

ANYONE FOR HEAVEN?

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*Imagine there's no heaven,
It's easy if you try;
No hell below us,
Above us only sky.
Imagine all the people living for
today.*

When British singer and songwriter John Lennon wrote these words in 1971, he could hardly have imagined that they would become iconic by the time he was murdered nine years later. The opening track on his album *Imagine*, the song was first released as a single in the United Kingdom in 1975 and made the top ten four times, the last time in 1999 after it had been voted the nation's favourite song lyric in a best-music-of-the-millennium poll. In a 2002 survey by *Guinness Book of Records* it was voted Britain's favourite single of all time. In 2004, *Rolling Stone* magazine ranked it third in a list of 'The 500 greatest songs of all

time' and in 2006 Australian television's Nine Network *Twenty to One* show selected it as the greatest song ever. His native city's airport, now Liverpool John Lennon Airport, has 'Above us only sky' as its slogan.

Heaven has often been a theme in popular music. The American rock and roll pioneer Eddie Cochran had success with 'Teenage Heaven', while 'Three Steps to Heaven' became a posthumous UK No.1 hit shortly after he died in a traffic accident in Wiltshire in April 1960. In 1971 the English rock band Led Zeppelin released an album (Led Zeppelin IV) that included the song 'Stairway to Heaven'. Often rated among the greatest rock songs of all time, it is the biggest-selling single piece of sheet music in rock history. In 1991 the English guitarist and singer-songwriter Eric Clapton and the American songwriter Will Jennings wrote 'Tears in Heaven' after Clapton's four-year-old son Conor fell to his death from the 53rd-floor window of an apartment in New York. The song included the words, 'Would you know my name if I saw you in heaven?' In 1995 the British rock band Queen released the album *Made in Heaven*, on which the song 'Heaven for Everyone' included the line, 'This world could be fed, this world can be fun; this could be heaven for everyone.' In 2011 a studio recording by the British alternative rock band Coldplay included the track 'Hurts like heaven', which speaks of conflicting human relationships and includes the line, 'You use your heart as a weapon, and it hurts like heaven.'

Many of us use the word 'heaven' more often than

we realize. To give some examples, in describing something particularly pleasant, such as a great meal, an enjoyable party, arriving safely at home after a long or difficult journey, returning there after some time in hospital, complete relief from chronic pain, lying on a sunlit beach while on holiday, slumping into our favourite armchair after a hard day's work, or finally collapsing into bed at the end of an exhausting day. 'Heavens above!', 'Good heavens!', 'Thank heavens!', 'Heaven forbid!' and 'Heaven help us!' are all familiar phrases. An exceptionally happy marriage is sometimes said to be one 'made in heaven'; people say they will 'move heaven and earth' to get something done; others will say they are in 'seventh heaven' when everything works out perfectly for them, or judge that something 'stinks to high heaven' when complaining about injustice or corruption.