

## Michael's Rock and Roll Posse: RIP, Ian McLagan, 1945-2014

So many rockers die every week, that it is hard to keep up with them—rather like WWII veterans, who are disappearing daily.

Ian McLagan, who passed yesterday, deserves mention, plus there is nothing like grading deadlines to make me want to read the obituaries. He was among the greatest rock pianists and organ players, playing in a number of bands, most notably Faces/Small Faces, with whom he was inducted into the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame. My friend and Posse member Brian Pusser brought this information to me, and suggested his work on an early version of “Stay With Me”:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BQISujVdfv8> . McLagan’s last gig was probably on the Lucinda Williams album from September, 2014, “Down Where the Spirit Meets the Bone,” which showed his great versatility and respect across musical genres—he played with dozens of other musicians and groups over the years. He was only 69 years old.

As always, such passings cause me to situate him, and I would place him in the top ten of all rock keyboardists, even though he is not always regarded as highly—in my view, those who are ranked higher or considered better usually played with great groups over a longer period of time, whereas McLagan, as I noted, played across so many groups and styles that he was almost a genuine studio player—high praise, in my book.

My own list (in no order, as I loved all of them) would include him, Rod Argent (Zombies and Rod Argent Project), John Paul Jones (Led Zeppelin), Michael Pinder (Moody Blues), Gregg Rolie (Santana and Journey), Billy Preston, Billy Joel, and Gregg Allman. On the issue of Gregg Allman, he helped engineer the best keyboard riff of all time, the towering ending coda of Eric Clapton’s majestic “Layla,” when he was with Derek and the Dominos. That piece was the product of Allman, drummer/pianist Jim Gordon, keyboardist Bobby Whitlock, and in an unacknowledged role, Rita Coolidge. Here is one of the dozens of YouTube performances of this song, surely one of the saddest and most sublime rock songs of all time, written by Clapton to record his then-unrequited love for George Harrison’s wife, Pattie Boyd: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Th3ycKQV\\_4k](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Th3ycKQV_4k) . Of course, Clapton and she later married, and he wrote “You Look Wonderful Tonight,” making her one of the few women who twice figured as a muse in such a setting. Naturally, they divorced. How can real life ever hold up to rock lyrics?

Last weekend, Tina and I saw “A Hard Day’s Night,” now celebrating its 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary, at the Museum of Fine Arts-Houston. Although the music in the movie did not show either Lennon or McCartney at the piano, they were also wonderful piano players. Early on, they both noodled around on their guitars to compose, but later, both—especially John—incorporated piano into their work more regularly and fruitfully. And there is that crashing piano riff at the end of “A Day in the Life,” where a combination of several pianos and a harmonium were played by at least five keyboardists, and then mixed by George Martin. This is widely considered to be the premier use of a piano in rock music, an arguable claim, and likely correct. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nADdLAvMAXI>

But “Layla” and “A Day in the Life” are worth listening to for almost any occasion, including ducking one’s grading duties. Once again, happy holidays,

Michael