

= The Answer 's at the End =

" The Answer 's at the End " is a song by English musician George Harrison , released in 1975 on his final album for Apple Records , Extra Texture (Read All About It) . Part of the song lyrics came from a wall inscription at Harrison 's nineteenth @-@ century home , Friar Park , a legacy of the property 's original owner , Sir Frank Crisp . This aphorism , beginning " Scan not a friend with a microscopic glass " , had resonated with Harrison since he bought the property in 1970 , and it was a quote he often used when discussing his difficult relationship with fellow ex @-@ Beatle Paul McCartney .

Harrison 's adaptation of the verse for " The Answer 's at the End " coincided with a period of personal upheaval , following the harsh criticism that his 1974 North American tour had received from a number of influential concert reviewers . The song 's plea for tolerance recalls Harrison 's 1970 hit song " Isn 't It a Pity " , and in part of its musical arrangement , " The Answer 's at the End " bears the influence of Nina Simone 's 1972 cover version of that earlier composition .

Like much of the Extra Texture album , the song has traditionally enjoyed a mixed reception from music critics and biographers ? being labelled " archaic parlour poetry " and a " bleak assessment of the human condition " on one hand , and a " gorgeously melodic song of forgiveness " on the other . The backing musicians on the recording include members of the band Attitudes , among them David Foster and Jim Keltner , who were signed to Harrison 's Dark Horse record label at the time .

= = Background = =

In March 1970 , George Harrison and his first wife , Pattie Boyd , moved into their Victorian Gothic residence at Friar Park in Henley @-@ on @-@ Thames , Oxfordshire . The 120 @-@ room house was built in the 1890s on the site of a thirteenth @-@ century friary by Frank Crisp , a City of London solicitor and microscopist . Harrison was immediately taken with Crisp 's penchant for whimsy , the legacies of which included interior features such as doorknobs and light switches shaped as monks ' faces (which meant " tweaking " a nose in order to turn each light on) , and a carving of a monk 's head that showed him smiling on one side and frowning on the other . A keen horticulturalist and an authority on medieval gardening , Crisp established 10 acres of formal gardens , which similarly reflected his eccentric tastes .

From midway through the twentieth century until 1969 , ownership of Friar Park resided with the Roman Catholic Church . As a result , paint masked some of Crisp 's inscriptions inside the house , but outside , signs reading " Don 't keep off the grass " , " Herons will be prosecuted " and " Eton boys are a Harrowing sight " remained intact .

Harrison also discovered inscriptions with a more profound meaning , which he described to his Hare Krishna friend Shyamasundar Das as " like songs really , about the devil , about friendship , life " . One example was " Shadows we are and shadows we depart " , written on a stone sundial ; another began : " Scan not a friend with a microscopic glass / You know his faults , now let his foibles pass ... " This four @-@ line verse was written above an entrance @-@ way in a garden wall , and it was an aphorism that Harrison soon took to quoting in interviews . On 28 April 1970 , just over two weeks after the Beatles ' break @-@ up , he used the words during an interview for New York 's WPLQ Radio , as Village Voice reporter Howard Smith repeatedly pushed for details on the animosity between Paul McCartney and the other three Beatles . In October 1974 ? towards the end of what Harrison termed a " bad domestic year " , following his split with Boyd , and shortly before his troubled North American tour with Ravi Shankar ? he used the same quote in an interview with BBC Radio 's Alan Freeman , when again discussing the current relationship among the four ex @-@ Beatles .

= = Composition = =

Harrison wrote his first Friar Park @-@ inspired composition , " Ballad of Sir Frankie Crisp (Let It Roll) " , within two months of moving in . As with the " Crispisms " that surfaced in the lyrics to his

1974 single " Ding Dong , Ding Dong " , a number of years elapsed before he incorporated the " Scan not a friend " inscription into a song . In 1975 , it provided the central theme to " The Answer 's at the End " , a composition that , theologian Dale Allison has written , " expresses the personal doubts and religious uncertainty George experienced in the mid @-@ 1970s " . This temporary uncertainty contrasted with his previous devotion to a Hinduism @-@ aligned spiritual path , Allison notes . It was also a period marked by Harrison 's excessive use of alcohol and cocaine ? a symptom of his despondency following the 1974 North American tour and the generally unfavourable reception afforded his Dark Horse album .

The song begins in the key of D , before changing key to F for the choruses . In its musical mood , authors Robert Rodriguez and Elliot Huntley liken the released recording to " Isn 't It a Pity " , issued on Harrison 's 1970 triple album All Things Must Pass , while Simon Leng describes " The Answer 's at the End " as a ballad set to a " mellow , reflective soul mood " , like much of its parent album , Extra Texture (Read All About It) .

According to the way he renders Crisp 's inscription in his 1980 autobiography , I , Me , Mine , Harrison made a minor alteration to the original text 's third line (" Life is one long enigma , true , my friend ") for his opening verse :

Scan not a friend with a microscopic glass
You know his faults , now let his foibles pass
Life is one long enigma , my friend
So read on , read on , the answer 's at the end .

In another passage from I , Me , Mine , read out by his son Dhani in the 2011 documentary George Harrison : Living in the Material World , Harrison explains that these words helped him reach a better understanding of human relationships and others around him .

The theme of tolerance is further reflected in the song 's chorus , where Harrison urges : " Don 't be so hard on the ones that you love / It 's the ones that you love , we think so little of ... " The chorus lyrics echo the message of " Isn 't It a Pity " , in this case , author Ian Inglis writes , providing a " bleak assessment of the human condition " .

The second verse begins with an example of what Harrison biographer Alan Clayson views as the " restricted code " found in the lyrics on much of Extra Texture . Harrison sings , " The speech of flowers excels the flowers of speech / But what 's often in your heart is the hardest thing to reach " ? the second line of which , Allison writes , " is surely [Harrison] talking about his inability to find God , who for him dwells , above all , inside the human being " . Allison suggests that , with the singer describing life as first an " enigma " and then a " mystery " , the previous certainties of his faith have disappeared ; true to the song title , Allison continues , " Only death will reveal ... whether his religious beliefs have been true or false . "

As a further reference to the sentiment regarding friendship expressed in " Isn 't It a Pity " , the middle section of " The Answer 's at the End " reflects the influence of Nina Simone 's 1972 cover of that earlier song . According to his recollection in I , Me , Mine , Harrison added this section , or coda , when recording " The Answer 's at the End " . In the lines " And isn 't it a pity how / We hurt the ones we love the most of all ... " , Inglis notes the influence of the 1944 pop standard " You Always Hurt the One You Love " .

In the final half @-@ verse , following a brief instrumental passage , Harrison personalises the second line of Crisp 's text to " You know my faults , now let my foibles pass " . Rodriguez remarks that the subject of reserving judgement would have resonated with Harrison at this time , given the " shellacking " he had recently received in music publications such as Rolling Stone .

Among the former Beatle 's biographers , interpretations differ over the message of Extra Texture songs such as " The Answer 's at the End " , with regard to his spirituality . Like Dale Allison , Gary Tillery writes of Extra Texture revealing Harrison 's " inner turmoil at having strayed from his faith " . Leng views this composition as " a deliberate tempering of tone rather than a change in fundamental beliefs " , however , with the song 's choruses " attenuat [ing] the search for universal solutions to a simpler , earthbound observation " . Joshua Greene similarly writes that Harrison had " regained strength and relaxed his missionary zeal " during 1975 . Greene references " The Answer 's at the End " while stating that " a modest appeal for tolerance " had now replaced the singer 's earlier "

exhortations to chant and warnings about rebirth in the material world " .

= = Recording = =

Harrison taped the basic track for " The Answer 's at the End " at A & M Studios in Los Angeles on 22 April 1975 . During the previous month , Harrison attended a press party held by McCartney and the latter 's band Wings , on board the Queen Mary at Long Beach ? an event that marked the first social meeting between the two former bandmates since December 1970 . McCartney biographer Howard Sounes views Harrison 's attendance as evidence of a " Beatles rapprochement " , five years after their break @-@ up .

Authors Nicholas Schaffner and Rodriguez have commented on the rushed and expedient nature of the sessions for Extra Texture , an album that saw out Harrison 's commitments to EMI @-@ affiliated Apple Records and allowed him to sign with his own , A & M @-@ distributed label , Dark Horse Records . Rather than use his Friar Park studio , Harrison recorded the album at a facility he admitted to finding " technically limiting " , since he was in Los Angeles overseeing projects by his various Dark Horse acts when studio time became available , following the cancellation of sessions for Splinter 's second album . Another of these acts was Attitudes , a band put together by his friend , session drummer Jim Keltner . " The timing was perfect , " Leng writes of Harrison 's approach to making Extra Texture , " as this latest signing to Dark Horse provided a ready @-@ made backup band , close at hand . "

Although Attitudes guitarist Danny Kortchmar did not play on the album , " The Answer 's at the End " was one of two songs that featured all three of the other band members : Keltner , pianist / musical arranger David Foster and bassist / lead singer Paul Stallworth . Another guest musician on the recording was keyboard player Gary Wright , a regular contributor to Harrison 's solo work throughout the 1970s and soon to enjoy a career breakthrough with his Dream Weaver album (1975) . A & M engineer Norman Kinney , who had carried out the mix down for the Concert for Bangladesh recordings four years before , added the song 's percussion , which the mastering sheet lists as tambourine and shaker . As for all the songs on the album , overdubs on the basic track were carried out between 31 May and 6 June .

Huntley describes " The Answer 's at the End " as " the first of the piano songs " on Extra Texture . While piano and other keyboard instrumentation was typically favoured throughout the album , the song also contains multiple guitar parts , in keeping with the sound more traditionally associated with Harrison . Credited to Harrison , these parts comprise 12 @-@ string acoustic guitar , electric guitar arpeggios over the choruses , and a brief solo . During the quieter , " isn 't it a pity how ... " codas , Leng writes , Harrison " semi @-@ scats " the words , " gospel style , over sundown jazz piano " ? a vocal affectation that reflected his immersion in the soul genre . Following the first of these codas , the full band returns for the short instrumental break , after which Harrison repeats the choruses , with his singing growing " more impassioned " , Huntley writes . The song ends with what Leng calls a second " smoochy coda " .

A string arrangement , arranged and conducted by Foster , was overdubbed on 6 June at A & M. Over the codas , where Huntley notes " the merest veneer of the strings " accompanying Harrison 's vocal , this orchestral part incorporates aspects of the string arrangement on John Lennon 's recent hit song " # 9 Dream " , which in turn had been inspired by John Barham 's score for " Try Some , Buy Some " , co @-@ produced by Harrison and Phil Spector in 1971 .

= = Release and reception = =

" The Answer 's at the End " was released on 22 September 1975 as the second track on Extra Texture (Read All About It) . Music critics immediately derided the song for its funereal tempo , which was all the more obvious after the upbeat album opener , " You " .

Dave Marsh of Rolling Stone referred to " The Answer 's at the End " as " padded subterfuge " which could " easily " have been cut down to two minutes from its length of 5 : 32 . In the NME , Neil Spencer wrote that , following " You " , " hopes of Hari 's revival are comprehensively dashed by five

@-@ and @-@ a @-@ half minutes of the inordinately dreary ' The Answer 's At The End ' " . Spencer described it as " one of Hari 's Homespun Homilies full of crusty chunks of potted wisdom " .

= = Retrospective assessment = =

Writing 21 years after its release , Alan Clayson dismissed the track , calling it " archaic parlour poetry " , on an album full of " long , dull melodies " . Simon Leng admires the " warm sonic scenes " of " The Answer 's at the End " and recognises it as an " interesting " composition , one that " ponders the nature of relationships " in a similar way to Bob Dylan 's 1975 album Blood on the Tracks . Leng groups the song with another Extra Texture track , " Grey Cloudy Lies " , however , as " two slabs of introspection " that suffer from being " part calls for tolerance and part expression of downright despair " . " [T] he old , bold George is no more , " Leng laments of " The Answer 's at the End " . " The certainties of ' The Lord Loves the One ' seem to have dissipated ... The passionate searcher of ' Hear Me Lord ' sounds defeated , asking for a little ' live and let live ' . " While similarly noting the bleakness of the subject matter , Ian Inglis opines : " The lack of optimism in his words is matched by a largely inconspicuous melody and an inconsistent production in which alternate piano , strings , and guitar interludes fail to provide a coherent musical context . "

" The Answer 's at the End " has its admirers , with music journalist Rip Rense citing the song as an example of how " even the rather hasty " Extra Texture offers " some of the most affecting moments in [Harrison 's] career " . With reference to the song 's second verse , Rense adds : " and how many songwriters have ever sung a line as wonderful as ' The speech of flowers excels the flowers of speech ? ' " Authors Chip Madinger and Mark Easter recognise " The Answer 's at the End " as a " highlight " of the album , while Elliot Huntley terms it a " gorgeously melodic song of forgiveness " . Huntley praises the track 's " epic sweep " and writes of the Simone @-@ inspired coda : " This is one of my favourite moments of the entire Harrison back @-@ catalogue , especially when the ensemble returns to see the song through to its conclusion ... "

AllMusic 's Richard Ginell describes " The Answer 's at the End " as one of Harrison 's " most beautifully harmonized , majestic , strangely underrated ballads " . Along with the Extra Texture tracks " You " and " This Guitar (Can 't Keep from Crying) " , Ginell rates the song " among the best " from Harrison 's solo career . In his book covering the Beatles ' first decade as solo artists , Fab Four FAQ 2 @. @ 0 , Robert Rodriguez includes " The Answer 's at the End " in a chapter that discusses eight overlooked Harrison compositions , and notes the song 's " grace and majesty " , reminiscent of " Isn 't It a Pity " . In December 2001 , Billboard editor @-@ in @-@ chief Timothy White , a longstanding friend of the former Beatle , titled his Harrison obituary " The Answer 's at the End " , a piece that went on to win an ASCAP @-@ Deems Taylor Award for excellence in music journalism .

Reviewing the 2014 Apple Years reissue of Extra Texture , for The Second Disc , Joe Marchese highlights " the touching ' The Answer 's at the End ' " among the " top @-@ draw material " found on the album . In his review for Paste magazine , Robert Ham views the song as a " [moment] when Harrison 's focus returns " on Extra Texture and one of the album 's ballads that " cut deep " . New Zealand music critic Graham Reid writes that " the melancholy and string @-@ enhanced The Answer 's At the End makes a lovely plea " , and he suggests that had Harrison recorded the track with Phil Spector , it " might not have sounded out of place " on All Things Must Pass .

= = Personnel = =

George Harrison ? vocals , 12 @-@ string acoustic guitar , electric guitars , slide guitar , backing vocals

David Foster ? piano , string arrangement

Gary Wright ? organ

Paul Stallworth ? bass

Jim Keltner ? drums

Norm Kinney ? tambourine , shaker