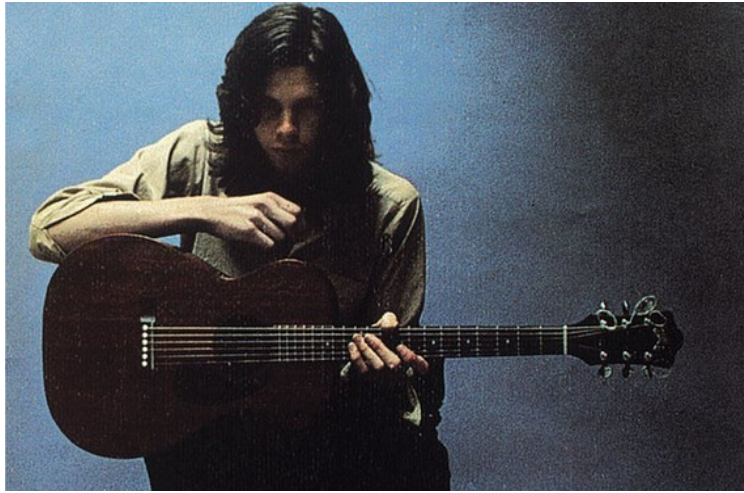


# Best Sad Songs



*by Miles Mathis*

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This is to decompress and release after months of heavy papers. I have done a best song list and a best love song list, so now it is time to list the best sad songs. As you are about to see, most of these come from the 1970s, with just a few from later decades. You may think that is just because that is my era, but it isn't. Or not only. It is because the 1970s really was the pinnacle of the radio sad song. There continued to be “negative feeling” songs later, but the negative feeling was no longer what I would call sadness. It had gone far darker, moving into angst, depression, and full-on manufactured pathology. And yes, I mean pathology manufactured by the government, expressly to screw you up, sell you more drugs, and keep you so emotionally obliterated you could not hope to revolt in any meaningful way. Your revolt would be limited to duct-taping your Doc Martens, getting a tattoo, or piercing your nose or something.

But this is from a time before all that, when people had never heard of Morrissey or Nine Inch Nails or Radiohead. This is the late Golden Age of radio music, after the crooners of the 50s and the girl bands of the 60s, when songwriting reached a sort of zenith. Cued by Paul Simon and Leonard Cohen, a new generation realized just what could be done with a radio song, and they went all-out in competition to create the most heart-wrenching three minutes possible.

1. Send in the Clowns, Steven Sondheim and Judy Collins (not Glynis Johns!)  
Fruit Tree, Nick Drake  
Dreams, Fleetwood Mac  
Don't Expect Me to be Your Friend, Lobo  
Photographs and Memories, Jim Croce  
Nights in White Satin, Moody Blues  
Tall Trees in Georgia, Eva Cassidy (live)  
I Can Let Go Now, Michael McDonald

The Boxer, Simon and Garfunkel  
10. Cactus Tree, Joni Mitchell  
Bitter Green, Gordon Lightfoot  
Empty Chairs, Don McLean  
I'm not in Love, 10CC  
Sad Eyes, Robert John  
How Much I Feel, Ambrosia  
At Seventeen, Janis Ian  
I'm Sorry, John Denver  
Please Come to Boston, Dave Loggins  
Yesterday, Beatles  
20. Operator, Jim Croce  
Lyn' Eyes, Eagles  
Crying, Roy Orbison  
Vincent, Don McLean  
Someone I Used to Know, Gotye  
Brandy, Looking Glass  
My Eyes Adored You, Four Seasons  
Chasing Cars, Snow Patrol  
If You Leave Me Now, Chicago  
All By Myself, Eric Carmen  
30. Suzanne, Leonard Cohen, Judy Collins  
Wildfire, Michael Martin Murphey  
Alone Again Naturally, Gilbert O'Sullivan  
Seasons in the Sun, Terry Jacks  
Daniel, Elton John  
I Wish it Would Rain, Temptations  
He Ain't Heavy, Hollies  
The Town I Knew So Well, Phil Coulter, the Dubliners  
Castles in the Air, Don McLean  
Mandy, Barry Manilow  
40. These Eyes, Guess Who  
All Apologies, Nirvana, Sinead O'Connor  
She Has No Time, Keane  
I Can't Make You Love Me, Bonnie Raitt  
Never Gonna Fall in Love Again, Eric Carmen  
You're Beautiful, James Blount  
Please Mister Please, Olivia Newton John  
It's Sad to Belong, England Dan and John Ford Coley  
Sail On, Commodores  
Darcy Farrow, John Denver  
Just When I Needed You Most, Randy van Warmer  
All Out of Love, Air Supply  
Shannon, Henry Gross

I'm sure I missed a lot of them, since I put this together pretty fast.

I didn't include any classical pieces, though I could make a few recommendations.

*Blute nur, du liebes herz.* Bach, from St. Matthew Passion. Important to hear it from a top boy's choir.  
Cello Concerto no. 1, 2<sup>nd</sup> movement, Haydn. Must be Jacqueline du Pre.  
Oboe Concerto in D minor, BWV1059R, adagio. Must be Heinz Holliger.  
Adagio in G minor, Albinoni.  
When I am laid in Earth, Purcell. Look for a heady female for this one, with less vibrato.  
*Pie Jesu*, Requiem, Faure. Again, this I find most pleasing sung by a boy or a female with less vibrato.  
Most professional sopranos oversing it. It requires more edge and less vibrato.  
*Stabat Mater dolorosa*, Pergolesi.  
Oboe Concerto in D minor, adagio. Marcello. Again, Heinz Holliger is the greatest.  
Cello Suite no. 5, Sarabande. Bach. This owes a lot to St. Colombe and Marin Marais, who you can learn about in the French movie *Tous les Matins du Monde*. See Jordi Savall.

Basically, whether you are writing a sad song on classical instruments or a sad contemporary song, get an oboe or cello and write in D minor. Your odds of success will go way up.