

On What Some Songs Add Up To
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Last night, sitting on my leather couch in my two-room rented apartment in Burlington, Vermont, five years into retirement at eighty, I watched a YouTube of singer Bobby Hatfield, who was half of a duo called The Righteous Brothers, performing the song “Unchained Melody” on the Andy Williams television show on NBC back in 1965. Andy interviewed him before he sang the song. Andy was a singer himself, and a very good one.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=m0EBs6uRgtw>

I was probably watching back then. I rarely missed an Andy Williams’ show. Bobby did a superb job with the song on that occasion. He was exactly my age at the time, 25 (I looked it up, and I resembled him some. Bobby’s gone now, a cocaine overdose in a Cleveland motel room. Andy Williams is gone now too.

Watching Bobby sing “Unchained Melody” reminded me of a thought I wrote about the song for this site in March of 2010 called “On Unchained Melody.”

<http://www.robertsgriffin.com/Unchained.pdf>

It dealt with a dream I had had about the song and it got into my deafness and into creativity and how its products last after we pass on.

I write these website thoughts one at a time with no attention to what has gone before or how anything fits into a larger pattern. I’m not trying to make a point or get any message across. I feel compelled to express myself publicly and I go with it and write things down and put it online for people to read if they want to.

Just now, I went back through the site to see how many of the thoughts have dealt with songs. It turns out to be eleven—“On Unchained Melody” in 2010 was the first. I’ve decided to put them here in the order I wrote them along with brief commentaries and videos of the song to see if collectively they add up to anything. Is there a pattern, do they make a point of some kind, reveal anything,

tell some kind of story, provide any insights, pose any challenges? I suggest you read the thoughts and watch the videos as I go through them.

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So “On Unchained Melody” thought and Bobby Hatfield’s performance of the song is the first one. What do you make of it? About me, about yourself, about the world?

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On to the second one. I have long had an interest in Bernie Taupin, best known for writing the lyrics to many of Elton John’s hits. I’m taken by the freshness and creativity and quality of Bernie’s lyrics, and with the idea of creating for a living. My strongest impulse is to create (I worked in a service profession, teaching), going from nothing to something, the experience of that, the gratification that comes from that, and I’m attracted to the fact that what is created is permanent, it lasts; really, forever.

I’m impressed by how Taupin, born in Britain, seems clear about what he wants—now, it is to live on a ranch in the American west--and by how he is willing to move on from the past. With all his success as a song writer, he hasn’t tried to hang on to that. He currently focuses on his artwork. And he has a new life partner. His example—he’s around my age--holds out possibilities for me; I don’t have to keep doing the same things in the same place with the same people.

I often go through a book of Bernie’s lyrics--*Bernie Taupin: The One Who Writes the Words for Elton John* (Jonathan Cape, 1976). I’m especially drawn to “Skyline Pigeon,” about flying away from here, from all of this. In July of 2013, I wrote a thought made up of lyrics from the song.

<http://www.robertsgriffin.com/SkylinePigeon.pdf>

Here’s Elton John singing it.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mTusxEh_w1E

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I was supposed to go to the west coast to spend Christmas of 2014 with my ten-year-old daughter Dee, but trouble with her mother, whom Dee lives with, led me to cancel the trip. I felt awful about letting Dee down, and was distraught about not seeing her. I felt I had betrayed Dee due to my weakness as a person.

The British rock singer Joe Cocker had just died and I watched a YouTube of a performance in Cologne, Germany a year earlier of his signature song, a cover of the Beatles' "With a Little Help from My Friends."

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qzDLZa01bYU>

I picked up on how Joe, who was near death from cancer when he performed the song, did his very best with it. I was uplifted to note that that with all of my limitations, I do my very best.

As I watched Joe do the song a second time, I took notice of one of his back-up singers, whose name I found out from an internet search s Laura Jane Jones. I wrote a thought about her which was really about affirming my own good qualities and the possibility of getting myself out of the hole I was in.

<http://www.robertsgriffin.com/JonesC.pdf>

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In a February, 2015 thought called "On a Ticket to Anywhere," I revisited the "Skyline Pigeon" theme. Get out of here! the here being Burlington, Vermont, where I've lived since the 1970s, having come from Minneapolis to take a university job. Go someplace, anyplace! The thought was adapted from the lyrics from the Tracy Chapman song, "Fast Car."

<http://www.robertsgriffin.com/ticket.pdf>

And here's Tracy singing the song.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yvGfVdx-gNo>

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There are people I had the obligation to look out for long ago and I didn't and I deeply regret it. I didn't think they needed me, but I can see by how their lives turned out that they did need me. There is a young girl, now sixteen-years-old, who needs me, and as long I have breath in me, I'll look out for her. In a June, 2015 thought called "On Serving Somebody," I expressed that commitment through the lyrics from Bob Dylan's song, "Gotta Serve Somebody." <http://www.robertsgriffin.com/ServeSomeb.pdf>

Bob singing the song.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0MzyBv4yOPU>

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Amid all the criticism of America these years, I am incredibly grateful to this country for giving me the chance to make something out of myself. The September, 2015 thought "On America" contained the lyrics of a song not heard much these days, "America (My Country 'Tis of Thee)." It was a big part of my childhood and underscores what is at the core of my country: a commitment to human freedom, liberty.

<http://www.robertsgriffin.com/America.pdf>

Here's the Soldier's Chorus singing it.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DqiOBbRzEgI>

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The lyrics of John Denver's "Annie's Song," which made up the October, 2015 thought "On 'Annie's Song'," were about me wanting to be back with someone who at one time was very close to. <http://www.robertsgriffin.com/AnnieA.pdf>

John Denver singing the song.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TyJRsp5t9mA&list=RDzlKLtnbU0xE&index=2>

I never got back with “Annie,” and still long to.

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The lyrics to Mickey Newbury’s compilation of three songs from the Civil War era comprised the October, 2016 thought, “On ‘An American Trilogy.’” The lyrics to the third song—“Hush little baby, don’t you cry . . .”—are to Dee.

<http://www.robertsgriffin.com/AmerTrilG.pdf>

Newbury singing the song. Newbury was also my age exactly. He and I were both 32 then. He looked remarkably as I did at that time. He’s gone now.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=f7p82Joum7Q>

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“On Chuck Berry” was written at the time of Berry’s death in March of 2017. The lyrics to his song “Memphis, Tennessee,” are about a father trying to reach his young daughter on the phone. I can relate (“Can’t you stay here, Daddy?”)

<http://www.robertsgriffin.com/BerryB.pdf>

Chuck singing the song while he still could. We all do whatever we do while we still can.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=B7fyNnoZ7IA>

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As a teenager back in 1958, I bought Conway Twitty’s hit record, “It’s Only Make Believe.” I suppose I had heard it on the radio. I didn’t understand the lyrics. Years later, I saw Conway in person at the Flamingo Club in Saint Paul—a shortish, pudgy, unhappy-

looking man. Conway is gone. The July, 2018 thought with the lyrics of the song.

<http://www.robertsgriffin.com/It%27sMakeBelieveC.pdf>

Here's Glen Campbell's version of the song. Glen had a show on CBS the same years Andy Williams did. I watched him too. Glen's gone.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Utrkirpbk_o

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Sitting here on this leather couch, I came upon a YouTube of Stevie Nicks' 1976 performance of her song "Rhiannon." Stevie is still alive.

<https://www.dailymotion.com/video/x2n5e5w>

Seeing the video got me to write a thought on the Welsh Rhiannon myth in March of 2020"On Rhiannon." The thought was a portion of a message to Dee. Dee didn't reply.

<http://www.robertsgriffin.com/RhiannonA.pdf>

I sent a book on Rhiannon and a link to the Stevie Nicks YouTube to Dee. She didn't acknowledge them.

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What do all these songs add up to? Perhaps that, long ago, I should have gotten up off this leather couch and gone someplace.

I'm reminded of the joke, I guess it is, about the little boy who announced to his parents that he was going to run away from home and strode out the front door.

Very soon, he was back.

"I thought you were running away from home," his dad said.

"I was," the little boy replied, "but I didn't know where to go."