

If you try sometimes, you just might find . . .

I'm a perfectionist. It means I always know what I want.

But, so many times down the years, it hasn't been what I've needed . . .

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It was 1965 and time for Paul Simon to end his partnership with Art Garfunkel.

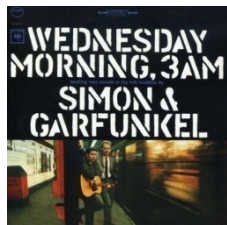
Again.

They'd been together off and on since 1955. When they released their first single in 1957 they were known as Tom & Jerry. "Hey, Schoolgirl" sold 100,000 copies and hit No. 49 on the *Billboard* charts. They performed the song on Dick Clark's *American Bandstand* right after Jerry Lee Lewis belted out "Great Balls of Fire."



They were juniors in high school.

That was about it for Tom & Jerry. Their recordings in 1958 tanked and the duo headed off to separate colleges.



Five years later they found themselves in Greenwich Village, immersed in the burgeoning folk scene, and started performing together again. Columbia Records re-named them Simon & Garfunkel and in October 1964 released their first album, *Wednesday Morning, 3 A.M.*

Another flop.

In fact, one track, the original version of "The Sound of Silence," actually became a topic of ridicule within the pop rock community.

So Simon pulled the plug on the partnership again and left for England. He wanted to be a soloist, and in 1965 he released *The Paul Simon Songbook*.

But fate had something else in store.

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I recently finished Marc Eliot's biography of Simon (*Paul Simon: A Life*) and he describes what happened next.

Tom Wilson of Columbia Records was looking for a follow-up to Bob Dylan's hugely successful single "Like a Rolling Stone" and he found it, writes Eliot, "in, of all places, Simon & Garfunkel's *Wednesday Morning, 3 A.M.*, an album that had been presumed dead and buried in Columbia Records' potter's field of also-rans and never-was's."

According to Eliot, Wilson first heard about "The Sound of Silence" when a late-night FM deejay catering to college students in Boston discovered a copy of *Wednesday Morning, 3 A.M.* and at precisely that day and time played "The Sound of Silence."

Other FM stations along the East Coast immediately picked it up and the song aired all the way down to Cocoa Beach, Florida, where it collided with thousands of college students on spring break. "When a local promotions man for Columbia went . . . to the beach to give away free albums of new artists," writes Eliot, "all anybody wanted was Simon & Garfunkel. The rep had to call Wilson to find out who the hell THAT was."

Wilson asked which specific song they were asking for and immediately dug out a copy of the track and listened to it. Repeatedly. He wasn't convinced. He thought "it had a certain something, but it was really too soft, he thought, to be a hit." Then he listened to a copy of the Byrds performing Pete Seeger's "Turn Turn Turn," their second number-one hit after covering Dylan's "Mr. Tambourine Man."

And that, says Eliot, "is when he got it. 'The Sound of Silence' needed to be remixed, rocked up, put to a beat with a (Roger) McGuinn-type guitar." Wilson recruited some of the same studio musicians Dylan had used, overlaid a strong bass, an electric guitar, and a drum part with the snare mixed way up. "And when he thought he had what he wanted," writes Eliot, "Paul Simon's lyrics, Artie Garfunkel's harmonies, the Byrds' clang, and a taste of Dylan's electric sound -- he released the single to every college FM rock station in the country, and a week later to everybody else."

And he never told Simon or Garfunkel what he was doing until after he'd finished the remix and released the record!

Simon got what he needed. He "was horrified when he first heard" the remix. It sounded nothing like the folk music he loved. But, as Eliot wryly remarks, he "loved the success." The dubbing orchestrated by Wilson transformed folk music into "folk rock," an entirely new genre, and by January 1966 the song had reached number one on the charts. By then Simon had hurried back to the U.S. and in that same month Simon & Garfunkel released their second, hugely successful album, *Sounds of Silence*.



All of this *after* he'd decided to break up the act.

Now, he couldn't.

As Eliot puts it: "He thought he and Artie had broken up this time for good, and now this . . . a partnership he hadn't wanted . . . rekindled as a result of a remix he had not made . . . whose enhanced performance he did not like."

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So, are you a perfectionist? On balance, that's not a bad thing . . . it's served me well . . .

But it took me many years -- and a lot of disappointments -- to realize how dangerous that mentality can be at times. It's a double-edged sword . . . and it worries me when social enterprise CEOs and senior managers fail to guard against the down side.

Maybe you're one of them. Maybe you honestly believe you always know what's best for your enterprise. Maybe you spend a lot of time staring over the shoulders of your employees and "fixing" things you decide aren't working.

Well . . . maybe you should get out of their way. Who knows, the people on your staff might be playing with slide guitars, snare drums or tambourines that don't produce what you want -- but could give you, and your social enterprise, exactly what it needs.

Just a thought . . .

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*"Oh, you can't always get what you want
But if you try sometimes, you just might find
You get what you need"*

*(Mick Jagger and Keith Richards,
You Can't Always Get What You Want)*