Song Title: **FEELING GOOD (aka Feelin' Good)**

Rating: **YES: Note**

REVIEWERS' NOTE
Reevaluation: Aug 16, 2023: change from YES to YES: Note

This song remains admissible, presenting no issues with its lyrics and message. The 1965 musical from which *Feeling Good* originates – *The Roar of the Greasepaint, The Smell of the Crowd* – has jarring elements, including a character called "the Negro" that has no name and is presented as a caricature in tattered clothes.

The show was progressive and satirized social class, race, and sexuality using what are now outmoded sensibilities, sexual politics, and stereotypes. Given the civil rights turmoil that was occurring in the US at the time, the message would have especially resonated with audiences. But over sixty years later, what resonated in the 1960's may be challenging for modern audiences. While not frequently performed, more modern productions have changed "the negro" to "the stranger" or "the foreigner."

Please also note the significance of this song with respect to the American Civil Rights movement. Please see Song History in this document.

References:

The Roar of the Greasepaint – The Smell of the Crowd – The Guardian

Coming of Age: Teaching and Learning Popular Music in Academia (scroll down to "Roar" section)

The Roar of the Greasepaint - The Smell of the Crowd – 1965 - The Official Masterworks Broadway Site

Theatre review: The Roar of the Greasepaint – The Smell of the Crowd

"The Negro" (now named "the foreigner") section of modern performance

GENERAL NOTE RE: Innocuous Songs from Problematic Movies/Musicals or Source Material/Author

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What year was this song written? 1964

What did your research tell you about the lyricist?
Leslie Bricusse (1931-2021) was an Oscar and Grammy-winning composer, lyricist and playwright who wrote the book, music and/or lyrics for more than 40 musical films and plays during his career.

He was nominated for ten Oscars, nine Grammys and four Tonys, and won two Oscars, a Grammy and eight Ivor Novello Awards (the premiere British Music Award).

In the 1960s and 1970s, Leslie Bricusse and Anthony Newley shared a fruitful partnership as "Brickman and Newburg", working on such memorable musicals as *Stop the World – I Want to Get Off* and *The Roar of the Greasepaint – The Smell of the Crowd* as well as music for the film adaptation of *Willy Wonka & the Chocolate Factory*. Bricusse also collaborated with Henry Mancini, John Williams, John Barry, Jerry Goldsmith, Jule Styne, Quincy Jones, and Andre Previn.

Some of his most notable work offstage included the score and lyrics for the film *Doctor Dolittle* (which starred Anthony Newley and won an Oscar for Best Original Song for *Talk to the Animals*) and the lyrics for James Bond theme songs *Goldfinger* (with Anthony Newley) and *You Only Live Twice*. Bricusse teamed with Cyril Ornadel on *Pickwick* at the London West End in 1963 and wrote *Sherlock Holmes: The Musical* in 1988. With Frank Wildhorn he penned both book and lyrics for *Jekyll & Hyde: The Musical*, which reached Broadway in 1990, and *Cyrano*, which debuted in Japan in 2009.

Many popular recording artists have had successful versions of his songs, including Sammy Davis Jr., Nina Simone, Matt Monro and Frank Sinatra, Shirley Bassey, Harry Secombe, Nancy Sinatra, The Turtles, Maureen McGovern and Diana Krall.

Bricusse received a British Academy of Songwriters, Composers and Authors for consistent excellence in British songwriting (Kennedy Award) and was inducted into the Songwriters Hall of Fame in 1989. He was awarded an OBE for services and contributions to the film industry and theater from Queen Elizabeth II in October 2001.

Anthony Newley (1931 – 1999) was an English actor, singer, songwriter, and filmmaker. A "latter-day British Al Jolson," he achieved widespread success in song, and on stage and screen. "One of Broadway's greatest leading men," from 1959 to 1962 he scored a dozen entries on the UK Top 40 chart, including two number one hits. Newley won the 1963 Grammy Award for Song of the Year for *What Kind of Fool Am I*, sung by Sammy Davis Jr., and wrote Feeling Good, which became a signature hit for Nina Simone. His songs have been performed by a wide variety of artists including Fiona Apple, Tony Bennett, Barbra Streisand, Michael Bublé and Mariah Carey.

With songwriting partner Leslie Bricusse, Newley was nominated for an Academy Award for the film score of *Willy Wonka & the Chocolate Factory* (1971), featuring *Pure Imagination*, which has been covered by dozens of artists. He collaborated with John Barry on the title song for the James Bond film *Goldfinger* (1964), sung by Shirley Bassey. An "icon of the early 1960s," his TV series *The Strange World of Gurney Slade* continues to have a cult following due to its advanced postmodern premise that he is trapped inside a television program.

Described by *The Guinness Book of British Hit Singles & Albums* as "among the most innovative UK acts of the early rock years before moving into musicals and cabaret, Newley was inducted into the Songwriters Hall of Fame in 1989.

What other material has been written by this lyricist?

Leslie Bricusse: Hit songs included *What Kind of Fool Am I?, Once in a Lifetime*, *Who Can I Turn To?*, *Talk to the Animals*, *On a Wonderful Day Like Today*, *Goldfinger*, *Gonna Build a Mountain*, *You Only Live Twice*, *My Kind of Girl, Feeling Good* (a number one hit for Nina Simone), *If I Ruled the World*, *The Love Theme from Superman*, *Two for the Road, The Candy Man*, and *Pure Imagination*. Both *Candy Man* and *What Kind of Fool Am I?* were major hits for Sammy Davis Jr.

Anthony Newley: “What Kind of Fool Am I”, “Pure Imagination”, “The Candy Man”, “Goldfinger”, “Feeling Good”, “What Kind of Fool Am I?”, “Gonna Build a Mountain”, Stop the World – I Want to Get Off, The Roar of the Greasepaint – The Smell of the Crowd, Willy Wonka & the Chocolate Factory

Who is the composer of this song? Anthony Newley and Leslie Bricusse

Please provide a link to the original song lyrics.
Feeling Good Lyrics - Nina Simone

Who and what is this song about, as originally intended by the composer and earlier performers?
The song is about feeling wonderful after things start going well in life.

What did you learn about the history OF THE SONG?
The song was written for the musical *The Roar of the Greasepaint – The Smell of the Crowd* (a transposition of the phrase "the smell of the greasepaint, the roar of the crowd," referring to the experience of theater performers). A parable disguised as a comic allegory about the class system in England, when it reached Broadway, it had morphed into a depiction of the conflict between the two main characters -- Sir (representing the wealthy, ruling class) and the downtrodden Cocky. The two continuously play “The Game” of life and every time it looks as though Cocky may be about to win, Sir changes the rules. “The Negro,” even more abject than Cocky, enters the game late -- and as Cocky and Sir argue about the rules -- unexpectedly wins, and sings *Feeling Good* in his moment of triumph as an expression of “emancipation” from how badly Cocky had treated him, leaving Cocky in awe. Cocky is re-inspired and by ignoring the rules, he manages to win, but neither he nor Sir can function without the other. The show ends with both Cocky and Sir frozen in a pose arguing which way to go next.

It is important to note that the Broadway cast album was released months ahead of the opening of the musical and landed in stores and on radio **in the midst of widespread racial turmoil inspired by the US civil rights movement and just four days after “Bloody Sunday,” March 7, 1965.** This was the first Selma to Montgomery (Alabama) march (to assert long-denied African American voting rights) and was ended by state troopers and county possemen, who brutally attacked about 600 unarmed protesters with batons, tear gas, and horses after they crossed Selma’s Edmund Pettus Bridge in the direction of Montgomery. This was followed in August of that year by the **Watts Rebellion**--six days of riots fueled by police brutality, high unemployment, substandard housing, inadequate schools, and racial discrimination.

Feeling Good was first performed on stage in 1964 by Cy Grant on the UK tour (but no recording exists) and by Gilbert Price in 1965 with the original Broadway cast. **The song has been noted to be an expression of the character “The Negro’s” frustration and sadness in the face of the struggles of Black people in America during a time of racial upheaval, culminating in the six-day Watts Rebellion of 1965. It encapsulates the musical's themes of social inequality, hope, and the pursuit of a better life and represents a moment of triumph and self-assertion.**

In Elizabeth Gould’s chapter of Coming of Age: Teaching and Learning Popular Music in Academia she notes that:

> [Price] performs a musical theater ballad as an African American spiritual, a singing style and music genre that was immediately identifiable to both black and white audiences in the United States as well as in England (Ward 2014). … Halfway through the bridge of *Feeling Good*, Price is accompanied by a choir of angels (*Greasepaint*'s young "Urchins"), leading into his triumphant exclamations, "And this old world is a new world and a bold world for me," and later in the third verse, "I know how I feel." He sings the final two-word refrain, "Feeling good!" in full voice, a cappella and extended out of time.
>
> Price's phrasing, subtle use of rubato, timbral shading, and melodic embellishments express the yearning, hope, and sorrow that was—and still is—heard as a performative effect of freedom. **Implications of this were underscored in August 1965, when an altercation in the Watts neighborhood of Los Angeles between three African American family members and LA police officers escalated into six days of rebellion—five days after [President Lyndon B.] Johnson had signed national voting rights legislation.**

Nina Simone recorded *Feeling Good* for her 1965 album *I Put a Spell on You*. Gould notes:

> *Feeling Good* was recorded in the midst of her fierce commitment to composing songs and singing in support of black revolution. Referenced by almost every cover released since then, including Muse's 2001 popular version, Simone's recording serves as the standard, and to the extent that it so completely re-places without ever completely effacing Grant's original, her cover is "irredeemably queer" (Halberstam 2011).

It is worth reading Gould's complete account of Simone's transformation from early 1940's child piano prodigy, shaped by the racism she experienced then and by the 1963 Ku Klux Klan bombing of the 16th Street Baptist Church in Birmingham, Alabama that killed four young Black girls. She quotes Nina Simone's reaction to this seminal tragic event:

> "I suddenly realized what it was to be black in America in 1963, but it wasn't an intellectual connection of the type Lorraine [Hansberry] had been repeating to me over and over—it came as a rush of fury, hatred and determination. In church language, the Truth entered into me and I 'came through.' . . . [F]or the next seven years I was driven by civil rights and the hope of black revolution. . . . My music was dedicated to a purpose more important than classical music's pursuit of excellence; it was dedicated to the fight for freedom and the historical destiny of my people." Everything about performing music changed for Simone that day, including her relationship with popular music audiences who adored her but as she later observes were "too easily pleased, and [only] interested in . . . the delivery of the lyrics." **About eighteen months after the bombing, Simone recorded *Feeling Good*.**

Anthony Newley's recording was actually the first release and in addition to Newley and Simone, several performers covered the song in 1965 including Cy Grant, Sammy Davis Jr., and John Coltrane. The song has also been covered by Traffic, Michael Bublé, George Michael, Victory, Eels, Joe Bonamassa, EDEN, Muse, Black Cat Bones, and Avicii, among others. The song was popularized by Nina Simone and then most recently by Michael Buble (2005) and Muse (2001).

The lyrics have not evolved over the decades. It is also popular in TV and radio commercials.

Share a link to the earliest performance of this song that you can find.
16 Feeling Good - The Roar of the Greasepaint, the Smell of the Crowd

Does any illustration or other characteristic of the original sheet music reflect an inappropriate theme? No

Please explain why the illustrations ARE or ARE NOT problematic.
It's a sketch of the two main characters Sir and Cocky. https://images.search.yahoo.com/search

Did this song, originally or subsequently, demean a marginalized racial/ethnic group (a group considered at a social disadvantage) through idiomatic expressions, metaphors, jargon, or message? And/or does the song present a sanitized/idyllic or false narrative regarding the American South and the life of the enslaved or newly freed OR of other marginalized racial/ethnic groups and their history? No

Please supply the links to any sources you used for this section of research.
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Feeling_Good
https://www.songhall.org/profile/Leslie_Bricusse
https://lesliebricusse.com/
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Leslie_Bricusse
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Anthony_Newley

Additional Questions to Consider (do not pertain to Admissibility)

The remaining questions pertain to Diversity, Equity & Inclusion issues other than those of race. As such, **THESE QUESTIONS DO NOT AFFECT A SONG'S ADMISSIBILITY**. They are provided to encourage your group to consider factors that may affect members of your audience and/or your performers with regard to religion, gender, sexual orientation, age, disability, and more. ***Please refer to the Music Choices section of Chapter Choices to Address Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion*** (in the ***Chorus Toolkit***) ***for details and strategies related to these factors.***

Could the message/lyrics of the song, original or subsequent, limit any singer or audience member's ability to engage, related to the following? A YES answer does not imply that the song is demeaning or exclusionary. Please see instructions here.

Age: No
Disability: No
Gender: No
Religion: No
Sexual Orientation: No
Visible Physical Difference: No
Other? No

Are there any adjustments to the lyrics that would make it more inclusive or current to our chorus culture or societal norms?
I did not identify any lyrics that might be addressed.