

= The Long and Winding Road =

" The Long and Winding Road " is a ballad written by Paul McCartney ( credited to Lennon ? McCartney ) from the Beatles ' album Let It Be . It became the group 's 20th and last number one song in the United States in June 1970 , and was the last single released by the quartet .

While the released version of the song was very successful , the post production modifications by producer Phil Spector angered McCartney to the point that when he made his case in court for breaking up the Beatles as a legal entity , he cited the treatment of " The Long and Winding Road " as one of six reasons for doing so . New versions of the song with simpler instrumentation were subsequently released by both the Beatles and McCartney .

In 2011 , Rolling Stone ranked " The Long and Winding Road " number 90 on their list of 100 greatest Beatles songs of all time .

= = Inspiration = =

McCartney originally wrote the song at his farm in Scotland , and was inspired by the growing tension among the Beatles . McCartney said later " I just sat down at my piano in Scotland , started playing and came up with that song , imagining it was going to be done by someone like Ray Charles . I have always found inspiration in the calm beauty of Scotland and again it proved the place where I found inspiration . "

McCartney recorded a demo version of the song , with Beatles ' engineer Alan Brown assisting , in September 1968 , during the recording sessions for The Beatles .

The song takes the form of a piano based ballad , with conventional chord changes . The song 's home key is E flat major but it also uses the relative C minor . Lyrically , it is a sad and melancholic song , with an evocation of an as yet unrequited , though apparently inevitable , love .

In an interview in 1994 , McCartney described the lyric more obliquely : " It 's rather a sad song . I like writing sad songs , it 's a good bag to get into because you can actually acknowledge some deeper feelings of your own and put them in it . It 's a good vehicle , it saves having to go to a psychiatrist . "

The opening theme is repeated throughout . The song lacks a traditional chorus , and the melody and lyrics are ambiguous about the opening stanza 's position in the song ; it is unclear whether the song has just begun , is in the verse , or is in the bridge .

= = Recording session = =

The Beatles recorded several takes of " The Long and Winding Road " on 26 January 1969 and again on 31 January with McCartney on lead vocals and piano , John Lennon on bass guitar , George Harrison on guitar , Ringo Starr on drums , and Billy Preston on Rhodes piano . This was during a series of sessions for an album project then known as Get Back . Lennon , usually the band 's rhythm guitarist , played bass only occasionally and made several mistakes on the recording , prompting some writers , such as Ian MacDonald , to postulate that the disenchanted Lennon 's ragged bass playing was purposeful .

In May 1969 , Glyn Johns , who had been asked to compile and mix the Get Back album by the Beatles , selected the 26 January recording as the best version of the song . The Beatles also recorded a master version as part of the " Apple Studio Performance " on 31 January , which contained a different lyrical and musical structure , but this version was not chosen for release . Bootlegs of the recording sessions of that day , and the film , show the band recording numerous takes of the song in a concerted effort to create a master . For both the 1969 and 1970 versions of the Get Back album , Glyn Johns used the 26 January mix as released on the Anthology 3 album in 1996 . When the project was handed over to Phil Spector he also chose the 26 January recording . In the spring of 1970 , Lennon and the Beatles ' manager , Allen Klein , turned over the recordings to Phil Spector with the hope of salvaging an album , which was then titled Let It Be .

Spector made various changes to the songs , but his most dramatic embellishments occurred on 1 April 1970 , the last ever Beatles recording session , when he added orchestral overdubs to " The Long and Winding Road , " " Across the Universe " and " I Me Mine " at Abbey Road Studios . The only member of the Beatles present was Starr , who played drums with the session musicians to create Spector 's characteristic " Wall of Sound . " Already known for his eccentric behaviour in the studio , Spector was in a peculiar mood that day , as balance engineer Peter Bown recalled : " He wanted tape echo on everything , he had to take a different pill every half hour and had his bodyguard with him constantly . He was on the point of throwing a wobbly , saying ' I want to hear this , I want to hear that . I must have this , I must have that . ' " Bown and the orchestra eventually became so annoyed by Spector 's behaviour that the orchestra refused to play any further , and at one point , Bown left for home , forcing Spector to telephone him and persuade him into coming back after Starr had told Spector to calm down .

Finally , Spector succeeded in overdubbing " The Long and Winding Road " , using 8 violins , four violas , four cellos , three trumpets , three trombones , two guitars , and a choir of 14 women . The orchestra was scored and conducted by Richard Hewson , who would later work with McCartney on his album , Thrillington . This lush orchestral treatment was in direct contrast to the Beatles ' stated intentions for a " real " recording when they began work on Get Back .

= = Controversy around Spector 's overdubs = =

When McCartney first heard the Spector version of the song , he was outraged and nine days after Spector had overdubbed " The Long and Winding Road " , McCartney formally announced the Beatles ' breakup . On 14 April , he sent a sharply worded letter to Apple Records business manager Allen Klein , demanding that the inclusion of the harp be eliminated and that the other added instrumentation and voices be reduced . McCartney concluded the letter with the words : " Don 't ever do it again . " These requests went unheeded , and the Spector version was included on the album with his overdubbed orchestration still in place .

In an interview published by the Evening Standard in two parts on 22 and 23 April 1970 , McCartney said : " The album was finished a year ago , but a few months ago American record producer Phil Spector was called in by Lennon to tidy up some of the tracks . But a few weeks ago , I was sent a re @-@ mixed version of my song ' The Long and Winding Road ' with harps , horns , an orchestra , and a women 's choir added . No one had asked me what I thought . I couldn 't believe it . " The Beatles ' usual producer , George Martin , agreed , calling the remixes " so uncharacteristic " of the Beatles . " It was an insult to Paul , " engineer Geoff Emerick recalled . " It was his record . And someone takes it out of the can and starts to overdub things without his permission . " McCartney asked Klein to dissolve the Beatles ' partnership , but was refused . Exasperated , he took the case to court , naming Klein and the other Beatles as defendants . Among the six reasons McCartney gave for dissolving the Beatles was that Klein 's company , ABKCO , had caused " intolerable interference " by overdubbing " The Long and Winding Road " without consulting McCartney .

Spector claimed the overdubs were necessary due to the poor quality of the recording , particularly Lennon 's bass playing , but whilst the poor quality of the bass playing has been noted by other sources ( in his book Revolution in the Head , a track @-@ by @-@ track analysis of the Beatles ' records , Ian MacDonald described it as " atrocious " to the point of sabotage ) , its basis as the full @-@ scale re @-@ working of the track by Spector has been questioned : McCartney has argued that Spector could have merely edited out the relevant mistakes and rerecorded them , a technique used elsewhere on the album , and specifically , it would have been a simple matter of having McCartney overdub a more appropriate bass part to replace the Lennon bassline that was judged to be inadequate , or even using the more polished version initially rejected by Glyn Johns .

The controversy surrounding the song did not prevent a chart @-@ topping single from being released in the United States on 11 May 1970 , joined by " For You Blue " on the B @-@ side . 1 @.@ 2 million copies were sold in the first two days , and the song began its ten @-@ week @-@ long chart run on 23 May . On 13 June , it became the Beatles ' twentieth and final number one

single in America , according to Billboard magazine . This is the all @-@ time record for number of number one singles on the Billboard Hot 100 chart . They achieved these twenty number one singles in a mere space of 74 months ; an average of one number one single per 3 @.@ 7 months , another all @-@ time record . " The Long and Winding Road " brought the curtain down on the Beatles ' seven consecutive years of domination in America that began with " I Want to Hold Your Hand " in 1964 .

Ringo Starr was impressed with the Naked version of the song : " There 's nothing wrong with Phil 's strings , this is just a different attitude to listening . But it 's been 30 @-@ odd years since I 've heard it without all that and it just blew me away . " Spector himself argued that McCartney was being hypocritical in his criticism : " Paul had no problem picking up the Academy Award for the Let It Be movie soundtrack , nor did he have any problem in using my arrangement of the string and horn and choir parts when he performed it during 25 years of touring on his own . If Paul wants to get into a pissing contest about it , he 's got me mixed up with someone who gives a shit . "

= = Other recordings = =

Since release in 1970 , there have been six additional recordings released by McCartney . The original 26 January take , without the orchestration and Spector overdubs , was included on Anthology 3 released in 1996 . This version included a bridge section spoken , rather than sung , by McCartney . In 2003 , the remaining Beatles and Yoko Ono released Let It Be ... Naked , touted as the band 's version of Let It Be remixed by independent producers . McCartney claimed that his long @-@ standing dissatisfaction with the released version of " The Long and Winding Road " ( and the entire Let It Be album ) was in part the impetus for the new version . The new album included a later take of " The Long and Winding Road " , recorded on 31 January . With no strings or other added instrumentation beyond that which was played in the studio at the time , it was closer to the Beatles 's original intention than the 1970 version . This take is also the one seen in the film Let It Be . McCartney and producer George Martin re @-@ recorded " The Long and Winding Road " with instrumentation incorporating a lead saxophone , for the soundtrack to McCartney 's 1984 film , Give My Regards to Broad Street A second new studio recording of the song was made by McCartney during the 1989 Flowers in the Dirt album sessions and released that year as a B @-@ side to the single " This One " .

" The Long and Winding Road " became a staple of McCartney 's post @-@ Beatles concert repertoire . On the 1976 Wings Over the World Tour , where it was one of the few Beatles songs played , it was performed on piano in a sparse arrangement using a horn section . On McCartney 's 1989 solo tour and since , it has generally been performed on piano with an arrangement using a synthesiser mimicking strings , but this string sound is more restrained than on the Spector recorded version . The live performance recording of the Rio de Janeiro concert in April 1990 is on the album Tripping the Live Fantastic . McCartney also played the song to close the Live 8 concert in London .

Several other artists have performed or recorded the song , including a 1999 Royal Albert Hall performance by George Michael , a 1978 recording by Peter Frampton , and a 2010 performance at the White House by Faith Hill when Barack Obama gave McCartney the Gershwin Prize .

= = Charts and certifications = =