FOUR | The Electric Light Orchestra and the Anxiety of the Beatles’ Influence

MARK SPICER

Musical influence—how the recordings of one artist or group influenced those of another—is central to the history of pop and rock music, and there is probably no influence story more famous than that of the creative rivalry between the Beach Boys and the Beatles in the mid-1960s. The first installment in this tale of musical one-upsmanship figures prominently in Love and Mercy, the excellent 2014 biopic about the Beach Boys’ Brian Wilson. In a scene from around fifteen minutes into the film, the twenty-three-year-old Brian (played by Paul Dano) and his brothers, Carl and Dennis, discuss the brand-new Beatles album, Rubber Soul, in late 1965: “You hear the new Beatles? It’s amazing. I mean, it works like a whole... Everything fits together, no fat... like an album of folk songs, but the sounds are really far out, lots of overdubbing.” Brian pleads with his brothers, “We can’t let them get ahead of us. I can take you further... if you let me stay home in the studio. It’s what I need to do. And I promise, when you come back, I will have stuff for you that will blow your minds.”

The rest of the story, well known to rock historians, sounds a bit like a game of musical table tennis. Inspired by Rubber Soul, Brian Wilson began writing and recording the songs for what would become Pet Sounds, an extraordinary album, which upon its release in May 1966 immediately caught the attention of the Beatles, especially Paul McCartney, as they were working on the songs for their next album, Revolver. McCartney has confirmed that his song “Here, There, and Everywhere,” in particular, was influenced by “God Only Knows,” which McCartney still declares his favorite pop song of all time. Revolver, of course, blew everyone’s minds when it was released in August 1966, but the Beach Boys followed just two months later with their landmark single, “Good Vibrations” (described by band publicist Derek Taylor as a “pocket symphony”). In turn, the Beatles, having decided to abandon performing live (the group’s final concert was at Candlestick Park, San Francisco, on 29 August 1966), could now, like Wilson, concentrate on writing and recording new music in the studio. The first fruit of that effort was the remarkable “Penny Lane/Strawberry Fields Forever” single, released in February 1967. Legend has it that hearing John Lennon’s “Strawberry Fields Forever”—with its swirl of Mellotron, “backward” taped effects, cellos and trumpets (arranged by George Martin), oodball harmonies, and other sounds previously unheard in pop and rock recordings—so profoundly affected the emotionally fragile and drug-addled Wilson that he gave up working on Smile, the Beach Boys’ highly anticipated follow-up album to Pet Sounds, thinking that the Beatles had already achieved with “Strawberry Fields” everything that a pop record could be (Gaines 1986/1995, 77). The June 1967 release of the Beatles’ Sgt. Pepper’s Lonely Hearts Club Band only deepened Wilson’s anxiety.

It would be no exaggeration to say that the Beatles, particularly in their work from Revolver onward, are to Anglo-American pop and rock music what Beethoven was to nineteenth-century symphonic music: the Beatles’ sheer fluency and innovation as songwriters and performers, along with their constant pushing of the boundaries of what could be achieved technically in the recording studio, set the bar so high that all subsequent pop and rock musicians striving for originality have had to navigate the huge creative space they carved within the landscape of recorded popular music. In making such a grandiose statement about the Beatles, I am invoking literary critic Harold Bloom’s famous theory of the “anxiety of influence.” Some purists may well question its applicability to popular (as opposed to “art”) music, so before going any further, I briefly explain Bloom’s theory and why I think it works as a conceptual lens through which we can better view the music of the Electric Light Orchestra (the focus of this chapter) and so many other pop and rock groups that emerged in the Beatles’ wake.

Bloom’s The Anxiety of Influence: A Theory of Poetry (1973) rests on the notion that the true subject matter of post-Enlightenment poetry is poetry itself—in other words, poems are always somehow “about” other poems, and every new poem is seen as a “misreading” or “misprision”
of a precursor poem or poems. Bloom divides poets into two categories, “strong” and “weak,” distinguishing them by their ability to confront their anxiety of influence. Drawing heavily on Freudian psychoanalysis, Bloom casts this as a kind of Oedipal struggle between sons and fathers, where strong poets successfully wrestle with their great poetic forefathers to achieve originality. Bloom then expands on his theory by positing a series of six “revisionary ratios” to gauge what he sees as varying levels of influence, ranging from clinamen (an initial “swerve” away from the precursor) to apophrades (a “return of the dead,” in which the poetic son (ephebe) so thoroughly assimilates the voice and style of his poetic forefather that he paradoxically even seems like the true author of the precursor’s poems).

Several musicologists and music theorists have adopted Bloom’s ideas and applied them fruitfully to music history as a means of understanding the obstacles that young composers inevitably face when writing new works in the shadow of their great precursors—from Brahms’s struggle to compose his first symphony while wrestling with Beethoven to early modernists such as Schoenberg and Stravinsky who confronted the past by rejecting conventional notions of tonality and meter in their music (Straus 1990, 1991; Korsyn 1991; Bonds 1996; Klein 2005). Not all music historians have been persuaded by the Bloomian model, however. In a 1994 article for the Journal of Musicology, for example, Lloyd Whitesell expresses a legitimate concern with this widespread application of the “Anxiety of Influence” theory to art music, arguing that by choosing to frame the musical past in such terms, we only perpetuate the idea that Western music history revolves around a particular and limited canon of masterworks by dead white men. A similar criticism could be leveled against the widely accepted notion (perpetuated by the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame and mainstream publications such as Rolling Stone and Mojo) of a canon of “classic rock” songs from the 1960s and 1970s that serves as the cornerstone of most accounts of the history of rock. Yet it nevertheless remains the case that the overwhelming majority of rock’s practitioners—certainly during rock’s formative decades in the United States and United Kingdom—have also been white males. The Beatles quickly achieved an iconic and almost godlike status among rock critics and fans alike, and more scholarly writing has been devoted to the Beatles than all other artists combined from rock’s sixty-year history. (Indeed, it is telling that Wilfred Mellers called his watershed 1973 musical study of the Beatles Twilight of the Gods.)

As a huge Beatles fan, I am well aware of the dangers of deification (what John Covach [2009, 6] calls the “fan mentality”), and we should all be wary of Beatles scholarship that borders on hagiography. Yet as scholars of this music, we cannot ignore the fact that the Beatles have also elicited—and continue to elicit—a profound sense of reverence and awe among their fellow pop and rock musicians, of whom none has been more astounded than the Electric Light Orchestra’s creative leader, Jeff Lynne.

To set the context for discussing the Beatles’ influence on the Electric Light Orchestra (ELO), I begin with a quotation from John Lennon himself. Appearing as a guest DJ on the New York City radio station WNEW on 28 September 1974, Lennon said,

“We’re gonna play Electric Light Orchestra from last year [1973], “Showdown,” which I thought was a great record... And it’s a nice group—I call them “Son of Beatles” although they’re doing things that we never did, obviously. But I remember a statement they made when they first formed was to carry on from where the Beatles left off with “[I Am the] Walrus,” and they certainly did. And for those people who like to know where licks and things come from, which I do, ’cause I’m always nicking little things myself, this is a beautiful combination of “I Heard It through the Grapevine” by Marvin Gaye and “Lightning Strikes Again” [by] Lou Christie, and it’s a beautiful job with a little “Walrus” underneath.”

As something of an anomaly among ELO’s output, with its funky R&B groove, “Showdown” is perhaps not the best representative of the group’s signature sound. But Lennon’s comments underscore that any discussion of influence in recorded popular music must focus first and foremost on the intertextual relationships between particular tracks—that is, on how the distinctive sound and style of one recording inspires other groups to try to mimic that sound and style in subsequent recordings. This is precisely what the Beatles did during their fledgling period as songwriters in the early 1960s, seeking to emulate the records that they most admired—“nicking little things”—primarily from American artists such as Chuck Berry (e.g., McCartney’s bass riff that undergirds “I Saw Her Standing There”), the Everly Brothers (e.g., the “clothesline harmony” of Lennon and McCartney’s vocal duet on the word please leading into the refrain of “Love Me Do”), and Roy Orbison (e.g., Lennon’s octave leap into his high falsetto on the second please in the refrain to “Please Please Me”), to name but a few representative examples from the Beatles’ debut U.K. album, Please Please Me. Playing the role
of armchair sonic historiographer, Lennon astutely observed the striking resemblance between the melodic, rhythmic, and harmonic design of the verses of “Showdown” and Gaye’s 1967 version of “I Heard It through the Grapevine,” while the chorus of “Showdown” echoes the falsetto chorus melody of Lou Christie’s 1966 U.S. No. 1 hit, “Lightnin’ Strikes,” a connection made all the more overt by the parallel location and identical melodic/rhythmic setting of the lyrics “raining” and “lightning” (in repeated half notes) at the onset of each chorus—and all this with a little “Walrus” underneath. (And of course, Lennon’s christening the Electric Light Orchestra “Son of Beatles” invokes very directly Bloom’s notion of oedipality.)

The Electric Light Orchestra formed in the summer of 1970—just months after the Beatles had announced their official breakup—as a side project of Roy Wood and Jeff Lynne, the primary songwriters and creative leaders of a Birmingham-based group, the Move. In February 1969, before Lynne officially joined the band, the Move scored their first and only U.K. No. 1 hit single, “Blackberry Way,” a song inspired by a certain Beatles track, as evidenced not only by the “berry” in its title but also by its sleepy psychedelic shuffle and Mellotron-soaked passages. Table 4.1 shows the U.K. Top Ten singles for the lone week that “Blackberry Way” occupied the No. 1 spot. The Beatles themselves had no singles in the Top Ten that week, but a faithful cover of “Ob-La-Di, Ob-La-Da” (Paul McCartney’s proto-reggae song from the “White Album”) by the Scottish group Marmalade was in the No. 10 position, falling down the charts after having occupied the No. 1 spot for three weeks earlier in January. Motown songs still rated highly on the U.K. singles charts in early 1969, with songs from Diana Ross and the Supremes and the Temptations, Martha Reeves and the Vandellas, and Stevie Wonder all in the Top Ten that week. Yet most interesting with respect to the topic of musical influence is the single at No. 2, Fleetwood Mac’s “Albatross,” which had been at No. 1 the previous week until “Blackberry Way” displaced it. “Albatross” is really not a song at all but a guitar instrumental (composed by the group’s founding guitarist, Peter Green)—a very slow shuffle groove, soaked in reverb, with a tapestry of blues tinged electric and slide guitar lines set entirely over a I-ii-Vi shuttle in E (an ever-repeating eight-bar chord pattern of E major for four bars, then F minor seventh for two bars, back to E major for two bars). The eclectic style and sound of Fleetwood Mac’s record quite obviously caught the ears of the Beatles, particularly Lennon, who “nicked” this exact chord progression as the harmonic basis for “Don’t Let Me Down,” recorded on 28 January 1969 and released in April as the B-side to the Beatles’ transatlantic No. 1 single, “Get Back.” (Lennon’s “Sun King,” from the medley on side 2 of Abbey Road [released in September 1969], is also said to have been inspired by “Albatross.”) Even late in their career, the Beatles thus were still being influenced by the records they heard and most admired, eclectically assimilating the new sounds and styles emerging around them into their own music as much as they were influencing other artists.

Whereas Brian Wilson was reportedly paralyzed by his anxiety of influence, Wood and Lynne saw the high bar set by the Beatles as a challenge, inspiring them to new creative heights as songwriters and in the recording studio. Taking such experimental—one might say “symphonic”—late Beatles tracks as “Strawberry Fields Forever,” “A Day in the Life,” “I Am the Walrus,” and “Glass Onion” as a point of departure, ELO’s distinctive sound was forged by bringing orchestral instruments into the mix not merely as sweeteners but as full-fledged members of the rock ensemble. Wood elaborates,

In the early Move days I was a big fan of the Beatles, especially things like “I Am the Walrus” and “Strawberry Fields” and things like that, with the George Martin string sound on them... And I thought, “Wouldn’t it be great if you could represent this on stage properly?” With your own band—like instead of having a guitarist, have a cel-lo player or a French horn player, and not have to use sessionmen. (Cromelin 1974, 12)

Lynne and Wood’s vision ultimately came to reality with the Electric Light Orchestra’s debut single, “10538 Overture,” recorded over various

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<th>Table 4.1. U.K. Top Ten, Week of 5 February 1969</th>
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<td>10 “Ob-La-Di, Ob-La-Da,” Marmalade</td>
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<td>9 “Mrs. Robinson [EP],” Simon and Garfunkel</td>
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<td>8 “Please Don’t Go,” Donald Peers</td>
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<td>7 “I’m Gonna Make You Love Me,” Diana Ross and the Supremes and the Temptations</td>
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<td>6 “You Got Soul,” Johnny Nash</td>
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<td>5 “To Love Somebody,” Nina Simone</td>
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<td>4 “Dancing in the Street [1969],” Martha Reeves and the Vandellas</td>
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<td>3 “For Once in My Life,” Stevie Wonder</td>
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<td>2 “Albatross,” Fleetwood Mac</td>
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<td>1 “Blackberry Way,” The Move</td>
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sessions from July 1970 to June 1971 but not released as a single until the summer of 1972. It peaked at No. 9 in the United Kingdom that August, although it did not chart in the United States. The song’s accumulative beginning features an arpeggiated guitar riff and fanfare-like rising French horn melody layered into the texture above a stock descending bass pattern (i–ii–vi–ii), all of which sounds decidedly Beatlesque (the harmonic profile of the introduction to “10538 Overture” reminds me mostly of Lennon’s “Dear Prudence,” the introduction of which is also built around an arpeggiated guitar figure set to the same descending bass pattern). The final layer of this texturally stratified introduction to enter is a tumbling flurry of cellos, all played by Wood and built up through multitracking to sound like a full cello section. As the song unfolds we can hear the cellos rocking out on jabbing repeated-note figures (recalling not only “Walrus” but also the aggressive, pulsing repeated quarter notes of Martin’s close-miked string octet arrangement for McCartney’s Revolver song “Eleanor Rigby”) and minor-pentatonic blues licks that would ordinarily be given to the electric guitars.

Wood parted ways with the Electric Light Orchestra soon after the release of “10538 Overture” to form his own glam rock outfit, Wizzard (with former Move bassist Rick Price), leaving Lynne as ELO’s sole composer and producer. Under Lynne’s leadership, ELO went on to achieve international superstardom in the later 1970s, especially in America, where their elaborate live shows—complete with lasers and a flying-saucer-shaped stage built on hydraulic lifts—could only be realized properly in sports stadiums and arenas. Table 4.2 shows the chronology of Electric Light Orchestra studio albums (excluding live albums and greatest hits compilations), from their eponymous debut (titled No Answer in the United States) through the astonishing 2015 comeback album Alone in the Universe (released under the moniker of Jeff Lynne’s ELO). The table confirms that ELO’s commercial zenith occurred in 1976–80, with all four of the group’s LPs during that period reaching the Top Ten on both sides of the Atlantic. Yet it is also intriguing to see that the three ELO albums from 1973 to 1975 (On the Third Day, Eldorado, and Face the Music) failed to chart in the group’s native United Kingdom, no doubt because during those three years ELO were devoting most of their time and energy (between recording new albums) to touring relentlessly in the United States, where pundits nicknamed them “the English guys with the big fiddles” and they quickly gained a reputation for their exciting and virtuosic live performances. This period in ELO’s stylistic development was also arguably its most experimental with respect to the band’s fusion of classical and rock elements in their songs (a clinamen-like swerve away from their anxiety-inducing precursors, surpassing anything the Beatles had achieved in this regard), as represented most obviously in their cover of Chuck Berry’s “Roll Over Beethoven,” which was released as a single in early 1973 and reached No. 6 in the United Kingdom and No. 42 in the United States. The Beatles had recorded their own take on “Roll Over Beethoven” in July 1963 for their second U.K. album, With the Beatles. While the Beatles’ version, like all the cover songs on their early albums, is an “homage cover”—that is, essentially copying the style and sound of Berry’s original—ELO’s version is a bona fide attempt to fuse Berry with Beethoven. The track begins with the immediately recognizable opening bars from the first movement of Beethoven’s Fifth Symphony, played in a scaled-down arrangement by the violin and two cellos, and then quickly morphs into Berry’s signature opening guitar riff (played more or less note-for-note by Lynne). As the track unfolds, the sung verses of Berry’s original are alternated with what might be called “developmental” instrumental sections that cleverly weave motives from Beethoven’s Fifth into the churning rock-and-roll groove.

We could devote a whole book to systematically teasing out the myriad intertextual references to the Beatles in ELO songs (in fact, a carefully curated fan website is already dedicated to doing exactly that), but since space is limited, I will look closely now at a few selected tracks from ELO’s 1970s heyday in which the intertextual connections to the Beatles are especially potent, starting with “Mister Kingdom,” a song

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<td>The Electric Light Orchestra [No Answer]</td>
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<td>Electric Light Orchestra II</td>
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<td>A New World Record</td>
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<td>Out of the Blue</td>
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<td>Discovery</td>
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<td>Secret Messages</td>
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<td>Balance of Power</td>
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<td>Zoom</td>
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<td>Alone in the Universe</td>
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from the 1974 concept album, Eldorado. This album represented an important turning point for ELO in that it was the group’s first to utilize a full orchestra in the recording studio as well as the first of four albums to feature what fans generally consider to be the “classic” ELO lineup of Jeff Lynne (guitar, lead vocals), Bev Bevan (drums), Richard Tandy (keyboards), Kelly Groucutt (bass, vocals), Mik Kaminski (violin), Hugh McDowell (cello), and Mike Edwards (cello). Several fans and critics have noted the striking similarity of the opening vocal melody in “Mister Kingdom” to the verse melody in Lennon’s “Across the Universe” (from Let It Be [1970]) (see example 4.1). To my knowledge, Lynne has never claimed publicly to have modeled “Mister Kingdom” on “Across the Universe,” yet the melodic similarities are obvious. (Statistically, there would likely be enough matches among the pitches and rhythms of these two melodies for any forensic musicologist to prove a plagiarism case, but Lennon would never have leveled such charges against his musical “son”!) There is also a strategic intertextual reference to “Across the Universe” in Lynne’s lyrics to “Mister Kingdom,” with the words “they pass away” echoing Lennon’s “they pass they slip away” (although these lyrics are situated at different locations in the two melodies, as the notated example shows). Not captured in the notation but also strikingly similar is the muffled and slightly fuzzed timbre of Lynne’s vocal, which sounds nearly identical to Lennon’s.

Example 4.2. Electric Light Orchestra. “Evil Woman” (from Face the Music, 1975), top, signature piano groove; middle, blues riffs played by the strings during the second verse; bottom, “Stravinskian burst” (2:40–2:44)

Yet despite these obvious matches between the melody, lyrics, and vocal timbre, Lynne has chosen not to adopt wholesale John Lennon’s harmonies. The “Across the Universe” melody (example 4.1, top) is set to a series of diatonic chords (D–Bm–Fm–Em–A, or, in functional Roman numerals, I–vi–iii–ii–V) that all fit squarely within the key of D major. In contrast, the “Mister Kingdom” melody (example 4.1, bottom) is set to a chord progression that features two chromatic harmonies, Am (v) and Cm (vii) — strange minor chords that lie outside of the key. Lennon was known for making such unorthodox harmonic moves in his late Beatles songs, and here I am reminded especially of the chord progression at the opening of the verses to “Strawberry Fields Forever,” where the tonic chord B–major moves unexpectedly to an F minor dominant chord (I–v) — exactly the same oddball progression we hear at the opening of “Mister Kingdom.” In paraphrasing “Across the Universe,” Lynne has effectively — and paradoxically — made the overall melodic and harmonic setting of “Mister Kingdom” sound more like Lennon than Lennon’s original.

The Electric Light Orchestra’s next LP, 1975’s Face the Music, again failed to chart in the United Kingdom, but the first single from this album, “Evil Woman” (which reached No. 10 on both the U.K. and U.S. charts), returned ELO to the Top Ten in the band’s homeland. Like the earlier single “Showdown,” “Evil Woman” is something of a stylistic anomaly among ELO’s output with its strong indebtedness to American rhythm and blues. “Evil Woman” begins with a short introduction, during which Lynne sings a recitative-like melody (“You made a fool of me . . .”) over a series of four unmetered tremolo string chords in C ma-
ELO’s 1977 double album, *Out of the Blue*, is generally considered the group’s masterpiece, and it includes what is no doubt the band’s most famous song, “Mr. Blue Sky.” In the early summer of 1977, a decade after *Sgt. Pepper* and just at the time punk, led by the Sex Pistols, was enjoying its commercial peak in the United Kingdom—Lynne rented a chalet in the Swiss alps overlooking Lake Geneva, where he intended to sequester himself for a month to write songs. As he recalled,

I went to Switzerland to write all this album called *Out of the Blue*... and I was sitting in this little chalet with me little tape recorder and me... electric piano, and bass, and guitar, trying to make these tunes up and nothing had come for like two weeks and it was all overcast and grim. And one day the sun came out to shine and it was fantastic. I could see all these beautiful mansions and snow-capped peaks and everything and that inspired me to write... “Mr. Blue Sky.”

The song would eventually become the finale to the four-movement “Concerto for a Rainy Day” that occupies the entirety of side 3 of the double album; in a burst of creative activity, the rest of the songs for *Out of the Blue* soon followed.

“Mr. Blue Sky” is peppered (pardon the pun) with sonic references to Beatles songs, yet foregrounded most obviously are those bouncy repeated piano chords in quarter notes—complete with panting on the phrase “running down the avenue” at the onset of the second verse—that immediately recall the sound and groove of McCartney’s “woke up, got out of bed” middle section of “A Day in the Life.” Example 4.3 provides an abbreviated transcription (showing just the piano chords and vocal melody) of the opening bars of the middle section of “A Day in the Life” (example 4.3, top) along with the corresponding opening bars of “Mr. Blue Sky” (example 4.3, bottom). Both passages begin with a piano vamp on the I chord and a vocal melody that hovers around $\frac{5}{4}$, but rather than moving to $\text{VII}$ after three bars, “Mr. Blue Sky” borrows the same eclectic opening chord sequence—an initial vamp on the tonic F major, followed by a temporary swerve to the relative key of D minor ($\text{Em}^7$–A–$\text{Dm}$, functioning as ii$^7$–V–i of vi), in the same key—from Paul McCartney’s 1965 U.S. No. 1 hit, “Yesterday.” (The “soul dominants”—close position IV triads over scale degree 5 in the bass—in repeated quarter notes that punctuate the end of each verse in “Mr. Blue Sky” are another of McCartney’s favorite chords, reminding me, for example, of the hip, soul-tinged sections in his multisong from the “White Album,” “Martha My Dear.”) The song “Yesterday,” of course, forms the subject of...
mounting excitement of this hold-on-to-your-horses ending is heightened further by the spectacular wavelike string runs, which echo the famous rising orchestral crescendo passage from “A Day in the Life.” After this shattering climax, the song has nowhere else to go and ends the same way it begins, with a wistful reprise of the introductory refrain, “Wish I was a Wild West hero.”

*Out of the Blue* was Lynne’s Sgt. Pepper. The next three ELO LPs—1979’s *Discovery* (or “Disco?Very!” as Tandy nicknamed it, making fun of Lynne’s embrace of the prevalent style, much to fans’ dismay, in songs such as “Shine a Little Love” and “Last Train to London”); 1980’s *Xanadu* film soundtrack (the title track, sung by the movie’s star, Olivia Newton-John, became ELO’s only single to reach No. 1 in the United Kingdom); and 1981’s *Time* (on which Lynne largely jettisoned ELO’s trademark strings in favor of synthesizers)—were hugely successful commercially but simply did not measure up to *Out of the Blue* in terms of harmonic and formal complexity. The Electric Light Orchestra would record and release two more albums, *Secret Messages* (1983) and *Balance of Power* (1986), before Lynne decided to disband the group as its popularity was clearly waning, especially in the United States. Symphonic rock groups such as ELO apparently had no place within the slick, synth-driven pop landscape of the later 1980s.

Table 4.8 lists the U.K. Top Twenty for the week of 19 July 1980, the second of the two weeks that “Xanadu” occupied the No. 1 position. This palette of hit songs exemplifies just how stylistically eclectic the U.K. singles charts had become by the end of the post-Beatles decade. Though on its way out, disco remained the prevalent style in the summer of 1980, with Lipps Inc.’s classic “Funky Town” at No. 12 (after having peaked at No. 2 for two weeks earlier in June) and disco hits by Stacy Lattisaw and Odyssey rounding out the top three along with the disco-tinged “Xanadu.” (Even the Rolling Stones embraced the disco style with “Emotional Rescue” at No. 19, as they had also done two summers earlier with “Miss You” [U.K. No. 3, June 1978].) Reggae had long since outgrown its novelty status, as represented by Bob Marley and the Wailers enjoying their biggest U.K. hit to date with “Could You Be Loved?” at No. 5, and Birmingham reggae group UB40’s “My Way of Thinking/I Think It’s Going to Rain” at No. 6. Punk as a style was well past its 1976–78 zenith but still flickered in postpunk anthems such as Joy Division’s “Love Will Tear Us Apart” at No. 17. American soul music (distinct from disco) also fared well on the U.K. charts that summer, with songs by the Spinners and Roberta Flack and Donny Hathaway making
the Top Twenty alongside Birmingham’s own “new wave soul” group, Dexy’s Midnight Runners. Even heavy metal was represented in the Twenty by Saxon’s “747 (Strangers in the Night)” at No. 19, while Kate Bush’s “Babooshka” (a song that defies stylistic labeling) was at No. 7, having introduced U.K. listeners to the kinds of wonderful new sounds made possible with the advent of digital sampling technology. (The song’s “broken glass” effect was a digital sample created on a Fairilght CM1.) There was also room for nostalgia songs, such as doo-wop revival group Darts’ cover of the Four Seasons’ 1965 hit “Let’s Hang On!” at No. 16, and one-off novelty songs such as Sploogdenessabounds’ “Simon Templar/Two Pints of Lager and a Packet of Crisps Please” (the kind of song that could only have charted in the United Kingdom) at No. 15. McCartney himself had his post-Wings ballad “Waterfalls” at No. 9. With respect to the topic of musical influence, however, I am most interested in the single at No. 8, Don McLean’s homage cover of Roy Orbison’s 1961 U.S. No. 2 hit, “Crying,” which had occupied the No. 1 spot for three weeks earlier that summer. Orbison had been an enormous influence on the early Beatles, with Lennon claiming to have modeled “Please Please Me” on Orbison’s 1960 U.K. No. 1 hit, “Only the Lonely” (heard most obviously in the dramatic “Orbison moment” in the song’s refrain when Lennon leaps into his high falsetto). Lynne, too, has acknowledged his profound admiration for Orbison, who may in fact rank second only to the Beatles among the influences on Lynne as a songwriter and vocalist. The dual influence of the Beatles and Orbison can be heard in the first ELO single from the Xanadu soundtrack, “I’m Alive” (U.K. No. 20, June 1980): the double-plagal punches in quarter notes (on beats 3, 4, and 1) that accompany the song’s titular refrain (“...I’m [VII] A– [IV] | live [I] ...”) recall the same trifold chordal hook heard throughout the Beatles’ “Get Back” (the kind of surface strategic intertextual reference to the Beatles that we have by now come to expect of ELO), yet Lynne’s lead vocal bears such an uncanny resemblance to the distinctive timbre of Orbison’s soaring tenor that one might guess Orbison himself was singing.

Soon after dissolving ELO in 1986, Lynne joined two of his idols, George Harrison and Roy Orbison, along with Bob Dylan and Tom Petty, in a supergroup, the Traveling Wilburys. He has subsequently become a highly sought-after producer, ultimately collaborating not only with Harrison on his 1987 comeback album, Cloud Nine, and on his posthumous 2002 album, Brainwashed, but also on solo records by Paul McCartney and Ringo Starr. In addition, Lynne was the technical brainchild behind the two “new” Beatles songs, “Free as a Bird” and “Real Love,” produced for the mid-1990s Anthology project (Cromer 1997). For Lynne, a musician who has always struggled with his anxiety of influence toward the Beatles, to be invited into the group’s inner circle as a producer and creative equal—essentially fulfilling the role of the “fifth Beatle,” like George Martin decades earlier—must have been a life-changing and career-capping experience.

Lynne reconstituted the Electric Light Orchestra briefly in the early 2000s, releasing one album Zoom (2001) on which both Harrison and Starr appeared as guest musicians. Ever the perfectionist, Lynne spent much of the later 2000s in his home studio in Los Angeles, Bungalow Palace, re-recording twelve classic ELO songs—including “10538 Overture,” “Showdown,” “Evil Woman,” and “Mr. Blue Sky”—singing and playing all of the instruments himself in an attempt to improve on what he felt was lacking in the sound and production of the original versions. If the Beatles are to pop and rock music what Beethoven was to nineteenth-century symphonic music, then one might say that Lynne is pop and rock’s Brahms.

Throughout ELO’s heyday in the 1970s, rock critics constantly compared the group to the Beatles, with the general consensus being that ELO’s music was too derivative and simply did not measure up to that
of its great precursors. This prevailing sentiment is evident in John Swenson's (1977, 92) *Rolling Stone* review of the group's 11 February 1977 performance at New York's Madison Square Garden:

ELO has gotten incredible mileage out of its adaption of rhythm cellos to a basic rock vocabulary, a technique made famous in George Martin's orchestrations for the Beatles. But this ersatz classical music places them more in the Moody Blues tradition. Guitarist Jeff Lynne has shown masterful pop sense by expanding this formula through a multiplicity of cops: on "Nightrider," one is reminded of the Rimsky-Korsakov's of *Scheherazade*; "Showdown" is plastic soul music, derivative of "I Heard It Through the Grapevine." In concert, the band's banal use of solo space for extended cello doodlings and a violin solo that climaxes with a Mantovanian "Hava Nagila" adds up to nothing more than froth, technically adept and clinically presented. ELO is a band with no musical identity of its own. (Swenson 1977)

Yet a funny thing about rock history is that it often takes decades for critics to realize how important a band was, as seems to be the case with ELO. In October 2008, for example, *The Guardian* published "ELO: The Band the Beatles Could Have Been," which begins, "Critics called them 'dull' and laughed at the spaceships. Did they not realize Jeff Lynne was a songwriter to rival Lennon and McCartney?" (McGee 2008). This critical reassessment has only intensified, especially in the United Kingdom, since the October 2012 airing of the BBC documentary and release of the compilation album of Lynne's careful remakes of ELO's greatest hits (which debuted at No. 8 on the U.K. album chart). On 12 November 2013, Lynne reunited with Richard Tandy, backed by the BBC Concert Orchestra, as Jeff Lynne and Friends to perform two classic ELO songs, "Livin' Thing" and "Mr. Blue Sky," for the televised Children in Need Rocks charity concert at London's Hammersmith Apollo. On 7 March 2014, Lynne was the featured guest on Chris Evans's BBC Radio 2 Breakfast Show, during which Evans—a longtime ELO fan—challenged the band to bring back ELO for a full-length concert. The response from Evans's radio audience was so enthusiastic (listeners sent in thousands of texts and tweets within minutes) that Lynne could hardly refuse. On 14 September, Lynne and Tandy took the stage in London's Hyde Park in front of an audience of fifty thousand fans, again backed by the BBC Concert Orchestra and billed now as Jeff Lynne's ELO, to play a triumphant ninety-minute set

for Radio 2's *Festival in a Day* live broadcast. Lynne treated his fans to all the classic ELO hits (executed flawlessly) and even paid homage to his late Traveling Wilburys bandmates with a performance of the Wilburys' 1988 hit "Handle with Care," as images of George Harrison and Roy Orbison loomed on the big screen behind the band. Lynne was extremely nervous at the idea of performing for such a large audience after being absent from the concert stage for almost three decades, but the nerves quickly dissipated as he launched into the opening number, "All Over the World" (1980, U.K. No. 11, U.S. No. 13): "I felt such relief that all these people were there, screaming and clapping to every song... I was just knocked out, just the most wonderful crowd I've ever seen. I had so much fun doing it, I decided to come back and do a new album" (Greene 2013).

*Alone in the Universe*, Lynne's first album of new ELO songs in fourteen years, was released on 13 November 2015 and received generally positive reviews. The Beatles' influence once again pervades this album, yet today's critics, unlike their 1970s counterparts, no longer seem to view Lynne's channeling of his inner Beatle as a sign of derivativeness or weakness. As John Lewis (2015) writes,

The idea of ELO as a continuity Fab Four has never been stronger than it is on *Alone in the Universe*. Although recorded in Jeff Lynne's home studio in Beverly Hills, every track seems to be sprinkled with a touch of Abbey Road fairydust. Opener "When I Was A Boy," in particular, is a wonderfully dreamy piece of '60s nostalgia from the perspective of an adolescent Lynne. "Don't wanna job cos it drives me crazy / Just wanna scream, 'Do you love me baby?'" he croons, over Lennon-style piano vamp, McCartneyesque plagal cadences, swooping "Walrus" cello effects and the finest guitar solo that George Harrison never played. What's particularly astonishing is that Lynne is doing absolutely everything here—vocals, harmonies, piano, bass, guitars, drums, programming—like John, Paul, George, Ringo, and George Martin melded into one hairy Omnibeatle.  

Example 4.4 provides an abbreviated transcription of the closing section of "When I Was A Boy," showing just the bass line and chords and Lynne's guitar solo (the "finest solo that George Harrison never played"). As Lynne's vocal enters over the soft, pulsing C major piano chords in quarter notes at the opening of the song (singing "When I was a boy I had a dream..."), it is not difficult to imagine that Lennon is singing, recalling
in particular the dreamy sound world of Lennon's beloved post-Beatles song "Imagine." In fact, from the standpoint of a Bloomian anxiety of influence, so closely has Lynne assimilated the plaintive vocal style of his great precursor that we might be convinced that Lennon himself has returned from the dead, an exemplar of the sixth and final of Bloom's revisionary ratios, *apoephrades*. At the song's chorus (where Lynne sings "And radio waves kept me company. . ."), a sparkling descant enters triumphantly in harmony with the lead vocal, sounding as if McCartney has joined in with Lennon (although Lynne is actually singing a duet with himself). "When I Was a Boy" has the Beatles running through its veins, as we have come to expect of an ELO song, yet its harmonic design—fittingly for a song in which Lynne is conjuring images from his adolescence—makes a pointed strategic intertextual reference to a non-Beatles song that nevertheless is just as emblematic of 1967's Summer of Love as *Sgt. Pepper* Procol Harum's iconic U.K. No. 1 hit, "A Whiter Shade of Pale." The verses of "When I Was a Boy" are set to the same series of chords in the same key, grounded by a descending bass line that traverses the entire C major scale from 8 down to 1. During the choruses (which follow the chord progression shown under the guitar solo in example 4.4), the all-white-key diatonic chords of the "Whiter Shade of Pale" pattern are adjusted: 3 (E) is reharmonized with a secondary V7 of ii, and the descending C major scale in the bass breaks off after 2, replaced by a sudden interjection of octave-doubled punches on 6-5 (A-G). Widening the orbit of strategic intertextual references to 1967 pop songs, these 6-5 punches—with the flattened sixth degree borrowed from the parallel key of C minor—reminded me immediately of the Beatles' 1967 U.K. Christmas No. 1 single, "Hello, Goodbye," in which McCartney similarly abbreviates the "Whiter Shade of Pale" chord changes for the chorus but instead interjects a borrowed iv6 chord (containing the flattened sixth scale degree).

The Harrisonsque guitar solo that arises over the chord changes of the chorus (as the climactic final section of "When I Was a Boy") is a perfect example of tasteful restraint at the expense of virtuosity: Lynne plays a simple yet elegant ascending sequential pattern in rhythmic tandem with the bass, creating another seemingly infinite wedge-shaped outer-voice structure à la "Walrus" (see Everett 1999). The chorus—and the song as a whole—ends with the eclectic cadential progression transcribed in the last two bars of example 4.4 (a rhythmic reduction of the upper voices, in whole notes, is shown in parentheses). Plenty of pop and rock songs end with a V7-I triadic cadential progression, but extending the IV7 chord to include its flatted seventh and ninth (here, the ninth C is sung by Lynne in his Orbisonian high falsetto, leaping up to the note on the final word of the refrain, "when I was a boy") is much rarer. When I first heard "When I Was a Boy," my mind was awash with the swirl of sonic historiographical references to the Beatles and others, but hearing that final chord progression—peppered as it is with a little descending string flourish (not shown in the example)—reminded me of no one else but ELO. Sure enough, this progression is also used toward the end of the extended coda to "Mr. Blue Sky," as if Lynne is deliberately referring here to ELO's most famous and beloved song. Although he performed and produced this remarkable comeback album largely by himself, Jeff Lynne the *ephebe* is far from alone in his intertextual universe—it sounds like he is having a party with his musical forefathers, and he now sits firmly at the head of the table.

Notes

An earlier version of this essay was presented at a special session on the Beatles' *Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band* organized by Gordon Thompson for the joint annual meeting of the American Musicological Society, Society for Music Theory, and Society for Ethnomusicology in New Orleans, November 2012. I am most grateful to Gordon and the other panelists, Walter Everett and Albin Zak, for their valuable feedback on that earlier version and to Gordon Turnbull for his editorial suggestions, which proved especially helpful during my final stages of revision.

1. The story of the creative rivalry between these two groups usually begins with *Rubber Soul* but really should be extended back a couple of years: in 1963, the Beach Boys were the top-selling pop artists in the United States according to *Billboard*, but the Beatles conquered America the following year.

2. For insightful analyses of "God Only Knows" and the Beach Boys' other experimental music, see Harrison 1997; Lambert 2007.

3. As Albin Zak (2008, 346) rightly notes in his essay on epic rock songs of the 1970s, "Good Vibrations" set an important precedent and was "one of the
first Top-Forty rock hits to employ a complex, unconventional song structure. The Beatles soon followed with songs "A Day in the Life" (1967), "Happiness Is a Warm Gun" (1968), and other epic tracks in which the multiple shifts of groove and affect sound as if two or more songs have been stitched together (which was actually true of "A Day in the Life")—"multisongs," as I call them. John Covach (2006) has discussed the Beatles' apparent shift in 1969 from favoring the old-fashioned AABA song form (which the Beatles had inherited from the grand earlier twentieth-century tradition of Tin Pan Alley) to exploring more unconventional song forms.

4. In a live Q&A session with fans on 27 January 2014, Brian Wilson was asked about hearing "Strawberry Fields Forever" for the first time and (rather defensively) denied that he had been "weakened" by it: "No, that's not true. It was a very weird record, but yeah, I liked it." In the same Q&A session, Wilson confirmed that McCartney was his favorite songwriting Beatle (transcript of the Q&A session available at www.brianwilion.com).

5. As Beatles scholar Tim Riley (2002, 380–90) aptly puts it, "The arc that went from 1963's Please Please Me to 1969's Abbey Road and 1970's Let It Be had enough thoughtful curves to exert anxiety of influence over generations of bands to come" (see also Reynolds 2011, 177–78). A short list of such groups might include The Who, Queen (see Braae 2015), Squeeze, XTC, and Tears For Fears, all of whom emerged on the U.K. popular music scene during the decade or so following the Beatles' breakup in 1970 and whose music demonstrates an anxiety of influence toward the Beatles in various telling ways. Mastroppolo (2014) offers a list of the "Top 11 Musicians Influenced by the Beatles"—a rather skewed list, since all the musicians he identifies, save for the Bee Gees, are American (in no ranked order): Dave Grohl (of Nirvana and the Foo Fighters), Joe Walsh (of the Eagles), Brian Wilson, Nancy Wilson (of Heart), Billy Joel, Michelle Phillips (of the Mamas and the Papas), Gene Simmons (of Kiss), Joni Mitchell, Roger McGuinn (of the Byrds), and Bruce Springsteen. In truth, however, the list of musicians influenced by the Beatles is infinite.


7. Mellor's title reminds me of the godlike status Bloom ascribes to William Shakespeare in Shakespeare: The Invention of the Human (1998; see also Schneider 2008, which posits the Beatles as the culmination of a grand tradition of Anglo-American poetry dating back to William Blake and the Romantic revolution of the 1790s). To be fair, though, not all popular music historians share such a reverence for the Beatles (see Wald 2009).

8. An audio file of Lennon's comments from this 1974 radio broadcast can be found at youtube.com by searching for "John Lennon" and "Electric Light Orchestra."

9. Everett (2001, 119–59) has thoroughly studied the myriad musical borrowings on the Beatles' first EMI recordings (September 1962–March 1963). Curtis (1987) was perhaps the first rock critic to invoke Bloom by suggesting that the Beatles themselves displayed a certain anxiety of influence toward the music of their idols in their early songs.

10. The Move was formed by music impresario Tony Secunda in October 1965 as a "Brum Beat" supergroup, drawing its members—Roy Wood (guitar, vocals), Carl Wayne (vocals), Trevor Burton (guitar, vocals), Chris "Ace" Kefford (bass, vocals), and Bev Bevan (drums)—from among three rival groups in Birmingham's burgeoning beat scene. Before "Blackberry Way" topped the charts in early 1969, the Move had enjoyed a string of U.K. top five hits in 1967–68—"Night of Fear" (U.K. No. 2), "I Can Hear the Grass Grow" (U.K. No. 5), "Flowers in the Rain" (U.K. No. 2), and "Fire Brigade" (U.K. No. 3). But despite Secunda's best efforts and an extensive 1969 U.S. tour, chart success on the other side of the Atlantic eluded the Move as the popularity of British Invasion groups waned in America. For a more detailed account of the Move's history, see Paytress 2008.

11. Before joining the Move in 1970, Jeff Lynne had been a member of another Birmingham group, the Idle Race (formerly Mike Sheridan and the Nightriders), which released a number of singles in 1967–69, including the Lynne composition "Imposters of Life's Magazine" (erroneously credited on the record's label as by "G. Lynn," much to Lynne's dismay). All of them failed to make much of a dent on the U.K. singles charts. In 1968, while still a member of the Idle Race, an australasian young Lynne was invited to observe the Beatles in action at Abbey Road studios as they were recording songs for the "White Album," a story he has often recounted in interviews: "The engineer for the Idle Race... was a friend of an engineer at Abbey Road, who called one night and invited us to a Beatles session. I was so scared I couldn't catch my breath. When we got there this engineer broke pulls us into his room, and there's John Lennon and George Harrison sitting there, and George Martin conducting the orchestra. They were doing this song called "Glass Onion"" (Gilmore 1978, 11).

12. All U.K. chart information for this chapter was confirmed at www.officialcharts.com. All U.S. chart information refers to Billboard's Hot 100 (in the case of singles) or the Billboard 200 (in the case of albums).

Although Lynne was not yet officially a member of the Move (and he does not perform on the finished single), the demo for "Blackberry Way" was recorded by Lynne and Wood (using Lynne's trusty Beocord 2000 De Luxe stereo reel-to-reel tape recorder) in the living room of the Lynne family home in Birmingham. The song's title and dark psychedelic style are clearly a nod to "Strawberry Fields Forever," yet Wood's vocal riff on the title lyric also bears a striking melodic resemblance (with its ascending-scalar pitches and shuffle eighth notes) to McCartney's vocal riff that similarly sets the title lyric throughout "Penny Lane." (I do not provide a notated example here, but the connection should be obvious to listeners by comparing Wood's sung melody on the syllables "...berry Way" with McCartney's on "Pen-ny Lane" at the opening of each song.) "Blackberry Way" thus cleverly makes a two-pronged strategic intertextual reference to both songs from the Beatles' double-Asied single. On the distinction between stylistic and strategic intertextuality, see Spicer 2009.
see Flory 2014)—and the influence of American soul music from Detroit and Memphis more generally—on the Beatles, as heard especially in songs from their middle period (e.g., “Day Tripper” [1965] and “Got to Get You into My Life” [1966]).

13. Philip Tagg has introduced the term shuttle to refer to a one-chord vamp or an oscillating progression involving just two chords (as opposed to a loop, which refers to a circular progression involving three chords or more). According to Tagg (2014, 371), “The duration of a two-chord shuttle, from one chord to the other and back, is, like that of a single-chord shuttle, always containable within the extended present.”

14. The U.K. pop singles charts have always been more stylistically eclectic than the U.S. singles charts, and it is therefore no surprise that “Allatross” failed to crack the Billboard Hot 100 in the United States (though it did reach No. 4 on Billboard’s “Bubbling Under” chart).

15. Cromelin 1974 was the first feature article on the Electric Light Orchestra (other than a record or concert review) to appear in Rolling Stone.

16. “10538 Overture” was released in the United Kingdom in late June, right as the final Move single, “California Man” (released in May), was peaking at No. 7. Lynne is credited as the sole writer of “10538 Overture,” with Wood listed as producer. Recorded on eight-track equipment, the song is about an escaped prisoner (according to Lynne) and takes its title from a serial number (10538) Lynne saw on the mixing console. Wood added $ to better fit the lyric of the last verse (“Did you catch his face—was it 10-05-38?”) and the word outtake to make it clear that the group was no longer the Move and was now the Electric Light Orchestra. “10538 Overture” has recently enjoyed a resurgence in popularity after being featured prominently on the trailer and soundtrack to the 2015 dark comedy American Hustle, where it aptly underscores the film’s depiction of crime and political corruption in 1970s New Jersey.

17. For more on accumulative beginnings in pop and rock songs, see Spicer 2004.

18. According to Wood, “The backing track to ‘10538 Overture’ was playing and I was playing all these Jimi Hendrix riffs on the cello, I went and did like fifteen of them and that’s how ELO was born really” (“The Birmingham Beat” [episode], Rock Family Trees, first aired on BBC Four, 23 January 2008).

19. Wizzard was an instant success in the United Kingdom, with a string of Top Ten hits in 1972–74, among them “See My Baby Jive” and “Angel Fingers” (both of which reached No. 1), and the 1973 Christmas single “I Wish It Could Be Christmas Every Day” (U.K. No. 4, kept out of the top spot by Slade’s “Merry Xmas Everybody”). But like the Move, Wizzard was unable to achieve any real success in the United States, and by late 1973 Wood had dissolved the group.

20. The first Electric Light Orchestra album was released on the Harvest label (a division of EMI) in the United Kingdom and by United Artists in the United States, where it received its title, No Answer, after a UA executive called ELO’s management to ask about the album’s title, received no response, and jotted “no answer” in his notes.

21. This chronology includes the soundtrack to the 1980 film Xanadu (which I consider part of the canon of F1.0 studio albums, even though ELO songs occupy only one side of the LP) but does not include the two Jeff Lynne solo albums (Armchair Theatre [1990] and Long Wave [2001]) or any releases by the spin-off group Electric Light Orchestra Part II, formed by ELO’s drummer and cofounder Bev Bevan in 1989 after Lynne had officially disbanded the original group. Bevan himself left ELO Part II in 1999 and sold his half of the rights to the Electric Light Orchestra name back to Lynne, while the remaining members of the spin-off group have continued performing (with various lineup changes) under the moniker the Orchestra. I think most fans would agree with me, however, that without Lynne, it is really not the Electric Light Orchestra.

22. The albums’ failure to chart in the United Kingdom also resulted partly from the fact that Harvest dropped ELO following the release of Electric Light Orchestra II; their subsequent U.K. label, Warner, did very little to promote their 1973–74 releases. Don Arden, who managed both ELO and Wizzard, created his own record label, Jet, in late 1974 to release and better promote his artists’ recordings. The first ELO album released under the Jet imprint was Face the Music (1975), which also spawned ELO’s first transatlantic Top Ten single, “Evil Woman.”

23. Other ELO tracks from this period that similarly attempt classical-rock fusion include the instrumental “Daybreaker” and a “rock version” of Grieg’s “In the Hall of the Mountain King” (both from On the Third Day), much of the Eldorado album (which includes an “Overture” that borrows an extended excerpt from Grieg’s Piano Concerto in A Minor and another song with the decidedly classical-sounding title of “Illusions in G Major”), and the multi-sectioned avant-garde instrumental “Fire on High” (from Face the Music). Also, a staple of the band’s live concerts during these years was an experimental cover of the Beatles’ “Day Tripper,” which ELO transformed into a full-blown multimedia song by adding a newly composed string introduction (conspicuously reminiscent of the string coda to the Beatles’ “Glass Onion”) and interspersing snippets from another of classical music’s greatest hits, the first movement of Mozart’s Piano Sonata in C Major, K. 545.

24. See “Is It Me or Did ELO Music Have Beatles All over It?” (discussion thread, started on 30 July 2009, http://forums.stevehoffman.tv/threads/is-it-me-or-did-elo-music-have-beatles-all-over-it.189808/).

25. Prog Sphere recently ranked Eldorado No. 25 among the Top 30 Progressive Rock Concept Albums: “The plot of ELO’s 1974 full-length follows a Walter Mitty–like character who journeys into fantasy worlds via dreams, to escape the disillusionment of his mundane reality. Jeff Lynne began to write the album in response to criticisms from his father, a classical music lover, who said that Electric Light Orchestra’s repertoire ‘had no tune’” (Savić 2014). The album contained ELO’s first U.S. Top Ten hit, the Lennonesque ballad “Can’t Get It Out of My Head” (peaking at No. 9 on the Hot 100 in March 1975; the single did not chart in the United Kingdom).

26. Melvin Gale replaced Edwards in 1975. Like all four Beatles (and many other pop and rock musicians past and present), Lynne never learned how to read and write music, preferring instead to use the recording studio as his canvas. He hired young arranger Louis Clark (classically trained at the Leeds College of Music) to assist with the extended string and choir arrangements for Eldorado.
Clark has continued to work intermittently with various incarnations of the hand (he currently plays keyboards with the ELO spin-off group, the Orchestra, alongside the other one remaining member from the “classic” ELO lineup, Kaminski) but is probably best known as the producer of the hugely popular *Hooked on Classics* records of the 1980s and 1990s.

27. Although the R&B-inspired groove of “Evil Woman” was somewhat unusual for ELO at the time (perhaps Lynne’s three years of relentlessly touring the United States and listening to American radio had rubbed off on him?), Lynne, like the Beatles, has always been one of rock’s most prolific songwriting chameleons, freely (and nostalgically) drawing on earlier styles from rock’s past and deftly changing styles from song to song and even within a song, all in the service of crafting a catchy hit (the “doo-wop” chorus of “Telephone Line” [1977, U.K. No. 8, U.S. No. 7] and the rockabilly throwback “Hold On Tight” [1981, U.K. No. 4, U.S. No. 10] are but two further examples). While stylistically the Electric Light Orchestra was conveniently labeled “symphonic rock,” Lynne has always insisted that ELO was first and foremost a pop group: “To me, pop is the best genre... because it’s got everything—Elvis, the Beatles... all these different, millions of styles” (Mr. Blue Sky 2012). For more on the Beatles’ rampant stylistic eclecticism, especially among their later recordings (as represented most obviously by the “White Album,” the consummate “postmodern album” of the rock era), see Whitley 2000.

28. Outside of the blues inflections in Lynne’s vocal melody, this introductory chord sequence might sound right at home in a Golden Age Broadway musical.

29. Despite the C major introduction, a minor should be considered the song’s primary key (though brief tonicizations of C major recur at the end of each verse and leading into the chorus). Since the same chord changes are used for both the verses and choruses, “Evil Woman” is an example of what Covach (2005) would call *simple* verse-chorus form (as opposed to *contrasting* verse-chorus form). This repeating chord pattern (I–v–iv–V) could be thought of as a minor-mode and “upsidedown” version of the iconic “Louie Louie” riff (I–IV–V [or V]–IV; see Doll 2011).

30. I have dubbed this passage the “Stravinskian burst” because its specific pitch content (C–B–G... with a tumbling flurry of pitches following a long-held initial high C) reminds me very much of the solo bassoon melody that opens Stravinsky’s *The Rite of Spring* (1913).

31. There is, however, another strategic intertextual reference to a Beatles song in the lyrics to “Evil Woman.” In first verse, Lynne sings, “There’s a hole in my head where the rain comes in,” an obvious riff on the opening line from McCartney’s *Sgt. Pepper* song “Fixed a Hole.”

32. By importing a portion of the actual recorded sound of another song from the same album into “Evil Woman,” Lynne is making what Lacasse (2000; this volume) would call an intraalbum *autotonic* reference. Listeners might recognize the Stravinskian burst in “Evil Woman” from its use in a very different and more recent context: the Pussycat Dolls’ 2006 hit single “Beep” (U.K. No. 2, U.S. No. 13), for which producer will.i.am used a digital sample of this two-bar passage as the song’s primary hook. (Unlike “Evil Woman,” where the Stravinskian burst appears only once, in “Beep” we hear it at the tail end of every chorus.) In keeping with the usual practice for songs built prominently around samples from older recordings, Lynne received co-writing credit for “Beep” along with will.i.am and Kara DioGuardi.

33. “Electric Light Orchestra” [episode], *Storytellers*, first aired on VH1, 20 April 2001. Lynne’s account brings to mind two other prior Beatles songs: John Lennon’s “Good Morning, Good Morning” (1967) and George Harrison’s “Here Comes the Sun” (1969).

34. The neighboring I–IV–V–I progression at the opening of the middle section of “A Day in the Life” is just one of several stock modal harmonic formulas—such as the “double-plagal” Mixolydian I–IV–V–I, associated most notably with the extended coda of “Hey Jude” and also heard during the coda of “Mr. Blue Sky”—that the Beatles were largely responsible for introducing into the lexicon of rock harmony in the 1960s. (For more on the double-plagal and other stock modal triadic progressions in rock, see Everett 2000; Blamonte 2010.) Yet this particular four-chord progression within the Beatles’ output is unique to “Yesterday” and may, in fact, be unique, for it is as early as McCartney was convinced he had heard this chord progression before, and yes, such secondarily I–IV–V–I tonizations are legion within Tin Pin Alley songs and jazz standards, but I can think of no Tin Pan Alley song that opens with this exact progression. The fact that Lynne borrows this progression in the same key as “Yesterday” only solidifies the strategic intertextual reference. The only other 1970s song I can think of that uses this same progression is the Stylistics’ 1972 soul hit “Betcha by Golly Wow” (U.K. No. 13, U.S. No. 3), where this four-chord sequence occurs at the onset of the chorus, transposed to E major: E–Dm–G–Cm.

35. “Yesterday” was not released as a single in the United Kingdom (it appeared on side 2 of the U.K. *Help!* album), but a cover version by Matt Monro reached No. 10 in the United Kingdom in October 1965, right as the Beatles’ original topped the Hot 100 in the United States. “Yesterday” was released as a Beatles song, yet as is well known, none of the other three Beatles actually played on the recording: McCartney sings and accompanies himself on acoustic guitar, supported by Martin’s beautiful string quartet arrangement. “Yesterday” holds the distinction of being the most covered song of the rock era (according to *Guinness World Records*), with more than three thousand versions recorded to date.

36. Everett (1999, 133–38) offers a detailed harmonic and voice-leading analysis of “I Am the Walrus,” including its oddball all-major harmonies and the seemingly infinite wedge-shaped outer voice design of its coda (with the bass ever descending against a melody that is ever ascending).

37. According to Lynne, when he was a child, his parents took him to see a 1954 John Wayne film, *The High and the Mighty*, and he was blown away by the orchestral music of the film’s title theme: “Oh, what a tune that is! But I can understand where my taste in chords and things come from, and it comes from way, way back... being a tiny kid” (Mr. Blue Sky 2012). The lasting influence of *The High and the Mighty’s* music on Lynne is heard throughout ELO’s output, but especially in this climactic final section of “Wild West Hero.”

38. Discovery spawned ELO’s highest-charting single in the United States, the pounding disco-rock anthem “Don’t Bring Me Down” (U.K. No. 3, U.S. No. 4).
Yet the standout on this album for me (and I think most diehard ELO fans) is "The Diary of Horace Wimp" (U.K. No. 6, not released as a single in the United States)—essentially a stylistic retake on "Mr. Blue Sky" that again evokes the bouncy quarter-note groove of McCartney's middle section of "A Day in the Life." (Tandy's vocoder—the "robot voice" spotlighted during a later verse of "Mr. Blue Sky" and one of that song's most memorable sonic features—also makes a triumphant return here.) The obvious intertextual connection to "A Day in the Life" notwithstanding, "The Diary of Horace Wimp" is also decidedly McCartneyesque in that Lynne adopts one of McCartney's favorite narrative schemes in his late Beatles songs, that of telling the story of a particular fictional character (à la "Eleanor Rigby")—in this case, another very "lonely person," Horace Wimp. Unlike the sad ending of "Eleanor Rigby," however (the title character's funeral, attended only by the equally lonely Father McKenzie), "The Diary of Horace Wimp" ends joyfully with the title character's wedding.

In the lyrics to "Beatles Forever," an unreleased ELO track from the Secret Messages sessions, Lynne laid bare his anxiety of influence toward the Beatles: "There's something about a Beatles song that lives forever more / The beauty of the harmonies, the sound of the Fab Four / I try to write a good song, a song with feel and care / I think it's quite a good song, 'til I hear one of theirs" (bootleg version available on YouTube).

40. For more on the reception history of Jamaican reggae in the United Kingdom, see Spencer 2010, 125, nn. 3-5.

41. Orbison's influence on Lynne's visual persona is evidenced by the fact that while Orbison, Lynne since the mid-1970s has rarely appeared in public without his trademark sunglasses.

42. For a detailed analysis of Orbison's development of his signature "sweet West Texas style" in his late 1950s and early 1960s recordings, see Zak 2010. Orbison had not had a hit record in the United Kingdom or United States since the mid-1960s. The huge success of McLean's cover of "Crying," in addition perhaps to Lynne's newfound penchant for emulating the Orbison vocal sound on ELO recordings (e.g., "Midnight Blue" from Discovery), sparked a resurgence of interest in Orbison's music and ultimately led to his collaborations with Lynne later in the decade.

43. According to Petty, Lynne's "three biggest influences [are] Del Shannon, Roy Orbison, and the Beatles." Petty, too, selected "Mr. Blue Sky" as his favorite ELO song, insisting, "it's not derivative. It's not really coming from anybody but Jeff. Nobody could do it quite like that." (Mr. Blue Sky 2012). Lynne also produced Petty's 1989 solo album, Full Moon Fever (U.K. No. 8, U.S. No. 3), and Orbison's 1989 album, Mystery Girl (U.K. No. 2, U.S. No. 5), which includes the transatlantic Top Ten single, "You Got It." (Mystery Girl was released after Orbison's sudden death from a heart attack on 6 December 1988.)

44. This iteration of ELO made a few 2001 television appearances (including on VH1's Storytellers), yet a concert tour in support of Zoom was canceled because of low ticket sales.

45. As Lynne says, "I knew I could make them better because I had all these years of experience working with George, and Paul, and Roy Orbison, and Tom Petty, and all these fantastic people... I've learnt so much working with them, you know, I'm hoping they learnt a bit working with me too." (Mr. Blue Sky 2012).

The resulting album, Mr. Blue Sky: The Very Best of Electric Light Orchestra, was released in October 2012 to coincide with the premiere of the BBC documentary.

46. Alone in the Universe debuted at No. 4 on the U.K. album chart and was certified platinum in the United Kingdom, but the album cracked the Billboard 200 for only one week (No. 29 for the week of 5 December 2015) before immediately falling off the chart. Lynne and ELO have come to be recognized as something of a national treasure in their native United Kingdom but have not retained such mainstream popularity in the United States. Jeff Lynne's ELO played a surprise concert at London's Porchester Hall on 9 November 2015, quickly followed by a short set for the 2015 Royal Variety Performance at the Royal Albert Hall on 15 November and two intimate U.S. album-release shows, at New York's Irving Plaza on 20 November and Los Angeles's Fonda Theatre on 24 November, prefaced respectively with appearances on The Tonight Show Starring Jimmy Fallon (18 November) and Jimmy Kimmel Live! (23 November). In 2016, ELO undertook a successful eighteen-date tour of the United Kingdom and Europe (April-June) that featured a seventy-five-minute set for an exuberant crowd at the Glastonbury Festival on 26 June (in the festival's traditional Sunday-afternoon "legends" slot).

The band capped off the summer with three sold-out shows at the Hollywood Bowl (a fitting venue for a group with such profound Beatles influences) on 9-11 September and two more at New York's Radio City Music Hall on 16 and 18 September. Most recently, Jeff Lynne's ELO performed four shows in the United Kingdom in June-July 2017, including a 24 June concert at London's (new) Wembley Arena that marked the group's return to the site of its most celebrated arena performances from the late 1970s (see Out of the Blue 1980, filmed on the opening night of ELO's remarkable eight-night run at the old Wembley Empire Pool during 1978's Out of the Blue tour). Perhaps the ultimate critical vindication occurred when ELO was inducted into the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame as part of the Class of 2017.

47. Space does not permit me to offer a close analysis of all ten songs on Alone in the Universe, but suffice it to say that Lynne once again shows his mastery of the "millions of styles" in the pop universe, ranging from the funky R&B of "Love and Rain" (essentially, Showdown) to the Orbison tribute "I'm Leaving You" and the synth-drenched anthemic title track (with a melodic and harmonic design that bears a more than coincidental resemblance to ELO's 1975 U.S. hit, "Can't Get It Out of My Head"). In "One Step at a Time," Lynne most closely revisits the signature sound and idiosyncrasy of ELO's classic 1970s hits, yet ironically, since Lynne is singing and playing all the instruments himself (it has always been Jeff Lynne's ELO, after all), no actual strings were used in the recording of the album.

48. The consummate "Baroque pop" song (inspired by McCartney's own attempts at "Bach meets pop" in his 1966-67 Beatles songs such as "Eleanor Rigby," "For No One," and "Penny Lane"), Procol Harum's "A Whiter Shade of Pale" occupied the No. 1 spot on the U.K. singles chart for seven weeks in June-July 1967, right as Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band topped the album chart.


Mr. Blue Sky: The Story of Jeff Lynne and ELO. 2012. Written and directed by Martyn Atkins. BBC.

FIVE | “If You’re Gonna Have a Hit”

- Intratextual Mixes and Edits of Pop Recordings

WALTER EVERETT

I am the Entertainer, I come to do my show.
Heard my latest record spin on the radio?
Aw, it took me years to write it; they were the best years of my life!
It was a beautiful song but it ran too long;
If you’re gonna have a hit, you gotta make it fit,
So they cut it down to 3:05.