

= Bangla Desh (song) =

" Bangla Desh " is a song by English musician George Harrison . It was released as a non @-@ album single in July 1971 , to raise awareness for the millions of refugees from the country formerly known as East Pakistan , following the 1970 Bhola cyclone and the outbreak of the Bangladesh Liberation War . Harrison 's inspiration for the song came from his friend Ravi Shankar , a Bengali musician , who approached Harrison for help in trying to alleviate the suffering . " Bangla Desh " has been described as " one of the most cogent social statements in music history " and helped gain international support for Bangladeshi independence by establishing the name of the fledgling nation around the world . In 2005 , United Nations Secretary @-@ General Kofi Annan identified the song 's success in personalising the Bangladesh crisis , through its emotive description of Shankar 's request for help .

" Bangla Desh " appeared at the height of Harrison 's popularity as a solo artist , following the break @-@ up of the Beatles and the acclaim afforded his 1970 triple album All Things Must Pass . It was pop music 's first charity single , and its release took place three days before the Harrison @-@ sponsored Concert for Bangladesh shows at New York 's Madison Square Garden . The single became a top ten hit in the United Kingdom and elsewhere in Europe , and peaked at number 23 on America 's Billboard Hot 100 . The recording was co @-@ produced by Phil Spector and features contributions from Leon Russell , Jim Horn , Ringo Starr and Jim Keltner . The Los Angeles session for the song marked the start of two enduring musical associations in Harrison 's solo career , with Keltner and Horn .

Backed by these musicians and others including Eric Clapton and Billy Preston , Harrison performed " Bangla Desh " at the UNICEF concerts , on 1 August 1971 , as a rousing encore . In a review of the Concert for Bangladesh live album for Rolling Stone magazine , Jon Landau identified this reading as " the concert 's single greatest performance by all concerned " . The studio recording appeared on the 1976 compilation The Best of George Harrison , which remained its only official CD release until September 2014 , when it was included as a bonus track on the Apple Years 1968 ? 75 reissue of Harrison 's Living in the Material World album . Artists who have covered the song include Stu Phillips & the Hollyridge Strings and Italian saxophonist Fausto Papetti .

= = Background = =

By the spring of 1971 , George Harrison had established himself as the most successful ex @-@ Beatle during the former band members ' first year as solo artists ; in the words of biographer Elliot Huntley , he " couldn 't have got any more popular in the eyes of the public " . Just as importantly , writes Peter Lavezzoli , author of The Dawn of Indian Music in the West , Harrison had " amassed such good will in the music community " during that time . Rather than looking to immediately follow up his All Things Must Pass triple album , he had spent the months since recording ended in October 1970 repaying favours to the friends and musicians who had helped make the album such a success . These included co @-@ producer Phil Spector , whose wife , Ronnie Spector , Harrison supplied with songs for a proposed solo album on Apple Records ; Ringo Starr , whose " It Don 't Come Easy " single he produced and prepared for release , following the original session for the song in March 1970 ; Bobby Whitlock , singer and keyboard player with the short @-@ lived Derek and the Dominos , whose eponymous debut solo album featured Harrison and Eric Clapton on guitar ; and former Spooky Tooth pianist Gary Wright , whose Footprint album (1971) Harrison also guested on , along with All Things Must Pass orchestrator John Barham .

Another project was a documentary on the life and music of Ravi Shankar , Howard Worth 's Raga (1971) , for which Harrison had stepped in at the last minute to provide funding and distribution through Apple Films . With Harrison also serving as record producer for the accompanying soundtrack album , work began with Shankar in Los Angeles during April 1971 and resumed in late June , following Harrison @-@ produced sessions in London for the band Badfinger .

A Bengali by birth , Shankar had already brought the growing humanitarian crisis in Bangladesh to Harrison 's attention , while staying at the ex @-@ Beatle 's house , Friar Park , earlier in the year .

The state formerly known as East Pakistan (and before that , East Bengal) had suffered an estimated 300 @, @ 000 casualties when the Bhola cyclone hit its shores on 12 November 1970 , and the indifference shown by the ruling government in West Pakistan , particularly by President Yahya Khan , was just one reason the Bengali national movement sought independence on 25 March 1971 . This declaration resulted in an immediate military crackdown by Khan 's troops , and three days later the Bangladesh Liberation War began . By 13 June , details of the systematic massacre of citizens were beginning to emerge internationally via the publication in London 's Sunday Times of an article by Anthony Mascarenhas . Along with the torrential rains and intensive flooding that were threatening the passage of millions of refugees into north @-@ eastern India , this news galvanised Shankar into approaching Harrison for help in trying to alleviate the suffering . " I was in a very sad mood , having read all this news , " Shankar later told Rolling Stone magazine , " and I said , ' George , this is the situation , I know it doesn 't concern you , I know you can 't possibly identify . ' But while I talked to George he was very deeply moved ... and he said , ' Yes , I think I 'll be able to do something . ' "

As a result , Harrison committed to staging the Concert for Bangladesh at Madison Square Garden , New York , on Sunday , 1 August . Six weeks of frantic activity ensued as Harrison flew between New York , Los Angeles and London , making preparations and recruiting other musicians to join him and Shankar for the shows . While conceding that Harrison was no " natural sloganeer " in the manner of his former bandmate John Lennon , author Robert Rodriguez has written : " if any ex @-@ Fab had the cachet with his fan base to solicit good works , it was the spiritual Beatle . "

= = Composition = =

Foreign journalists had been deported from East Pakistan shortly before the Pakistani army 's Operation Searchlight , and even after Mascarenhas ' first @-@ hand observations had been published , Shankar and Harrison were concerned that the mainstream media in the West were showing a reluctance to report all the facts . That summer , it also emerged that America was supporting General Khan 's military offensive , both financially and with weaponry ? despite the Blood telegram in April , in which officials at the US Consulate in Dacca advised their State Department of the " genocide " taking place and accused the US Government of " moral bankruptcy " . Realising the need to create greater awareness of the situation in Bangladesh , and particularly the refugee camps of India that had become " infectious open @-@ air graveyards " with the outbreak of cholera , Harrison quickly composed a song for the cause . " Bangla Desh " was " written in ten minutes at the piano " , he would later recall . The title translates as " Bengal nation " , and the fact that Harrison spelt it as two words is indicative of how little the new country name had been acknowledged by the Western media at this time .

As with the concerts , Harrison made a point of steering clear of the politics behind the problem , his lyrics focusing instead on the human perspective . At the suggestion of Leon Russell , who had participated in the recent Ronnie Spector and Badfinger sessions , Harrison began the song with a brief verse outlining his own introduction to the Bangladesh crisis :

My friend came to me with sadness in his eyes
Told me that he wanted help before his country dies
Although I couldn 't feel the pain , I knew I had to try
Now I 'm asking all of you to help us save some lives .

These lines refer to Shankar 's request for help , and " [in] deference to the Shankar context " , musical biographer Simon Leng suggests , Harrison set the opening verse as a rock version of Indian music 's traditional alap ? " a slow introductory statement of the main ideas " . Lyrically , the remainder of the song concentrates on the uncompromising message " We 've got to relieve Bangla Desh " as thousands of refugees , particularly children , fell victim to the effects of famine and disease .

Bangla Desh , Bangla Desh
Where so many people are dying fast
And it sure looks like a mess

I 've never seen such distress
Now won 't you lend your hand , try to understand
Relieve the people of Bangla Desh .

The final verse @-@ chorus reflects a point that former US Fund for UNICEF president Charles Lyons has identified as a perennial obstacle when addressing global issues of poverty ? that the problems appear to be too big and too distant for individuals to be able to solve :

Now , it may seem so far from where we all are

It 's something we can 't reject

That suffering , I can 't neglect ...

In this verse , the line " Now won 't you give some bread to get the starving fed " contains a " clever pun " , Harrison biographer Ian Inglis notes , whereby the word " bread " is used to refer to both money and food .

= = Recording = =

With little time to begin rehearsing for the New York shows , the " Bangla Desh " single was rush @-@ recorded in Los Angeles . Sources differ over the venue and date : the Record Plant West seems the most likely studio , with sessions taking place on 4 ? 5 July and horn overdubs perhaps on 10 July . Phil Spector again co @-@ produced , but as with the recording details for the sessions , the exact line @-@ up of musicians is a matter of conjecture . According to Simon Leng , who consulted Klaus Voormann and Jim Horn for his book *While My Guitar Gently Weeps* , the line @-@ up comprised Harrison , Leon Russell (piano) , Horn (saxophones) , Voormann (bass) , Starr , Jim Keltner (both on drums) and Billy Preston (organ) . Leng and Beatles author Bruce Spizer credit a " horn section " led by Jim Horn , which could include regular partner Chuck Findley and even the rest of the six @-@ piece section , christened " the Hollywood Horns " , that would go on to perform in New York on 1 August .

The recording begins with Harrison 's emotive introduction backed by what Lavezzoli describes as a " rolling piano figure " from Russell . Following the words " help us save some lives " , the piano sets up the song 's " driving groove " , Lavezzoli continues , as the rhythm section and Harrison 's electric guitar join in , creating the same musical blend of gospel and rock that Harrison had adopted on much of *All Things Must Pass* . In a review for the *NME* in August 1971 , Derek Johnson wrote of " Bangla Desh " : " Opens almost like a sermon , then the beat come is ... as George wails fervently to a backing of a solid rhythm section and handclaps . " The track retains an " urgent ' live ' mood " , Leng notes , although it is possible that Starr 's contribution was overdubbed after the main session , due to his filming schedule for the Western movie *Blindman* (1971) , in Spain . The song features solos shared between Russell , Horn (on tenor sax) and Harrison (slide guitar) , and fades out with the ensemble playing in double time , similar to a fast gat section (or drut) used in Hindustani classical music .

" Bangla Desh " marked the first occasion that Harrison worked with Horn , who would go on to become a regular collaborator . Already a veteran of the LA music scene by 1971 , Horn recalls his " jaded " mindset before meeting Harrison , but describes the session as a " real turning point " in his career , " because we were doing something for a cause " . It was also the first time that Keltner played on a George Harrison session , the two musicians having already worked together on Lennon 's *Imagine* album (1971) . The " Bangla Desh " session was the beginning of a lifelong friendship , with the pair remaining " as brothers " , Keltner has said , until Harrison 's death in 2001 . Together with Clapton , Preston , Bob Dylan and the group Badfinger , all these musicians joined Harrison and Shankar on stage at Madison Square Garden .

Ravi Shankar cut a benefit disc of his own at this time , the Harrison @-@ produced *Joi Bangla EP* . The A @-@ side featured two vocal compositions sung in Bengali ? the title track (which translated to mean " Victory to Bangladesh ") and " Oh Bhaugowan " ? while on the reverse was a six @-@ minute recital of " Raga Mishra Jhinjoti " , featuring Shankar , sarod master Ali Akbar Khan , and Shankar 's regular tabla player , Alla Rakha .

= = Release = =

At Harrison 's urging , Capitol Records , Apple 's distributor in the United States , set all four of its manufacturing plants to producing copies of the " Bangla Desh " single ; one @-@ sided , white label promo discs were also rushed through to ensure immediate radio play for the song . For the US picture sleeve , designer Tom Wilkes chose a suitably topical image , incorporating headlines and text from New York Times articles about the Bangladesh crisis . The articles made mention of vultures being the " happiest creatures " amid the chaos in Dacca , and India 's " wait and see " policy regarding events in East Pakistan . The front of the picture sleeve was topped with the line " (We 've Got to Relieve) " before the words " Bangla Desh " , leading a number of publications to include the parenthetical text as part of the official song title . Boxed off at the foot of the front sleeve were details of the George Harrison ? Ravi Shankar Special Emergency Relief Fund (care of UNICEF 's New York headquarters) , to which proceeds of the single would go and further donations were encouraged . The back cover of the US sleeve was taken from a UPI news agency photograph ? an " emotional " image showing a mother comforting her starving child . This photo was also used in the aid project 's magazine advertising campaign , as well as for the front of the single 's picture sleeve in Denmark and Japan .

Backed with the well @-@ regarded " Deep Blue " , the " Bangla Desh " single was issued on 28 July 1971 in the United States (as Apple 1836) , with a UK release following two days later (R 5912) . It peaked at number 10 on Britain 's national singles chart and number 23 on the Billboard Hot 100 in America ; the other US chart compilers , Cash Box and Record World , placed the single at number 20 and number 13 , respectively . " Bangla Desh " attracted sustained airplay in the days leading up to the concerts , and lent the relief project an authentic social and political significance . A Bangladeshi academic , Professor Farida Majid , would later write : " To the utter consternation of [US President] Nixon and [Secretary of State] Kissinger , George Harrison 's ' Bangla Desh ' hit the chart . It was a thrilling moment in the midst of all the sad news emanating from the battlefield . Even the Western journalists covering the civil war in East Pakistan were not yet using the word ' Bangladesh ' . " The studio recording was also played at the Concert for Bangladesh shows , following Shankar 's opening set , over footage of the refugees and scenes from the war .

= = = Reissue = = =

Despite the song having been a hit ? and its status as the first @-@ ever pop charity single , fourteen years before Band Aid and USA for Africa ? " Bangla Desh " was mostly ignored by record @-@ company repackagers following 1971 . Over a period of 43 years , the studio version received an album release only on the 1976 compilation The Best of George Harrison , which was issued on CD in 1987 . The song has since been included as a bonus track , remixed by Paul Hicks , on the 2014 reissue of Harrison 's Living in the Material World album , part of the eight @-@ disc Apple Years 1968 ? 75 box set .

= = Reception and legacy = =

On release , Billboard magazine described " Bangla Desh " as " a musical appeal to help our fellow @-@ man " that " should find immediate and heavy chart action " . In his contemporary review for the NME , Derek Johnson considered the song to be " [n] ot so strong melodically as ' My Sweet Lord ' , but still nagging and insistent " , and added : " one can immediately detect the despair and pity in [Harrison 's] voice as he sings of the appalling plight of the East Pakistanis ... his lyric is bound to cause some heart @-@ searching . " A wave of public goodwill accompanied the single 's release in 1971 , as was the case with the two benefit concerts , the subsequent live album , and the 1972 concert film . Simon Leng has identified genuine friendship as being key to the success of Harrison and Shankar 's relief project : the friendship between the two of them that saw the ex @-@ Beatle become involved , and the friendships Harrison had cultivated with Dylan , Clapton and Starr that ensured their participation . Leng notes that the opening lyrics to " Bangla Desh " (" My friend

came to me ... ") could equally have applied to Harrison 's efforts to enlist the reluctant Dylan and heroin @-@ sidelined Clapton .

In his concert review for The Village Voice , Don Heckman described " Bangla Desh " as " a song which expresses far better than words what kind of man Harrison is " . Heckman went on to compare Harrison 's philanthropy with the activities of two of his former bandmates , saying : " I have no quarrel with John Lennon 's endless clattering around inside his psyche , or Paul McCartney 's search for sweetness and light , but at the moment I have to have stronger feelings about George Harrison 's active efforts to do something about the misery in the world around him . How surprising that the most introspective of the Beatles should be the one who , in the long run , takes the most effective actions . "

Away from its context as a song designed purely to bring attention to the Bengalis ' cause , as Harrison himself described it , " Bangla Desh " has often been viewed by commentators as a rushed and underwhelming composition . Robert Rodriguez qualifies this opinion , however : " As a single , the song was possibly not the most commercial of records , but as a call to service , it could scarcely have been improved upon . " " Bangla Desh " ' s standing as rock music 's first charity single is not overlooked , with Ian Inglis stating : " ' Bangla Desh ' serves as a model for the charity singles that would become commonplace in the decades ahead , although , in this instance , the power of Harrison 's song lies not in its assembly of famous performers but in its literal and absolute commitment . " On this point , Leng deems the song as having " as much raw energy as anything [Lennon 's] Plastic Ono Band ever offered " . In The Dawn of Indian Music in the West , Peter Lavezzoli writes : " Harrison 's lyric and vocal were concise and powerful , a direct call for action in a specific crisis . As such , ' Bangla Desh ' remains one of the most cogent social statements in music history . "

In his interview for the 2005 reissue of Saul Swimmer 's Concert for Bangladesh film , UN Secretary @-@ General Kofi Annan acknowledged Harrison and Shankar as " pioneers " in their efforts for the people of Bangladesh , and credited the song 's opening verse for personalising the crisis by showing " the man behind the music " . Thirty @-@ three years before this , on 5 June 1972 , UNICEF officially recognised Harrison and Shankar with its annual Child Is the Father of the Man award .

In 2004 , " Bangla Desh " was played during the final episode of the BBC television series Himalaya with Michael Palin , in which Palin travels south from Bhutan to Bay of Bengal and reflects on Bangladesh 's struggle for independence . Writing for Blender magazine in April that year , Paul Du Noyer described the song as a " fine 1971 single " . In the 2005 " Beatles Solo " edition of NME Originals , Adrian Thrills rated " Bangla Desh " second among Harrison 's " ten solo gems " (behind " What Is Life ") , referring to it as a " jazz @-@ blues @-@ rock shuffle " that " set the template for Band Aid " . Writing in The Cambridge Companion to the Beatles in 2009 , Michael Frontani said that with his Bangladesh relief effort , Harrison " pioneered the whole idea of the charity album and single , as well as of the rock concert fundraiser " . While bemoaning the song 's omission from the 2009 Harrison compilation Let It Roll , Jon Cummings of popdose.com described " Bangla Desh " as " no great artistic achievement " within itself , but " a key moment ... in the evolution of pop @-@ music activism " .

The song is featured in Bruce Pollock 's 2005 book The 7 @,@ 500 Most Important Songs of 1944 ? 2000 . In 2010 , AOL Radio listeners placed " Bangla Desh " at number 10 in a poll to decide the ten best post @-@ Beatles Harrison songs .

= = Live version = =

Harrison played " Bangla Desh " as an encore at both of the Madison Square Garden shows on 1 August 1971 , with the evening performance being selected for inclusion on the Concert for Bangladesh triple live album . After the familiar introduction to the song , the band " threw their full weight behind Harrison " , Lavezzoli writes , " playing the darkest and heaviest music of the show " . On release that December , Jon Landau of Rolling Stone identified the song as " the concert 's single greatest performance by all concerned " , and added that by the close of the show , the lyrics

to Harrison 's single were " no longer an expression of intent but of an accomplished mission ? help has been given , people have been reached , an effort has been made and results will be felt " .

In his album review for Melody Maker , Richard Williams wrote that the live version of " Bangla Desh " " roars and rages to a stunning close " . Played at a faster tempo than the studio recording , it features what Spizer terms a " blistering " saxophone solo from Horn , and a vocal by Harrison that Leng describes as " astonishingly powerful " and " a pure act of zeal " . As shown in the concert film , following his brief guitar solo towards the end of the song , Harrison repeats the line " Relieve the people of Bangla Desh " before exiting the stage to great applause , as the band plays on without him . In his book on the Beatles ' first decade as solo artists , Rodriguez views this live performance as perhaps Harrison 's " high water mark of public esteem " .

Although he was reportedly eager to repeat the experience of these New York shows , Harrison never played " Bangla Desh " in concert after 1971 and he did not perform live again until his 1974 North American tour with Shankar . By that point , the Bangladesh Liberation War had long ended , with India 's defeat of the Pakistani army in December 1971 , but Bangladesh was now experiencing a devastating famine that would account for up to 1 @.@ 5 million lives . During a concert in Los Angeles on 11 November , Harrison responded to requests for the song " Bangla Desh " with a suggestion that the audience instead chant " Krishna , Krishna , Krishna " and use the positive power of mantra to help the Bangladeshi population .

= = Cover versions = =

Harrison biographer Alan Clayson has written of the " triumph " of the Bangladesh concerts leading to a host of imitators and tribute acts replicating the shows ' programme , among which was a French band 's cover version of " Bangla Desh " . Another example was the Tribe 's Bangla Desh (1972) , a full album of highlights from the concerts , including Harrison 's " Bangla Desh " , " My Sweet Lord " and " Here Comes the Sun " . The previous year , Stu Phillips & the Hollyridge Strings released an easy listening version of " Bangla Desh " on their Beatles tribute album The George , John , Paul & Ringo Songbook (1971) . Another 1971 cover version , re @-@ released in 2002 on the compilation When They Was Fab ? A Tribute to the Solo Beatles , was recorded by the Top of the Poppers .

Following Jim Horn 's prominent contribution to the original Harrison recording , Italian saxophonist Fausto Papetti recorded the song for his 1972 album 14a Raccolta . Alternative band B.A.L.L. covered " Bangla Desh " on their 1988 album Bird , as part of their parody of early 1970s rock stars such as the former Beatles .

= = Personnel = =

The following musicians are believed to have played on the studio recording of " Bangla Desh " .

George Harrison ? vocals , electric guitar , slide guitar , backing vocals

Leon Russell ? piano

Jim Horn ? tenor sax , baritone sax , horn arrangement

Billy Preston ? organ

Klaus Voorman ? bass

Ringo Starr ? drums , handclaps *

Jim Keltner ? drums

Chuck Findley ? trumpet *

* denotes unconfirmed credits .

= = Chart performance = =