

1413. A Whiter Shade Of Pale

Backgrounds Of S. Radic

A Whiter Shade of Pale is the most successful hit of the British band Procol Harum from 1967.

The music is by Gary Brooker and Matthew Fisher, the lyrics by Keith Reid. Keith Reid wrote the lyrics to A Whiter Shade of Pale in early 1967 and offered it to the music publisher Essex Music, whose owner David Platz was impressed and still requested the missing music. After Gary Brooker had composed the music, two demo recordings were made in Mono on March 7, 1967. The final recordings in April 1967 in the Olympic Studios were made in a 3-hour session in which only 2 takes were recorded without overdubs and mixed in mono. The line-up consisted of Gary Brooker (vocals and piano), Matthew Fisher (Hammond organ M-102), Ray Royer (guitar), David Knights (bass) and Bill Eyden (drums).

A Whiter Shade of Pale is generally referred to in the media as the song "no one understands". The band members have always made contradictory statements about the interpretation of the lyrics, so they don't help with the interpretation. In 1994 Keith Reid published the following statement: "A nervous seducer drinks himself courage by alcohol at a party. Increasing alcoholisation impairs his perception through digressive thoughts: fragments from childhood experiences and his pusillanimous goals. The metaphor recurring in the song is about a ship catastrophe that draws a parallel between a romantic conquest and the dangers of the sea. Aha..."

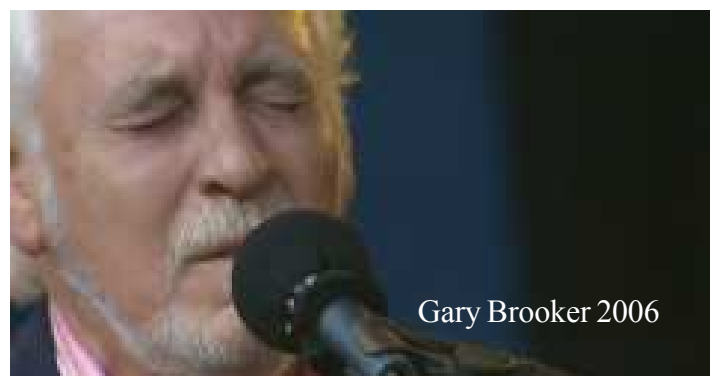
The text needs a lot of interpretation and must be seen in the context of the psychedelic phase that was modern at the time it was written. The core of psychedelia was the effect of hallucinogenic drugs on human perception. An early commentary by the British New Musical Express denies this psychedelic component; rather, Procol Harum plays between the music of Bach, Soul and Modern Jazz. However, the music and not the lyrics are meant here.

Musicologically, the song belongs, because of its classical influence, to the so-called "Baroque Rock", as does Eleanor Rigby of the Beatles. Fisher's solemn organ playing was inspired by Percy Sledges When a Man Loves a Woman. He had the idea for the chord sequence from Johann Sebastian Bach's Air from the Suite No. 3 in D major, which can also be recognized by the bass lines and the organ playing.



The pop song consists of two melodies, the sung one and the contrapuntal one played by the organ. This compositional technique of counterpoint reached its climax with Bach. The piece is regarded as the first arrangement of Bach works in rock music.

The live concert version presented here from 2006 in Denmark is accompanied by the Danish Symphony Orchestra and has a "Baroque introduction" in C minor, which is reminiscent in part of the sound of Rondo Veneziano with solo strings and later with oboe solo. After approx. 1:30 min. the intro ends with a modulation in C major and Gerry Brooker takes over the singing and accompanies himself at the piano in 4-beat and full orchestral-beat-rhythm, or with the famous organ solo, as in the original from 1967.



Gary Brooker 2006



Slow-4Beat (T=80)

The musical score is divided into two sections: *Main 1* and *Main 2*. The instruments and their parts are as follows:

- Solo-Str.:** Treble clef, 4/4 time. *Main 1* features a melodic line with eighth notes and quarter notes. *Main 2* has a whole rest.
- Strings:** Bass clef, 4/4 time. *Main 1* consists of a chord pad of quarter notes. *Main 2* consists of a chord pad of whole notes.
- Piano:** Bass clef, 4/4 time. *Main 1* consists of a chord pad of quarter notes. *Main 2* consists of a chord pad of quarter notes.
- Bass:** Bass clef, 4/4 time. *Main 1* consists of a dotted quarter note followed by an eighth note. *Main 2* consists of a quarter note followed by an eighth note.
- Drums:** Drum set notation, 4/4 time. *Main 1* includes *Ride-Cymbal* (quarter notes), *BD* (dotted quarter notes), and *Rimshot* (quarter notes). *Main 2* includes *small crash* (quarter notes), *DSD* (quarter notes), and *BD* (dotted quarter notes).

Programming instruction

This slow beat consists of two different rhythms: *Main 1* is the "baroque" rhythm for the orchestra interlude with strings and oboe. It is also not a "real" beat, but rather an effect rhythm in the Easy-Listening area. You can see this by the fact that the lookup is done by a rimshot (snare edge). In *Main 2* you have to play the expected Slow-4Beat. Here only the piano takes over the quarter beats (4Beat), the strings provide the chord pad and the DSD (Disco-Snare-Drum) plays the proper lookup. The bass and the bass drum play dotted, the solo strings have a break.