



TUNE INTO ENGLISH
Simon & Garfunkel's

The Sound of Silence



Riferimento del folk degli anni Sessanta, questa canzone del duo newyorkese critica l'isolamento e la solitudine causati dallo stile di vita contemporaneo.

With one of the most recognisable opening lines in pop music, Simon & Garfunkel's **breakthrough hit**¹ *The Sound of Silence* was, surprisingly, a commercial **failure**² on its **release**³ in 1964. A year later, with folk rock increasing in popularity, their record company remixed the song and, before the then-separated duo even heard the new version, it became a worldwide success. Songwriter Paul Simon was **allegedly**⁴ horrified when this new version was played to him, and his partner Art Garfunkel declared it "interesting". However, they quickly reunited and became one of the best-selling music acts of the 1960s. Thought by many to be a response to the assassination of US president John F. Kennedy in 1963, the song was in fact performed live two months before the shocking event. The song consists of five **stanzas**⁵, mostly in the past tense, describing how people tend to ignore the

advice⁶ of leaders who **speak out**⁷ against injustice. Simon recalls writing the song in his family's bathroom, **with the lights off**⁸, saying he found it easier to concentrate there! The song describes how, alone in the darkness, the narrator reflects on a disturbing dream, before **wandering**⁹ the streets and seeing how people seem apathetic towards or **fearful**¹⁰ of what is going on around them. He tries to **warn**¹¹ them, calling silence a cancer, but they keep their heads down. The final verse describes how people **worship**¹² materialism, ignoring dissenters who express themselves through graffiti. *The Sound of Silence* was added to the US National Recording Registry in 2013, a list associated to the Library of Congress of recordings defined as being "culturally, historically, or aesthetically significant." ☒



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05

LOWER INTERMEDIATE B1

GLOSSARY

- 1 **breakthrough hit**: primo successo
- 2 **failure**: fallimento
- 3 **release**: pubblicazione
- 4 **allegedly**: presumibilmente
- 5 **stanzas**: strofe
- 6 **advice**: consiglio
- 7 **to speak out**: manifestarsi
- 8 **with the lights off**: con le luci spente
- 9 **to wander**: vagare
- 10 **fearful**: timorose
- 11 **to warn**: avvertire
- 12 **to worship**: adorare
- 13 **creeping**: insidiosa
- 14 **seeds**: semi
- 15 **restless**: irrequieti
- 16 **cobblestone**: ciottoli
- 17 **damp**: umidità
- 18 **to stab**: pugnalarlo
- 19 **to split**: dividere
- 20 **to dare**: osare
- 21 **fools**: stupidi
- 22 **to bow**: fare una riverenza
- 23 **tenement halls**: case popolari



Scan this QR code with your smartphone or tablet and listen to the official song on YouTube while reading the lyrics.

tenement halls²³: these are houses for the poor.

'neath: an abbreviation of 'beneath', meaning 'under'.

naked light: a light that is not covered.

Hello darkness, my old friend
I've come to talk with you again
Because **a vision softly creeping**
Left its **seeds**¹⁴ while I was sleeping
And the vision that was planted in my brain
Still remains
Within the sound of silence

a vision softly creeping¹³: the adverb 'softly' and adjective 'creeping' should come before the noun 'vision' but this is more poetic.

In **restless**¹⁵ dreams I walked alone
Narrow streets of **cobblestone**¹⁶
'Neath the halo of a street lamp
I turned my collar to the cold and **damp**¹⁷
When my eyes were **stabbed**¹⁸ by the flash of a neon light
That **split**¹⁹ the night
And touched the sound of silence

And in the **naked light** I saw
Ten thousand people, maybe more
People talking without speaking
People hearing without listening
People writing songs that **voices never share**
No one **dared**²⁰
Disturb the sound of silence

voices never share: they do not sing the songs.

"**Fools**²¹" said I, "You do not know
Silence like a cancer grows
Hear my words that I might teach you
Take my arms that I might reach you"
But my words **like silent raindrops fell**
And echoed in the wells of silence

like silent raindrops fell: the verb should become before the adjective 'silent' and the noun 'raindrops' but this is more poetic.

And the people **bowed**²² and prayed
To the neon god they made
And the sign flashed out its warning
In the words that it was forming

And the sign said, "The words of the prophets
Are written on the subway walls
And **tenement halls**
And whispered in the sounds of silence"



Fergal Kavanagh runs the website www.tuneintoenglish.com, the web's largest free resource for learning English through pop music.

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