

= The Obvious Child =

" The Obvious Child " is a song recorded by American singer @-@ songwriter Paul Simon . It was the lead single from his eighth studio album , The Rhythm of the Saints (1990) , released by Warner Bros. Records . Written by Simon , its lyrics explore mortality and aging . The song is accompanied by a performance from Brazilian drumming collective Olodum in a live recording . Simon wrote his lyrics to complement the song 's rhythm ; in following this approach he wrote many passages that could be considered nonsensical .

The single , released in September 1990 , was commercially successful , performing well on charts worldwide . In the United States , it was mainly successful on the Album Rock Tracks chart , where it peaked at number 21 . Outside the US , " The Obvious Child " was a top 15 hit in the United Kingdom and the Netherlands . The song received highly positive reviews upon its release . Simon promoted the song alongside Olodum in a performance on Saturday Night Live . The song also influenced popular culture ; it is the namesake of the 2014 film Obvious Child .

= = Background = =

The rhythm tracks are performed by Grupo Cultural Olodum , a drumming collective (" bloco afro ") directed by " Negoinho do Samba " (Alves de Souza) and also signed to Warner Bros. It , like many songs on The Rhythm of the Saints , was recorded live in the streets of Pelourinho Square of Salvador , Brazil in February 1988 . Microphones were hung from windows or on telephone poles to capture the performances . According to Simon , " Hundreds of people gathered . It was an amazing day ? an amazing recording experience . " The vocal track was recorded at the Hit Factory in New York City .

= = Composition = =

The song 's drum introduction is indebted to " Madagascar " , a song by Olodum from their 1987 LP Egito Madagáscar . Writer Steve Sullivan writes that the figure is a " standard device " for the group , who also employ abbreviated versions of it elsewhere on the album : " Salvador Nao Inerte " and " Vinheta Cuba @-@ Brasil " . Following this , the song breaks into an instrumental fragment that , according to Stephen Holden of The New York Times , echoes the Silhouettes ' 1957 doo @-@ wop hit , " Get a Job " . Holden also compared the song 's conclusion to another doo @-@ wop song , the Charts ' " Desirie " (1957) .

The song 's lyrics thematically relate to a fear of aging and leaving behind the " boldness of youth , " according to Sullivan . Holden considered it a story of an everyman pondering the uncertainty of life whilst navigating his high school yearbook . Rolling Stone 's John Mcalley too found it an everyman battling the fact that his " days have become defined by their limitations and dogged ordinariness . " For The Rhythm of the Saints , Simon was inspired by poet Derek Walcott , and would base first @-@ draft lyrics on his poems . Simon attempted to match the rhythmic quality of the composition with his lyrics , whether that meant a lyric was meaningless or not . A lyric relating to " the cross is in the ballpark , " for example , has no meaning ; Simon said , " I found [it] to be a satisfying rhythmic phrase against the drums . "

= = Chart performance = =

" The Obvious Child " performed well on singles charts in several territories worldwide . In the United States , the song reached a peak of number 92 on the Billboard Hot 100 on January 5 , 1991 ; it spent five weeks on the chart as a whole . It performed better on the magazine 's Mainstream Rock Tracks chart , where it placed at number 21 on November 10 , 1990 , and on the Modern Rock Tracks chart , where it reached a peak of number 24 a week earlier on November 3 . It had more longevity on the former chart , where it spent ten weeks total . In Canada , the song first debuted on the RPM 100 on October 20 , 1990 at position 98 . It peaked at number 28 during the week of

December 8 , 1990 , and remained at that peak for two weeks .

Internationally , the single performed better . In the United Kingdom , the song premiered on the UK Singles Chart on September 30 , 1990 at number 61 , and rose over the following weeks to a peak of number fifteen on November 4 , 1990 . It charted best in the Netherlands ' Nationale Top 100 , where it reached a peak of number 12 . On Belgium 's Ultratop 50 , it hit number 29 . In Australasian territories , it charted right outside the top 40 : in Australia , the song reached number 42 , and in New Zealand , it peaked at number 46 .

= = Reception = =

Upon its release , " The Obvious Child " received positive reviews from music critics of the time . Stephen Holden of The New York Times was perhaps the most effusive :

Greg Sadow of Entertainment Weekly praised the song 's " confident drums that resound with special exuberant zing . " A reviewer for People felt that " the more exotic musical elements are subsumed by Simon 's pretty pop structures [...] You never get the impression that Paul has truly gone native or even considered it . He 's more like a kid camping under the stars in his own backyard . "

Reviews have continued to be very positive over time . Writer Steve Sullivan , in his book Encyclopedia of Great Popular Song Recordings , Volume 1 (2013) , calls the song " an extraordinary work that surpasses any individual song Paul Simon had ever produced as a solo artist . " Cameron Scheetz , in a 2014 article for The A.V. Club , examined the song ; he called it " the perfect confluence of the wild , frenetic drumming and Simon 's folksy melodies . "

= = Promotion and use in media = =

Simon performed the song , accompanied by Olodum and Neguinho do Samba , on Saturday Night Live on November 17 , 1990 .

The song is the namesake for the 2014 film Obvious Child ; it appears in a scene in which two characters drunkenly dance together . Director Gillian Robespierre titled the film with hope that its meaning would be ambiguous .

= = Formats and track listing = =

All songs written by Paul Simon , except where noted .

= = Charts = =