

= Blue Jay Way =

" Blue Jay Way " is a song recorded by the English rock group the Beatles . Written by George Harrison , it was released in 1967 on the band 's Magical Mystery Tour EP and album . The song was named after a street in the Hollywood Hills of Los Angeles where Harrison stayed in August 1967 , shortly before visiting the Haight @-@ Ashbury district of San Francisco . The lyrics document Harrison 's wait for music publicist Derek Taylor to find his way to Blue Jay Way through the fog @-@ ridden hills , while Harrison struggled to stay awake after the flight from London to Los Angeles .

As with several of Harrison 's compositions from this period , " Blue Jay Way " incorporates aspects of Indian classical music , although the Beatles used only Western instrumentation on the track , including a drone @-@ like Hammond organ part played by Harrison . Created during the group 's psychedelic period , the track makes extensive use of studio techniques such as flanging , Leslie rotary effect , and reversed tape sounds . The song appeared in the Beatles ' 1967 television film Magical Mystery Tour , in a sequence that visually re @-@ creates the sense of haziness and dislocation evident on the recording .

While some reviewers have dismissed the song as monotonous , many others have admired its yearning quality and dark musical mood . The website Consequence of Sound describes " Blue Jay Way " as " a haunted house of a hit , adding an ethereal , creepy mythos to the City of Angels " . Among its continued links with Los Angeles , the song was one of the first Beatles tracks that cult leader Charles Manson adopted as the foundation for his Helter Skelter theory of an American race @-@ related countercultural revolution . Artists who have covered the song include Bud Shank , Colin Newman , Tracy Bonham , Siouxsie and the Banshees and Greg Hawkes .

= = Background and inspiration = =

George Harrison wrote " Blue Jay Way " after arriving in Los Angeles on 1 August 1967 with his wife Pattie Boyd and Beatles aides Neil Aspinall and Alex Mardas . The purpose of the trip was to spend a week with Derek Taylor , the Beatles ' former press officer and latterly the publicist for California @-@ based acts such as the Byrds and the Beach Boys . The visit also allowed Harrison to reunite with his sitar tutor , Ravi Shankar , whose Kinnara School of Music and upcoming concert at the Hollywood Bowl he helped publicise .

The title of the song came from a street named Blue Jay Way , one of the " bird streets " high in the Hollywood Hills West area overlooking the Sunset Strip , where Harrison had rented a house for his stay . Jet @-@ lagged after the flight from London , he began writing the composition on a Hammond organ as he and Boyd waited for Taylor and the latter 's wife , Joan , to join them . The home 's location , on a hillside of narrow , winding roads , together with the foggy conditions that night , created the backdrop for the song 's opening lines : " There 's a fog upon L.A. / And my friends have lost their way . " Harrison had almost completed the song by the time the Taylors arrived , around two hours later than planned .

The week with Taylor proved to be important for the direction of the Beatles . At the height of the Summer of Love and the popularity of the band 's Sgt. Pepper 's Lonely Hearts Club Band album , Harrison , Taylor and their small entourage visited the international " hippie capital " of Haight @-@ Ashbury , in San Francisco , on 7 August . Harrison had expected to encounter an enlightened community engaged in artistic pursuits and working to create a viable alternative lifestyle ; instead , he was disappointed that Haight @-@ Ashbury appeared to be populated by drug addicts , dropouts and " hypocrites " . Following his return to England two days later , Harrison completed work on " Blue Jay Way " at his home in Esher . He also shared his disillusionment about Haight @-@ Ashbury with John Lennon , soon after which the Beatles publicly denounced the popular hallucinogen LSD (or " acid ") and other drugs in favour of Transcendental Meditation under Maharishi Mahesh Yogi . While noting Harrison 's role in " inspir [ing] the West 's mainstream acquaintance with Hindu religion " through his leadership in this aspect of the Beatles ' career , author Ian MacDonald describes " Blue Jay Way " as a " farewell to psychedelia " , just as " It 's All

Too Much " , which the Beatles recorded in May 1967 , became Harrison 's " farewell to acid " .

= = Composition = =

= = = Music = = =

" Blue Jay Way " was one of several songs that Harrison composed on a keyboard over 1966 ? 68 ? a period when , aside from in his work with the Beatles , he had abandoned his first instrument , the guitar , to master the sitar , partly under Shankar 's tutelage . The song is in 4 / 4 time throughout ; its structure consists of an intro , three combinations of verse and chorus , followed by repeated choruses . While MacDonald gives the musical key as " C major (minor , diminished) " , musicologist Alan Pollack views it as a mix of C major and C modal , and acknowledges the " highly unusual " incorporation of the notes D ? and F ? . The inclusion of the latter note suggests the Lydian mode , which , according to musicologist Walter Everett , had only been heard previously in popular music in the Left Banke 's 1966 single " Pretty Ballerina " .

The song 's melody oscillates over the chords of C major and C diminished , a chord favoured by Harrison in his Indian music @-@ inspired compositions for the Beatles . Acknowledging Harrison 's statement that the tune is " slightly Indian " , Everett considers " Blue Jay Way " to be related to the ragas Kosalam and Multani . According to author Simon Leng , however , Harrison based the song partly on Raga Marwa . Following the inclusion of a raga @-@ style introduction (or alap) in his previous Indian compositions , " Love You To " and " Within You Without You " , " Blue Jay Way " begins with a preview of the song 's melody played softly , in free time , over the opening drone . Author Ian Inglis credits the song 's incorporation of ambient drone , specifically its role in providing " an anchorage point for vocal and instrumental improvisation " , as one of the first examples of a musical device that soon became prevalent in the work of Fairport Convention , the Incredible String Band and other folk artists .

The length of the verses falls short of an even eight bars through the omission of a final beat . Pollack recognises this detail as reflecting a sense of impatience , in keeping with the circumstances surrounding the song 's creation . Following the third verse ? chorus combination , the outro comprises four rounds of the chorus , with the lyrics to the final round consisting of the repeated " Don 't be long " refrain . As a feature that Pollack terms " compositionally impressive " , each of the four sections in this outro varies in structure by being either shorter in length or less musically detailed .

= = = Lyrics = = =

The lyrics to " Blue Jay Way " relate entirely to Harrison 's situation on that first night in Los Angeles . He refers to fighting off sleep and recalls his advice to Taylor to ask a policeman for directions to Blue Jay Way . Author Jonathan Gould views the song as " darkly funny " , with the singer 's concern over his friends ' tardiness almost resembling " a metaphysical crisis " . In the choruses , Harrison repeatedly urges " Please don 't be long / Please don 't you be very long " , a refrain that Inglis identifies as central to the composition 's " extraordinary sense of yearning and melancholy " .

Taylor later expressed amusement at how some commentators interpreted " don 't be long " as meaning " don 't belong " ? a message to Western youth to opt out of society ? and at how the line " And my friends have lost their way " supposedly conveyed the idea that " a whole generation had lost direction " . With regard to whether Harrison was telling contemporary listeners not to " belong " , Inglis writes , this " alternative reading " of the song aligned with Timothy Leary 's catchphrase for the 1960s American psychedelic experience , " Turn on , tune in , drop out " . In Gould 's opinion , the continual repetition of the line at the end of " Blue Jay Way " transforms the words into " a plea for nonattachment ? ' don 't belong ' " . Rather than attaching any countercultural significance to this , however , Gould views it as the Beatles repeating the wordplay first used in the chorus of Lennon 's 1963 song " It Won 't Be Long " .

= = Production = =

= = = Recording = = =

The Beatles began recording " Blue Jay Way " on 6 September 1967 at EMI 's Abbey Road Studios in London . The song was Harrison 's contribution to the television film *Magical Mystery Tour* , the first project undertaken by the band following the death of their manager , Brian Epstein . Author Nicholas Schaffner describes " Blue Jay Way " as the first Harrison @-@ written Beatles recording on which he " adapt [ed] some of his Indian @-@ derived ideas to a more Western setting " , with Hammond organ , cello and drums serving the function of , respectively , tambura drone , sitar and tabla .

The group achieved a satisfactory rhythm track in a single take . On 7 September , this recording ? comprising two organ parts , bass guitar and drums ? was reduced to two tracks on the 4 @-@ track master tape , after which Harrison overdubbed his double @-@ tracked lead vocal , and he , Lennon and Paul McCartney added backing vocals . Among Beatles biographers , MacDonald credits Harrison as the sole organ player on the song , while Kenneth Womack and John Winn write that Lennon played the second keyboard part . Recording was completed at Abbey Road on 6 October , with the addition of tambourine , played by Ringo Starr , and cello . The latter was performed by an unnamed session musician . As with all the songs recorded for *Magical Mystery Tour* , final mixing was carried out on 7 November .

= = = Studio effects = = =

" Blue Jay Way " features extensive use of three studio techniques employed by the Beatles over 1966 ? 67 : flanging , an audio delay effect ; sound @-@ signal rotation via a Leslie speaker ; and (in the stereo mix only) reversed tapes . Beatles historian Mark Lewisohn compares " Blue Jay Way " with two Lennon tracks from this period , " Strawberry Fields Forever " and " I Am the Walrus " , in that the recording " seized upon all the studio trickery and technical advancements of 1966 and 1967 and captured them in one song " . Together with the pedal drone supplied by the keyboard parts , the various sound treatments reinforce the sense of dislocation evident in the song .

In the case of the reversed @-@ tape technique , a recording of the completed track was played backwards and faded in at key points during the performance . This effect created a response to Harrison 's lead vocal over the verses , as the backing vocals appear to answer each line he sings . Due to the limits of multitracking , the process of feeding in reversed sounds was carried out live during the final mixing session . Described by Lewisohn as " quite problematical " , the process was not repeated when the Beatles and their production team worked on the mono mix .

= = Appearance in *Magical Mystery Tour* film = =

The song 's segment in *Magical Mystery Tour* was shot mainly at RAF West Malling , an air force base near Maidstone in Kent , during the week beginning on 19 September . Described by Womack as " the movie 's hazy , psychedelic sequence " , it features Harrison sitting on a pavement and playing a chalk @-@ drawn keyboard . Dressed in a red suit , he is shown busking on a roadside ; next to his keyboard are a white plastic cup and a message written in chalk , reading : " 2 wives and kid to support " . The depiction of Harrison , seated in the lotus position and seemingly zoned out , matched his public image as the most committed of the Beatles to Transcendental Meditation and Eastern philosophy .

The filming took place in an aircraft hangar , with the scene designed to re @-@ create a typically smog @-@ ridden Los Angeles . Music journalist Kit O 'Toole writes that the smoke surrounding Harrison " almost engulf [s] him , mimicking the ' fog ' described in the lyrics " . Through the use of prismatic photography , the " Blue Jay Way " segment also shows Harrison 's " image refracted as if

seen through a fly 's eye " , according to author Alan Clayson , who describes the scene as mirroring " the requisite misty atmosphere " suggested by the recording . In its preview of Magical Mystery Tour in 1967 , the NME highlighted the segment as one of the film 's " extremely clever " musical sequences , saying : " For ' Blue Jay Way ' George is seen sitting cross @-@ legged in a sweating mist which materialises into a variety of shapes and patterns . It 's a pity that most TV viewers will be able to see it only in black and white . "

At other times during the sequence , the four Beatles alternate in the role of a solo cellist . These scenes were filmed on 3 November , on the rockery at Sunny Heights , Starr 's house in Weybridge , Surrey . Tony Barrow , the production manager for Magical Mystery Tour , recalls that , as " a colourful conclusion " to the segment , they set off fireworks that had been bought for the upcoming Guy Fawkes Night celebrations . The version of " Blue Jay Way " appearing in the 2012 DVD release of Magical Mystery Tour is an alternative edit and includes some previously unused footage . O 'Toole admires the " Blue Jay Way " sequence as " one of the film 's too @-@ few bright spots " and " a perfect representation of the track 's hallucinatory qualities " .

= = Release and reception = =

" Blue Jay Way " was issued in Britain as the final song on the Magical Mystery Tour double EP on 8 December 1967 . In America , where Capitol Records had combined the six EP tracks with five songs issued on the band 's singles throughout the year , creating a full album , the release took place on 27 November .

Reviewing the EP for the NME , Nick Logan considered it to be " Sergeant Pepper and beyond , heading for marvellous places " , during which " we cruise down ' Blue Jay Way ' with [Harrison] almost chanting the chorus line . A church organ starts this one off and leads us into a whirlpool of sound ... " Among reviews of the US release , Saturday Review admired the album as a " description of the Beatles ' acquired Hindu philosophy and its subsequent application to everyday life " , while Robert Christgau wrote in Esquire that , despite three of the new songs being " disappointing " , Magical Mystery Tour was " worth buying ... especially for Harrison 's hypnotic ' Blue Jay Way ' " . Christgau described the track as " an adaptation of Oriental modes in which everything works , lyrics included " .

In a combined review of concurrent releases such as Magical Mystery Tour , the Rolling Stones ' Their Satanic Majesties Request and Cream 's Disraeli Gears , Hit Parader praised the Beatles for further " widening the gap between them and 80 scillion other groups " . The reviewer added : " The master magicians practice their alchemy on Harrison 's ' Blue Jay Way ' , recorded perhaps in an Egyptian tomb , and ' I Am The Walrus ' , a piece of terror lurking in foggy midnight moors . These two songs accomplish what the Stones attempted . "

= = Retrospective assessment = =

A critic of the Beatles ' output immediately post @-@ Sgt. Pepper , Ian MacDonald found " Blue Jay Way " " as unfocused and monotonous as most of the group 's output of this period " , adding that the song " numbingly fails to transcend the weary boredom that inspired it " . Writing for Rolling Stone in 2002 , Greg Kot considered it to be " one of [Harrison 's] least @-@ memorable Beatles tracks ? a song essentially about boredom ? and it sounds like it " . Similarly unimpressed with Magical Mystery Tour , Tim Riley describes " Blue Jay Way " as a song that " goes nowhere tiresomely " , with a vocal that " sounds as tired and droning " as the musical accompaniment .

Ian Inglis writes that the emotion Harrison conveys on the track " belies its apparently trivial lyrics " and that , together with the instrumentation and backing vocals , his pleas " create an unusually atmospheric and strangely moving song " . Writing for Rough Guides , Chris Ingham deems the song to be " essential Beatlemusic " ; he views it as Harrison 's " most haunting and convincing musical contribution of the period " , after " Within You Without You " , as well as " possibly the most unnerving of all Beatles tracks " . In a 2002 review for Mojo , Charles Shaar Murray described the song as " eerie , serpentine " and " a fine and worthy companion for Pepper 's Within You Without

You " . Writing in Uncut that same year , Carol Clerk called it " a weirdly atmospheric triumph " .

In his book *Indian Music and the West* (1997) , Gerry Farrell refers to the song when discussing its author 's contribution to popularising Indian classical music , writing : " It is a mark of Harrison 's sincere involvement with Indian music that , nearly thirty years on , the Beatles ' ' Indian ' songs remain among the most imaginative and successful examples of this type of fusion ? for example , ' Blue Jay Way ' and ' The Inner Light . ' " Simon Leng writes of the song : " Harrison was working at a sophisticated level of extrapolating Indian scales to the Western setting , something no one else had done ? ' Blue Jay Way ' explores the structures of Indian music just as ' Within You Without You ' debates its philosophical roots . " In her song review for the music website *Something Else !* , Kit O 'Toole describes " Blue Jay Way " as one of its composer 's " most eccentric and abstract compositions " and " the perfect snapshot of the Beatles ' most unusually creative artistic phase " . Former Record Collector editor Peter Doggett , writing in Barry Miles ' *The Beatles Diary* , similarly admires the recording , saying that the Beatles rendered the song " an exotic , almost mystical journey " that evokes a mysterious Eastern mood " without a single Indian instrument being employed " .

In his 2009 review for *Consequence of Sound* , Dan Caffrey highlights the track among the " stellar moments in the album 's first half " and considers it to be " George Harrison 's most underrated song " . Caffrey adds : " For a piece inspired by the simple act of waiting for a friend to arrive at his Los Angeles home on a foggy night , ' Blue Jay Way ' is a haunted house of a hit , adding an ethereal , creepy mythos to the City of Angels . " Writing for *The A.V. Club* , Chuck Klosterman describes the song as being among " the trippiest ... material [the Beatles] ever made " , while Mark Kemp of *Paste* views it as " wonderfully wobbly " . Scott Plagenhoef of *Pitchfork Media* includes " Blue Jay Way " among the EP 's four " low @-@ key marvels " , about which he opines : " Few of them are anyone 's all @-@ time favorite Beatles songs ... yet this run seems to achieve a majesty in part because of that : It 's a rare stretch of amazing Beatles music that can seem like a private obsession rather than a permanent part of our shared culture . "

= = Cover versions and cultural references = =

Lord Sitar included " Blue Jay Way " on his 1968 album of Indian music @-@ style recordings , titled *Lord Sitar* . The artist credit was a pseudonym for London session guitarist Big Jim Sullivan , although rumours circulated that Lord Sitar was in fact Harrison himself , partly as a result of EMI / Capitol 's refusal to deny the claim . Also in 1968 , jazz saxophonist and flautist Bud Shank , another associate of Ravi Shankar , recorded the song for his album *Magical Mystery* .

" Blue Jay Way " was a rare Beatles song released before their 1968 self @-@ titled double album that Charles Manson adopted as part of his theory of an impending social revolution in the United States , a scenario that led to his followers carrying out a series of murders in Los Angeles during the summer of 1969 . Finding parallels between the Beatles ' lyrics and the Book of Revelation , and believing himself to be the messiah , Manson interpreted Harrison 's opening verse and chorus as the Beatles calling out to Jesus Christ .

Colin Newman , singer and guitarist with the post @-@ punk band Wire , included a cover of " Blue Jay Way " on his 1982 solo album *Not To* . In March 2015 , the song was also his selection for the NME 's " 100 Greatest Beatles Songs " poll . Newman cited the track as an example of how the Beatles were " properly serious about their art " and why they now " need to be rescued from the clammy clutches of the heritage industry " .

Borbetomagus released a live recording of the song on their 1992 album *Buncha Hair That Long* , a version that Trouser Press later said " could easily reunite the Beatles for good if it were played in the presence of the surviving trio " . On their 2003 live album *Seven Year Itch* , Siouxsie and the Banshees included a reading that , according to *The Guardian* 's reviewer , " transformed [the song] into an apocalyptic howl " . Other artists who have covered " Blue Jay Way " include Tracy Bonham , on her 2007 album *In the City + In the Woods* , and the Secret Machines , whose version appears in the Julie Taymor @-@ directed film *Across the Universe* (2007) . Former Cars keyboardist Greg Hawkes recorded a ukulele rendition for his 2008 solo album *The Beatles Uke* .

Harrison 's experience when writing " Blue Jay Way " is referenced in the Jonathan Kellerman novel Obsession (2007) , as the lead character , Alex Delaware , waits among the " bird streets " overlooking Sunset Strip . The US hip hop group Death Grips quote from the song 's lyrics in their 2012 track " Double Helix " , released on The Money Store , an album that Clash magazine described as sounding like " the burning skies of LA 's decaying empire " .

In a 2011 interview , music producer and radio host Kim Fowley identified " Blue Jay Way " as the first song in which a member of the Beatles wrote about America and cited it as evidence of Harrison 's standing as " the most American of all the Beatles " during the 1960s . Fowley highlighted this connection ? including Harrison 's friendships with David Crosby of the Byrds and other California @-@ based musicians , such as Leon Russell ? as the foundation for rock music 's first all @-@ star charity concert , the Concert for Bangladesh , which Harrison staged in New York in August 1971 .

Due to the attention created by the Beatles ' song , the street signs for Blue Jay Way have long been collector 's items for fans visiting the Hollywood Hills . In May 2015 , a lane in the Heavitree area of Exeter , in the English county of Devon , was named Blue Jay Way after the song . In addition to much of the filming for Magical Mystery Tour having taken place at various locations in the West Country , the title commemorates the Beatles ' three concert appearances at Exeter 's ABC Cinema over 1963 ? 64 .

= = Personnel = =

According to Ian MacDonald :

George Harrison ? lead vocals , Hammond organ , backing vocal

John Lennon ? backing vocal

Paul McCartney ? backing vocal , bass

Ringo Starr ? drums , tambourine

Session musician ? cello