

Songs You Love to Love: The Top Ten Romantic Tunes of All Time

Ah, the power of love! Your heart beats faster, your eyes open wider, and you're much more likely to listen to a love song. Each February 14, and during the weeks leading up to Valentine's Day, the musical choices of the nation turn more romantic.

Over the years, some wonderfully potent love songs have been recorded. In fact, the most difficult part of writing this article was trimming the list down to just ten tunes.

So, if you don't find your favorite love song here, send me an e-mail at immedia@pacbell.net and let me know your desires on the subject. Meanwhile, you might want to visit www.romantic-lyrics.com or www.theromantic.com for a large selection of songs, often with the complete lyrics.

But right now, sit back, relax, pop a chocolate bon-bon in your mouth, and read some surprising facts about the Top Ten Love Songs for Valentine's Day (in chronological order):

"Someone to Watch Over Me," George and Ira Gershwin, 1926.

The birthplace of this lovely and moody number was an otherwise light and frothy Broadway musical called "Oh, Kay." The song was originally fast-paced, but soon moved to the ballad form, in keeping with the lyrics. There have been evocative renditions of the song every year since it was first composed, with a wide variety of artists contributing notable versions, including Rosemary Clooney, Doris Day, Judy Garland, Ella Fitzgerald, Frank Sinatra, Elton John, rapper Queen Latifah (although hers is not a rap version), trumpeter Chris Botti, pianist Keith Jarrett, blues legend Etta James, Barbra Streisand, and Sting, who sang it over the opening credits of the 1987 Ridley Scott film of the same name.

"Night and Day," by Cole Porter, 1932.

Written for the play, "Gay Divorce," and also appearing in the film, "The Gay Divorcee," this may be the most famous of Porter's 800+ songs, and illustrates his seemingly effortless flow of words, culminating in the bold statement that all of life's torments won't end "Till you let me spend my life making love to you, day and night, night and day." Such is the economy of Porter's writing that this one phrase combines the singer's desire with a promise of eternal love while managing to invert and restate the title, all in 17 words. It's why many songwriters would want to say to Porter, "You're the Top," which is another of his famous songs, and would have made this list if it wasn't also so full of humor.

"Unchained Melody," Alex North and Hy Zaret, 1936.

William Stirrat was 16 and too shy to approach the girl of his dreams, so he wrote one of the world's most beautiful tales of love and longing (using Zaret as his pen name). The breathtaking melody was by Alex North (who went on to compose scores for "Spartacus," "Cleopatra," and many other films). It took 19 years before their song appeared in the prison picture, "Unchained," where it was nominated for a Best Song Oscar. Al Hibbler sang it in the film, but that same year saw the song hit the charts in versions by Hibbler, Les Baxter, Roy Hamilton, and June Valli. Among the nearly 700 artists who have recorded this song are Harry Belafonte, Liberace, Jimmy Young, U2, Leann Rimes, Neil Diamond, Willie Nelson, Heart, Elvis Presley, and, of course, the Righteous Brothers. Their 1965 recording was a huge hit, and reached the top twenty again a quarter century later when it appeared on the "Ghost" soundtrack in 1990. The duo re-recorded the song the same year and THAT version als!

o hit the top twenty.

"First Time Ever I Saw Your Face," by Ewan MacColl, 1957.

A long, slowly-building flame is how some people describe the version sung by Roberta Flack, which created a sensation when it appeared in Clint Eastwood's 1971 directorial debut, "Play Misty for Me." Experimental playwright and folk singer MacColl wrote it 14 years earlier for his partner, Peggy Seeger, who needed a romantic song for a play. Written in less than an hour, the song virtually defines the term "love song." Flack's is the definitive rendition,

but the song has been recorded by dozens of performers in many genres, including Johnny Cash, Celine Dion, Elvis Presley, Mel Torme, Isaac Hayes, Gordon Lightfoot, and George Michael.

"Cherish," by Terry Kirkman, 1966.

Kirkman reportedly wrote this lovely song in a half-hour while he was the keyboard player in the overlooked Los Angeles-based band The Association. Featuring wonderfully expressive vocal harmonies, the song is actually about unrequited love, but its feeling of desire is so strong that this tune still gets played at weddings and anniversary parties. Some Internet sites explain that the recording was nearly three and a half minutes long, which was a bit much for radio play in those days, so the song was sped up to 3:13 but listed on the label as 3:00. It later became the first hit for David Cassidy, star of TV's "The Partridge Family," but that shouldn't dissuade you from checking out the original.

"God Only Knows," by Brian Wilson, 1966.

Although it begins with the line, "I may not always love you," the rest of the song is as assertive about undying love as anything ever written. In the recording by the Beach Boys, Carl Wilson's lead vocal achieves a rarified combination of strength and tenderness and the entire track is ethereal in its beauty. Cover versions of the song appear in the films "Boogie Nights" and "Saved," while the original is at the end of the charming Richard Curtis film, "Love, Actually."

"Your Song," by Elton John and Bernie Taupin, 1967.

It is said that the original lyric sheet has coffee stains on it because Taupin wrote the song at breakfast one morning at the home of John's parents, where he and the soon-to-be-superstar artist were living. While some mistakenly think this was the first John/Taupin collaboration, it was one of their earliest works. John reportedly wrote the melody in 20 minutes. The song perfectly captures the sense of wonder experienced by anyone who has fallen in love.

"I Will Always Love You," by Dolly Parton, 1974.

When Dolly Parton ended her professional songwriting relationship with Porter Wagoner, she wrote this heartfelt breakup song even though they were not romantically involved. The result was a number one country hit for Parton. She recorded another version for the 1978 film, "The Best Little Whorehouse in Texas," and again hit number one on the country charts. Whitney Houston's version of the song appeared in the 1992 film, "The Bodyguard," and dominated the pop, soul and adult contemporary charts for weeks. Not a day goes by without someone playing it to demonstrate the depth of their love, which is ironic since it is a song about saying goodbye.

"Heaven," by Jim Vallance and Bryan Adams, 1983.

Written for the thankfully forgotten 1983 film "A Night in Heaven," the song also appeared on Adams' "Reckless" album the following year and hit number one. Today, a whole new generation knows the song from DJ Sammy's 2002 dance version, which was recorded with Yanou and features vocals by Do (Dominique van Hulst). This modern, rhythmic version, which has dance floor clout yet still conveys the swirling all-encompassing passion of love, now appears in more than a dozen different remixes and has charted in nearly two dozen countries.

"In Your Eyes," by Peter Gabriel, 1986.

This track from Gabriel's "So" album has been called the most beautiful love song ever recorded. There's no denying its passion and power, with unusual chords and lyrics that touch on spiritual and metaphysical themes. Film director Cameron Crowe worked hard (and reportedly paid two hundred thousand dollars) to get the song into his film, "Say Anything" (in the scene where John Cusack holds a boom box over his head). Another popular story about the song is that it was written for Gabriel's then girlfriend, Rosanna Arquette. If true, it would mean she had two hit songs written for her that decade, as she is the subject of Toto's "Rosanna" from 1982.

Short note about the author

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