

= Dark Horse ( George Harrison song ) =

" Dark Horse " is a song by English musician George Harrison , released as the title track to his 1974 solo album on Apple Records . The song was the album 's lead single in North America , becoming a top @-@ twenty hit in the United States , but it was Harrison 's first single not to chart in Britain when issued there in February 1975 . While the term " dark horse " had long been applied to Harrison due to his success as a solo artist following the Beatles ' break @-@ up in 1970 , commentators recognise the song as Harrison 's rebuttal to a number of possible detractors : those reviewers who criticised the spiritual content of his 1973 album *Living in the Material World* ; his first wife , Pattie Boyd ; and his former bandmates John Lennon and Paul McCartney . Harrison also used the title for that of his record label , and his 1974 North American tour with Ravi Shankar would come to be known as the Dark Horse Tour .

Harrison taped an early version of the song with Ringo Starr in 1973 , intending to finish this recording for the album . The officially released version was recorded during rehearsals for his 1974 concerts , at a time when Harrison 's exhaustion through overwork contributed to him contracting laryngitis and losing his voice . Harrison 's singing was similarly affected throughout the ensuing tour . A number of music critics rate " Dark Horse " as one of Harrison 's finest post @-@ Beatles compositions and believe that the single would have achieved greater success with a cleaner vocal performance . The recording reflects Harrison 's embracing of the jazz @-@ funk musical genre , and features contributions from musicians such as Tom Scott , Jim Horn , Billy Preston , Willie Weeks and Andy Newmark .

Harrison played " Dark Horse " throughout both the 1974 tour and his 1991 Japanese tour with Eric Clapton . A live version appears on his 1992 album *Live in Japan* . Recordings also exist of Harrison performing the song during radio and television appearances in the 1970s , although none of these versions are available on official releases . For the first time since the debut CD releases of *Dark Horse* and *The Best of George Harrison* in the early 1990s , " Dark Horse " was remastered in 2014 , along with its parent album , as part of Harrison 's Apple Years reissues . The latter release includes an acoustic demo of the song , which Harrison recorded in 1974 before the onset of laryngitis .

= = Background and composition = =

George Harrison 's 1973 album *Living in the Material World* had divided music critics , with Stephen Holden of *Rolling Stone* lauding it as " a pop religious ceremony for all seasons " and " an article of faith , miraculous in its radiance " , while the *NME* 's reviewer derided the pious nature of the songs and concluded : " So damn holy I could scream . " Although the album was another " massive " commercial success for Harrison , and the general perception remained that he was still the most capable of the four ex @-@ Beatles , Harrison was reportedly stung by this criticism of the overt Vaishnava Hindu spirituality in his music . His purchase of Bhaktivedanta Manor early that year as a UK headquarters for ISKCON ? or , colloquially , " the Hare Krishna movement " ? led to ridicule in the British press . Author Joshua Greene , a former ISKCON devotee , describes a visit Harrison made to the house in August 1973 when the singer shared his concerns with Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada , the movement 's international leader : " I 'm provoking a bad reaction , " Harrison confided . " The stronger the commitment on my part , the stronger the animosity becomes . "

At the same time , Harrison 's marriage to Pattie Boyd was coming to an end , and he would later describe his behaviour during their final years together as " the naughty period , 1973 ? 74 " . Biographer Ian Inglis has written of Harrison 's dismay at the more negative reviews for *Material World* : " It coincided with a period of intense disarray and frequent infidelities in his personal life , and the combination of these two sources of disappointment produced a mood of gloom and cynicism that would invariably work its way into his next musical projects . "

Harrison wrote " Dark Horse " in 1973 , apparently as a rebuttal to critics of *Living in the Material World* . Like a number of reviewers of the *Dark Horse* album , Inglis also interprets the composition as Harrison 's message of defiance to Boyd . Harrison 's comments on " Dark Horse " in his 1980

autobiography , I , Me , Mine , are as " obscure " as the song 's lyrics , writes theologian Dale Allison . While the term " dark horse " usually refers to an unlikely or surprise winner , Harrison states in I , Me , Mine that he was unaware of that meaning at the time ; his lyrics instead referred to someone who carried out clandestine sexual relationships ? that is , a dark horse in Liverpudlian terms .

Harrison 's musical biographer , Simon Leng , views " Dark Horse " as its composer addressing his critics by creating a " new persona " . " This ' George ' is a man one step ahead of his detractors , " Leng writes , " triumphing with quicker feet and better gags . Commentators try to pin his character down at peril , for he is likely to change and take the least expected course . " In the song 's choruses , Harrison declares himself " a dark horse / Running on a dark race course " , " a blue moon " , and a " cool jerk " who is " Looking for the source " . Leng paraphrases this self @-@ depiction as meaning " a loner " and " an elusive , cheeky maverick " .

While describing the lyrics as " smarmy , if not somewhat defensive " , AllMusic 's Lindsay Planer identifies the song 's opening verse as " seem [ ing ] to address the situation " between Harrison and Boyd :

You thought that you knew where I was and when  
Baby , looks like you 've been fooling you again  
You thought that you had got me all staked out  
Baby , looks like I 've been breaking out .

Planer suggests that the " searing " verse @-@ two lines " You thought you had got me in your grip / Baby , looks like you was not so smart " are a further example of this interpretation . Like Planer , Inglis recognises a third possible target of Harrison 's scorn ? former bandmates John Lennon and Paul McCartney . Inglis observes that in the song 's final verse , Harrison is making it clear to those who have underestimated him in the past that his abilities are not " recent acquisitions " :

I thought that you knew it all along  
Until you started getting me not right  
Seems as if you heard a little late  
I warned you when we both was at the starting gate .

Leng notes that this Harrison " character " would return in his 1976 composition " This Song " , written as a light @-@ hearted reflection on his " travails in court " during the " My Sweet Lord " plagiarism case .

= = Recording = =

= = = 1973 basic track = = =

Harrison first recorded " Dark Horse " at his Friar Park studio , FPSHOT , in Oxfordshire , in November 1973 . Along with tracks by future Dark Horse Records acts Ravi Shankar and Splinter , Harrison included the song on a tape he compiled for music @-@ business executive David Geffen before departing for India in late January 1974 . This early , unfinished version of " Dark Horse " featured Harrison on acoustic guitar and guide vocal , bassist Klaus Voormann and Ringo Starr on drums , and it is noticeably slower in tempo than the official release .

Harrison used the song title as the name for his new record label , launched in May 1974 ( with worldwide distribution through A & M Records ) , for which Shankar and Splinter were the first signings . Harrison then announced that he would be touring the United States ? the first US tour by a member of the Beatles since 1966 ? with Shankar as co @-@ headliner .

= = = Official version = = =

By October , when he arrived in Los Angeles to prepare for the tour , a combination of Harrison 's business commitments , his dedication to projects by his Dark Horse acts , and a lifestyle that Leng terms " one drink too many , too frequently " meant that production on Harrison 's Dark Horse album was severely behind schedule . For three weeks , by day Harrison rehearsed with his tour band ,

which included Tom Scott , Billy Preston , Jim Horn , Robben Ford , Willie Weeks and Andy Newmark , at the A & M studio complex on La Brea Avenue , Hollywood . In the evenings , he added vocals and other overdubs to tracks rush @-@ recorded at Friar Park . He had intended to finish " Dark Horse " in this way but decided instead to re @-@ record the track , since the musicians were having to learn the song for inclusion in the concert setlist .

Already exhausted through overwork before arriving in Los Angeles , Harrison lost his voice early on in the rehearsals and contracted laryngitis , the results of which were obvious on the finished songs , particularly " Dark Horse " . Harrison and his tour band recorded the album 's title track live on a sound stage at A & M in late October , with Norm Kinney engineering the session . Lon and Derrek Van Eaton , who , like Preston , were a former Apple Records act now signed with A & M Records , overdubbed backing vocals soon afterwards .

This official version of " Dark Horse " is notable for its arrangement , incorporating aspects of funk and jazz , as well as for Harrison 's lead vocal , which he described as sounding like the singer Louis Armstrong . Harrison later told reporters that he quite liked the result , but according to Andy Newmark , Harrison was concerned about how concert @-@ goers would react to his shot vocals . The recording features a trio of flute players , led by Scott ; Billy Preston on electric piano ; and Robben Ford doubling Harrison 's capo @-@ ed acoustic @-@ guitar part , much like Pete Ham had done three years before on " Here Comes the Sun " at the Concert for Bangladesh . The busy rhythm section of " funky stalwarts " Weeks and Newmark contributed to the track sounding more contemporary than Harrison 's recent solo work , which had used the previously preferred team of Voorman , Starr and / or Jim Keltner , although the latter does provide hi @-@ hats here , supporting Newmark 's beat . In addition , Emil Richards played a percussion instrument known as a crochét .

= = Release = =

Backed with " I Don 't Care Anymore " , " Dark Horse " was issued as the album 's lead single in America ( as Apple 1877 ) , on 18 November 1974 . The single was available in a white sleeve on which the song lyrics and a large dot appeared in blue print . Capitol Records , Apple 's US distributor , sent an edited mix , cutting a minute 's worth from the middle of the song , as a promotional disc for radio stations across America .

" Dark Horse " made a strong impact as a single , authors Chip Madinger and Mark Easter write , reaching the US top 20 " with ease " . It then peaked at a relatively low number 15 on the Billboard Hot 100 , however , on 11 January 1975 , before disappearing from the chart altogether two weeks later . In Canada , where the tour had begun on 2 November , " Dark Horse " reached number 26 on the RPM 100 . In Britain , the song was released as the second single off Dark Horse , in February 1975 ( as Apple R 6001 ) , with the show @-@ opening " Hari 's on Tour ( Express ) " on the B @-@ side . The single failed to place at all on the UK Singles Chart , then just a top 50 .

Due to the delay in completing the recording , Capitol was unable to issue the Dark Horse album until the second week of December , towards the end of the tour . In the original , LP format , " Dark Horse " appeared as the second track on side two , between " Ding Dong , Ding Dong " , the album 's other single , and the soul @-@ inflected " Far East Man " . In his handwritten sleeve notes , Harrison lists A & M Records secretary and future wife Olivia Arias among the participating musicians , her contribution being " Blissed out " . The couple had first met at the start of Harrison 's hectic few weeks in Los Angeles , and Arias became his constant companion on the tour .

" Dark Horse " appeared on the 1976 Capitol compilation The Best of George Harrison but it was omitted from the posthumous , career @-@ spanning Let It Roll : Songs by George Harrison in 2009 . Having last been remastered for Dark Horse 's debut release on CD , in January 1992 , the song was remastered for inclusion on Harrison 's Apple Years 1968 ? 75 reissues , released in September 2014 .

= = Reception = =

### == Contemporary reviews ==

On release, Billboard magazine described "Dark Horse" as "a pleasing, acoustic flavored cut" with an "instantly catchy sound that should satisfy AM listeners and more 'critical' fans", adding that the use of flutes "spices [up]" the recording. The following month, the same magazine's album review referred to Harrison "riding high" with the title track and noted "lots of FM potential" in the songs on Dark Horse.

With the US release coming two weeks into Harrison's high @-@ profile tour with Shankar, much of the critical reaction there to "Dark Horse" centred on the perilous state of Harrison's voice. "Dark Hoarse" was a widely used moniker, as several concert reviewers wrote disparagingly of Harrison "croaking" his way through Beatles classics such as "Something" and "In My Life". Discussing this period of Harrison's career in an article for Mojo, in November 2014, Mat Snow writes that "George's '70s honeymoon with the public was over".

In a notably unfavourable review of the album, for Rolling Stone, Jim Miller quoted the chorus of the title track to illustrate his point that the singer's "quest for illumination populates his lyrics with sermons and awkward mea culpas". Miller added that "thanks to Harrison's no @-@ voice and stilted lyrics, ['Dark Horse'] quite fails to evoke the self @-@ confident master of 'My Sweet Lord' or even 'Living in the Material World'." Reviewing the album for the NME, Bob Woffinden took exception to Harrison's lyrics, ridiculing "Dark Horse" as "a putdown of Patti [Boyd], an affirmation of Harrison's male chauvinism? he was on top of the game all through".

Among more favourable reviews, Michael Gross of Circus Raves defended the Harrison/Shankar tour as having been "plagued by untrue press reports [while] creating a new, unbounded music that defied labelling as easily as the men involved defied national boundaries". Gross wrote that "Dark Horse" "brings back memories of The White Album, as Chuck Findlay, Jim Horn and Scott dart through the intricate melody on flutes". In Melody Maker, Brian Harrigan found Harrison's gruff vocal a bonus, writing that he "coaxes a tremendous amount from his normally unimpressive voice" and sings "particularly well" on the title track. Harrigan highlighted "Dark Horse" as "easily the strongest number on the album", with support musicians Newmark and Preston "playing up a storm".

In their 1975 book *The Beatles: An Illustrated Record*, NME critics Roy Carr and Tony Tyler similarly approved of Harrison's husky singing on "Dark Horse", praising it as "definitely a style to pursue". Like Carr and Tyler, Nicholas Schaffner rated "Dark Horse" among Harrison's finest compositions. Writing in *The Beatles Forever*, Schaffner opined that "Dark Horse" could have been one of Harrison's most successful singles had he "only waited to recoup his voice before committing it to tape". Seven years after his unfavourable review in the NME, Woffinden acknowledged that the song would have sounded "really good" had it been "graced with good vocals" and released in a "different context".

### == Retrospective assessment and legacy ==

Writing for Rolling Stone in 2002, Greg Kot took issue with Harrison's strained vocal and viewed the song as "continu[ing] in the condescending autobiographical vein" of Material World tracks such as "The Light That Has Lighted the World". Conversely, author Alan Clayson has written of the song's "sandpapery appeal", with the lead vocal "a not unattractive cross between McCartney and Rod Stewart".

Simon Leng considers "Dark Horse" to be a "jaunty and pleasing hit" and one of Harrison's best compositions, but rues the fact that Harrison did not marry up his vocal from an earlier, bluesy demo with the backing he subsequently recorded in LA. Leng reasons that a bigger chart hit would surely have been the result, if the song's vocal track had not sounded "like the torments of a man swallowing razor blades". Dale Allison also subscribes to this view, while Harrison biographer Elliot Huntley writes that "Dark Horse" might have made an "excellent stand @-@ alone single", backed by "So Sad". This coupling would have provided Harrison with the necessary product to

promote on tour , Huntley observes , without " derailing [ his career ] at full speed " , which the rushed and vocally compromised Dark Horse album effectively did .

Reviewing Harrison 's 2014 Apple Years reissues for the Chicago Tribune , Mark Caro describes the song as " one of [ Harrison 's ] most sublime creations despite his dark @-@ hoarse vocals " . Shawn Perry of vintagerock.com writes that " the title track [ of Dark Horse ] with Harrison 's scratchy vocal assumes a special personality all its own " , while Paul Trynka , in a review for Classic Rock magazine , describes it as " a fine song ? marred by George 's voice , tired , worn and sapped of its usual sweetness " . Andrew Grant Jackson features " Dark Horse " in his book Still the Greatest : The Essential Solo Beatles Songs , and considers that " the huskiness of his voice threatens to distract " , but " the strength of the composition , the uplifting chorus , the ' Stairway to Heaven ' -esque flute by Tom Scott , and the subtly funk keys by Preston nudge it into Harrison 's top tier , though just by a nose . "

= = Other versions = =

As well as performing the song throughout both the 1974 tour and his 1991 Japanese tour with Eric Clapton , his only other tour as a solo artist , Harrison recorded " Dark Horse " a number of times before and after the officially released studio version . The " laidback " original take , from the November 1973 sessions at FPSHOT , is available unofficially on the Harri @-@ Spector Show bootleg compilation , along with the other selections sent to David Geffen and outtakes from Harrison and Phil Spector 's February 1971 sessions for Ronnie Spector .

= = = 1974 Apple Years demo = = =

The Apple Years 1968 ? 75 box set and Dark Horse reissue includes a previously unreleased version of " Dark Horse " . Recorded as a solo demo , this reading features Harrison on vocals and acoustic guitar , with added backing vocals . Brennan Carley of Spin magazine writes of the " newly unearthed version " being " a bit twangier and more acoustic than Harrison 's final product " and describes his singing as " clearer , less gruff , and more natural " compared to the 1974 release . While viewing " Dark Horse " as " a great personal theme song of sorts " for Harrison , Blogcritics ' Chaz Lipp considers his lead vocal on this " excellent demo " to be an improvement . Trynka similarly writes that this version " puts things right " , with Harrison 's vocal " impassioned , but subtle " .

= = = October ? December 1974 radio and television performances = = =

In October 1974 , shortly before leaving for Los Angeles , Harrison performed " Dark Horse " on acoustic guitar during a radio interview with BBC disc jockey Alan Freeman . The location has been identified as either Apple 's offices on St James 's Street , London , or in front of a fire at Friar Park . During the candid interview , Harrison enthused about Eric Clapton and Ravi Shankar , jokingly referred to John Lennon as " a saint " and " such a bastard " , and claimed that Paul McCartney had " ruined " him as a guitar player . This version of " Dark Horse " is available unofficially on bootlegs such as Pirate Songs .

On 30 October , days before the band left for the first show in Vancouver , Harrison and his musicians recorded an abridged live performance of the song for promotional purposes at the A & M sound stage where they were rehearsing . Later in the tour , Harrison found a way to alter his vocal pitch to better cope with the effects of laryngitis , but Simon Leng writes of this performance : " It gives a candid glimpse of the pain [ that ] Harrison 's need to sing was inflicting on him . " At the end of the 1974 tour , Harrison and the tour band filmed another performance of " Dark Horse " , intended for inclusion in the debut series of Saturday Night Live . The filming took place at NBC TV Studios in New York on 19 December , but the network decided to delay the show for a year and the Harrison segment was never aired .

== November 1976 , Saturday Night Live ==

In November 1976 , while promoting his first album on Dark Horse Records , Thirty Three & 1 / 3 , Harrison finally appeared on Saturday Night Live , performing a number of songs with Paul Simon , as well as a solo version of " Dark Horse " . Although the song does not appear on lists of the tracks taped on 19 November at NBC , Alan Clayson writes of Harrison singing " Dark Horse " , " hunched over a hollow @-@ body Gretsch " , in a blue @-@ lit studio . Harrison and Simon 's duet on " Homeward Bound " later appeared on the Olivia Harrison @-@ inspired charity album Nobody 's Child : Romanian Angel Appeal in 1990 , but nothing else from this 1976 performance has been officially released .

== 1991 Japanese tour ==

In what Leng terms a " safe " setlist for his 1991 Japanese tour with Clapton , Harrison 's inclusion of " Dark Horse " provided a rare example of a song from his post @-@ All Things Must Pass work from the 1970s , along with the Living in the Material World hit " Give Me Love ( Give Me Peace on Earth ) " . " Dark Horse " appeared on the Live in Japan album , released in July 1992 . Elliot Huntley has written that it was " a joy " to hear this live version , since : " Unencumbered by problems with his throat , the catchiness of ' Dark Horse ' positively shines through . " The performance on Live in Japan was recorded at Osaka 's Castle Hall on 11 December 1991 .

== Personnel ==

George Harrison ? vocals , acoustic guitar

Billy Preston ? electric piano

Robben Ford ? acoustic guitar

Willie Weeks ? bass

Andy Newmark ? drums

Jim Keltner ? drums

Tom Scott ? flute

Jim Horn ? flute

Chuck Findley ? flute

Emil Richards ? percussion

Derrek Van Eaton ? backing vocals

Lon Van Eaton ? backing vocals

== Chart positions ==