

Quintessential Yacht Rock Songs and Artists

With the Yacht Rock genre having expanded over the last 3 or 4 years to include songs that weren't considered yacht-rocky enough, some musicians putting together song lists have voiced the echoing concern, "I really don't know anymore."

Speaking of just that...

Emerging seemingly out of nowhere with a Grammy-winning album in 1979, Christopher Cross is the perfect yacht rock figure, a normal-looking dude who just so happens to sing like the wind on a summer evening. *I Really Don't Know Anymore*, from his debut album, is now considered Yacht Rock.

The song explores the emotional aftermath of a past relationship, capturing the confusion and unresolved feelings that linger long after it's over. It's a reflection on the struggle to find clarity and closure, highlighting the emotional weight of moving on from someone who once meant so much. It's also a very typical theme of Yacht Rock songs in general. To put the Yacht Rock cherry on top, Michael McDonald added background vocals to this and other songs on the album. Which album, you asked?

Christopher Cross released his self-titled debut album on December 27, 1979, through Warner Bros. Records. Produced by Michael Omartian and recorded in July of that year, it was among the first albums in popular music to be digitally recorded, utilizing (at the time) the cutting-edge 3M Digital Recording System.

Widely regarded as one of the most influential soft rock albums of the late 1970s and early 1980s, *Christopher Cross* earned five Grammy Awards at the 1981 ceremony. These included Album of the Year, Record of the Year, Song of the Year, and Best New Artist—making Cross the first artist in history to win all four major categories in a single year.

In retrospect, the album is seen as a cornerstone of the yacht rock genre. In 2009, *Spin*'s Chuck Eddy named it one of the genre's eight essential albums. Timothy Malcolm of *Vinyl Me, Please* included it in his 2017 list of the top 10 yacht rock albums, noting that while the album leans heavily on acoustic guitar and strings—making it something of a sonic outlier—its smooth sound and introspective themes fit the genre perfectly. Writing for *The Vinyl District* in 2018, Michael H. Little called it not only the smoothest but also the best album in the genre, crediting it with making Cross "the face of soft rock."

Yacht rock, originally referred to as the *West Coast sound* or *adult-oriented light rock*, is a broad musical style and aesthetic closely linked to soft rock, a genre that achieved major commercial success from the early 1970s to the mid-1980s. Influenced by smooth soul, soft rock, smooth jazz, R&B, and disco, yacht rock is characterized by polished production, clean vocals, and an emphasis on light, catchy melodies. The term "yacht rock" was coined in 2005 by the creators of the online comedy series *Yacht Rock*, who associated the music with the leisurely, upscale lifestyle of Southern California boating culture. While embraced by fans, the label was initially viewed as a pejorative by some music critics.

With bands covering the light rock songs of this genre popping up all over the US and other countries, it's easy enough to find live Yacht Rock shows. It's not as easy to find bands that truly understand the period, the original artists, how the songs were performed and recorded, and how they should be rekindled into the hearts and ears of all of us 50 years later.

Granted, not everyone cares about such things, but for those who are interested, our weekly newsletter will shed some light on all things Yacht Rock and the music business in general.