

= Oh What a Circus =

" Oh What a Circus " is a song from the 1976 musical Evita , written by Andrew Lloyd Webber and Tim Rice , and music composed by Webber . It was recorded by English singer David Essex and released as a single on August 19 , 1978 , by Mercury Records . Essex had played the character of Che in the musical based on Che Guevara , and the song is sung from Che 's point of view . Produced and arranged by Mike Batt , " Oh What a Circus " is a mid tempo song , comparing the musical 's title character Eva Perón 's life with a circus , and calling her actions fraudulent . The song is a contrafactum , and shares its tune with the better known " Don 't Cry for Me Argentina " from the same show .

" Oh What a Circus " was a commercial success for Essex , who had been dropped by his previous record company due to his declining sales . The song reached number 3 on the UK Singles Chart , and the top 30 in Belgium and Netherlands . In subsequent versions of the musical , " Oh What a Circus " was sung by a number of performers , including Mandy Patinkin , Ricky Martin and Scottish rock musician Marti Pellow . In the 1996 film adaptation of the musical , the song was sung by Antonio Banderas and American singer Madonna , and received critical appreciation for its flamenco infused composition .

= = Background and release = =

" Oh What a Circus " was written by Andrew Lloyd Webber and Tim Rice while they were developing the Evita for Broadway in 1976 . Both were extremely intrigued by the stories surrounding the life of Eva Perón while researching her during the mid 1970s . The duo were also on the lookout for various actors to play the part of the narrator for Evita , inspired by Che Guevara .

In the meantime , English singer David Essex had completed his work on the concept album , Jeff Wayne 's Musical Version of The War of the Worlds , and was interested in theatrical productions . He received a call from Rice and Webber , and immediately accepted the part . Evita had already generated interest with its concept album of the same name , as well as the commercial success of singer Julie Covington 's released single , " Don 't Cry for Me Argentina " . Essex met director Hal Prince and talked about the character of Che , including the vision that Rice and Webber had about him . Due to his Romanian ancestry , Essex had the characteristic laconic nature and idealistic looks needed from Che .

Evita was a success from its opening night , with Derek Jewell of The Sunday Times praising Webber 's score , as well as Essex 's portrayal of Che as a " brooding , enigmatic " character . Meanwhile , Essex had released a cover version of the Lorraine Ellison song , " Stay with Me , which reached number 45 on the UK Singles Chart , thus CBS Records cancelled their contract with him . Essex 's manager started looking for a new record deal for him , and signed one with Phonogram Records , who suggested that he release one of the songs from the Evita album as his single . They decided to release " Oh What a Circus " , with another of Che 's songs , " High Flying , Adored " as its B side . The song was released on August 19 , 1978 , under the Mercury subsidiary of Phonogram in the United Kingdom .

= = Composition and reception = =

Musically , " Oh What a Circus " is a contrafactum , and shares its composition with the better known " Don 't Cry for Me Argentina " from the same show , but has a faster tempo and completely different lyrics . The song includes a choral chant in Latin , based on the Catholic anthem " Salve Regina " . Alternative lyrics to " Don 't Cry for Me Argentina " appear as a prelude to the song from Act 2 , sung by a young girl characterizing Eva 's younger self . The version of " Oh What a Circus " present on the Evita concept album was sung by Colm Wilkinson . However it was not used , instead Essex recorded a new version which was arranged and produced by Mike Batt , in the style of Phil Spector . A video for the song was filmed at Clifton Cathedral in Bristol and showed Essex

singing the song as a crowd moves around inside a building carrying candles .

An uptempo version of the main melody for " Don 't Cry for Me Argentina " , " Oh What a Circus " acts as an introduction to the whole musical and is sung after " Requiem for Evita " , as Che ponders about the life of Eva . The song was composed in a key of C major with a medium tempo of 128 beats per minute . Essex 's voice spans from C ? 3 to E5 and the song follows a basic sequence of F / C ? G7 ? C ? Am / C ? Dsus ? C ? D7 / C ? G / B as its chord progression . Lyrically , it talks about the news of Eva 's death and her funeral , as well as Che 's belief that the mourning for her was misplaced and Eva 's life and preaching was fraudulent . It compares her life to that of a circus with a choir added during the middle section . The lyrics question the sainthood of Eva and her praise as a godly character among the Argentinians , while taunting her that she had failed her people by not being immortal . The words had rhyming across the verses like those of (" show / go ") and (" town / down ") which Rice explained was done intentionally to make the song appear asymmetrical .

Oh what a circus , oh what a show , Argentina has gone to town
Over the death of an actress called Eva Perón

...

Oh what an exit , that 's how to go , When they 're ringing your curtain down
Demand to be buried like Eva Perón

After its release in August 1978 as the third single from the Evita concept album , " Oh What a Circus " entered the UK Singles Chart at number 36 . It progressed and climbed the charts rapidly , ultimately reaching a peak of number 3 in its sixth week . It was Essex 's highest charting song , since " Hold Me Close " had topped the charts in 1975 . " Oh What a Circus " was present within the top @-@ 100 of the UK Singles Chart for a total of 11 weeks . Across Europe the song charted in Belgium for 5 weeks , reaching a peak of number 26 . In Netherlands , the song charted on both the Dutch Top 40 and Single Top 100 charts , reaching peaks of number 18 and number 20 respectively . The song also charted at number eight in Ireland . Although not released in Australia , the song managed to enter the Kent Music Report charts for one week at number 72 .

= = Cover versions = =

Mandy Patinkin played Che for the American premiere production and recording , and sings the song . Author William A. Everett wrote in his book , The A to Z of the Broadway Musical that Patinkin 's singing and portrayal of Che " interracted on a psychological level with the title character (played by Patti LuPone) , challenging her actions and motivations . " In the 1996 film Evita , the song is sung by actor Antonio Banderas and singer Madonna . In the film , Che muses while in an empty bar following the lavish funeral procession for Eva Perón , and then on the streets of Buenos Aires as the community mourns and later riots . Eva 's lyrics come during a pan over her funeral casket and is not sung directly by Eva . It begins with Spanish guitars as Banderas takes the lead vocals , with a changing choir throughout .

A different rhythm and tempo occurs in the middle where it main composition has rock influences and piano , as Banderas uttered the line , " She didn 't say much , but she said it loud " . The choir is brought back towards the end , followed by an orchestral passage consisting of the main theme , accompanied by sounds of gong and timpani . Madonna sings the final verses , uttering the lines " share my glory , so share my coffin " . Author J. Randy Taraborrelli complemented Madonna 's singing in the book , Madonna : An Intimate Biography , describing her vocals as " supple and strong " . This view was shared by author Lucy O 'Brien in Madonna : Like an Icon who said that " the sweetness and the power of Madonna 's voice comes out as never before on these tracks " . It also received positive review from Paul Verna of Billboard , who listed the " flamenco flavored " song as a highlight from the soundtrack .

For the 2006 First West End Revival of Evita , actor Matt Rawle portrayed Che and sang the song . Michael Billington from The Guardian received it negatively , saying that " Lacking any coherent idea , the show is motored by a succession of Lloyd Webber songs : ' Another Suitcase in Another Hall ' , ... ' Oh What a Circus ' , ' High Flying , Adored ' and all the rest . " While reviving the play for

Broadway in 2012 , singer Ricky Martin was signed to play Che . The character was altered and instead of portraying Che Guevara like the original play , he was made a worker class everyman , who narrated the events . According to Joe Dziemianowicz from Daily News , Martin 's performance as Che gave it " a great big touch of star quality ... He also gives an appealing performance in the role of Che , " the writer added . James Hebert from San Diego Union @-@ Tribune complimented Martin for setting " the tone right away in the opening number ' Oh What a Circus ' " with his " bemused , smilingly cynical " characterization of Che . In the 2014 Second West End Revival of the play , the role of Che was played by Marti Pellow from Scottish rock band Wet Wet Wet . Natalie Banyard complimented the choice of Pellow as Che , adding in an article for Bristol Post that " Never was there a more inspired piece of casting than that of [Pellow] as [Che Guevara] in Evita . " Banyard also noticed that there was " no hint of Marti 's Scottish brogue as he stops the show with his renditions of ' Oh What a Circus ' and ' The Lady 's Got Potential ' . " Hank Marvin performed an instrumental version of the song on his 1997 album Hank Marvin and the Shadows Play the Music of Andrew Lloyd Webber and Tim Rice .

= = Track listing = =

UK 7 " single

" Oh What a Circus " ? 3 : 54

" High Flying , Adored " ? 3 : 19

= = Credits and personnel = =

David Essex ? vocals

Tim Rice ? songwriter

Andrew Lloyd Webber ? songwriter , composer

Mike Batt ? producer , arrangement

Tony Bridge ? mastering at Pye Studios

Credits adapted from the 7 " single liner notes .

= = Charts = =