

That Old Black Magic: Unravelling the Enchanting Allure of a Timeless Classic

3/20
Swing
THAT OLD BLACK MAGIC
- HAROLD ARLEN / JOHNNY MERCER

That old black mag - ic has me in its spell, - That
old black mag - ic that you wave as well, - Those
i - or - gans fin - gers up and down my spine, - The
same old catch - craft when your eyes meet mine, - The
same old sin - gle that I feel in - side, - and
then that ol - e - ve - tor starts its ride, - and
down and down I go, 'round and 'round I go
like a - leet that's caught in the tide, - I should

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That Old Black Magic: tales with a twist - Volume 2

by Ronald Slaton

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The Genesis of a Masterpiece

In the vibrant musical landscape of the 1940s, the legendary composer Harold Arlen and the gifted lyricist Johnny Mercer embarked on a creative collaboration that would forever etch their names in music history. Together, they gave birth to a timeless masterpiece, a love song destined to captivate generations: *That Old Black Magic*.

The exact genesis of the song remains shrouded in a veil of mystery, adding to its enigmatic allure. Some sources suggest that Arlen composed the haunting melody while experimenting with a new piano. As his fingers danced across the ivories, the haunting notes poured forth, weaving a spell of romantic longing.

Meanwhile, Mercer, known for his poetic prowess, was inspired by the melody's enchanting power and crafted lyrics that perfectly captured the essence of love's bewitching spell. The words flowed effortlessly from his pen, painting a vivid tapestry of emotions.

Thus, *That Old Black Magic* was born, a timeless ballad that would become a beloved standard in jazz, pop, and beyond.

Lyrical Enchantments

The lyrics of That Old Black Magic are a testament to Mercer's lyrical genius. Each verse paints a vivid tableau of love's undeniable power, weaving a tapestry of longing, desire, and enchantment.

The opening lines set the stage for a tale of irresistible attraction:



“That old black magic has me in its spell

That old black magic that you weave so well

When your eyes meet mine

I feel such a thrill go down my spine”

Mercer masterfully employs metaphors to convey the protagonist's overwhelming desire. The "old black magic" becomes a symbol of the irresistible power of love, its spellbinding charm ensnaring the heart.

The chorus serves as a poignant refrain, encapsulating the bittersweet longing and anticipation that accompanies love's embrace:



“That old black magic can make me believe

Every promise that you make me

That old black magic can make me believe

You're mine forever and a day”

Mercer's use of the conditional "can make me believe" beautifully captures the bittersweet nature of love, where even the most fantastical promises seem within reach.

Throughout the verses, Mercer explores the various aspects of love's transformative power, weaving a tapestry of intricate emotions:

“

“It makes me see stars up above

In the middle of the day”

Love's presence transforms the mundane into the extraordinary, making the impossible seem tangible.

“

“It makes the moonlight brighter

And the stars all seem to twinkle more”

Under love's spell, the world around becomes more vibrant and alluring, as if imbued with a magical glow.

“

“It makes me forget how to be hard

And makes me softer

Than the gentle rain”

Love's power to soften even the most hardened of hearts is a testament to its transformative essence.

Mercer concludes the song with a poignant acknowledgment of love's enduring presence:

“

“That old black magic keeps spinning me around

Makes me so dizzy with desire

It makes my heart beat faster

Than an airplane motor”

The song ends as it began, with the "old black magic" still firmly in control, its spellbinding enchantment captivating the protagonist forever.

A Symphony of Melodies

Just as Mercer's lyrics wove a tapestry of emotions, Arlen's melodies created a captivating musical backdrop for That Old Black Magic. The

song's composition is a masterclass in musical storytelling, each section perfectly complementing the lyrical content.

The intro sets the tone with an enchanting interplay of piano and strings, creating a sense of anticipation and longing. The verse melodies are hauntingly beautiful, with a balance of flowing grace and subtle syncopations. The chorus bursts forth with a majestic sweep, its soaring melody echoing the intensity of the emotions it conveys.

A particularly notable aspect of the composition is its use of chromaticism. Arlen masterfully incorporates chromatic notes into the melody, adding an element of tension and unease that perfectly mirrors the protagonist's whirlwind of emotions.

Enduring Legacy

Since its inception in 1943, That Old Black Magic has become an enduring classic, its spellbinding allure captivating generations of listeners. The song has been recorded by countless artists, from Ella Fitzgerald and Frank Sinatra to Michael Bublé and Lady Gaga, each interpretation adding a unique layer to its rich musical tapestry.

Beyond its musical merits, That Old Black Magic has also found a prominent place in popular culture. The song has been featured in numerous films, television shows, and Broadway productions, further solidifying its status as a timeless masterpiece.

In 1999, That Old Black Magic was inducted into the Grammy Hall of Fame, a prestigious honor bestowed upon recordings of exceptional quality or

historical significance. This accolade serves as a testament to the song's enduring impact on the music world.

The Magic Endures

That Old Black Magic remains a timeless classic for a reason. Its enchanting melody, captivating lyrics, and enduring legacy have captured the hearts and imaginations of listeners for generations.

The song's ability to evoke such a wide range of emotions is a testament to its universal appeal. It speaks to the longing, desire, and enchantment that are inherent to the human experience. Whether performed by a jazz ensemble, a pop star, or a Broadway orchestra, That Old Black Magic continues to weave its spell, its enchanting allure forever captivating our hearts.

So let us raise a glass to That Old Black Magic, a timeless masterpiece that continues to inspire, enchant, and remind us of the irresistible power of love.



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