

= Who Can See It =

" Who Can See It " is a song by English musician George Harrison , released on his 1973 album *Living in the Material World* . The lyrics reflect Harrison 's uneasy feelings towards the Beatles ' legacy , three years after the group 's break @-@ up , and serve as his statement of independence from expectations raised by the band 's unprecedented popularity . Some music critics and biographers suggest that he wrote the song during a period of personal anguish , following the acclaim he had received as a solo artist with the 1970 triple album *All Things Must Pass* and his 1971 ? 72 Bangladesh aid project . The revelatory nature of the lyrics has encouraged comparisons between *Living in the Material World* and John Lennon 's primal therapy @-@ inspired 1970 release , *Plastic Ono Band* .

A dramatic ballad in the Roy Orbison vein , the composition features unusual changes in time signature and a melody that incorporates musical tension . Harrison self @-@ produced the recording , which includes heavy orchestration and a choir , both arranged by John Barham . Several commentators consider Harrison 's vocal performance on " Who Can See It " to be among the finest of his career , while his production style has been likened to that of Beatles producer George Martin . The other musicians on the track are Nicky Hopkins , Klaus Voormann , Jim Keltner and Gary Wright .

Among reviews of the song , " Who Can See It " has been described variously as an " aching , yearning masterpiece " , a " song which goes on far too long to make its simple point " , and an " unequivocal statement " on Harrison 's identity . In line with his self @-@ image as a musician , regardless of his past as a Beatle , Harrison included " Who Can See It " in the setlist for his 1974 North American tour with Ravi Shankar , the first tour there by a former Beatle since the band 's break @-@ up .

= = Background and inspiration = =

As with the majority of the songs on his *Living in the Material World* album , George Harrison wrote " Who Can See It " over 1971 ? 72 . In his autobiography , *I , Me , Mine* , he makes light of the emotion behind the song , describing it as simply " a true story meaning ' Give us a break , squire ' " . Simon Leng , Harrison 's musical biographer , recognises the song as a statement of considerable personal anguish , however . He writes of Harrison having been " deeply traumatized " by the effects of the Beatles ' unprecedented popularity , and equally disoriented by his success as a solo artist following their break @-@ up in April 1970 . According to Leng , Harrison was in the same state of internal conflict over 1972 ? 73 as John Lennon had been when writing the song " Help ! " in 1965 , during his self @-@ styled " fat Elvis period " . Music critic Stephen Holden highlighted a similar comparison between the two ex @-@ Beatles in July 1973 , when he deemed *Living in the Material World* to be " as personal and confessional " as Lennon 's primal therapy @-@ inspired *Plastic Ono Band* album (1970) .

During the Beatles ' career , Harrison had been the first to tire of Beatlemania and the group 's celebrity status , and he had written songs rejecting what Leng terms the " artifice " surrounding the band . Lennon himself described the Beatles ' predicament as " four individuals who eventually recovered their individualities after being submerged in a myth " . In addition , for Harrison , while he began to match Lennon and Paul McCartney as a songwriter towards the end of the group 's career , his relatively junior position in the Beatles was a source of frustration to him , which , according to music journalist Mikal Gilmore , left " deep and lasting wounds " .

Aside from being released from the psychological pressure of being a Beatle in 1970 , Harrison was the one who potentially benefited the most from the group 's break @-@ up . His 1970 triple album , *All Things Must Pass* , was a major commercial and critical success , eclipsing releases by both Lennon and McCartney . According to author Ian Inglis , Harrison became " popular music 's first statesman " as a result of both *All Things Must Pass* and his 1971 ? 72 Bangladesh aid project . The last of these established humanitarianism as a new direction for rock music , in addition to focusing on Harrison the level of attention previously afforded the Beatles . While Leng describes " Who Can

See It " as a " plea for understanding from a private man living his life in public " , Inglis writes that , after the " euphoria " of his recent achievements as a solo artist , Harrison was forced to confront " some of the more unpleasant realities of his everyday life " .

= = Composition = =

" Who Can See It " is in the musical key of E. The melody incorporates various augmented and diminished chords , which Harrison describes in I , Me , Mine as " all kinds of suspended chords " , since he played them in an open tuning on the guitar . The song starts with a solitary guitar figure and then builds in intensity through the verse and into the chorus , as musical tension matches the emotion of the lyrics .

Leng views " Who Can See It " as a " new type of ballad " from Harrison , one that combines a " dramatic edge " with rhythmic sophistication . The time signature shifts throughout the composition , from 4 / 4 to 6 / 4 and 5 / 8 , with brief portions in 5 / 4 and 3 / 4 . In Leng 's description , the melody features " sweepingly large chromatic intervals " , beginning with the verse 's third line ? a four @-@ semitone swoop that recalls the ascending melismas commonly used in Indian music . Harrison later remarked , with reference to the boldness of the tune : " [' Who Can See It '] reminds me of Roy Orbison for some reason . He could do this good . "

Among the material Harrison wrote or finished for Living in the Material World , several songs reflect on his years with the Beatles , and in the case of " Who Can See It " , with bitterness . In the opening verse , he states :

I 've been held up
I 've been run down
I can see quite clearly now through those past years
When I played towing the line .

Inglis views these lines as a reference to Harrison 's working @-@ class upbringing as well as his years as a member of the Beatles . In the chorus that follows , Harrison contends that , having personally lived through these experiences , his sole wish is that his feelings " Should not be denied me now " , and he concludes : " I can see my life belongs to me / My love belongs to who can see it . " Inglis offers a simple précis of this statement : " he has paid his dues . Now he is his own man ... "

In the song 's second verse , Harrison sings of having " lived in fear " and witnessed the hatred created by " this sad world " . While later discussing his aversion to performing live after 1966 , Harrison presented a similar imagery , citing the Beatles ' concerns regarding the threat of assassination . He also referred to the band 's fame as " very one @-@ sided " , since the Beatles " gave their nervous systems " while receiving the adulation of their fans .

Leng finds the words to verse two typical of Harrison 's tendency towards " internalization of world events " in some of his songs from this period , whereby " hate , conflict and strife " are projected onto the " wider world " in the likes of " Who Can See It " and " The Light That Has Lighted the World " . Theologian Dale Allison views the mention of " this sad world " as a further reference to the essentially " tragic " nature of human existence , after " All Things Must Pass " and in anticipation of later Harrison songs such as " Stuck Inside a Cloud " , in that " notwithstanding all the success and adulation " , ultimately , " we are all alone " . Allison writes of the message behind " Who Can See It " : " Here he declares his freedom from his Beatle past , his freedom to be himself . "

= = Recording = =

Harrison had intended to co @-@ produce his long @-@ awaited follow @-@ up to All Things Must Pass with Phil Spector , a mainstay of his career since 1970 . Spector 's unreliability meant that Harrison was forced to produce Living in the Material World alone ? an outcome that music critics Greg Kot and Zeth Lundy find regrettable , in light of how Spector 's signature Wall of Sound treatment might have suited ballads such as " Who Can See It " and " The Day the World Gets ' Round " . Another regular Harrison collaborator , John Barham , provided orchestral arrangements

as before , and noted an " austere quality " in some of the new songs . " George was under stress during Living in the Material World , " Barham said later . " I felt that he was going through some kind of a crisis . I think it may have been spiritual , but I cannot be sure . "

Harrison taped the basic track for " Who Can See It " between October and December 1972 , either at the Beatles ' Apple Studio in London or at FPSHOT , his home studio in Henley , Oxfordshire . He recorded his vocals during the first two months of the new year , and Barham 's orchestration and choir were added in late February .

Harrison 's twin electric @-@ guitar parts recall the sound of the Beatles ' Abbey Road album , through his use of a Leslie rotary effect ? a detail that Leng finds significant , given the song 's subject matter . In another Beatles comparison , music journalists Alan Clayson and John Metzger consider Harrison 's production on Material World to be similar to George Martin 's work with the band . Leng writes of " Who Can See It " having been " conceived with an Orbison vocal " , and the singing duly reflects Orbison 's more dramatic style . Harrison 's vocal reaches falsetto in places , while , in Clayson 's description , " swerving from muttered trepidation to strident intensity " during the course of the song .

Aside from Harrison , the musicians on the recording include Nicky Hopkins (piano) , Klaus Voormann (bass) and Jim Keltner (drums) . As can be heard in the outtake of " Who Can See It " available unofficially on the Living in the Alternate World bootleg , Gary Wright 's original contribution was a prominent harmonium part , superseded by Barham 's strings and brass on the released version . Leng nevertheless credits Wright with playing organ on the song .

= = Release and reception = =

Apple Records released Living in the Material World at the end of May 1973 in the United States and a month later in Britain . " Who Can See It " appeared as track 4 on side one of the LP format , in between what Leng terms the " perfect pop confection " " Don 't Let Me Wait Too Long " and another song that referenced Harrison 's Beatle past , " Living in the Material World " . Reflecting the album 's lyrical themes , Tom Wilkes 's art design contrasted a devout spiritual existence with life in the material world , by featuring Hindu religious images such as a painting of Krishna and his warrior prince Arjuna , and a photograph of Harrison and his fellow musicians at a banquet , surrounded by symbols of material wealth and success .

The album confirmed Harrison 's status as the most commercially successful ex @-@ Beatle , but it drew criticism from some reviewers for the number of slow songs among its eleven tracks , as well as the perceived preachy tone of Harrison 's lyrics . According to author Michael Frontani , lines such as " My life belongs to me " in " Who Can See It " " betrayed sentiments of a man increasingly at odds ? with fans and critics who wanted him to be ' Beatle George , ' or at least to be less fixated on his spirituality " .

In his review for Rolling Stone , Stephen Holden wrote that , amid Material World 's " miraculous ... radiance " , the song represented " passionate testament " and " a beautiful ballad whose ascendant long @-@ line melody is the most distinguished of the album " . In Melody Maker , Michael Watts described Living in the Material World as " far , far removed from the Beatles " and " more interesting " lyrically than All Things Must Pass . Watts noted the " large autobiographical insights " provided in Harrison 's songwriting , of which " Who Can See It " showed " he 's found the way at last " . Writing of Harrison 's standing on an album he considered " as personal , in its own way , as anything that Lennon has done " : Watts said : " Harrison has always struck me before as simply a writer of very classy pop songs ; now he stands as something more than an entertainer . Now he 's being honest . " NME critic Bob Woffinden praised the song also , but suggested it was " ideal material " for someone with a wider vocal range than Harrison .

= = Retrospective reviews = =

Some recent reviewers have been less enthusiastic , with PopMatters ' Zeth Lundy opining that , rather than Harrison 's more " stripped @-@ down " production aesthetic , " Who Can See It " would

have benefited from " the hyper @-@ drama of All Things Must Pass ' resonant abyss " . Writing for Rolling Stone in 2002 , Greg Kot similarly bemoaned the " hymn @-@ like calm " of the performance and its falling short of the " transcendent heights " of Harrison 's 1970 triple set . In their Solo Beatles Compendium , Chip Madinger and Mark Easter dismiss the track as a " song which goes on far too long to make its simple point " , a situation not helped by a " histrionic " vocal from Harrison .

Reviewing the 2006 reissue of Living in the Material World for Q magazine , Tom Doyle included it among the album 's best three tracks and wrote : " the introspective moods of The Light That Has Lighted The World and Who Can See It , with their ornate instrumentation and weepy vocals , are lovely things . " Former Mojo editor Mat Snow describes Material World as " a treat for the ears " and , while conceding Harrison 's limitations as a singer compared with Lennon and McCartney , he writes that Harrison " worked hard to ensure the choruses of ... ' Who Can See It ' caught the ear with their deep and delicious emotion " . In his review of the 2014 reissue of Harrison 's Apple catalogue , for Classic Rock , Paul Trynka refers to Material Word as an album that " sparkles with many gems " ; of these , he adds , " it 's the more restrained tracks ? Don 't Let Me Wait Too Long , Who Can See It ? that entrance : gorgeous pop songs , all the more forceful for their restraint . " New Zealand Herald journalist Graham Reid writes of Harrison " sound [ing] battered by recent events and the Beatle legacy " on " Who Can See It " , yet he cites the song as a " standout " on an album that " can be very moving " .

Among Beatles biographers , the Roy Orbison influence in " Who Can See It " is frequently noted , as is the fact that Harrison 's lead vocal is one of the best of his career . In addition to admiring the album 's disciplined , George Martin @-@ like production , Alan Clayson has written of the " hitherto unprecedented audacity " of the vocals found throughout Material World , adding : " He may have lacked the Big O 's operatic pitch , but ' Who Can See It ' was among George 's most magnificent performances on record . Veering cleanly into falsetto on other tracks , too , never had his pipes been so adept . " Elliot Huntley describes " Who Can See It " as a " beautiful ballad " and an " aching , yearning masterpiece " . In his chapter on George Harrison in the book The Dawn of Indian Music in the West , Peter Lavezzoli is another who highlights Harrison 's singing on this " gorgeous Roy Orbison @-@ esque ballad " .

While praising a vocal that " positively bursts with passion " , Leng identifies the song 's " prevailing emotions " as " bitterness and anger " and notes : " If any Beatles fan was laboring under the misapprehension that George had enjoyed the [Beatles] episode as much as they had , this song tells the exact opposite story . " Ian Inglis writes that the " rather ponderous " arrangement on " Who Can See It " limits its " entertainment " value but , like " The Light That Has Lighted the World " , the song is an " unequivocal statement of who he is " .

= = Live performance = =

In line with his stated refusal to play the role of " Beatle George " at the time , " Who Can See It " was among the songs rehearsed and played on Harrison 's North American tour with Ravi Shankar in November ? December 1974 . Given the composition 's " intensity of sentiment " , Leng views it as a notable inclusion in the concert setlist . Harrison dropped the song in a program reshuffle following the opening show , however , due to his laryngitis @-@ ravaged vocals cords being unable to carry such a demanding tune .

The tour was the first North American tour by an ex @-@ Beatle , a fact that encouraged expectations from many critics and concert @-@ goers that were at odds with Harrison 's aim ? which was to present a musically diverse show featuring a minimum of his Beatles @-@ era songs . In an attempt to justify himself , Harrison took to quoting from the chorus of " Who Can See It " during interviews , as an example of Gandhi 's advice to " create and preserve the image of your choice " .

= = Personnel = =

George Harrison ? vocals , electric guitars

Nicky Hopkins ? piano

Gary Wright ? organ

Klaus Voormann ? bass

Jim Keltner ? drums

John Barham ? string and brass arrangements , choral arrangement