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"**A Day in the Life**" is a song by the British rock band [The Beatles](#) written by [John Lennon](#) and [Paul McCartney](#), based on an original idea by Lennon. It is the final track on the group's 1967 album *[Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band](#)*. Since its original album release, "A Day in the Life" has been released as a [B-side](#), and also on various [compilation albums](#). It has been covered by other artists including [The Fall](#), [Bobby Darin](#), [Sting](#), [Neil Young](#), [Jeff Beck](#), [The Bee Gees](#) since 2008, by Paul McCartney in his live performances. *[Rolling Stone](#)* magazine ranked it the 26th [greatest song of all time](#).<sup>[1]</sup>

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## Lyrical inspiration and collaboration

There is some dispute about the inspiration for the first verse. Many believe that it was written with regard to the death of [Tara Browne](#), the 21-year-old heir to the [Guinness](#) fortune and close friend of Lennon and McCartney, who had crashed his [Lotus Elan](#) on 18 December 1966 when a Volkswagen pulled out of a side street into his path in Redcliffe Gardens, Earls Court.<sup>[2]</sup> In numerous interviews, Lennon claimed this was the verse's prime inspiration. However, [George Martin](#) adamantly claims that it is a drug reference (as is the line "I'd love to turn you on" and other passages from the song) and while writing the lyrics John and Paul were imagining a stoned politician who had stopped at a set of traffic lights.<sup>[3]</sup>

The description of the accident in "A Day in the Life" was not a literal description of Browne's fatal accident. Lennon said, "I didn't copy the accident. Tara didn't blow his mind out, but it was in my mind when I was writing that verse. The details of the accident in the song — not noticing traffic lights and a crowd forming at the scene — were similarly part of the fiction."<sup>[4]</sup>

The final verse was inspired by an article in the *[Daily Mail](#)* in January 1967 regarding a substantial amount of potholes in [Blackburn](#), a town in [Lancashire](#). However, he had a problem with the words of the final verse, not being able to think of how to connect "Now they know how many holes it takes to" and "the [Albert Hall](#)". His friend Terry Doran suggested that they would "fill" the Albert Hall.<sup>[5]</sup>

McCartney provided the middle section of the song, a short piano piece he had been working on independently, with lyrics about a commuter whose uneventful morning routine leads him to drift off into a reverie. He had written the piece as a wistful recollection of his younger years, which included riding the bus to school, smoking and going to class.<sup>[6]</sup> The line "I'd love to turn you on", which concludes both verse sections, was, according to Lennon, also contributed by McCartney; Lennon said "I had the bulk of the song and the words, but he contributed this little lick floating around in his head that he couldn't use for anything."<sup>[7]</sup>

## Recording

The Beatles began recording the song, with a working title "In the Life of...", on 19 January 1967, in the innovative and creative studio atmosphere ushered in by the recording of [Strawberry Fields Forever](#) and [Penny Lane](#) over the preceding weeks.<sup>[8]</sup> The two sections of the song are separated by a 24- bar bridge. At first, The Beatles were not sure how to fill this transition. Thus, at the conclusion of the recording session for the basic tracks, this section solely consisted of a simple repeated piano chord and the voice of assistant [Mal Evans](#) counting the bars. Evans's guide vocal was treated with gradually increasing amounts of echo.

The 24-bar bridge section ended with the sound of an alarm clock triggered by Evans. The original intent was to edit out the ringing alarm clock when the missing section was filled in; however it complemented McCartney's piece well; the first line of McCartney's song began "Woke up, fell out of bed", so the decision was made to keep the sound.<sup>[9]</sup> Martin later said that editing it out would have been unfeasible in any case.<sup>[10]</sup>

The basic track for the song was refined with [remixing](#) and additional parts added at recording sessions on 20 January and 3 February.<sup>[9]</sup> Still, there was no solution for the missing 24-bar middle section of the song, when McCartney had the idea of bringing in a full orchestra to fill the gap.<sup>[9]</sup> To allay concerns that classically-trained musicians would not be able to improvise the section, producer [George Martin](#) wrote a loose score for the section. It was an extended, [atonal crescendo](#) that encouraged the musicians to improvise within the defined framework.<sup>[9]</sup>

The orchestral part was recorded on 10 February 1967, with McCartney and Martin conducting a 40-piece orchestra. The recording session was completed at a total cost of £367 for the players, an extravagance at the time.<sup>[11]</sup> Martin later described explaining his improvised score to the puzzled orchestra:

Template:Quote

McCartney noted that the strings were able to keep themselves in the designated time, while the trumpets were "much

#### "A Day in the Life"

#### Song by The Beatles

<b>Album</b>	<i>Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band</i>
<b>Released</b>	1 June 1967
<b>Recorded</b>	Abbey Road Studios 19, 20 January, 3, 10 February 1967
<b>Genre</b>	Rock
<b>Length</b>	5:05
<b>Label</b>	Parlophone, Capitol, EMI
<b>Writer</b>	Lennon/McCartney
<b>Producer</b>	George Martin

wilder".<sup>[7]</sup>

McCartney had originally wanted a 90-piece orchestra, but this proved impossible; the difference was made up, as the semi-improvised segment was recorded multiple times and eventually four different recordings were overdubbed into a single massive crescendo.<sup>[9]</sup> The results were successful; in the final edit of the song, the orchestral bridge is **repeated** after the final verse.

It was arranged for the orchestral session to be filmed by NEMS Enterprises for use in a planned television special.<sup>[12]</sup> The film was never released in its entirety, although portions of it can be seen in the "A Day in the Life" promotional film, which includes shots of studio guests **Mick Jagger**, **Marianne Faithfull**, **Keith Richards**, **Donovan**, **Pattie Boyd** and **Michael Nesmith**.<sup>[13]</sup>

Reflecting The Beatles' taste for experimentation and the **avant garde** at this point in their careers, the orchestra players were asked to wear or were given a costume piece on top of their formal dress. This resulted in different players wearing anything from red noses to fake stick-on nipples. Martin recalled that the lead **violinist** performed wearing a **gorilla** paw, while a **bassoon** player placed a **balloon** on the end of his instrument.<sup>[11]</sup>

Due to the multiple takes required to perfect the orchestral cacophony and the final chord, as well as their considerable procrastination in composing the song, the total duration of time spent recording "A Day in the Life" was 34 hours.<sup>[14]</sup> In contrast, the Beatles' earliest work, their first album *Please Please Me*, was recorded in its entirety in only 10 hours.<sup>[15]</sup>

## Song structure

The song comprises portions originally authored independently by Lennon and McCartney, two cacophonous, part-improvised, **orchestra crescendos**, and a sustained final piano chord. While Lennon's lyrics were inspired by contemporary newspaper articles, McCartney's were reminiscent of his youth. The decisions to link sections of the song with orchestral crescendos and to end the song with a sustained piano chord were made only after the rest of the song had been recorded.

"A Day in the Life" is in the key of G major, but, as **Alan W. Pollack** explains, "its true center of gravity is in the parallel minor [of G Major] and the Major keys of E".<sup>[16]</sup> The verses are in G-major/E-minor and the bridge is in E-major. A 4/4 meter is used throughout. The song is laid out with an instrumental beginning, followed by three verses (0:13), an orchestral crescendo (1:45), a middle section (2:16), an orchestral bridge (2:49), the final verse (3:19), a second orchestral crescendo (3:50), and a final piano chord (4:21–5:05).

Each verse is sung by Lennon and follows the same basic layout, but each has a different way of ending. The first verse, which is twenty measures, ends with a repetition of the F major **chord progression** before returning to the home key. The second verse, two measures shorter than the first, ends on the C major chord rather than repeating the F major progression. The third verse is the same as the second, except that there is one more measure (to accommodate the "I'd love to"), and the verse does not return to the home key. Instead it leads to a bridge, a 24-measure long glissando-like crescendo starting from low E to an E several octaves higher. Random cymbal crashes are interspersed near the end to "challenge your sense of meter".<sup>[16]</sup>

An alarm clock rings, beginning McCartney's middle section. While the pulse of this section remains the same, the accents suggest a tempo twice as fast as that of the verses before. The three chords in this nineteen measures long section are the I, flat VII, and V chords (E, D, and B). This is followed by an orchestral bridge: a repeated **circle of fifths** (from C to E) over twenty measures. The bridge is accompanied by a wordless vocal ("Ahhhh...")<sup>[17]</sup> and leads to the fourth and final verse.

The final verse has the same layout as the third verse. Starr's drumming, however, retains its double-time feel from McCartney's section. This verse leads to the second crescendo. However, after the orchestra hits its highest note, there is a measure of silence, which leads to the final E-major piano chord.

## The final chord

Following the final orchestral crescendo, the song ends with one of the most famous final **chords** in music history.<sup>[11][18]</sup> Lennon, McCartney, Starr, and Evans shared three different pianos and played an E-major chord simultaneously. The final chord was made to ring out for over forty seconds by increasing the recording sound level as the vibration faded out. Towards the end of the chord the recording level was so high that listeners can hear the sounds of the studio, including rustling papers and a squeaking chair.<sup>[19]</sup>

The piano chord was a replacement for a failed vocal experiment: on the evening following the orchestra recording session, the four Beatles had originally recorded an ending of their voices humming the chord, but after multiple overdubs they found that they wanted something with more impact.<sup>[20]</sup>

## Variations

On the *Sgt. Pepper* album, the start of "A Day in the Life" is cross-faded with the applause at the end of the previous track "Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band (Reprise)". On the *The Beatles 1967–1970* LP, "A Day in the Life" fades in through the *Sgt. Pepper* cross-fade, but on the CD version of *1967–1970*, the song starts cleanly, without any fade or cross-fade.<sup>[21][22]</sup>

Following "A Day in the Life" on the *Sgt. Pepper* album is a high frequency tone and a few seconds of **gibberish**. Recorded two months after the mono and stereo masters for "A Day in the Life" had been finalised, the gibberish (entitled in the session notes "Edit for LP End") was added to the run-out groove of the initial British pressing<sup>[23]</sup>. See **the Sgt. Pepper album** for details.

On *Anthology 2*, in an early, pre-orchestral version of the song, McCartney can be heard saying "See, the worst thing about doing this, that we're doing something like this, is that I think that at first people, sort of, are a bit suspicious. You know, 'Come on, what are you up to?'. But the thing is it really is just..." before the song fades out.<sup>[24]</sup>

The *Anthology 3* version of "The End" concludes with the final chord of "A Day in the Life", played backwards and then forwards, to bring closure to the *Anthology* CD series.<sup>[25]</sup>

## Supposed drug references

The song became controversial for its supposed references to **drugs**. On 1 June 1967, the day the *Sgt. Pepper* LP was released, the BBC announced it was banning "A Day in the Life" from British stations due to the line "I'd love to

File:ADITL in audacity.png

A waveform view of "A Day in the Life" showing its characteristic crescendos and sudden instrumental changes.

turn you on," which, according to the corporation, advocated drug use.<sup>[2]</sup> Other lyrics allegedly referring to drugs include "found my way upstairs and had a smoke / and somebody spoke and I went into a dream". A spokesman for the BBC stated, "We have listened to this song over and over again. And we have decided that it appears to go just a little too far, and could encourage a permissive attitude to drug-taking".<sup>[26]</sup>

Lennon and McCartney denied that there were drug references and publicly complained about the ban at a dinner party celebrating their new album to their manager, **Brian Epstein**. Lennon said that the song was simply about "a crash and its victim", and called the line in question "the most innocent of phrases".<sup>[26]</sup> McCartney later flatly denied the drug allegations, saying that "what we want to do is to turn you on to the truth rather than ...pot".<sup>[26]</sup> However, George Martin later commented that he had always suspected that the line "found my way upstairs and had a smoke" was a drug reference, recalling how the Beatles would "disappear and have a little puff", presumably of **cannabis**, but not in front of him.<sup>[27]</sup>

When *Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band* was released in South Asia, **Malaysia** and Hong Kong, "A Day in the Life" was excluded along with "**With a Little Help from My Friends**" and "**Lucy in the Sky with Diamonds**" because of supposed drug references.<sup>[28]</sup>

## Recognition

"A Day in the Life" is one of The Beatles' most influential songs. Paul Grushkin in his book *Rockin' Down the Highway: The Cars and People That Made Rock Roll*, called the song "one of the most ambitious, influential, and groundbreaking works in pop music history".<sup>[29]</sup> In "From Craft to Art: Formal Structure in the Music of the Beatles", the song is described thus: "A Day in the Life" is perhaps one of the most important single tracks in the history of rock music; clocking in at only four minutes and forty-five seconds, it must surely be among the shortest epic pieces in rock.<sup>[30]</sup>

The song appears on many top songs lists. It placed twelfth on **CBC's 50 Tracks**, the second highest Beatles song on the list after "**In My Life**".<sup>[31]</sup> It placed first in *Q Magazine's* list of the 50 greatest British songs of all time, and was at the top of *Mojo Magazine's* 101 Greatest Beatles Songs, as decided by a panel of musicians and journalists. <sup>[32][33][34]</sup> "A Day in the Life" was also nominated for a **Grammy** in 1967 for **Best Arrangement Accompanying Vocalist Or Instrumentalist**.<sup>[35]</sup>

On 27 August 1992 Lennon's original handwritten lyrics were sold by the estate of **Mal Evans** in an auction at **Sotheby's** London for \$100,000 (£56,600).<sup>[36]</sup> The lyrics were put up for sale again in March 2006 by **Bonhams** in New York. Sealed bids were opened on 7 March 2006 and offers started at about \$2 million.<sup>[37][38]</sup>

In 2004, *Rolling Stone* ranked "A Day in the Life" at number 26 on the magazine's list of the **500 Greatest Songs of All Time**.

## Cover versions and references

"A Day in the Life" has been covered and referenced numerous times by other artists. **Jazz guitarist Wes Montgomery** covered the song and used it as the title track to his **instrumental** album "A Day in the Life" (arranged and conducted by **Don Sebesky**).<sup>[39]</sup> **Phish** have covered the song several times throughout their career.<sup>[40]</sup> The Cat's Miaow version of "A Day in the Life" omitted the orchestral and middle sections, and appeared on their 1996 *A Kiss and a Cuddle* album.<sup>[41]</sup> Alternative rock band **Mae** recorded a version of the song for their album *The Everglow EP* in 2006.<sup>[42]</sup> Jazz guitarist **Grant Green** covered the song on his 1970 album *Green is Beautiful* (Blue Note Records).<sup>[43]</sup> **The Libertines'** **Carl Barat** and **Pete Doherty** covered "A Day in the Life" for **BBC Radio 2's** 40-year-anniversary celebration of *Sgt. Pepper*, broadcast 16 June 2007.<sup>[44]</sup> **Sting** recorded a version of the song on *MTV Unplugged*.<sup>[45]</sup> **Brie Larson** recorded an acoustic version exclusively for her **MySpace** page.<sup>[46]</sup> **Type O Negative** (who have been highly influenced by the Beatles) referenced the song at the closing of their song "Kill You Tonight (Reprise)" with the famous extended E-major chord.

In 2008, **Yoko Ono** toured with a 100-piece collection of Lennon's artwork drawn between 1968 and 1980 under the title, "A Day in the Life." The tour presented non-original limited edition copies, with many having colour added later on Ono's orders.<sup>[47]</sup>

**Neil Young** played a version of the song during both his 2008 European summer tour, his 2008 North American winter tour, and his 2009 Australia and New Zealand tour. <sup>[48]</sup>

**Paul McCartney** played 'A Day in the Life' during The Liverpool Sound Festival at Anfield Stadium in Liverpool together with **Give Peace A Chance**.

**Eric Burdon & War** recorded this song in an early session in 1969. The incomplete version with 11 minutes was released on their 1976 compilation album, *Love Is All Around*.

The **Devo** song "Some Things Never Change" from the 1988 album *Total Devo* paid homage to the song, starting each verse with the nearly identical, "I saw the news today oh boy", and following similar structure.<sup>[49][50]</sup> **Soundhog** produced a **remix** version of the song called "A Day in Tracy's Life", incorporating **Mogwai's** song "Tracy" and bits of work by Kid Loco.<sup>[51]</sup> **Zack de la Rocha & DJ Shadow'** track "March of death" contains verse "I read the news today oh boy". **Mark Z. Danielewski** quotes part of the song's lyrics ("I saw a film today, oh boy") in the beginning of his book *House of Leaves*. **David Bowie's** "**Young Americans** from the album of the same name features chorus singers singing the line "I saw the news today, oh boy".

The **Dream Theater** song **Six Degrees of Inner Turbulence** ends with a sustained E major chord played on synthesizer that fades out for approximately 2 minutes, much like the ending chord of "A Day in the Life".

**Brand New** references the ending lyric of "Never to see any other way" in their song "**Play Crack the Sky**" off of *Deja Entendu*. After the song appears over, a closing door can be heard as well as **Jesse Lacey** repeating those words.

## Cover versions

Cover artist	Release date	Album title	Additional information
<b>Wes Montgomery</b>	1967	A Day In The Life <sup>[52]</sup>	
<b>Brian Auger and the Trinity</b>	1968	Definitely What <sup>[53]</sup>	

<a href="#">Grant Green</a>	Jan 30, 1970	<a href="#">Green Is Beautiful</a> <sup>[54]</sup>	
<a href="#">Lighthouse</a>	1971	<a href="#">One Fine Light</a>	
<a href="#">Eric Burdon &amp; War</a>	1976	<a href="#">Love is All Around</a> <sup>[55]</sup>	
<a href="#">London Symphony Orchestra</a>	1978	<a href="#">Classic Rock: Second Movement</a>	
<a href="#">Sting</a>	1993	<a href="#">Demolition Man</a> <sup>[56]</sup>	
<a href="#">London Starlight Orchestra</a>	Apr 23, 1996	<a href="#">20 Beatles Greatest Hits</a> <sup>[57]</sup>	Instrumental
<a href="#">Mae</a>	Nov 21, 2006	<a href="#">The Everglow EP</a> <sup>[58]</sup>	
<a href="#">Jeff Beck</a>	Nov 24, 2008	<a href="#">Performing This Week: Live at Ronnie Scott's Jazz Club</a> <sup>[59]</sup>	

## Personnel

Words and Music by [John Lennon](#) and [Paul McCartney](#)

Published by [Northern Songs](#)

Performance:

- [John Lennon](#): double tracked [lead vocals](#) (on all the verses), [acoustic guitar](#), [maracas](#) and [piano](#) (final E chord).
- [Paul McCartney](#): [piano](#), [lead vocals](#) (on the middle eight), and [bass guitar](#).
- [George Harrison](#): [maracas](#), [acoustic guitar](#)
- [Ringo Starr](#): [drums](#), [congas](#) and [piano](#) (final E chord).
- [George Martin](#): [harmonium](#) (final E chord) and [producer](#).
- [Mal Evans](#): [alarm clock](#), [counting](#), [piano](#) (final E chord)
- [Geoff Emerick](#): [engineering](#) and [mixing](#).
- Orchestrated by [George Martin](#), [Paul McCartney](#) and [John Lennon](#).
- Conducted by [George Martin](#) and [Paul McCartney](#)
- [John Marston](#): [harp](#)
- [Eric Gruenberg](#), [Granville Jones](#), [Bill Monro](#), [Jurgen Hess](#), [Hans Geiger](#), [D. Bradley](#), [Lionel Bentley](#), [David McCallum](#), [Donald Weekes](#), [Henry Datyner](#), [Sidney Sax](#), [Ernest Scott](#): [violin](#)
- [John Underwood](#), [Gwynne Edwards](#), [Bernard Davis](#), [John Meek](#): [viola](#)
- [Francisco Gabarro](#), [Dennis Vigay](#), [Alan Delziel](#), [Alex Nifosi](#): [cello](#)
- [Cyril Mac Arther](#), [Gordon Pearce](#): [double bass](#)
- [Roger Lord](#): [oboe](#)
- [Basil Tschaikov](#), [Jack Brymer](#): [clarinet](#)
- [N. Fawcett](#), [Alfred Waters](#): [bassoon](#)
- [Clifford Seville](#), [David Sandeman](#): [flute](#)
- [Alan Civil](#), [Neil Sanders](#): [french horn](#)
- [David Mason](#), [Monty Montgomery](#), [Harold Jackson](#): [trumpet](#)
- [Raymond Brown](#), [Raymond Premru](#), [T. Moore](#): [trombone](#)
- [Michael Barnes](#): [tuba](#)
- [Tristan Fry](#): [timpani](#).<sup>[60]</sup>

## See also

- [List of songs banned by the BBC](#)

## Notes

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## External links

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