

It must be very wearying to be a musician with a long career but famous for just one song. Bit like the preacher with one sermon, which is all of us, except for us nobody wants to hear it the first time, nevermind repeated encore. Anyway, the artiste with one big hit. Forget all the music that you long and lovingly crafted over the years; forget the artistic triumphs where your heart was poured, your tears drained, your soul scoured then bared, moulded into your aesthetic tour de force. Forget it: all your public want to hear is that big hit, the novelty record with the earworm chorus that hit the toppermost, the Eurovision entry that *almost* made *douze points*, the gimcrack Christmas singalong with the idiotic hook that's on a loop in ASDA from the start of October that you wish you'd wiped from the tape before the record company got hold of it. Apart from the money it brings in, obviously. But it would be nice if just once they asked for something different. Play it again Sam. What's that? No play IT again. You know... we're all going on a...

So despite one of the most varied and artistically interesting forty-plus-year careers in music, all everybody wants Marc Almond to sing is Tainted Love. Despite being for years the underground darlings with a long back catalogue of barricade storming agitprop, audiences only ever want to hear Chumbawamba play Tubthumping. For those who fancy themselves more culturally refined the effect can be seen just as clearly over in the more rarified concert halls of classical. The composer of hundreds of works across a range of genres from ballets to brass bands, choral repertoire to operas Holst, for example, is known to posterity solely for The Planets suite: if he did gigs (which would need him to be still alive obviously, but if he did) all the audience would be shouting would be 'come on Gustav play us *I Vow to thee my country mate*'. We just want to hear the hit. Away from music's exalted heights, even for the culturally deprived it's the same: after a career beginning before most of us were born, with number one hits galore in most of the intervening decades, all everybody wants Cliff Richard to do is shut up and go home. After having put his shirt back on obviously.

It takes bravery, integrity or a certain contempt for the people who are paying your gas bill, for an artist so afflicted to refuse to play their signature tune, but hats off to 'em, some do try.

Politicians very often lack that bravery and integrity but frequently do possess the contempt by the shovel-full. Watch, read, listen to any interview with a politician from any party and despite having the whole songbook to choose from, however much their interlocutors may try to get them to sing a new tune, get them onto something, anything else, the person after your vote will doggedly refuse to say anything other than their spin-approved spiel, round and round like the proverbial scratched record stuck in the groove, or, again nodding to the classical world, something composed by Phillip Glass. Your typical politician is the bizarre singer that only wants to sing the one song- the b-side on a Portugal-only release- and sing it over and over and over again till everybody else is making for the exits and demanding a refund. Much like being locked in a church singing Give me joy in my

heart over and over for 3 hours. I believe it happens in some. However, not quite time to swerve to church yet, still a bit more on politicians to go.

Without doubt the most well known politician of my lifetime was Margaret Thatcher- her of the recently erected Grantham statue. The Iron Lady had many hit tunes- the Lady's not for turning; no, no, no; no such thing as society; we are a grandmother, bring your daughters to the slaughter to name but a few. I think that last one was Iron Maiden. None of Mrs Thatcher's ditties would make my Desert Island Discs, even if I was castaway on Canvey picking a record every day for the next fifty years, the last human to survive after Putins great patriotic nuclear Armageddon. Not personally a paid up member of the fan club. But I know some of you are and I have to tread carefully here. I also know that you'd know by now if I was lying to you from the pulpit so suffice to say most of what Mrs T proclaimed I would proclaim anathema; but I will say that, although disagree with her conclusions you might, you could almost always see that she had followed a logical path to get there- she had weighed evidence, taken stock, poured over statistics and reached her decision, however disagreeable it was. That wasn't always the case. One of her earliest grooves, didn't appear to have been arrived at by logic and, was entirely- and she wasn't stupid, so I guess deliberately- misleading. I don't think she actually wrote it, but it was her that made it a hit. She first released it in the 70s and you still hear it blaring out a thousand tinny speakers even now. It was such a catchy tune people can't help singing it all these years later. What I'm going on about- and I'm sorry this metaphor has been past breaking points many minutes since- is Mrs Thatcher's riffing on the economy when she would compare the management of government finances to those of a housewife balancing the household budget. Money in must equal money out, balancing the books, can't spend money you don't have etc. It sounds pretty straightforward, basic common sense. If you or me spend more than we've got coming in, we very soon run into trouble. For us, to stay in the black, we must either spend less or earn more. There is only a finite amount of money and if you spend it, it's gone.

That's what it's like for our household budgets. But not for governments. It's counterintuitive I know, but it's not. Do it properly, and when governments spend money, they get more money back. If governments splash the cash around then it stimulates the economy, gets more people in work, gets people running round a bit busier making more and more money, and it keeps on spreading like the common cold in a kindergarten. All it takes is for a single ten pound note to be exchanged ten times and suddenly it's £100. It's not a zero-sum game. The money-go-round isn't at a fixed speed- it can go faster and - in theory at least- everybody wins.

However, all good Christians- and many bad ones as well- know that "the desire for money is the root of many evils"-so let's shift our attention to that perennial subject of song, the theme of thousands upon thousands of tunes and that is love. Money and love are often painted as antitheses- money can't buy me love after all- but there is a point at which they start to behave exactly the same.

The final track on the Beatles last album is called, fittingly enough The End, and it ends with the line 'And in the end, the love you make, is equal to the love you take.' It sounds quite profound- more so certainly than 'can't buy me love'- but it's not true. Just like Margaret's magic money tree, love grows. And it keeps growing, till there's more than you start with much more. And unlike money, love never ends up hoarded in the bank vaults of the rich. It just keeps growing, the virtuous circle of the cardinal virtue.

Christians have many songs and tunes; but we too have only one that everybody want to hear. Happily, it's our best one, a sort of greatest hits medley all on one vinyl platter. Of course, it's a love song.

There is an ancient and rather beautiful tale told about St John, the guy who penned the letters that bear his name and the gospel [read out this morning]. In his extreme old age St John was so weak, he had to be carried into each service at his church at Ephesus in the arms of his disciples. He was what you might call a dedicated churchgoer, unlikely to say 'Can't go to the service this morning it's raining'. In fact, at the gatherings St John was unable to say anything except 'Little children, love one another'. All the time, that was all he said. 'Little children, love one another'. Almost like a politician, refusing to deviate from the script. For a while his church ignored it: it was just the sort of thing people in extreme old age tend to do, get stuck on a loop. Did I ever tell you about the time sweets came off rationing? Finally one of his disciples had had enough and asked him: 'Master, why do you always say that? "Because," John replied, "it is the Lord's command, and if you do only this, it is enough.'" Turns out St John wasn't stuck in the run-out groove of senility. He'd boiled the gospel down to its essentials- Love one another- and then just repeated it. And as repetition is the heart of all song, when he repeated it, he made music.

Love one another.

It is the song of our faith. It is our greatest hit, the only one we want to sing and the only one we want to hear. It really is the song of the ages, the music of the spheres and the melody of heaven. It is a love song. And God is that song.

Love grows. Love wins. God is love.