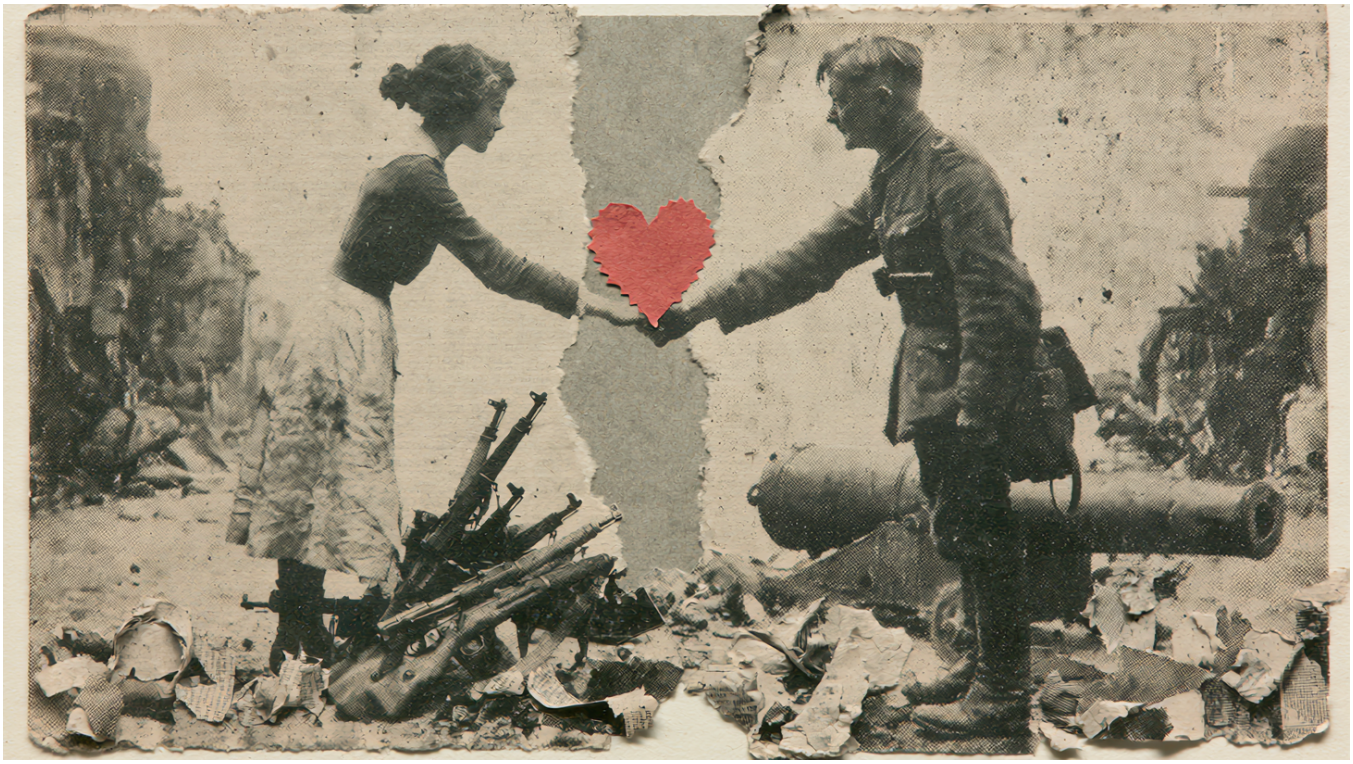

FRIEDENSNOTE NR. 64

The Opposite of War

With his song „Silly Love Songs", Paul McCartney defended the right to write love songs even in the face of drastic political ills.

John Lennon and Paul McCartney — perhaps the most famous songwriting duo of all time. The two companions, however, grew apart. After the end of the Beatles, both worked on their solo careers. In doing so, the respective images of the two artists differed greatly. Lennon was regarded as the politically alert rebel, McCartney rather as the gifted but harmless writer of schmaltz.

It may be that disparaging remarks about the ex-colleague's work also came from John Lennon himself. Reacting to this, Paul McCartney created the very successful song „Silly Love Songs" in 1975. With it he expressed that not only politically accusatory chansons have value, but also songs about the „most beautiful feeling in the world". After all, the demand for them, he argues, is unbroken. So: „What's wrong with that?"

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SONG	Silly Love Songs
PERFORMER	Paul McCartney
ALBUM	Wings at the Speed of Sound, 1976

> *Blessed through love, gods through love, men made equal to gods! Love makes heaven more heavenly, and earth into the kingdom of heaven*

wrote Friedrich Schiller in 1792 in his hymn „Triumph der Liebe". For Schiller, the Sturm und Drang poet, love was the all-powerful force capable of making the world a better place. Whoever loves wages no wars — this, roughly, is what the message would mean, translated into the world of pacifist thought.

On 30 April 1975, that is 183 years after Schiller's ode to love, the Vietnam War, which had been raging since 1955, came to an end with the capture of the South Vietnamese capital Saigon by North Vietnamese troops. Drawing a line under this dark chapter also made clear what terrible consequences the entry of the USA into the war — justified in 1964 by President Lyndon B. Johnson with the sentence so familiar to us, „The freedom of San Francisco is being defended in Saigon" — actually had. Present-day estimates assume that in the Vietnam War one million soldiers and two million civilians lost their lives and two million people were maimed. The herbicide „Agent Orange", sprayed extensively by the Americans from planes and helicopters, contained the highly toxic dioxin TCDD. The sprayed poison can still be found in the food chain today and continues to cause illnesses and miscarriages.

No, the freedom of San Francisco was certainly not defended in Saigon. Instead, the question repeatedly raised by US soldiers in letters home, *!Why are we here*?" was in 1975 left finally without a satisfactory answer. The war left behind a branded country and an American trauma that gave rise to impressive anti-war films such as Francis Ford Coppola's „Apocalypse Now", Stanley Kubrick's „Full Metal Jacket" or Oliver Stone's „Platoon". And when Oliver Stone, toward the end of his film, has the wounded soldier Chris Taylor say: „We did not fight the enemy, we fought ourselves, the enemy was in us", he describes war as what it ultimately is: the absence of love within us.

> *The true opposite of war is not peace, but love. And whoever fills the world with love acts as a true pacifist.*

> *„You'd think that people would've had enough of silly love songs.*
> *But I look around me and I see it isn't so.*
> *Some people want to fill the world with silly love songs.*
> *And what's wrong with that?*
> *I'd like to know*
> *'Cause here I go again."*

One musician who agitated very early on against the Vietnam War through protests and songs was John Lennon. As early as 1969, in this context, came his song „Give peace a chance", and two years later, in 1971, Lennon released „Imagine", his musical vision of a seemingly perfect world without religion, possessions or national borders. To this day „Imagine", and the longing it proclaims for „Nothing to kill or die for", is regarded as the ultimate anthem of the peace movement.

With his commitment to peace, John Lennon quickly became the darling of the music critics and clearly stood above Paul McCartney — his once congenial partner in the Beatles — in favor and esteem. After the most successful band of all time announced its breakup in 1970, the years up to 1975 clearly belonged, in public perception, to John Lennon, who established himself as an influential peace activist. Paul McCartney, by contrast, appeared to the music world as nice but colorless and inconsequential. While Lennon in „Imagine" dreamed melancholically of the brotherhood of all people, McCartney composed cheerful, life-affirming love songs.

In 1973, for instance, he wrote „My Love" for his wife Linda — a song reminiscent of „The long and winding road" and since ennobled by more than 130 cover versions. In the spring of 1975 came „Listen to what the man said", a buoyant, positive song about the power of love that sold over a million copies in the USA but left the critics rather at a loss. The reproach directed at McCartney was always the same: how can anyone churn out silly love songs in politically volatile times? And John Lennon, too, hardly held back with his criticism. As early as 1971 he released the song „How do you sleep" and there described McCartney's music as „muzak", as department-store or elevator music.

> *I love you, I love you, I love you, I love you.*

Toward the end of that politically volatile year 1975, given the insolences he had to endure from critics and from John Lennon, Paul McCartney must finally have lost his temper, and during a stay in Hawaii he wrote one of his most successful songs of the post-Beatles era: „Silly Love Songs”. After its release in 1976, the song topped the US Billboard charts for five consecutive weeks and was listed there as the most successful single of the year.

Musically, „Silly Love Songs” is certainly a masterpiece. Simple and pleasant to the ear, yet in truth complex, melodic and with that mixture of musical sophistication and mainstream appeal so characteristic of Paul McCartney. The song is light and cheerful in conception and — presumably as a concession to the zeitgeist, after all disco beats and the Bee Gees dominated the charts in the mid-1970s — even quite danceable. For this, McCartney built in a dominant and uniquely played bass line, pushed the drums to the fore and underpinned the melody with groovy horns and strings. „Silly Love Songs” is musically rounded off by several vocal lines sung in counterpoint, which lends the song softness and gentleness.

> *„I can’t explain, the feeling’s plain to me*
>
> *Now can’t you see?*
>
> *Ah, she gave me more, she gave it all to me*
>
> *Now can’t you see?*
>
> *What’s wrong with that?*
>
> *I need to know*
>
> *’Cause here I go again.“*

But for Paul McCartney „Silly Love Songs" was far more than just a chart success. For him „Silly Love Songs" was a liberating blow. The song is first and foremost a glad tidings to his critics, along the lines of: „Yes, I write love songs. People long for them. Stop belittling love songs at last. Let yourself go with it.

Even the very first verse of „Silly Love Songs” expresses this message: "You’d think that people would’ve had enough of silly love songs. But I look around me and I see it isn’t so." „You might think

people had had enough of silly love songs. But when I look around, I see that it is not so." And elsewhere: "Some people wanna fill the world with silly love songs", meaning: „Some people want to fill the world with silly love songs," only to pose, at the end of the song, the question that for McCartney is surely rhetorical: „What's wrong with that?" „What is wrong with that?"

Of course there is nothing wrong with it. Not even in politically volatile times. Least of all then, one is tempted to add. That was true in 1975. And it is true today, fifty years later, more than ever.

> *I love you, I love you.*

> *„Love doesn't come in a minute,*
> *Sometimes it doesn't come at all.*
> *I only know that when I'm in it,*
> *It isn't silly, love isn't silly,*
> *Love isn't silly at all."*

And so „Silly Love Songs" is at least as much a peace note as Lennon's „Imagine" and „Give peace a chance", even if McCartney's message of peace comes across more quietly and unobtrusively than Lennon's works.

„Silly Love Songs" denounces nothing, demands nothing, does not present itself as overtly intellectual or excessively moralistic.

„Silly Love Songs", masterfully realized melodically, pays homage simply to the absolute and everlasting opposite of war: love.

Love for one's life partner, for family, for friends and for all people who meet one peacefully with open arms. And love, too, for the people who do not. McCartney's message in „Silly Love Songs" is carried into the world not so much by the lyrics as chiefly by the music.

Whoever hears „Silly Love Songs" and knows the feeling of love will be reminded of this immense gift, which must be preserved and protected. Whoever hears „Silly Love Songs" and has not yet received this gift will find in this song a promise of what may still be to come. War has no place in these emotions; it is a foreign body, robber and enemy all at once. Whoever loves and feels love

wages no wars. It can be that simple. McCartney needs few words for it. He does not ask us to give peace a chance. He lets the music speak, music that warms you like a blanket on a cozy winter evening and lets you sense how cold it would be without love, without the all-powerful adversary of war.

> „*How can I tell you about my loved one?*
>
> *How can I tell you about my loved one?*
>
> *(I love you) How can I tell you about my loved one?*
>
> *(I love you) How can I tell you about my loved one?*
>
> *I love you, I love you*
>
> *I love you (I can't explain, the feeling's plain to me, say, can't you see?)*
>
> *I love you (ah, he gave me more, he gave it all to me, say, can't you see?)*
>
> *I love you (I can't explain, the feeling's plain to me, say, can't you see?)*
>
> *(How can I tell you about my loved one?)*
>
> *I love you (ah, he gave me more, he gave it all to me, say, can't you see?)*
>
> *(How can I tell you about my loved one?)*
>
> *I love you (I can't explain, the feeling's plain to me, say, can't you see?)*
>
> *(How can I tell you about my loved one?)*
>
> *I love you (ah, he gave me more, he gave it all to me, say, can't you see?)*
>
> *(How can I tell you about my loved one?)*"

According to Statista, global military spending in 2023 amounted to around 2.4 trillion US dollars. The total number of wars, civil wars and interstate conflicts has risen sharply since 1946. Whereas in 1946 only 11 wars and conflicts were recorded, in 2023 there were 59 in all. And today, fifty years after the end of the Vietnam War, the military confrontation in Ukraine threatens to escalate into a European Armageddon because, it seems, weapon-worshipping politicians and inciting media have once again drawn the wrong lessons from the past. "Our freedom is being defended in Kyiv", Matthias Döpfner, chairman of Axel Springer SE, commented in the BILD newspaper in February 2022. It is alarming that this so often abused and mendacious sentence can still be uttered without meeting broad social resistance.

The sobering truth is: neither „Give peace a chance" nor „Imagine" nor „Silly Love Songs" has made the world more peaceful. To formulate this as a demand on songs would surely overtax them and their creators beyond all measure.

But McCartney's „Silly Love Songs", unlike „Imagine" and „Give peace a chance", at least addresses the most powerful feeling of all — the one through which the enemy within us becomes the friend within us and peace becomes an existential end in itself: love. Whereas John Lennon believed he could do entirely without the word „love" in the lyrics for „Imagine" and „Give peace a chance" — which is astonishing, especially in „Imagine" as a word-painting of a perfect world — McCartney in „Silly Love Songs", in the Schillerian sense, places in our hands the magic that makes the world better, and lets us sink into it in an equally magical melody.

!*What's wrong with that*?" Nothing. Here and now especially, one could wish that a great many people might once again open themselves to it — to that funny feeling called „love" that creates peace within us and thereby everywhere else as well. And so the middle finger that Paul McCartney extended to his critics and to his friend John Lennon in the politically volatile year 1975 with „Silly Love Songs" is in truth an everlasting peace sign.

> *„You'd think that people would've had enough of silly love songs*
> *But look around me and I see it isn't so, oh no*
> *Some people want to fill the world with silly love songs*
> *And what's wrong with that?"*

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THE SONG IN ITS ORIGINAL · YOUTUBE

www.youtube.com/watch?v=ap87QgZKTNw

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Andreas Geltinger, Jahrgang 1964, studierte Betriebswirtschaftslehre an der Ludwig-Maximilians-Universität in München und schloss das Studium als Diplom-Kaufmann ab. Danach arbeitete er in Wirtschaftsprüfungs- und Unternehmensberatungsgesellschaften, mittelständischen Unternehmen sowie internationalen Großbanken. Daneben verfasste er zahlreiche betriebswirtschaftliche Fachbücher und -artikel.

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