

# Stand by Me

Name \_\_\_\_\_

One day in 1961, Ben E. King had a little time left in a recording session, so he sang the start of a new song he was writing. The song was inspired by an old hymn King knew. "When the night has come and the land is dark and the moon is the only light we'll see... I won't cry, I won't cry..." It was a good start, but the song wasn't finished. The songwriting team of Jerry Leiber & Mike Stoller finished it for Ben E., including adding its well-known bass line. Ben E. recorded it, and yes, "Stand By Me" was a #1 hit on the R&B charts!

View Ben E. King's 1961 appearance on *American Bandstand*, a television show featuring teenagers dancing to Top 40 records plus the appearance of at least one performer who would lip-sync to their latest hit. <https://youtu.be/TYDkQgKgghc> (2:53)



Ask a grandparent or older adult if they remember *American Bandstand*. Did they listen to "Stand By Me" or dance to this song when they were a teenager? What other songs do they remember from that time in their life?

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Fast forward 25 years to 1986. Movie producer Rob Reiner had finished a movie that he wanted to re-title *Stand By Me*. Reiner also wanted the original recording as part of the movie's soundtrack. With this new attention, "Stand By Me" became a hit all over again—a monster hit!—and a new generation used Ben E. King's song to convey even more messages.

Since 1961, "Stand By Me" has been recorded more than 400 times.

One of those recordings is in the award-winning documentary, *Playing For Change: Peace Through Music (PCF)*. "PCF is a movement created to inspire and connect the world through music, born from the shared belief that music has the power to break down boundaries and overcome distances between people."



View this video of many musicians performing "Stand By Me" in their natural environments. Roger Ridley introduces the song, "No matter who you are, no matter where you go in your life, at some point you're gonna need somebody to stand by you." <https://youtu.be/Us-TVg40ExM> (5:27)

How is the feeling in this performance similar or different from Ben E. King's performance on *American Bandstand*?

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In 2014, “Stand By Me” was added to the National Recording Registry, a list of sound recordings deemed “culturally, historically or aesthetically significant” by the Library of Congress. These recordings are not necessarily selected as the “best” recordings of all time, but rather as works of enduring importance to American culture.” Ben E. King felt this was a tremendous honor. He passed away just weeks after receiving this recognition.

Here is a performance of “Stand By Me” that took place in New York City’s Central Park.  
<https://youtu.be/MDBgOyEN2OU> (3:45) How is it different performances from others you’ve heard?

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- \_\_\_\_\_



On May 19, 2018, “Stand By Me” was sung at The Royal Wedding of Prince Harry and Meghan Markle. The Kingdom Choir is a British gospel choir led by Karen Gibson.

<https://youtu.be/AyFILjdNqk8> (3:33)

What do you think was communicated by this song, in this place, by this choir?

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In today’s times, think about what this song communicates to you or makes you think of.

- Who might you share this song with?
- Is there someone who needs your support?
- What could you do to let someone know you are there for them?
- Who do you want or need standing by you, supporting you?

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