

# “Sweet Dreams (Are Made Of This)”—Eurythmics (1983)

Added to the National Registry: 2003

Essay by Lori Majewski (guest post)\*



*Eurythmics*

“Songs are like ships: They have their own particular voyages and destinations. Once they’ve been launched, there’s no turning back. You just have to follow the journey.”

So wrote Annie Lennox in a January 2023 Instagram post acknowledging the 40th anniversary of the Eurythmics’ inescapable juggernaut, “Sweet Dreams (Are Made Of This).” After composing it with her musical other half, Dave Stewart, the song embarked the duo on the adventure of a lifetime, traveling the world and the seven seas for four-plus decades and counting. It’s a bona fide synth-pop smash and an all-ages anthem. “Sweet Dreams” laid the groundwork for EDM, has been covered by artists as disparate as Pink, Nas, St. Vincent, and Marilyn Manson, and was even reinterpreted by Lennox herself as an ode to the #MeToo movement.

“The meaning of ‘Sweet Dreams’ is fundamentally about aspiration, motivation and purpose,” Lennox told the Library of Congress upon learning the song was among the 25 audio treasures selected for preservation in the National Recording Registry in 2023. “It’s about how everyone usually has a ‘dream’ to realize their destiny--their fate--and their future, in their own particular way. I’ve been a musician all my life and I always wanted to be able to make music and sing. And, later on, I realized I wanted to write songs too, and I came down to London with a ‘dream’ or aspiration. For most of the young people in my hometown, it would have been almost impossible to pursue and realize a dream like that.”

Lennox’s hometown is Aberdeen, Scotland; Stewart’s is Sunderland, England. In 1975, they met-cute at a London health-food restaurant where she was waiting tables. “I began steaming up the window from the outside with my breath, and I began drawing on the window’s condensation,” Stewart wrote in his 2016 autobiography called--what else?—“Sweet Dreams Are Made Of This.” “I wrote, in reverse, so she could read, ‘Will you marry me?’”

For the next five years, they spent every night together. During that time, the couple saw a good bit of the world touring as part of the British rock band The Tourists, a modestly successful five-piece that notched a couple of UK top-tens. Then Lennox and Stewart split in 1980--from the group and each other. However, they remained close friends and laser-focused on their shared musical mission, even naming their new duo after a term for being in perfect, harmonious proportion: Eurythmics.

Unfortunately, their first album, 1981’s “In the Garden,” proved a commercial disappointment, and their record label, RCA, decided against picking up the option for a second. Plus, Stewart was recovering from two collapsed lungs, and Lennox was mired in a crippling depression.

“So what did Annie and Dave do?” U2’s The Edge asked during his induction speech inducting Eurythmics into the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame in 2022. Edge answered his own question: “They did what all the great dreamers do: They doubled down on their vision. They borrowed £5000”--about \$30,000 in 2024--”from the bank to set up a one-room recording studio in north London, to make a purely electronic album.”

The loan bought the equipment they needed to record and produce their own music: “a simple-to-operate TEAC eight-track recorder and a second-hand Revox two-track recorder to mix down into,” said Stewart. “We had minimal other equipment: a Klark Telknik spring reserve, a Bel noise reduction system, a Roland space echo, and our pride and joy, a Soundcraft secondhand desk with sixteen inputs, meaning we could record and mix our own records for the first time.” They’re all fossils by today’s standards, but in 1983, it was cutting-edge gear--just what a mad scientist like Stewart needed for his experiments.

Unfortunately, “I couldn’t get any of the new equipment to work,” Stewart told “The Guardian” in 2017. “Annie...was curled up on the floor in the fetal position when I managed to produce this beat and riff. She suddenly went: ‘What the hell is that?’ and leapt up and started playing the other synthesizer. Between the two dueling synths we had the beginnings of ‘Sweet Dreams (Are Made of This)’.”

Those dueling synths were the secret sauce. Six months before “Sweet Dreams” was released in January 1983, two other British electronic singles took the US by storm: “Don’t You Want Me” by the Human League, which hit number one on Billboard’s Hot 100, and Soft Cell’s cover of “Tainted Love.” Together with Gary Numan’s “Cars”--a 1979 British release that went top-ten on the U.S. Hot 100 in June of 1980--they planted the Second British invasion’s flag in the sand. To be sure, all three have endured to become classics. However, with “Sweet Dreams,” Eurythmics went beyond those songs’ video game-like bleeps and bloops, using synthesizers to create sounds so lush, so epic--it was like classical music but made with electric violins!

“We were very, very excited,” Stewart recalled. “Annie immediately started to get some ideas for lyrics and went down to this little empty room below the studio to write. Shortly after, she came out with: ‘*Sweet Dreams are made of this.*’ Incredible! Could there be a more appropriate title?”

*Sweet dreams are made of this  
Who am I to disagree?  
I travel the world and the seven seas  
Everybody's looking for something*

*Some of them want to use you  
Some of them want to get used by you  
Some of them want to abuse you  
Some of them want to be abused...*

As important as that trilogy of “Cars,” “Don’t You Want Me” and “Tainted Love” were--and are--their lyrics were not nearly as urgent or foreboding. Lennox had experienced enough of the music industry to know it harbored villains. “Sweet Dreams” was her truth. She was quite literally a starving artist who was determined to keep her integrity intact while chasing her own dream of being a songwriter, as Stewart urged her on: “*Hold you head up/Keep your head up/Moving on.*”

“My entire existence has revolved around songwriting--because without the song, there is nothing else; that is the core of everything,” Lennox told me in 2015. “I remember [sitting] on top of the double decker bus in London and thinking to myself, ‘I’m a singer-songwriter. I’m a

singer-songwriter. That's what I want to do. That's who I am. It was maybe in an abstract moment sitting on that bus, but it just came--boom!--as a thought in my mind. And it felt so right."

Not to be outdone, of course, is the powerful, superstar-in-the-making delivery. "Sweet Dreams" is Lennox emerging from the chrysalis. She sounds different than she did with The Tourists and on "In The Garden." Now she was emoting, for the first time, like a soul singer. On those other projects, it's as if she was holding back; now she was unleashed. What did she have to lose? The vocal is so alive, so human--the ad libs are visceral. In perfect contrast to Stewart's programmed and synthesized melodies, Lennox's voice is the song's lifeblood, as well as its heart and soul.

"Sweet Dreams (Are Made Of This)" became the show piece of Eurythmics' second album, which they also called "Sweet Dreams." Still, their label mustn't have thought that much of the title track, as they didn't select it as the first single... or the second... or the third.

"[It] was passed over... because [the label] didn't think it had a chorus!" said The Edge in his Rock Hall speech. Yet "the track got so much radio play that, eventually, it was released, along with one of the most iconic videos of the MTV era."

For Gen-Xers who grew up with cable television, the images from the accompanying "Sweet Dreams" music video are almost as iconic as the song. Lennox in the Muppets-orange crew cut. The duo meditating while sitting cross-legged on a boardroom table. The cows wandering through the board room--*real cows!*

Everything worked in tandem: the synths, the sound of her voice, their eccentric image, the emergence of MTV. "Sweet Dreams" summited Billboard's Hot 100 on September 12, 1983, and became a smash all around the world.

Eurythmics went on to have many more hits. Together they've been inducted into the Songwriters Hall of Fame. Separately, Stewart worked with the likes of Mick Jagger, Tom Petty and Stevie Nicks, while Lennox sold millions of records and won an Academy Award as a solo artist. More recently, she's become of a staple of her idol Joni Mitchell's Joni Jams. But "Sweet Dreams (Are Made Of This)" is their legacy. It's what made all of those other things possible.

"Somewhere right now...there are drunken karaoke versions being sung in Russian, Japanese, and Italian," said Stewart. "It follows me around every day, everywhere I go. Trying on clothes in a boutique, buying organic veggies at the market, riding in an elevator or driving past someone else's car and hearing it on their radio.... Something that took a very short piece of time to create and not even a few hours to produce becomes the lightning rod that affects the rest of your life."

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\*The views expressed in this essay are those of the author and may not reflect those of the Library of Congress.