

✘ It's been a while since [we discussed Great Environmental Songs](#). But we missed an important one.

In 1972, when I was seven, if your radio was not playing Don McLean's "American Pie," it was playing "Horse With No Name" by a new band called "America" — a somewhat ironic name since the band was in fact from England. America was hardly a one-hit wonder, but that song is seared into my mind, especially its highly articulate refrain: "La-la-la la-la-la-la la-la-la LA-la."

But re-reading its actual words, it's pretty clearly an environmental tune. Consider these couple of verses:

After two days in the desert sun  
My skin began to turn red  
After three days in the desert fun  
I was looking at a river bed  
And the story it told of a river that flowed  
Made me sad to think it was dead...

After nine days I let the horse run free  
'Cause the desert had turned to sea  
There were plants and birds and rocks and things  
there was sand and hills and rings  
The ocean is a desert with its life underground  
And a perfect disguise above  
Under the cities lies a heart made of ground  
But the humans will give no love

These words are touching lots of people. I checked out a website allegedly devoted to understanding pop lyrics, and "Horse With No Name" has *seventy-eight* responses. Many speculated that the song is actually about heroin, because in some subcultures, [that's what "horse" refers to](#). But Dewey Bunnell, the lead singer, [has shot that one down](#):

"Here we are still trying to explain that damn song that's 37 years old," he says with some exasperation. "It was a travelogue in my mind, **an environmental song to some degree**. We were part of the hippie era

of save the earth, and I've always been attracted to nature and the outdoors. I had spent time as a kid in the Southwest and fell in love with the desert. So there I was in England reminiscing, pining for that vast wilderness called the desert. And, no, the horse wasn't heroin."

It was just a horse!

So I think we should add it to the pantheon. Besides, '72 was a pretty good year: the Lakers and the Bruins won their respective championships, as did the mustachioed Oakland A's, so all in all, great for California. Nixon won as well, but at least he was from here, too, although I'm a little less proud of that.

I should add, finally, that several of my co-bloggers *were not yet born* when "Horse With No Name" hit the charts. I find this fact profoundly offensive.

[youtube [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=I\\_NPSFEzsPc](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=I_NPSFEzsPc)]