
33 GREAT SONGS ABOUT FOOD

BY GLEN CREASON

“The fine arts are five in number, namely: painting, sculpture, poetry, music and architecture, the principal branch of the latter being pastry.”

—Atonin Careme

Songwriters spend eternities pondering the passions in their existence, coaxing blood and notes out their foreheads to wax poetic about love and pain and other precious items held in their hearts.

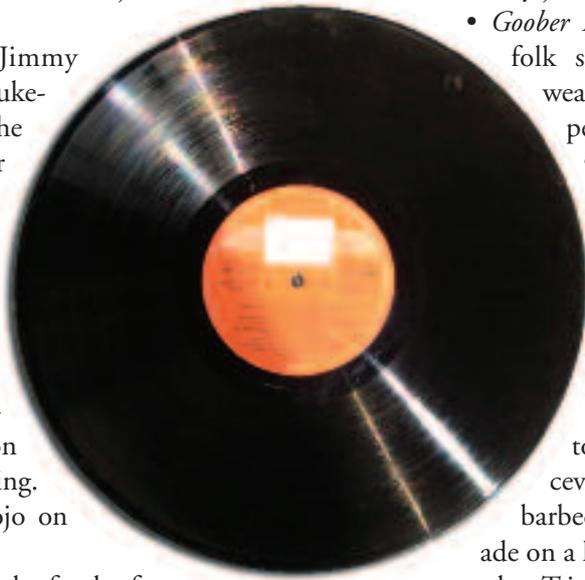
Some even extend the search to the precious cargo that has caressed their palates and filled their bellies. What could be better than combining two of life’s greatest pleasures into one sweet bundle of endorphins?

Of course, people have been combining sex and music, or food and sex, and most certainly food and music since the first time man thumped a hollow log in the forest primeval while munching on a brontosaurus burger.

In the past 30 years I have tried to collect some songs about potent potables and comestibles; these are just a handful of my personal favorites:

- *Bangers and Mash*—Peter Sellers and Sophia Loren: The strangest of musical partners until Bing Crosby joined David Bowie to sing Christmas carols, Sellers and Sophia formed a delightful duo who sang several novelty tunes in the '60s. Highlights are when Ms. Loren moans in delight.
- *Sukiyaki*—Kyu Sakamoto: What we may have thought was a nice, bouncy tune about a tender meat dish in a Japanese restaurant was actually a tender, heartbreaking song on love lost. Japanese weep when hearing this; we try to sing along.
- *Java Jive*—The Ink Spots: For pure harmony and musicianship, one of the truly great songs about food. There are several versions out there ranging from espresso tempo to decaf.
- *Animal Crackers*—Shirley Temple: In my childhood household, my little sister’s version ranked up there with *It’s a Small World* sung repeatedly in the back seat on the way home from Disneyland while exhausted.
- *Big Fat Ham*—Jellyroll Morton: Jelly’s songs were never really about food but they sure do sound good the way he sing them.
- *Jambalaya*—Hank Williams: Certainly in the Hall of Fame for several reasons, primarily the practically step-by-step menu on the bayou.
- *Savoy Truffle*—The Beatles: The greatest pop band ever had a sweet tooth and despite this *White Album* throw-away not being in their top 100 best songs it is about chocolate.
- *Salt Peanuts*—Dizzy Gillespie: One of the most recognizable riffs in all of jazz history. Everyone from Diz to Screaming Lord Sutch has recorded this.
- *Mother Popcorn*—James Brown: A masterpiece of funk that actually recreates the rhythm of the cooking process in describing something pretty unintelligible, to be honest. Yeah! Popcorn! Oh! Uh! Yeah! Yeah! Yeah! Yeah! Yeah! EEEE Yeah! Do the Popcorn Hu! Oooooooooooh! Popcorn! Yeah! Yeah! Yeah!
- *Dixie Chicken*—Little Feat: Speaking of lyrics that might not always have a literal translation from rock and roll to English, “If you be my Dixie chicken I’ll be your Tennessee lamb/ and we can walk together down in Dixieland.
- *Matzoh Balls*—Slim Gaillard: Yep, an African American hipster singing about the Jewish delicacy that contains all the flavor of the cardboard that backs the Big 10 tablet.
- *Mashed Potato*—Dee Dee Sharp: You can always date folks by the dances they choose to do at wedding receptions when they are sauced. You might see the Funky Chicken, the Frug, the Cabbage Patch or the Posin’ but if you see someone doing the Mashed Potato they are, like, 60-something and might be headed for the Ben-Gay afterward.
- *Home Grown Tomatoes*—Guy Clark: A truly great songwriter craftsman puts in words the heart-swelling joy of those divine fruits of the vine it normally costs you \$85 to grow unless you live in Ventura County.

- *Sweet Potato Pie*—James Taylor: Some folks complain of James Taylor's songs being a little treacly but this one actually is satisfyingly sweet in melody and lyrics.
- *Black Coffee*—Peggy Lee: The one, the only Miss Peggy Lee turning a mundane subject into a full-blown soap opera in 31 lines. "Now a man was born to go a lovin' / But was a woman born to weep and fret / and stay at home and tend her oven / and down her past regrets / in coffee... and cigarettes." They don't dare write them like that anymore.
- *Green Onions*—Booker T. and the MGs: Kids may be humming this one in the 22nd century. An infectious groove that has been rolling on for almost 50 years without missing a beat.
- *Punky's Dilemma*—Simon and Garfunkel: It may not have food in the title but it does contain references to cornflakes, raisins, muffins, boysenberries and jam in one song.
- *Cheeseburger in Paradise*—Jimmy Buffett: Yes, it might be on the jukebox in hell someday but it IS the best of the best cheeseburger songs when you put it up against "hold the pickle, hold the lettuce, special orders don't upset us..."
- *Watermelon Man*—Mongo Santamaria: The tropically delicious slice of sweet, undulating Latin soul could go on and on and on without a soul complaining. Mongo had his watermelon mojo on that day.
- *Hotcakes*—Carly Simon: Despite the food reference and the mention of breakfast staples, I bought the album just to look at Carly Simon on the cover. She still looks damn good and I don't even eat hotcakes anymore.
- *Peaches in Regalia*—Frank Zappa: Always light years ahead of his time, Zappa put this out in the last gasps of the '60s while most people were trying to imitate Tommy Rowe and *Dizzy*. I'm sure these peaches are not the drupes we love to eat over the sink, but the song truly rocks.
- *Eggs and Sausage*—Tom Waits: One the true classics of food folk, this song lists most the late-night diner fare including eggs, sausage, coffee, hashed browns, toast, chili, burgers, fries and pie. Pass the Pepcid AC.
- *Guava Jelly*—Bob Marley: While guava jelly doesn't appeal much to me, I am sure if you smoked what Bob was smoking all day long it might have its appeal sometime during the munchies period.
- *Spam*—Monty Python: So good, they made a musical out of it!



- *One Meat Ball*—Ry Cooder: While this is Josh White's song, I like the growl of Master Cooder and his stinging guitar accompaniment.
- *That's Amore*—Dean Martin: An obvious choice for its classic opening line "When the moon hits your eye like a big pizza pie... that's amore!" It also mentions the less memorable "When the stars make you drool, just like pasta fazool..."
- *Hot Pastrami*—Dartells: Appropriate that a song saluting this fatty meat sandwich should basically repeat the same riff over and over and over again. Pastrami, the delicious but deadly concoction, has that quality of staying in the digestive system and revisiting itself to your senses over and over and over again too.
- *Piping Hot*—Ade Monsborough: The anomaly in the group, this song has no words and therefore no lyrics but was the only jazz solo I know played on a sweet potato.
 - *Goober Peas*—Kingston Trio: A truly oddball folk song that combines the Civil War, wearing rags and having fleas with eating peanuts. No, really.
 - *Lechon y Bachata*—Miguelito Cuni: One of my favorite Cuban dishes that I consider a creation of the Gods, which is appropriate since this, is a Christmas song.
 - *Lemon Tree*—Peter, Paul and Mary: Anyone who actually believes the "the fruit of the poor lemon is impossible to eat" has never had great Peruvian ceviche or lemon meringue pie or lemon barbecued swordfish or an iced cold lemonade on a hot day, for crying out loud. If you can remember Trini Lopez singing this, you are probably too old to eat lemon Thai chili salsa.
- *Pepper Steak*—Art Pepper: While the title is undoubtedly inspired by the musician's own name, the tune certainly contains all the juiciness and spices of the delicious and cholesterol zooming qualities of this glorious dish du la 1950s, when butter and bacon were king and queens of the grill.
- *Sprout and the Bean*—Joanna Newsom: Certainly the most unique of all the compositions here. Ms. Newsom's voice has been compared to a pre-teen on helium but her fantastic and unique lyrics alongside the haunting strum of an electric harp make for a rather magical musical journey.

I could go on—on to sweets and candy, on to beverages and booze, even on to salads—but I am getting peckish and will send this one into the ether.