

WITH A LITTLE HELP FROM MY FRIENDS

APPEARS IN
ROCK & POP
2018

JOE COCKER

⚡ Released: 1968 ⚡ Album: With a Little Help From My Friends ⚡ Label: Regal Zonophone, A&M

ABOUT THE SONG

'With a Little Help From My Friends' is a song by the Beatles from their 1967 album *Sgt. Peppers Lonely Hearts Club Band*, sung by drummer Ringo Starr. In 1968, English singer Joe Cocker released the song as a single, reaching number one on the UK Singles Chart.

Cocker's version of the song later gained fame as the theme song for the hit American TV series 'The Wonder Years', which ran from 1988-1993. In 2001, it was inducted into the Grammy Hall of Fame, and in 2014 it was voted the seventh best cover version ever in a BBC poll.

The song has been covered many times - in 1988 it topped the charts again as a charity single by English band Wet Wet Wet and in 2004 as the debut single from Pop Idol UK winners Sam & Mark.

RECORDING AND PRODUCTION

Joe Cocker's version of 'With a Little Help From My Friends' was produced by English record producer Denny Cordell, and mixed by Tony Visconti, an American record producer, musician and singer.

The track, as well as several other tracks on Cocker's album of the same title, featured a pre-Led Zeppelin Jimmy Page on guitar, and Procol Harum's BJ Wilson on drums.

COMPOSITION

Cocker's arrangement of the track was a major departure from the Beatles version - he slowed it down and changed it from a 4/4 beat to a 6/8 time signature, changed the chords in the middle eight and added a long instrumental introduction with a now iconic guitar riff. The Beatles reportedly loved Cocker's version.

“
WHAT WOULD YOU DO
IF I SANG YOU A SONG
WOULD YOU STAND UP
AND WALK OUT ON ME
”

'I REMEMBER HIM AND DENNY CORDELL COMING ROUND TO THE STUDIO IN SAVILLE ROW AND PLAYING ME WHAT THEY'D RECORDED AND IT WAS JUST MIND-BLOWING, TOTALLY TURNED THE SONG INTO A SOUL ANTHEM, AND I WAS FOREVER GRATEFUL FOR HIM FOR HAVING DONE THAT.'

PAUL MCCARTNEY



LIVE PERFORMANCES

Not long after Cocker released 'With a Little Help From My Friends', he appeared as a relative newcomer at the 1969 Woodstock festival in Bethel, New York. Cocker's iconic performance of the song has gone down in history as one of the highlights of the festival, and was immortalised in the *Woodstock* film documentary, released in 1970. He performed it again at Woodstock '94, 25 years later. In 2002, Cocker performed the song at Buckingham Palace for the Golden Jubilee of Queen Elizabeth II, with Phil Collins on drums and Brian May on guitar.

THE ALBUM

'With a Little Help From My Friends' was the ninth track on Joe Cocker's debut album of the same name, released in May 1969. It was recorded in London at Olympic Studios and Trident Studios, featured more than 20 musicians and vocalists, and was produced by Denny Cordell. Cordell was reportedly so determined to produce a perfect album that it took over a year to complete. The album featured ten tracks, including covers of songs originally released by Bob Dylan, Traffic and Nina Simone, alongside three originals written by Cocker and Chris Stainton, who played piano, organ and bass on the album.

ABOUT THE ARTIST

John Robert 'Joe' Cocker OBE was born in Sheffield in 1944, and started singing in public at the age of 12. He formed his first group, The Cavaliers, in 1960 with three friends - they broke up after a year and Cocker left school to work as an apprentice gasfitter. He continued to pursue his music though, and in 1961 he started a new project, Vance Arnold and the Avengers, playing covers in pubs around Sheffield. The band got their first big break supporting the Rolling Stones at Sheffield City Hall in 1963. Cocker signed a record deal with Decca as a solo artist in 1964, releasing a cover of 'I'll Cry Instead' by the Beatles. The record flopped and he lost his record deal as a result. He moved on with a new group, Joe Cocker's Blues Band. In 1966, Cocker formed The Grease Band with Chris Stainton, and started gigging around town. The band caught Denny Cordell's attention and Cocker and Stainton dissolved the band to move to London and begin recording music with Cordell. 1968 saw the release of the single 'With a Little Help From My Friends', and his break out Woodstock performance and release of his first album followed in 1969.

Cocker released more than 20 studio albums between 1969 and 2012. He won a Grammy Award in 1983 for his duet 'Up Where We Belong', with Jennifer Warnes and was awarded the OBE for his services to music in 2007.

Joe Cocker died from lung cancer in December 2014, at the age of 70. In 2015, A tribute concert was performed at the Lockn' Festival in Virginia, and a feature-length documentary titled *Joe Cocker: Mad Dog With Soul* was released in 2017.

MORE TO EXPLORE

Songs: 'I'll Cry Instead', Joe Cocker (1964), 'Up Where We Belong', Jennifer Warnes & Joe Cocker (1984),

Albums: *With a Little Help From My Friends*, Joe Cocker (1969). **Artists & Collaborators:** BJ Wilson, Chris Stainton, Denny Cordell, Jennifer Warnes, Jimmy Page, Paul McCartney, Ringo Starr, Sam & Mark, Tony Visconti, The Beatles, Wet Wet Wet. **Trinity Rock & Pop syllabus:** Male Vocals, Grade 6, Drums, Grade 7, Guitar, Grade 6, Keyboards, Grade 5.

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**JOHN MENDELSON,
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