

= Isn't It a Pity =

" Isn't It a Pity " is a song by English musician George Harrison from his 1970 solo album All Things Must Pass . It appears in two variations there : one the well @-@ known , seven @-@ minute version ; the other a reprise , titled " Isn't It a Pity (Version Two) " . Harrison wrote the song in 1966 , but it was rejected for inclusion on releases by the Beatles . In many countries around the world , the song was also issued on a double A @-@ side single with " My Sweet Lord " . In America , Billboard magazine listed it with " My Sweet Lord " when the single topped the Hot 100 chart , while in Canada , " Isn't It a Pity " reached number 1 as the preferred side .

An anthemic ballad and one of Harrison 's most celebrated compositions , " Isn't It a Pity " has been described as the emotional and musical centrepiece of All Things Must Pass and " a poignant reflection on The Beatles ' coarse ending " . Co @-@ produced by Phil Spector , the recording employs multiple keyboard players , rhythm guitarists and percussionists , as well as orchestration by arranger John Barham . In its extended fadeout , the song references the closing refrain of the Beatles ' 1968 hit " Hey Jude " . Other musicians on the recording include Ringo Starr , Billy Preston , Gary Wright and the band Badfinger , while the reprise version features Eric Clapton on lead guitar .

The song appeared as the closing track on Harrison 's career @-@ spanning compilation Let It Roll (2009) , and a live version , from his 1991 tour with Clapton , was included on Live in Japan (1992) . Clapton and Preston performed the song together at the Concert for George tribute in November 2002 . " Isn't It a Pity " has been covered by numerous artists , including Nina Simone , Matt Monro , Cowboy Junkies , Paul Young , Elliott Smith , Galaxie 500 , Jonathan Wilson and Graham Nash , Tedeschi Trucks Band , and Roberta Flack .

= = Background and composition = =

While no longer the " really tight " social unit they had been throughout the chaos of Beatlemania ? or the " four @-@ headed monster " , as Mick Jagger famously called them ? the individual Beatles were still bonded by genuine friendship during their final , troubled years as a band , even if it was now more of a case of being locked together at a deep psychological level after such a sustained period of heightened experience . Eric Clapton has described this bond as being just like that of a typical family , " with all the difficulties that entails " . When the band finally split , in April 1970 ? a " terrible surprise " for the outside world , in the words of author Mark Hertsgaard , " like the sudden death of a beloved young uncle " ? even the traditionally most disillusioned Beatle , George Harrison , suffered a mild bereavement .

Towards the end of May that year , among the dozens of tracks that would be considered and / or recorded for his All Things Must Pass triple album , Harrison returned to a number of unused songs that he had written during the late 1960s . " Isn't It a Pity " was one of these , having most recently been rejected by the Beatles during the January 1969 Get Back sessions that resulted in their final album , Let It Be . According to Abbey Road engineer Geoff Emerick , however , the song had been offered for inclusion on 1967 's Sgt. Pepper 's Lonely Hearts Club Band , while Mark Lewisohn , the band 's acknowledged recording historian , has stated that it was first presented during sessions for the previous year 's Revolver . Lewisohn 's opinion appears to tally with a bootlegged conversation from the Get Back sessions , where Harrison reveals that John Lennon had vetoed " Isn't It a Pity " three years before , and that he (Harrison) considered offering the song to Frank Sinatra . (Harrison had recently met Sinatra in Los Angeles while working there with Apple signing Jackie Lomax .)

Despite its relative antiquity by 1970 , the song 's lyrics lent themselves well to the themes of spiritual salvation and friendship that define All Things Must Pass , being consistent with the karmic subject matter of much of the album . In his 1980 autobiography , Harrison explains : " ' Isn't It a Pity ' is about whenever a relationship hits a down point ... It was a chance to realise that if I felt somebody had let me down , then there 's a good chance I was letting someone else down . " His lyrics adopt a nonjudgmental tone throughout :

Isn't it a pity , isn't it a shame
How we break each other's hearts , and cause each other pain
How we take each other's love without thinking any more
Forgetting to give back , now isn't it a pity .

Harrison biographer Ian Inglis has referred to the song's "surprisingly complex" lyrics , which in one sense can be seen as a personal observation on a "failed love affair" yet at the same time serve as a comment on "the universal love for , and among , humankind" . This theme had featured in previous Harrison songs such as "Within You Without You" and "While My Guitar Gently Weeps" and would remain prominent in much of his subsequent compositions . The same parallels regarding the universality of love in Harrison's work has been noted by Dale Allison , author of the first "spiritual biography" on the ex-Beatle ; "When George asks , 'Isn't It A Pity ?' , " Allison writes , "the scope of his question is vast : it embraces almost everything ."

Speaking to Billboard editor @-@ in @-@ chief Timothy White in 2000 , Harrison said of "Isn't It A Pity" : "It's just an observation of how society and myself were or are . We take each other for granted ? and forget to give back . That was really all it was about ."

= = Recording = =

Two contrasting versions of the song were recorded in London in mid 1970 during the sessions for All Things Must Pass , both of which were intended for release , from the outset . According to Harrison , after recording the first version , he had decided he was unhappy with it , and the second version came about by chance "weeks later" , when one of the backing musicians began playing the song during a session . The so @-@ called "Isn't It A Pity (Version Two)" is noticeably slower than the better known , seven @-@ minute "epic" reading of the song . Eric Clapton's lead guitar fills , phased piano from Tony Ashton , and John Barham @-@ arranged woodwinds dominate Version Two , which is also more in keeping with the Beatles' earlier attempts on the track ; as with "Ballad of Sir Frankie Crisp" , it features extensive use of the Leslie speaker sound so familiar from the band's Abbey Road album .

Like the concurrently recorded "My Sweet Lord" , the album's other "Isn't It A Pity" betrays the influence of co @-@ producer Phil Spector more so than the comparatively sedate Version Two . It is also the most extreme example of Harrison's stated intention to allow some of the songs on All Things Must Pass to run longer and feature instrumentation to a greater degree than had been possible within the confines of the more pop @-@ oriented Beatles approach to recording . "Isn't It A Pity" (Version One , in its All Things Must Pass context) starts small and builds ? "and it builds and it builds" , NME's Alan Smith would soon write . Taping of the backing track took place at Abbey Road Studios on 2 June , and judging by Spector's comments regarding Harrison's early mixes , the orchestral arrangement was not added until late August at the earliest . The first slide @-@ guitar break on the released recording , quite possibly overdubbed some time after the June sessions also , would adopt a near @-@ identical melody to the one Harrison had vocalised when routing the song for the other Beatles on 26 January 1969 ? reflecting a quality admired by Elton John in the latter's 2002 tribute to Harrison : "All his solos are very melodic ? you can almost sing his solos . " Inglis writes that the effect of Harrison's "elaborate patterns" on slide guitar is to "counterbalance the underlying atmosphere of pessimism with shafts of beauty" , similar to the "notes of light and dark" provided by Pete Drake's pedal steel on the song "All Things Must Pass" .

Now in the key of G (two semitones down from the Get Back performance) , "Isn't It A Pity" begins "dirge"-like with a two @-@ note pedal point provided by layers of keyboards and acoustic guitars . Only at the one @-@ minute mark , at the start of verse two , does the rhythm section come in , after which the instruments begin to "break out of their metronomic straitjacket to attain an almost ecstatic release" , as Beatles Forever author Nicholas Schaffner put it in 1977 . The "balmy" slide guitar passage , supported by Barham's string section , follows this second verse , and from that point on ? around 2 : 38 ? the same , circular chord structure continues for the remaining four @-@ and @-@ a @-@ half minutes of the song . The long fade @-@ out sees what Schaffner

termed the "pseudo @-@ symphonic tension" burst into a frenzy of brass and timpani, further bottleneck soloing, and the "What a pity" mantra joined by "Hey Jude"-style "Na @-@ na @-@ na @-@ na" chorus.

One of the most obvious examples of what Rolling Stone magazine's album reviewer later termed "the music of mountain tops and vast horizons", "Isn't It a Pity" featured the largest line @-@ up of musicians found on the album? including three or four keyboard players, a trio of extra rhythm guitarists, the orchestral strings, brass and tympani, and a male choir. Harrison's former bandmate Ringo Starr and two musicians with well @-@ established links to the Beatles, Klaus Voormann and Billy Preston, were among the participants, on drums, bass and organ, respectively. Members of Apple band Badfinger provided the "felt but not heard" acoustic guitars (behind Harrison's), consistent with Spector's criteria for his Wall of Sound technique, while author Bruce Spizer has suggested that Peter Frampton may have been among the rhythm guitarists also. Pianist Gary Wright, who would go on to collaborate regularly with Harrison over the subsequent decades, recalls the session for "Isn't It a Pity" as being his first with Harrison. Bobby Whitlock, the other main keyboard player on All Things Must Pass, with Wright, recalls playing a "phase @-@ shifted pump organ, or harmonium" on the track. Another possible participant is Maurice Gibb, Starr's Highgate neighbour at the time, who claimed to have played piano on the song.

= = Release = =

Originally, the intention had been to release "Isn't It a Pity" as the lead single from All Things Must Pass in October 1970, until Spector and others persuaded Harrison that "My Sweet Lord" was the most obvious choice. The full, seven @-@ minute "Isn't It a Pity" was therefore issued as a double A @-@ side with "My Sweet Lord" on 23 November in the United States and Canada (as Apple 2995), four days before the album's release there. Reflecting the equal status of the two tracks, both sides of the single's picture sleeve featured the same Barry Feinstein @-@ shot photo of Harrison, the only differences being the song title below Harrison's name and the fact that the green Apple Records logo and catalogue number appeared only on the side for "My Sweet Lord".

The single was phenomenally successful in North America, and around the world. Both songs were listed at number 1 on America's Billboard Hot 100 chart, for four weeks starting on 26 December. In Canada, "Isn't It a Pity" was the lead side when the single topped the RPM 100 chart for five weeks, through to mid January 1971. "Isn't It a Pity" was issued on All Things Must Pass as the final track on side one of the LP format, providing, in biographer Elliot Huntley's words, an "elegiac, plaintive song of reconciliation" after the angry "Wah @-@ Wah". Author Robert Rodriguez writes of the public's perception of "Isn't It a Pity" on release: "All Things Must Pass was replete with songs that could easily be interpreted as commentary on the Beatles' breakup; though this particular song predated the events of 1969? 1970, the subtext [wasn't] diminished in the least. " "Isn't It a Pity (Version Two)" appeared as the penultimate track on side four of the original three @-@ record set, thus serving as what Rodriguez terms "a bookend to a nearly completed journey".

Despite the song's commercial success, and its standing as one of the most @-@ covered compositions among Harrison's post @-@ Beatles output, "Isn't It a Pity" was omitted from EMI / Capitol's The Best of George Harrison in November 1976. It was included on the 2009 compilation Let It Roll: Songs by George Harrison, however. A demo version of the song, recorded during the Get Back sessions, is also available on Let It Roll as an iTunes Store exclusive.

A live version from December 1991, again with Clapton, appears on the album Live in Japan.

= = Reception = =

"Isn't It a Pity" remains one of Harrison's most popular songs with critics and fans alike. AllMusic calls it "deeply moving and powerful", while in their book on the solo Beatles' recording history, Eight Arms to Hold You, Chip Madinger and Mark Easter declare: "If any George Harrison song can be called 'majestic', 'Isn't It a Pity' would be the one." In his December 1970 album review

for the NME , Alan Smith described it as a track that " catches the mood of aching tolerance of pain , which Harrison can do so well " and " a ballad which will stand out from the album with the passing of the years " . While reviewing the song 's pairing with " My Sweet Lord " , Billboard magazine wrote of a " powerhouse two @-@ sided winner " with " equally potent lyric lines and infectious rhythms " .

Simon Leng identifies the song as musically " sumptuous " and praises Harrison 's melody and " unique " use of notes beyond the key signature , as well as John Barham 's " evocative , suspended orchestration " . He notes also the similarity of their combined musical counterbalance with elements of Indian raga , in the number of swaras (tones) in both ascending and descending scales . To Leng , " Isn 't It a Pity " is the " pivotal song " , the " essence " of All Things Must Pass , encapsulating the album 's struggle between " gospel ecstasy and the failure of human relationships " . He concludes : " Ever bittersweet , ' Isn 't It a Pity ' records the last dying echoes of the Beatles . "

Writing in the late 1970s , Nicholas Schaffner noted the song 's " towering simplicity " and the " endlessly repetitive fade @-@ out that somehow manages to be hypnotic instead of boring " . Like Leng and Schaffner , a number of commentators have remarked on the significance of " Isn 't It a Pity " in the context of the Beatles ' demise , starting with the song 's length : 7 : 10 ? just a second under " Hey Jude " . Ben Gerson , in his 1971 Rolling Stone review , described the song as a " lament ... whose beginning is the broken thirds of John 's ' I Am the Walrus ' and whose end is the decadent , exultant last half of Paul 's ' Hey Jude ' " . Peter Doggett considers " Isn 't It a Pity " a " remarkably non @-@ judgemental commentary on the disintegration of the Beatles ' spirit " .

Elliot Huntley has complained of the song 's enforced period in hibernation : " [It] simply beggars belief that the track was rejected by Martin , Lennon and McCartney ? three men whose reputations rested on their ability to spot a good tune when they heard one . " Huntley views " Isn 't It a Pity " as worthy of " fully fledged standard " status , with Barham 's " soaring " strings and Harrison 's " sublime " slide guitar combining to take the song " into the heavens , where it stays " . Mojo contributor John Harris highlights the song in his review of one of the few " truly essential " solo albums by a former Beatle , writing : " The faster songs [on All Things Must Pass] (eg Wah Wah) are delightful ; the slowies (Isn 't It A Pity , Beware Of Darkness) simply jaw @-@ dropping . "

Speaking in 2001 during promotion for the 30th anniversary reissue of All Things Must Pass , Harrison named the song among his three favourite tracks on the album , along with " Run of the Mill " and " Awaiting on You All " . In 2010 , AOL Radio listeners voted " Isn 't It a Pity " seventh in a poll to find the ten best post @-@ Beatles George Harrison songs . Both Eric Clapton and Tom Petty have named " Isn 't It a Pity " among their favourite two Harrison compositions , Petty calling the song " a masterpiece " . According to Acclaimed Music , " Isn 't It a Pity " is featured in Bruce Pollock 's 2005 book The 7 @, @ 500 Most Important Songs of 1944 ? 2000 , while in 2013 , Holland 's Radio 2 program Het Theater van het Sentiment listed the song at number 1 (ahead of Lennon 's " Imagine ") in its " Top 40 Songs by Year " for 1971 .

= = Personnel = =

The musicians who performed on the two All Things Must Pass versions of " Isn 't It a Pity " are believed to be as follows .

= = Cover versions = =

In May 1971 , singer Matt Monro released a UK single of " Isn 't It a Pity " (produced by George Martin) .

Nicky Thomas recorded the song for his 1971 album Tell It Like It Is .

Ireland 's 1970 Eurovision Song Contest winner , Dana , covered the song in 1971 , a rendition that has been described as a " poignant " commentary to the political upheaval then gripping Ulster .

The Three Degrees recorded " Isn 't It a Pity " during their period on Roulette Records in 1970 ? 72 , later released on the 1995 compilation The Roulette Years .

Nina Simone 's " intense " , eleven @-@ minute reworking of " Isn 't It a Pity " was released on her

1972 album Emergency Ward ! , a statement on the Vietnam War which also includes a cover of " My Sweet Lord " . A six @-@ minute version of " Isn 't It a Pity " was issued on the 51 @-@ track compilation The Essential Nina Simone in 1993 . In his autobiography , Harrison says he was influenced by Simone 's treatment when he came to record his song " The Answer 's at the End " in 1975 .

Galaxie 500 covered the song on their On Fire album in 1989 .

A version by Pete Drake appeared on his eponymous solo album , released in 1997 .

The song appears on Television Personalities ' 1998 album Don 't Cry Baby ... It 's Only a Movie .

In March 2001 , 18th Dye contributed a version of " Isn 't It a Pity " to Snowstorm ? A Tribute to Galaxie 500 .

At the Concert for George on 29 November 2002 , a year to the day after Harrison 's death , Eric Clapton and Billy Preston performed the song with backing from Dhani Harrison , Jeff Lynne , Gary Brooker , Jim Keltner , Ray Cooper , Jim Horn , Tom Scott and others .

Jay Bennett and Edward Burch recorded " Isn 't It a Pity " for Songs from the Material World : A Tribute to George Harrison , a multi @-@ artist compilation released in February 2003 .

Classical guitarist Joseph Breznikar recorded a version of the song for his 2003 tribute album George Harrison Remembered : A Touch of Class .

Cowboy Junkies covered the song on their Early 21st Century Blues album in 2005 .

Joel Harrison recorded " Isn 't It a Pity " for his album Harrison on Harrison : Jazz Explanations of George Harrison , released in October 2005 .

A cover version by Les Fradkin was released in 2005 on his Something for George tribute album .

Spanish singer Rafo de la Cuba covered the song in December 2005 .

A version by Paul Young was included on his 2006 album Rock Swings .

Pedro Aznar covered the song as " No Es Una Pena ? " , with Spanish lyrics , on his album Quebrado in 2008 .

In September 2008 , members of Heard of Buffalo performed the song for the Jerry Lewis MDA Telethon .

" Isn 't It a Pity " was among a number of Harrison and Beatle covers recorded or performed by Elliott Smith ; a version appears on the 1998 @-@ 08 @-@ 12 : Hoboken , NJ , USA album .

Soul singer Bettye LaVette covered the song on Interpretations : The British Rock Songbook in 2010 .

David McAlmont and Bernard Butler 's performance of " Isn 't It a Pity " was released on the Live From Leicester Square album in February 2011 .

A version by Jonathan Wilson and Graham Nash appeared on Harrison Covered , a tribute CD accompanying the November 2011 issue of Mojo magazine .

Also in November 2011 , marking the ten @-@ year anniversary of Harrison 's death , Keane recorded a version of the song .

Roberta Flack covered " Isn 't It a Pity " on her album Let It Be Roberta ? Roberta Flack Sings The Beatles , released in February 2012 .

My Morning Jacket have included " Isn 't It a Pity " in their live performances ; when playing the song at the Forecastle Festival in July 2012 , they were joined on stage by Dean Wareham of Galaxie 500 .

Local H covered the song on their 2014 album Local H 's Awesome Mix Tape 2

= = Chart positions = =