

= Eight Miles High =

" Eight Miles High " is a song by the American rock band the Byrds , written by Gene Clark , Jim McGuinn (a.k.a. Roger McGuinn) , and David Crosby and first released as a single on March 14 , 1966 (see 1966 in music) . Musically influenced by Ravi Shankar and John Coltrane , " Eight Miles High " , along with its McGuinn and Crosby @-@ penned B @-@ side " Why " , was influential in developing the musical styles of psychedelic rock , raga rock , and psychedelic pop . Accordingly , critics often cite " Eight Miles High " as being the first bona fide psychedelic rock song , as well as a classic of the counterculture era .

The song was subject to a U.S. radio ban shortly after its release , following allegations published in the broadcasting trade journal the Gavin Report regarding perceived drug connotations in its lyrics . The band strenuously denied these allegations at the time , but in later years both Clark and Crosby admitted that the song was at least partly inspired by their own drug use . The failure of " Eight Miles High " to reach the Billboard Top 10 is usually attributed to the broadcasting ban , but some commentators have suggested that the song 's complexity and uncommercial nature were greater factors .

" Eight Miles High " reached number 14 on the Billboard Hot 100 chart and number 24 in the UK Singles Chart . The song was also included on the band 's third album , Fifth Dimension , which was released on July 18 , 1966 . " Eight Miles High " became the Byrds ' third and final U.S. Top 20 hit , and was also their last release before the departure of Gene Clark , the band 's principal songwriter at the time .

= = History = =

= = = Composition = = =

The song 's lyrics are , for the most part , about the group 's flight to London in August 1965 and their accompanying English tour , as hinted at by the opening couplet : " Eight miles high and when you touch down , you 'll find that it 's stranger than known . " Although commercial airliners fly at an altitude of six to seven miles , it was felt that " eight miles high " sounded more poetic than six and also recalled the title of the Beatles ' song " Eight Days a Week " .

According to Clark , the lyrics were primarily his creation , with a minor contribution being David Crosby 's line , " Rain grey town , known for its sound " , a reference to London as home to the British Invasion , which was then dominating U.S. music charts . Other lyrics in the song that explicitly refer to the Byrds ' stay in England include the couplet : " Nowhere is there warmth to be found / Among those afraid of losing their ground " , which is a reference to the hostile reaction of the UK music press and to the English group the Birds serving the band with a copyright infringement writ , due to the similarities in name . In addition , " Round the squares , huddled in storms / Some laughing , some just shapeless forms " describes fans waiting for the band outside hotels , while the line " Sidewalk scenes and black limousines " refers to the excited crowds that jostled the band as they exited their chauffeur @-@ driven cars .

Although the basic idea for the song had been discussed during the band 's flight to England , it didn 't actually begin to take shape until the Byrds ' November 1965 tour of the U.S. To alleviate the boredom of traveling from show to show during the tour , Crosby had brought along cassette recordings of Ravi Shankar 's music and the John Coltrane albums Impressions and Africa / Brass , which were on constant rotation on the tour bus . The influence of these recordings on the band would manifest itself in the music of " Eight Miles High " and its B @-@ side " Why " .

Clark began writing the song 's lyrics on November 24 , 1965 , when he scribbled down some rough ideas for later development , following a discussion with guitarist Brian Jones , before the Byrds made a concert appearance supporting the Rolling Stones . Over the following days , Clark expanded this fragment into a full poem , eventually setting the words to music and giving them a melody . Clark then showed the song to McGuinn and Crosby , with the former suggesting that the

song be arranged to incorporate Coltrane 's influence . Since Clark 's death , however , McGuinn has contended that it was he who conceived the initial idea of writing a song about an airplane ride and that he and Crosby both contributed lyrics to Clark 's unfinished draft . In his book , Mr. Tambourine Man : The Life and Legacy of the Byrds ' Gene Clark , author John Einarson disputes this claim and ponders whether McGuinn 's story would be the same were Clark still alive .

= = = Recording = = =

The master recording of " Eight Miles High " was recorded on January 24 and 25 , 1966 , at Columbia Studios in Hollywood , with record producer Allen Stanton guiding the band through the recording process . John Einarson has noted that the influence of Coltrane 's saxophone playing and , in particular , his song " India " from the Impressions album , can be clearly heard in " Eight Miles High " ? most noticeably in McGuinn 's recurring twelve @-@ string guitar solo . In addition to this striking guitar motif , the song is also highlighted by Chris Hillman 's driving and hypnotic bass line , Crosby 's chunky rhythm guitar playing and the band 's ethereal harmonies .

" Eight Miles High " also exhibits the influence of sitarist Ravi Shankar , particularly in the droning quality of the song 's vocal melody and in McGuinn 's guitar playing . However , the song does not actually feature the sound of the sitar , despite the Byrds having appeared brandishing the instrument at a contemporary press conference held to promote the single . In a 1966 promotional interview , which was added to the expanded CD reissue of the Fifth Dimension album , Crosby said that the song 's ending made him " feel like a plane landing . "

An earlier version of " Eight Miles High " was recorded at RCA Studios in Los Angeles on December 22 , 1965 , but Columbia Records refused to release that recording because it had not been produced at a Columbia @-@ owned studio . McGuinn has since stated that he believes this original version of the song to be more spontaneous sounding than the better known Columbia release . That opinion was echoed by Crosby , who commented " It was a stunner , it was better , it was stronger . It had more flow to it . It was the way we wanted it to be . " This original version of " Eight Miles High " initially saw release on the 1987 archival album Never Before and was also included as a bonus track on the 1996 Columbia / Legacy CD reissue of Fifth Dimension .

= = Release and legacy = =

= = = U.S. radio ban = = =

" Eight Miles High " was released on March 14 , 1966 in the U.S. and May 29 , 1966 in the UK , reaching number 14 on the Billboard Hot 100 , and number 24 on the UK Singles Chart . Following its release , the band faced allegations of advocating the use of recreational drugs from Bill Gavin 's Record Report , a weekly newsletter circulated to U.S. radio stations . This resulted in " Eight Miles High " being banned in a number of states within a week of the report being published , a factor which contributed to the single 's failure to break into the Billboard Top 10 . The Byrds and their publicist , Derek Taylor , countered by strenuously denying that the song was drug @-@ related , with Taylor issuing an indignant press release unequivocally stating that the song was about the band 's trip to England and not drug use . However , by the early 1980s , both Crosby and Clark were prepared to admit that the song was not entirely as innocent as they had originally declared , with the former stating " Of course it was a drug song ! We were stoned when we wrote it . " Clark was less blunt , explaining in interview that " it was about a lot of things . It was about the airplane trip to England , it was about drugs , it was about all that . A piece of poetry of that nature is not limited to having it have to be just about airplanes or having it have to be just about drugs . It was inclusive because during those days the new experimenting with all the drugs was a very vogue thing to do . "

Research analyst Mark Teehan , writing for Popular Musicology Online , has challenged the widely held view among critics , music historians and the Byrds themselves that the U.S. radio ban hurt

sales of " Eight Miles High " . Having examined the local music surveys and the Billboard regional retail sales charts , as they relate to the national charting of " Eight Miles High " , Teehan has uncovered evidence suggesting that the progressive and uncommercial nature of the song was a much bigger factor in its failure to reach the Billboard Top 10 . The author 's research revealed that " Eight Miles High " failed to reach the Top Five in any of his sample of 23 regional markets , and most telling , among the thirty radio stations included within this sample , it reached the Top 10 on only seven of them (23 %) .

Teehan points out that although the Gavin Report recommended that radio stations withdraw the single from airplay , many stations did not comply with this request . In addition , Teehan notes that the radio ban was not suggested by the Gavin Report until April 29 , 1966 , almost seven weeks after the single had initially been released ? ample time for it to have made its mark on the charts . Teehan has uncovered evidence showing that " Eight Miles High " was already decelerating on the national charts before the end of April 1966 . He concludes that the groundbreaking song lacked strong commercial appeal by virtue of its complexity , unique sound , and excessive length (commercial radio stations were reluctant to play songs that were over two @-@ and @-@ a @-@ half minutes long during the mid @-@ 1960s) , and that it suffered from uncoordinated and inefficient promotion by Columbia Records .

= = = Influence and reception = = =

The song 's use of Indian and free @-@ form jazz influences , along with its impressionistic lyrics , were immediately influential on the emerging genre of psychedelic rock . Accordingly , some authors and music historians , including Eric V. D. Luft , Domenic Priore , and Dwight Rounds , have described " Eight Miles High " as being the first bona fide psychedelic rock song . In his book *Riot On Sunset Strip : Rock ' n ' Roll 's Last Stand in Hollywood* , Priore cites " Eight Miles High " as being the record that kicked off the psychedelic craze , explaining " prior to ' Eight Miles High , ' there were no pop records with incessant , hypnotic basslines juxtaposed by droning , trance @-@ induced improvisational guitar . "

The song was responsible for the naming of the musical subgenre raga rock , when journalist Sally Kempton , in her review of the single for *The Village Voice* , used the term to describe the record 's experimental fusion of eastern and western music . However , although Kempton was the first person to use the term raga rock in print , she had actually borrowed the phrase from the promotional material that the Byrds ' press office had supplied to accompany the " Eight Miles High " single release . In a 1968 interview for the *Pop Chronicles* radio documentary , McGuinn denied that the song was in fact an example of raga rock , while Crosby , speaking in 1998 , dismissed the term entirely , stating " they kept trying to label us ; every time we turned around , they came up with a new one ... it 's a bunch of bullshit . " Nonetheless , the experimental nature of the song placed the Byrds firmly at the forefront of the burgeoning psychedelic movement , along with the Yardbirds , the Beatles , Donovan and the Rolling Stones , who were all exploring similar musical territory concurrently .

Contemporary reviews for the single were mostly positive , with *Billboard* magazine describing the song as a " Big beat rhythm rocker with soft lyric ballad vocal and off @-@ beat instrumental backing . " *Record World* magazine also praised the song , commenting " It 's an eerie tune with lyrics bound to hypnotize . Will climb heights . " In the UK , *Music Echo* described the song as " wild and oriental but still beaty " . The publication also suggested that with the release of " Eight Miles High " the Byrds had jumped ahead of the Beatles in terms of creativity , stating " [By] getting their single out now they 've beaten the Beatles to the punch , for Paul [McCartney] admitted recently that the Liverpool foursome are working on a similar sound for their new album and single . " In recent years , Richie Unterberger , writing for the *Allmusic* website , has described " Eight Miles High " as " one of the greatest singles of the ' 60s . "

In 1999 , the song was inducted into the Grammy Hall of Fame , an honor reserved for " recordings of lasting qualitative or historical significance that are at least 25 years old . " In 2004 , *Rolling Stone* magazine ranked " Eight Miles High " at number 151 on their list of *The 500 Greatest Songs of All*

Time and in March 2005 , Q magazine placed the song at number 50 on their list of the 100 Greatest Guitar Tracks .

= = Post @-@ release = =

During the same month that " Eight Miles High " was released as a single , the Byrds ' main songwriter , Gene Clark , left the band . His fear of flying was stated as the official reason for his departure , but other factors , including his tendency toward anxiety and paranoia , as well as his increasing isolation within the group , were also at work . Following the release of " Eight Miles High " and Clark 's departure , the Byrds never again managed to place a single in the Billboard Top 20 .

The Byrds performed " Eight Miles High " on a number of television programs during the 1960s and 1970s , including Popside , Drop In , Midweek , and Beat @-@ Club . The song would go on to become a staple of the band 's live concert repertoire , until their final disbandment in 1973 . A sixteen @-@ minute live version of " Eight Miles High " was included on the Byrds ' (Untitled) album in 1970 , and another live version was released as part of the 2008 album , Live at Royal Albert Hall 1971 . The song was performed live by a reformed lineup of the Byrds featuring Roger McGuinn , David Crosby , and Chris Hillman in January 1989 .

The song would remain a favorite of Clark 's during his post @-@ Byrds solo career and would often be performed live at his concert appearances until his death , in 1991 . McGuinn also continues to perform an intricate acoustic guitar rendition of the song in his live concerts . Crosby has revisited " Eight Miles High " infrequently during his post @-@ Byrds career , but it was performed during Crosby , Stills , Nash & Young 's reunion tour of 2000 , with Neil Young handling McGuinn 's guitar solo , while the other three members sang the song 's three @-@ part harmonies . Additionally , the Byrds ' bass player , Chris Hillman , recorded an acoustic version of " Eight Miles High " as part of his 2005 album , The Other Side .

In addition to its appearance on the Fifth Dimension album , " Eight Miles High " also appears on several Byrds ' compilations , including The Byrds ' Greatest Hits , History of The Byrds , The Original Singles : 1965 ? 1967 , Volume 1 , The Byrds , The Very Best of The Byrds , The Essential Byrds and There Is a Season .

= = Cover versions and media references = =

" Eight Miles High " has been covered by many different bands and artists , including , the Ventures , Leathercoated Minds , Lighthouse , Leo Kottke , Roxy Music , Ride , Stewart / Gaskin , Robyn Hitchcock , Rockfour , Les Fradkin , The Kennedys , and the Postmarks . In addition , Hüsker Dü released the song as a single prior to the release of their Zen Arcade LP in 1984 . The song was also covered in 1969 by Golden Earring , who put a nineteen @-@ minute version on their Eight Miles High album . The Emerson , Lake & Palmer spinoff group 3 recorded the song with revised lyrics on their 1988 album , To the Power of Three . Crowded House have also covered the song with ex @-@ Byrd Roger McGuinn , on their I Feel Possessed EP .

Don McLean 's song " American Pie " makes reference to " Eight Miles High " with the lines " The Birds [sic] flew off with a fall @-@ out shelter / Eight miles high and falling fast . " The First Edition 's 1968 hit , " Just Dropped In (To See What Condition My Condition Was In) " , contains a reference to the song with the line " I tripped on a cloud and fell a @-@ eight miles high . " The independent rock band Okkervil River references " Eight Miles High " in its song " Plus Ones " , on the 2007 album The Stage Names . Bruce Springsteen 's song " Life Itself " , from his 2009 album Working on a Dream , features guitar playing and production techniques reminiscent of " Eight Miles High " by the Byrds .

The Byrds ' version of " Eight Miles High " was featured in the 1983 film Purple Haze . It also appears in both the " Le Voyage dans la Lune " and " The Original Wives Club " episodes of the television miniseries From the Earth to the Moon .