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What was the song moon river about

You may notice that Henry Mancini's "Moon River" is not only terse but also relatively-simple in presentation. As explained in the trivia section, it was intentionally designed so. But despite being simple-sounding, the lyrics are actually a bit intricate. Or perhaps more accurately we can say they're ambiguous to the point where they can be taken a number of ways. For instance, first and foremost they are nostalgic in nature, being primarily based on one of its co-writers, Johnny Mercer's, childhood. And relatedly, "Moon River" reads like one of those types of songs which feature a narrator who is longing to see more of the world than what his current surroundings have to offer. And to note the aforementioned Mercer grew up in Savannah, Georgia, where the titular waterbody is actually situated, but ultimately passed away in no other city than Hollywood itself. So in that regard, even if not in its entirety, "Moon River" operates along the same fundamental rural-to-urban drift ideological premise which we have come across numerous times, even on some 21st rather tracks. Or rather, we can say in this particular case it isn't so much about heading out west to make it big, as with most other songs we are referring to, as it is the singer's desire to "see the world" in the name of curiosity. Romantic Undertone And thirdly, there is what some may interpret as a romantic undertone. But honestly, the lyrics aren't overtly amorous in any way, shape or form. But that's the mood one can get based not only on certain terminology but also the fact that the singer is fantasizing about making the aforementioned journey alongside an unspecified addressee, though said addressee may be the "Moon River" itself. That being said, this song was written specifically to fit into the plot of a movie entitled Breakfast at Tiffany's (1961). And apparently, it is not presented within a romantic context in said film despite being relayed by a female character. Rather it is intended to be more symbolic of a "small-town sweetheart" who, now finding herself depressed in the big city, is longing for the simpler days of her youth. That is why for instance the vocalist gives a shoutout to a homey, i.e. his/her "huckleberry friend" and is reminiscing on the "Moon River" in the first place. All in all So again this song may be simple in presentation but more complex in actual meaning. It's almost like a person being far from home and desiring to return but at the same time remembering the feeling that urged him or her to leave in the first place. So simply classifying "Moon River" as nostalgic, as it is primarily meant to be, would be an injustice. Or maybe we can conclude by saying that whereas the singer may miss Moon River, with said location being symbolic of his sincerer yet less-exciting hometown, at the same time he doesn't actually have any plans of returning there to settle. "Moon River" by Audrey Hepburn The first recording of this song was actually rendered by the late Audrey Hepburn (1929-1993), and she did so as part of a 1961 film she starred in entitled Breakfast at Tiffany's. And it proved successful from the jump, earning its composers an Academy Award in the Best Original Song category in 1961. Henry Mancini's Version Henry Mancini's own rendition came out during October of 1961, apparently around the same time as Audrey Hepburn's. Mancini (1924-1994) was known more as a composer and musician in general as opposed to a vocalist. He had the privilege of recording this song, even though he wasn't necessarily a singer himself, considering that he's one of its co-writers. And the other author would be Johnny Mercer (1909-1976), who actually wrote the lyrics. Being a composer/conductor and all, Henry Mancini's version actually features an orchestra. And whereas it isn't as celebrated as Audrey Hepburn's original, it was still a success. It most notably peaked at the 11th position on the Billboard Hot 100. Mancini's rendition also holds the distinction of being utilized on the 1989 Roger Stone / Tom Cruise film Born on the Fourth of July. It was also featured on a 1994 episode of the popular TV sitcom Frasier, in which Mancini also appeared. Grammy Achievements Mancini had a long and distinguished career, boasting of 20 Grammys for instance and accordingly a Grammy Lifetime Achievement Award granted to him posthumously in 1995. And besides "Moon River", he is also famous for putting together two of the most iconic theme songs in history, those to Peter Gunn and The Pink Panther. Three of those aforementioned Grammy Awards were attributable to "Moon River". In 1962 Mancini took home the following Grammy trophies as a result of his version of this tune: More Facts about "Moon River" According to Henry Mancini, it only took him "about 30 minutes to compose" Moon River, which again proved to be one of his greatest hits. He intentionally made it a simpler composition, "bearing in mind the limitations of Audrey Hepburn's voice". It should be noted that Hepburn was an actress by profession, not a singer. Also the tune was composed specifically with the character she played in Breakfast at Tiffany's in mind. Perhaps related to the fact that Audrey Hepburn was not actually a singer, Paramount Pictures had almost cut this song, including the scene it is featured in, from the movie all together. But at the end of the day, it was Hepburn herself who most vehemently rejected that idea. And to note, the original plan was to dub her vocals, i.e. have Audrey lip sync while another vocalist actually did the singing. The working title of this song was actually "Blue River". Perhaps such was due to the fact that Hepburn's character renders it in the movie while depressed. However, Johnny Mercer discovered that the name had already been used, which is why he changed it. And it is possible that such would be a song entitled "Blue River" which Elvis Presley recorded in 1963 but didn't release until 1967. More Facts!!! This is one of those songs that proved so popular that the society at large had to recognize its influence. That is to say that at the time, the waterbody referred to in Savannah, Georgia was actually called the Back River. But it had its name changed to Moon River in recognition of this track. Moreover Johnny Mercer's home in the vicinity took on the moniker Moon River House. In 1962 a British singer from South Africa named Danny Williams (1942-2005) came out with his own version of this classic that actually topped the UK Singles Chart. And if you thought the lyrics of this song are a bit confusing you're not alone, as originally he refused to record it based on that very notion. However, upon actually watching Breakfast at Tiffany's, his disposition changed. Concerning the aforementioned "huckleberry friend", many people interpret such as a reference to Mark Twain's classic novel Adventures of Huckleberry Finn (1884), which is also themed on childhood. However, it has been pointed out that such is not the case. Rather Mercer really had a friend, whom the two of them used to pick huckleberries together. Mercer and Mancini never actually met while putting this song together. The producer of Mancini's version is Dick Peirce, who also by the way produced the song for Audrey Hepburn. By Jane O'BrienBBC NewsMedia caption, The story behind "Moon River"Most of the score of one of the 20th Century's most popular film tunes, Moon River, was never written down, but a painstaking restoration is about to make its debut in London.Moon River was made famous by Audrey Hepburn in the 1961 movie Breakfast at Tiffany's, in which she played the part of New York socialite Holly Golightly. But Hepburn was not a trained singer and initially Paramount film-makers thought they would need to dub somebody else's voice. But the composer Henry Mancini persevered in composing something she could manage."Henry was at home one night and we were watching Funny Face in which Audrey Hepburn sings How Long Has This Been Going On," recalls Mancini's widow Ginny. Image source, Mancini Family"He went to the piano and started playing it, and knew she could sing something in that range."It took him about a month and a half before he put down the first three notes. It sounded promising and in half an hour he had written the melody of Moon River."Mancini asked Johnny Mercer to write the lyrics. But much of the film's musical score, including Moon River, was never written down during the editing process. Now, after months of careful restoration, audiences will be able to hear it performed for the first time during a special screening at London's Royal Albert Hall this week.What's more, a demo tape recorded by Mancini and Mercer has been released to the BBC by the Mancini family. It has not been made public before. Media caption, Listen to the original 'Moon River' demoMercer wrote three sets of lyrics, his favourite version inspired by the full moon over a river near his childhood home in Savannah, Georgia, says Ginny Mancini. "Many songwriting teams sit down together and work out a strategy for a song, a way it's supposed to go. Henry and Johnny never sat down together. They discussed what it should be and what the lyric had to say, but once Henry had the melody nailed, he would just send it to Mercer."Mancini was rehearsing for a benefit concert at the Beverly Wilshire Hotel in Los Angeles when Mercer turned up with lyrics in hand.Image source, Mancini FamilyImage caption, Henry and Ginny Mancini (courtesy of the Mancini family)They sat down in the empty ballroom and Henry played Moon River while Johnny sang the lyrics. Johnny was a wonderful singer and I loved to hear him sing. "They were two of the best," Mrs Mancini recalled. Shortly after that they recorded a demo for the studio and, as Ginny Mancini put it, the song was a "slam dunk". But Moon River was almost cut from the final edit because the first screening of Breakfast at Tiffany's was too long. "As legend has it the head of the studio said, 'We'll just cut the song.' I saw Henry go pale. We were all stunned, totally stunned. We were quiet for a minute or two and then there was a barrage of reasons why it should stay in the film and cuts should be made in other areas."Audrey Hepburn herself intervened and in the end, Moon River remained, earning Mancini and Mercer an Oscar in 1961 for best original song and today ranking fourth in the American Film Institute's list of top film songs. Image source, Mancini FamilyBut in spite of its popular success, Moon River was not Mancini's favourite composition. "That's not to say he didn't love it - but Two for the Road was his favourite," says Mancini. On 12 June, Moon River will be sung by Henry and Ginny Mancini's daughter, Monica, in a world premiere at the Royal Albert Hall. The performance by the Philharmonia Film Orchestra and the Philharmonia Chorus will be conducted by Justin Freer, who restored the musical soundtrack.Image source, Justin Freer"Henry was so well versed in jazz that sometimes in his scores he would just write 'Latin percussion rhythms.' Instead of writing out the rhythms, he would just write the words," Freer says."He basically composes on the spot, telling people what to play, how to voice things, what rhythms they should play. And a lot of that was never recorded physically by hand or on paper. "So I had to transcribe it all, figure out what the orchestrations were, voicing, basically creating a new version of the score that didn't exist because the original notation didn't match what was ultimately recorded."Freer has restored other movie soundtracks including The Godfather and Gladiator, and he's currently working on It's a Wonderful Life. But Breakfast at Tiffany's has a particular significance because he trained at the Henry Mancini Institute, a college for gifted musicians.Image source, Mancini FamilyImage caption, Henry Mancini at the piano"It's very much a full circle," he says. "The Mancinis have been so supportive of me since many years ago and we are now able to present what is easily Henry's most well-known score. It's very special."Henry would be so pleased," says Mrs Mancini. "I guess the scholarship paid off."Ginny Mancini will be a guest on Woman's Hour on Radio 4 on Friday 12 June at 10:00 BST

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