

= Harry Patch (In Memory Of) =

" Harry Patch (In Memory Of) " is a song by the English alternative rock band Radiohead . The band wrote and recorded the song as a tribute to the British supercentenarian Harry Patch , the last surviving soldier to have fought in the trenches during World War I. The song was self @-@ released on 5 August 2009 as a downloadable single and sold for £ 1 from the band 's website , with all proceeds donated to The Royal British Legion .

Recorded in an abbey shortly after Patch 's death , the song consists of Thom Yorke 's singing and a string arrangement composed by Jonny Greenwood , absent of Radiohead 's typical mix of rock and electronic instrumentation . The lyrics are from the perspective of a soldier in the First World War , and include modifications of quotations from Patch . While reception to the song was generally positive , with many critics praising the song 's message , others panned the song as overly sombre . The Patch family voiced their approval of the song 's message and the band 's charitable use of the proceeds .

= = Recording and music = =

According to a post by Yorke on Radiohead 's blog Dead Air Space , " Harry Patch (In Memory Of) " was inspired by a " very emotional " 2005 interview with Harry Patch on the Today programme on BBC Radio 4 . Yorke wrote that " The way he talked about war had a profound effect on me . " The song was recorded live in an abbey , only a few weeks before Patch died on 25 July 2009 at the age of 111 . Along with follow @-@ up single " These Are My Twisted Words " , " Harry Patch (In Memory Of) " represents the earliest releases from the recording sessions that would result in Radiohead 's next album , The King of Limbs , although neither song is included on that album .

The song has no standard rock instrumentation , and instead comprises an orchestral string arrangement composed by Jonny Greenwood and Yorke 's vocals . Strings introduce the song with a series of repeated arpeggiated notes , which continue as Yorke 's singing begins . There is a bridge described as a " grim , delicately furious peak " halfway through the song . Pitchfork Media 's Mark Richardson compared the track to Gavin Bryars ' 1971 composition Jesus ' Blood Never Failed Me Yet and Samuel Barber 's 1936 Adagio for Strings . Critics from Rolling Stone , The Village Voice , and The Daily Telegraph drew comparisons between the song 's string arrangements and the score to the film There Will Be Blood , primarily composed by Greenwood ; however , Jim Fusilli of The Wall Street Journal believed that the two works " [bear] no resemblance " to each other . Andrea Rice of American Songwriter simply noted that the song 's style was far removed from " anything emblematic of Radiohead " .

While Radiohead has expressed anti @-@ war sentiments in the past ? including a contribution to the 1995 War Child charity compilation The Help Album ? " Harry Patch (In Memory Of) " marks the first time that a Radiohead song explicitly refers to war in its lyrics . For this reason , the song marks a departure from Yorke 's typically abstract writing . The lyrics are from the perspective of a soldier in the midst of First World War trench warfare . Several of the lines , including " Give your leaders each a gun and then let them fight it out themselves " and " The next will be chemical but they will never learn " , are adapted from quotations by Patch . Both Luke Lewis of NME and Simon Vozick @-@ Levinson of Entertainment Weekly compared the lyrics to Wilfred Owen 's First World War @-@ era poem Dulce et Decorum est . Rice referred to Yorke 's voice in the song as an " innocent and youthful falsetto " and the NME said his singing is " subdued to the point where you really need to read the lyrics " .

= = Release = =

" Harry Patch (In Memory Of) " premiered on BBC Radio 4 's Today programme on the morning of 5 August 2009 , one day before Patch 's burial . It became available for purchase later that day on Radiohead 's online store W.A.S.T.E. as a download for £ 1 , or US \$ 1 @.@ 68 at the time of release . All proceeds from the song are donated to The Royal British Legion , a charity supporting

those who are serving or have served in the British Armed Forces . The track can also be streamed from the Today section of BBC Online , where it was posted along with a description and the lyrics . Based on internet traffic data for Radiohead 's website taken from Alexa Internet , The Guardian 's Chris Salmon believed that if the single had been released conventionally it would have likely cracked the UK Singles Chart 's top ten .

The song 's unconventional release , carried out " in classic Radiohead fashion " according to Mehan Jayasuriya of PopMatters , was praised by The Guardian 's John Harris : " Welcome , once again , to the future of popular music : no need for albums , or marketing campaigns , or grand announcements ? just a song by Radiohead , recorded mere weeks ago , premiered on yesterday 's Today programme , and now available to download . " Caleb Garning of Wired noted the song 's " abrupt creation " and the sudden announcement of The King of Limbs as part of Radiohead 's move towards an unpredictable release schedule for new recorded material . In a feature for The Quietus , Wyndham Wallace argues that the track 's release is in line with broader music industry trends towards " instant gratification " , kick @-@ started by the digital release of Radiohead 's previous album In Rainbows .

= = Reception = =

Critical reception was generally positive . Jim Fusilli of The Wall Street Journal referred to the song as " a masterly achievement " , highlighting Yorke 's " eerie " vocals and Greenwood 's " elegant " arrangement , and concluding that " with Radiohead , the unexpected isn 't merely a ploy . It 's a new approach to modern music that 's often thrilling . " Dan Martin of The Guardian described the song as " a desolate lament over bleak , circling strings that build as the song progresses " and wrote that " considering the solemnity of the subject , the song finds Radiohead at their most understated and serene " . Vozick @-@ Levinson of Entertainment Weekly called the song " a gorgeous anti @-@ war ballad " and said that " Needless to say , it 's very much worth any Radiohead fan 's pound , regardless of the exchange rate . " NME named the track as one of the ten best tracks of the week and called it an " elegaic " , " affecting , slow @-@ burn statement " that " rather than hectoring , [...] states simply the horrors of war that Patch spoke so movingly about " .

Critic Allan Raible of ABC News compared the song to earlier Radiohead songs " How to Disappear Completely " and " Pyramid Song " and called it " one of the most beautiful compositions Thom Yorke and company have ever released . " Richardson gave the song a score of seven out of ten in Pitchfork 's song review feature The Playlist , and wrote that while it could be criticized as " a noble but failed experiment , overly maudlin and sentimental even if it is surface @-@ level pretty " , the song 's " simplicity and unsubtle affect , especially coming from this band , wind up being strengths . " In a later column , Richardson would further defend the song from charges of excessive sentimentality and attributes the song 's emotional success to its severe subject , death : " If these pieces were connected to thoughts of breaking up with a girlfriend or getting fired or lamenting cold weather or any of a million other of life 's tragedies , they wouldn 't work , at least not in the same way . They need that huge weight [of death] [...] on the other end to balance them out . " Kyle Anderson of MTV.com called the song a " slow , florid affair " and placed its " typically dark " lyrics in the context of Radiohead 's previous political activism , such as their participation in the anti @-@ human trafficking MTV EXIT campaign .

Praise for the song was not universal . Rob Harvilla of Village Voice wrote that the track offered " nothing terribly earth @-@ shattering " and thought that " the contrast between Thom 's dolphin @-@ soothing calm and lyrics like ' I 've seen hell upon this earth / The next one will be chemical / But they will never learn ' might just ruin your lunch . " David Malitz of The Washington Post complained : " It 's a little too Sigur Ros @-@ y and doesn 't really go anywhere " but acknowledged it " [s] till kept my interest for five and half minutes " .

Patch 's grandson Roger Patch voiced his family 's approval of the song , saying :

" Our family is very touched that Radiohead has reached out to its followers and especially the younger generation through the single that echoes Harry 's interview in 2005 . Harry loved music and would be 100 per cent behind Radiohead in raising awareness of the suffering of conflict ? not

least the futility of it ? in a way that can also benefit the Legion . It 's a great idea which we support wholeheartedly . "

Peter Cleminson , national chairman of The Royal British Legion , thanked Radiohead for their support and said " Radiohead has picked up the torch from Harry Patch to hold it high . [...] Radiohead uses Harry 's own words to remind us of the horrors of war , and we believe Harry would be pleased . "