

= Circles (George Harrison song) =

" Circles " is a song by English musician George Harrison , released as the final track of his 1982 album *Gone Troppo* . Harrison wrote the song in India in 1968 while he and the Beatles were studying Transcendental Meditation with Maharishi Mahesh Yogi . The theme of the lyrics is reincarnation . The composition reflects the cyclical aspect of human existence as , according to Hindu doctrine , the soul continues to pass from one life to the next . Although the Beatles never formally recorded it , " Circles " was among the demos the group made at Harrison 's home , Kinfauns , in May 1968 , while considering material for their double album *The Beatles* .

Harrison revisited " Circles " during the sessions for his 1979 album *George Harrison* before he finally recorded it for *Gone Troppo* . Over this period , Harrison had softened the spiritual message in his work and had also begun to forgo the music business for a career as a film producer with his company HandMade Films . The song was produced by Harrison , Ray Cooper and former Beatles engineer Phil McDonald , with recording taking place at Harrison 's Friar Park studio between May and August 1982 . The track features extensive use of keyboards and synthesizer , with Billy Preston , Jon Lord and Mike Moran among the contributing musicians .

A slow , meditative song , " Circles " has received a mixed response from reviewers , some of whom find it overly gloomy . In the United States , it was issued as the B @-@ side of the album 's second single , " I Really Love You " , in February 1983 . As the closing track on *Gone Troppo* , " Circles " was the last song heard on a new Harrison album until 1987 , when he returned with *Cloud Nine* .

= = Background and composition = =

" Circles " was one of several songs that George Harrison wrote in Rishikesh , India , when he and his Beatles bandmates were attending Maharishi Mahesh Yogi 's Transcendental Meditation course in the spring of 1968 . Aside from providing an opportunity to progress with meditation techniques , the two @-@ month stay marked Harrison 's return to the guitar after two years of studying the Indian sitar , partly under the tutelage of Ravi Shankar . Harrison biographer Simon Leng considers that " Circles " was composed on an organ , however , as most of Harrison 's Indian @-@ inspired melodies since 1966 had been . Leng writes of " fugue @-@ like keyboard parts " on the song and " bass figures " that partly recall the works of Johann Sebastian Bach . Author Ian Inglis considers that " Circles " " displays a direct connection with the unspoken psychedelia " of Harrison 's Beatles tracks " Blue Jay Way " and " Long , Long , Long " .

The song 's lyrical theme is reincarnation , in keeping with its composer 's absorption in Hindu philosophy ? a preoccupation that had led the Beatles to the Maharishi 's teachings and would result in Harrison 's introduction to the Hare Krishna movement in December 1968 . Harrison had first taken reincarnation as his theme for " Art of Dying " , which he began writing in 1966 , and it would continue to be the focus of many of his compositions as a solo artist , notably the 1973 hit " Give Me Love (Give Me Peace on Earth) " . Theologian Dale Allison highlights " Circles " as the only Harrison song to use the term " incarnate " , however , and he also notes the composer 's use of the word " soul " " in its proper metaphysical sense " .

Allison describes the lyrics as " a clear statement of reincarnation " , as well as " the most blatant example " of Harrison 's desire to pass on to a " ' higher ' and better world " at death , and so escape the cycle of rebirth in the material world . In the song 's choruses , the lines " He who knows does not speak / He who speaks does not know " quote the Chinese sage and author Lao @-@ Tse , whose work *Tao Te Ching* inspired Harrison 's 1968 composition " The Inner Light " . Elsewhere in the lyrics to " Circles " , Harrison contemplates the changing nature of friendship as , over the course of lifetimes , according to Inglis , " our enemies become our companions , affections turn into hatred " .

Lindsay Planer of AllMusic writes that Harrison carried out " significant lyrical embellishments " after debuting the song in 1968 . On the released recording , he concludes with a statement on how to break the circle of repetition : " When loss and gain and up and down / Become the same , then we

stop going in circles . " Allison interprets this conclusion , and Harrison 's worldview generally , as espousing the need to recognise the illusory nature of the material world , saying : " All the multiplicity and diversity are in truth manifestations of the one hidden and divine reality ? opposites are not opposites . To understand that up is down and that gain is loss is to be ? on one 's way to escaping from the material world . "

Musically , Leng views the " chromatic melodic web " of " Circles " as appropriate for conveying the " repetition and entrapment " of reincarnation , as the soul passes through one human life to another . The song is in the key of F major , although , in Leng 's estimation , the melody " yearn [s] for resolution in E minor ? revolving in dissonance like a lost soul awaiting its place in the reincarnation checkout line " .

= = The Beatles ' demo = =

" Circles " was one of five Harrison compositions that the Beatles demoed before recording their 1968 double album , The Beatles , also known as the White Album . The song was taped in late May 1968 at Kinfauns , Harrison 's home in Esher , using his Ampex four @-@ track recorder . Although never released officially , the demo began circulating on bootleg compilations in the early 1990s .

Harrison played organ on the track , taping two parts on the instrument . The use of keyboards contrasted with the mainly acoustic @-@ guitar backing otherwise employed on the Beatles ' Esher demos ; author and critic Richie Unterberger describes the keyboard sound as " an eerie organ that seems to have been dragged out of a dusty , disused church closet " . In his book Revolution in the Head , Ian MacDonald credits the instrument as a harmonium and writes that , rather than performing the song alone , Harrison was " shadowed by a tentative ? bass @-@ line " from Paul McCartney .

As with another Harrison composition inspired by the Beatles ' time in Rishikesh ? " Sour Milk Sea " ? the group did not attempt to record " Circles " for the White Album . With the band 's songwriting output at an unprecedentedly high level , Harrison 's " Not Guilty " was similarly left off the album , even though the group had completed a recording of that track .

= = Recording = =

In 1978 , Harrison returned to both " Circles " and " Not Guilty " during the sessions for his sixth post @-@ Beatles solo album , George Harrison . Although " Not Guilty " appeared on that release the following year , " Circles " remained unused until 1982 , when Harrison again revisited it while working on Gone Troppo . By this point in his career , Harrison had long softened the spiritual message of his work and , since the late 1970s , he had distanced himself from the Hare Krishna movement . Allison notes that Harrison nevertheless gave an in @-@ depth interview to senior devotee Mukunda Goswami in September 1982 , during which he shared his thoughts on reincarnation , meditation and chanting .

" Circles " was recorded at Harrison 's Friar Park studio , in Henley @-@ on @-@ Thames , Oxfordshire , during sessions held between 5 May and 27 August 1982 . Harrison co @-@ produced the track with Ray Cooper and former Beatles engineer Phil McDonald . The backing musicians included keyboard players Billy Preston , Jon Lord and Mike Moran , while Harrison also played synthesizer , in addition to bass and slide guitar . Leng describes the song as Harrison 's " first Hindustani blues " and , unlike the sparse 1968 recording , a track arranged with " rich instrumentation " that includes " gospel flourishes " from Preston , on piano and Hammond organ , and " Harrison 's unique guitar tones " .

Leng also comments on the seemingly unlikely pairing of Harrison and Lord , who was the keyboardist for heavy rock bands such as Deep Purple and Whitesnake . Acknowledging the close friendship between the two near @-@ neighbours , Leng cites Lord 's presence on the track as indicative of a preference for locally sourced contributors and " trusted pals " when Harrison made Gone Troppo . As another factor in the album 's creation , Harrison felt increasingly removed from

contemporary musical trends and more involved with his burgeoning film company , HandMade , whose recent successes had included Terry Gilliam 's fantasy adventure Time Bandits (1981) . While viewing " Circles " as " a throwback to the early days of enlightenment in the 1960s " , Leng considers that the " ponderous , stuttering , meditative pace and bizarre , circular melodic structure " of the song evokes " the feeling of being transported to one of the parallel realities " depicted in Gilliam 's film .

= = Release = =

" Circles " was issued on 5 November 1982 as the closing track on Gone Troppo , sequenced after Harrison 's song from the Time Bandits soundtrack , " Dream Away " . By this point , " Circles " had already gained a degree of notoriety , as a title that frequently appeared on lists of the Beatles ' unreleased compositions . Writing in Mojo in 2011 , John Harris described the song as " one bit of Fabs @-@ related intrigue " on a release that otherwise received little notice , due to the artist 's refusal to promote his " contract @-@ finisher " with Warner Bros. Records , the distributor of his Dark Horse record label . Author Alan Clayson comments that the song 's " sense of once more going through the old routine " matched its " world @-@ weary lyrics " ? a reflection of Harrison 's disenchantment after Warner 's had rejected part of the content of his previous album , Somewhere in England .

Gone Troppo became Harrison 's last album for five years , during which he continued to focus on film production , while occasionally contributing to film soundtracks . Among these projects , the HandMade comedy Water (1985) reunited four of the musicians who played on " Circles " , as Moran wrote part of the film score (with Harrison) , and Harrison , Lord , Moran and Cooper made a cameo appearance as " the Singing Rebels Band " , along with Eric Clapton and Ringo Starr . In February 1983 , " Circles " was released as the B @-@ side to the album 's second single in the United States , " I Really Love You " .

= = Reception = =

Discussing the reception to Gone Troppo in their book Eight Arms to Hold You , Chip Madinger and Mark Easter note " Circles " as the only track " reflecting weightier matters " on what was otherwise Harrison 's " frothiest " collection of songs to date , and they conclude : " Sadly , a decent album was lost in the shuffle of the rapidly changing marketplace of the early ' 80 's . " In a contemporary review for Musician magazine , Roy Trakin found that , following John Lennon 's murder two years before , Harrison 's " tortured honesty " undermined the album 's " attempt to heal those psychic wounds with calm , offhanded music " , and he added that " not even Billy Preston can rescue ? the maudlin tautologies of the closing ' Circles ' . "

More impressed with Gone Troppo , Dave Thompson wrote in Goldmine in 2002 that , together with " Dream Away " , " Circles " " stand [s] alongside any number of Harrison 's minor classics " . In his book The Unreleased Beatles , Richie Unterberger describes the song as " a pretty neat , if droning , reflection of Harrison 's more somber spiritual sensibilities " , and he views the 1968 demo as a version that " exerts by far the greater fascination " compared with Harrison 's later recording . Unimpressed with the track , author John Winn dismisses " Circles " as " a depressing number that makes ' Blue Jay Way ' sound like a Little Richard freakout " . Ian MacDonald describes it as " a typically perceptive , if deeply gloomy , song about karma " .

Simon Leng admires " Circles " as " one of [its] composer 's most complex pieces " and pairs the song with " Beware of Darkness " , as " a study in Harrison 's unique harmonic sense " . In light of its appearance as the final track on Gone Troppo , Leng adds : " ' Circles ' was so personal and eccentric that it seemed to close the book on George 's recording career . It felt like he was making music only for himself . "

= = Personnel = =

According to the Gone Troppo CD credits and Simon Leng :

George Harrison ? vocals , bass , synthesizer , slide guitars , backing vocals

Billy Preston ? organ , piano

Mike Moran ? synthesizer

Jon Lord ? synthesizer

Henry Spinetti ? drums

Ray Cooper ? percussion