

TUNE INTO ENGLISH

John Travolta and Olivia Newton-John's Summer Nights

La prima canzone di uno dei musical più acclamati di tutti i tempi è un duetto in stile 'botta e risposta' su una tipica avventura estiva.

The story of a teenage summer romance in the 1950s, as told from the different points of view of Danny Zuko, a US high school student, and Sandy Olsson, an Australian who has moved to America, *Summer Nights* was a massive¹ hit in 1978. It will always be associated with John Travolta and Olivia Newton-John, who performed it for the film version of the musical *Grease*². However, the song, written by Jim Jacobs and Warren Casey, was first recorded by Barry Bostwick and Carole Demas for the 1972 Broadway production.

At the start of the new high school year, Danny, a macho womaniser³, brags⁴ about the physical aspects of his fling⁵ to his gang, the T-Birds, exaggerating or even inventing some parts. Meanwhile, strait-laced⁶ Sandy shares her far more innocent (and accurate⁷) version to the Pink Ladies, referring mainly to her emotions. The song is a stereotypical depiction⁸ of the alleged⁹ difference between teenage boys and teenage girls. In today's wider woke culture, some lyrics have provoked controversy, particularly the boys' question "Did she put up a fight¹⁰?"

The lyrics are a succession of rhyming couplet¹¹ and are almost all in the simple past tense, with their friends using the imperative to ask the storytellers¹² to "tell me more". The song winds down¹³ with the revelation that the relationship has ended. Little do Danny and Sandy know¹⁴ that they are now at the same high school — fans of *Grease* know what happens next! ☒



SCAN, READ & LISTEN

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LOWER INTERMEDIATE B1

GLOSSARY

- 1 massive: enorme
- 2 grease: brillantina
- 3 womaniser: donnaiolo
- 4 to brag: vantarsi
- 5 fling: avventura, flirt
- 6 strait-laced: puritana
- 7 accurate: fedele
- 8 depiction: descrizione
- 9 alleged: presunto
- 10 to put up a fight: opporre resistenza
- 11 couplet: versi
- 12 storytellers: narratori
- 13 to wind down: concludersi
- 14 little do they know: quello che non sanno
- 15 to drift away: andare alla deriva
- 16 cramp: crampo
- 17 damp: bagnato
- 18 to drown: annegare
- 19 to show off: mettersi in mostra
- 20 arcade: sala giochi
- 21 to stroll: passeggiare
- 22 dock: molo
- 23 vow: voto
- 24 cute: carino
- 25 flour: farina
- 26 to rip: strappare
- 27 seams: cuciture, giunture

had me a blast: the idiom to have a blast means 'to have a great time'. It is used here with the reflexive pronoun me.

cute²⁴ as can be: this comparison means 'it is not possible to be cuter'.

suit: a swimsuit or a bathing costume.

to make out: an informal phrasal verb meaning 'to kiss'.

don't mean a thing: songs often use the incorrect form of verbs for the rhythm. The correct form here would be doesn't.

don't gotta brag: gotta is an informal contraction of got to, meaning 'must'. Don't got to is incorrect English, it should be (you) mustn't

a drag: boring

he got friendly: an informal contraction of 'want to', often used in song and spoken English.

Summer loving, **had me a blast**
Summer loving, happened so fast
I met a girl crazy for me
Met a boy **cute as can be**
Summer days, drifting away¹⁵
To-ah! Oh, the summer nights

Well-a, well-a, well-a, huh
Tell me more, tell me more
Did you get very far?
Tell me more, tell me more
Like, does he have a car?
Uh huh (doo doo)

She swam by me, she got a **cramp**¹⁶
He ran by me, got my **suit** damp¹⁷
I saved her life, she nearly drowned¹⁸
He **showed off**¹⁹, splashing around
Summer sun, something's begun
But ah! Oh, the summer nights

Well-a, well-a, well-a, huh
Tell me more, tell me more
Was it love at first sight?
Tell me more, tell me more
Did she put up a fight?
Dow, doobie do, doobie do

Took her bowling in the **arcade**²⁰
We went **strolling**²¹, drank lemonade
We **made out** under the dock²²
We stayed up 'til ten o'clock
Summer fling, **don't mean a thing**
But ah! Oh, the summer nights
Whoa, whoa, whoa

Tell me more, tell me more
But you **don't gotta brag**
Tell me more, tell me more
'Cause he sounds like **a drag**
Shoo bop bop, shoo bop bop

He got friendly, holding my hand
Well, she got friendly **down in the sand**
He was sweet, just turned eighteen
Well, she was good, you know what I mean
Summer heat, boy and girl meet
But ah! Oh, the summer nights
Whoa, whoa, whoa

Tell me more, tell me more
How much **dough** did he spend?
Tell me more, tell me more
Could she get me a friend?

It turned colder, that's where it ends
So I told her we'd still be friends
Then we made our true love vow²³
Wonder what she's doing now
Summer dreams, **ripped at the seams**
But, oh
Those summer
Nights!
(Tell me more, tell me more, more, more)

dough: slang for 'money' (literally, the mixture of flour²⁵ and water used to make bread).

ripped²⁶ at the seams²⁷: a phrase meaning 'torn' or 'destroyed'.



SCAN & WATCH



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

down in the sand: the song uses rhyming couplets, Danny implies they kissed while lying on the beach.

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

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