

## Pet Songs and Sounds

Written by Janet Goodman, BT Contributor  
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### Animal lovers put their hearts in their tunes



Ever since animals entered households as pets, they've had the special distinction of being artistic muses for creative people. Ancient Egyptian and Assyrian craftsmen sculpted and painted dogs and cats, and as new means of self-expression were discovered, from literature to filmmaking, pets steadfastly remained inspirations.

In the past century, with inventions like the phonograph and radio, music has become a part of our every day, and songwriters have turned to their furry muses to create what's popularly referred to as "the soundtrack of our lives." When it comes to songs about pets, they become personal. They make us think about our own as we slap knees or reach for the Kleenex boxes, effortlessly tapping into our emotions.

Television has a history of embracing funny pet songs. Perhaps the most aired cat song of all time is the "Meow Mix Theme" composed by Tom McFaul of jingle house Lucas/McFaul for the cat food commercial. You know the words: *Meow, meow, meow, meow, meow, meow, meow, meow...*

Sung by kitties (really the voices of jingle queen Linda November and Toni Wine), it's had a successful 40-year run, still scoring "aw" points with consumers.

Sitcom watchers crack up at "Smelly Cat," the song written and performed by *Friends* character Phoebe. It's classic "bad Buffay" writing, with lyrics like *Smelly Cat, Smelly Cat/What are they feeding you?*

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In 1960 the songwriters Ray Evans and Jay Livingston wrote the theme song for a TV show about a talking Palomino. Livingston recorded a demo to be resung by a professional singer, but the show's producers loved his performance, and after 54 years of syndication, "Mr. Ed" has become one of the most beloved theme songs of all time: *A horse is a horse, of course, of course/And no one can talk to a horse, of course....*

Freddy Mercury expressed the crazy unconditional love of cat owners on "Delilah," a tribute to his tortoiseshell feline. Included on Queen's 1991 *Innuendo* album -- the last before his death -- it features hilarious, meowing guitar licks.

More serious, often wistful pet songs have become hits for recording artists. Lobo earned a Top 5 in 1971 with a soft rocker about traveling the country in a beat-up truck called "Me and You and a Dog Named Boo." Twenty years later, Pirates of the Mississippi recorded the poignant Danny Mayo song about tolerance, "Feed Jake," that went to No. 15 on *Billboard's* country chart. At age ten, Elvis won five dollars at a state fair contest performing Red Foley's tragic "Old Shep." He later recorded it for his second studio album and released it as a single in 1956.

Perhaps the biggest pet song to date is Patti Page's "Doggie in the Window." Released in 1953, it stayed at No. 1 for eight weeks. The single sold two million copies and caused American Kennel Club registration to increase eight percent that year.

Future exotics owner Michael Jackson had his first U.S. No. 1 solo pop hit with a melancholy "best friend" tribute to a pet rat that saves a boy from bullies. "Ben" was recorded for closing credits of the horror movie of the same name. On top for one week, it was nominated for an Academy Award for best original song in 1973, and won a Golden Globe for best song.

Sometimes songs appear to be about human-to-human relationships but were really inspired by pets. Henry Gross had a No. 5 hit in 1976 with his haunting, falsetto ballad "Shannon," a song about Beach Boy Carl Wilson's Irish setter that had been hit by a car. Paul McCartney confessed in 1977 that "Martha My Dear" (on 1968's *White Album*) was not a song about then girlfriend Jane Asher, but about his Old English sheepdog.

Now with the digital age, anyone with a video camera or smartphone can easily earn their 15 minutes by uploading to social media sites. YouTube, in particular, has become *the* place for

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the modern-day musical tribute to animals. It teems with critter videos, many of them of pet owners singing to or about their companions in little self-penned ditties to the tunes of well-known songs.

Pets themselves have become the stars, like Nora the Piano Cat. Her moving CATcerto performance with the Klaipeda Chamber Orchestra has five million hits; sadly, being the classless humans that we are, goofy, fake-playing Keyboard Cat has outdone her, with hundreds of millions of hits.

There are birds singing anything from Mozart's *Magic Flute* to Lady Gaga and SpongeBob; animals singing to other animals; holiday compilation videos of pets given comical human voices, and dogs howling (their owners call it singing). From silly to saccharine to somber, no matter how or when they were created, pet songs have their place in music history and hearts.

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