

**This interview with
ANNIE LENNOX
was conducted by the Library of Congress
on April 12, 2023**



Annie Lennox

Library of Congress: Congratulations on having “Sweet Dreams” added to the National Registry.

Annie Lennox: Thank you very much!

I feel as if I ought to have Dave (Stewart) right here. I'm only one half of Eurythmics and he is the significant other half. So my first disclaimer is that I am not Eurythmics. I am 50%.

LC: Can you tell us a little bit about the genesis of Eurythmics and then this song, “Sweet Dreams (Are Made Of This)”?

AL: The meaning of “Sweet Dreams” is fundamentally about aspiration, motivation and purpose. 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.

It's also a somewhat wry comment on the situation Dave and I found ourselves in, after years of touring--writing songs, making videos and doing everything we had to do to survive at that time in the late 1970's.

Things have changed so much.

At that point in time we were recording on vinyl. Then we went to cassette tape. Then we went to CD and now we're streaming. I don't know what's gonna be next, but there'll definitely be a “next.”

So....music!

Birds create the purest form of music you could ever hear. Listening to birdsong is like tuning in directly to “God”--as it were. I’m not religious, but whatever that natural source is, the birds are singing and it's for free! Birds don’t appear to know much about how humans make music, but they offer us something to listen to every single day.

LC: At the time of “Sweet Dreams,” you and Dave were having some tough financially times.

AL: “Sweet Dreams” was written and recorded in a few hours in a place in London called “Camden Lock.” Dave and I were working above a picture framing factory. We owned some sound equipment and the owner of the factory said, “You can house your stuff here, as long as I can use it from time to time.” So we did a little deal with him like that. Everything was a kind of a hustle, because Dave and I were absolutely poor. We had no money at all to speak of. But Dave, who is an incredibly inventive person, had an idea to go to the manager of the local bank in North London where we lived. He put on a suit, with a shirt and tie, and brought a briefcase with some examples of the music we'd already made and went to see the bank manager, Geoff.

Geoff was a guitar enthusiast. He loved music and loved playing guitar.

After that meeting, he actually thought we were worth lending £3,000--which was an absolute small fortune back then.

That loan gave us the means to buy a synthesizer and a small prototype drum machine.

We had a computer at one point that actually had a wooden base. It’s featured in the video of “Sweet Dreams.” Dave’s typing on the keys. He’s very much a futurist and I’m very much a Luddite!

But the two things together was a good combination for quite a long time and we were just trying, trying, trying to make the very best music we could.

When you try to make music, you can't be like: “I'm going to make money. I'm going to be famous! Everybody's gonna know us! Everything's gonna be a success!”

It doesn't work like that, and success very often follows a lot of failure. And then there's whatever “success” is in the music industry. At that time, back in the early 80’s, it was all about selling lots of records. So if you fail, you're not selling records and they're not playing your music on the radio and no one's really knowing about you; it's a painful thing. It's hard. It's a hard drop.

I mean, many people have fallen from great heights.

The music industry is a beast. It doesn't suffer fools gladly and it has no compassion at all. It sees artists as product and it's become more and more like that.

We were just very fortunate by happenstance or serendipity.

A couple of people in the record industry actually flew the flag for us and thought, “These guys are really special and you have to listen to what they’re doing.” And, yes, please do facilitate them getting a colored sleeve on their vinyl!

Everything we achieved had to be fought for.

We've struggled and fought all the way through, and we both have amazing stories to tell.

I personally feel like a pirate, you know, that has come back from a series of mishaps and adventures...and the crazy stories I could tell about making music and the actual lived experience of it.

LC: The lyrics you came up with the title “Sweet Dreams (Are Made of This)” were kind of misunderstood when it blew up so big. You mentioned “Sweet Dreams” as a wry comment. But then you had another line in there about, “Some of them want to abuse you... Some of them want to be abused....”

AL: When you write songs it's a little bit like launching a boat--setting it out to sea.... and you don't actually know if it's going to make it to shore on the other side and what's going to happen with the weather and all these things.

You never actually know how people are going to accept it, or how they're going to see it. I've discovered that whatever you think, however you think about your work, your piece of commentary or whatever you put out there, a sentence or a line, or a song...people are going to interpret it in their own way. So you have no control at all about that.

Sometimes people understand it but, you know... I realize I've come to terms with it... It doesn't really matter, because it's almost like a puzzle that you just have to be free enough to say, “Take whatever they like out of the song,” except when people want to use your songs politically, as they might not be exactly in sync with you... Then that's not so good!

LC: What do you think is the legacy of this song is?

AL: Well, “Sweet Dreams”.... is almost like a mantra. It's almost like a haiku poem. It is a coded message. It's a commentary about the human condition, about when we are born. We haven't been asked to be born and we are told that our name is “this,” our gender is “this” and this is our home, our family, our country, our school, and our identity is taken from things that we, actually, in many ways have no control over.

So if you actually dig deeper into the song, it is a question about what motivates you as a human being. What is your purpose in life? Which is always the “who”:... Who am I? Why am I here? And what is the purpose in life? And it's alchemically boiled into that song, so you can use it as a happy birthday song--a celebratory song. Or I've just graduated, so I'm gonna put on “Sweet Dreams”!

And I think looking back over 40 years since that song came out, I love the way people have identified with it--how it's lasted and keeps being reinvented. It keeps coming back and people keep loving it. I mean, it's a miracle to me, because I had no idea at the time we were creating it, that it was going to have this kind of lineage ahead of it.