sup>9</sup> , the brightest star in the sky."

---

<sup>1</sup> *Up to that point a remarkable feat;*

<sup>2</sup> *Letting alone the case for extraterrestrials, one could make the case of the one single needle in 1,000 trillion trillion trillion haystacks, and that's only considering one single Sirius among the more or less 150 billion stars in just one galaxy;*

<sup>3</sup> *Which can only be heard in an atmosphere;*

<sup>4</sup> *Included also some non-Caucasian music and a toddler [saying hello in English](#);*

<sup>5</sup> *Hopeful, or hopelessly senseless;*

<sup>6</sup> *To those who will object that Pluto is not a planet, the matter is one of definition only;*

<sup>7</sup> *The whole idea of travel is to approach;*

<sup>8</sup> *If the point of equal attraction to Sun and Sirius, that would be 3.1 light years away, reached in year 106,634 AD or about (don't forget to mark your calendar);*

<sup>9</sup> *A further 5.4 light years, reached in year 289,608 AD or about (idem about your calendar).*