

**MISIRLOU** (MEE-zir-loo) = my unhappy one (or: my Egyptian girl)  
and **NEVER ON SUNDAY** and **HASAMISU**

CROSS-INDEX TERMS:

**Cuando alegre tu sonries mujer** - Spanish lyrics for *Misirlou*

**Desert shadows creep across purple sands** - English lyrics for *Misirlou*

**Miserlou, Misery Lou** - prevalent misspellings

**Misirlou Variations, Never On Sunday, Hasamisu**

**Snake Dance** - the name among some Girl Scouts

BACKGROUND:

"Is *Misirlou* Greek?"

"Well, a Greek-American re-choreographed the Cretan prototype, making it Greek by parentage and early development. Another Greek-American selected music which was written by a Greek, making it Greek by design and by marriage. And Greeks around the world and especially in Buffalo, New York have taken it as their own, making it Greek by adoption."

"Okay, it's Greek!"

"But it wasn't created in Greece! And those students weren't creating a product of Greek culture! And the music has absolutely nothing to do with Greece. Just read the words! It isn't a Greek Syrtó, it's a Latin Beguine with an Arabian theme!"

"Okay, it's not Greek!"

Seriously though, the question of whether *Misirlou* is Greek or recreational, folk or popular, or meritorious or not depends on the use to which you put it and on your definitions of "Greek" and "folk." So I suggest we call *Misirlou* a Greek dance for purposes of classification, but not for purposes of description. That way, you can locate this dance description through a search for Greek dances, read the background, and **decide for yourself**.

ORIGIN OF MISIRLOU:

Quoting Brunhilde Dorsh (no, she's not Greek. How did you guess?):

In the year 1945, the Duquesne University Folk Dancers, a group of girls who shared my enthusiasm for dancing, were asked to participate in a music-and-dance program to honor America's allies of World War II. The program was titled: "Music and Dance of Poland, Greece, Chechoslovakia and Jugoslavia" and was arranged by the Tuesday Musical Club of Pittsburgh. I knew no Greek dances, but the girls in their quick and enterprising way discovered two girls on the campus who were of Greek background: Patricia Mandros and Mercine Nesotas. Both knew something about Greek folk dances and Pat could play the piano. (We had no records at that time.) Before long we had learned the Hasapikos and Kritikos [described in this *Problem Solver*]. However, Pat had no piano music for the Kritikos, apparently it was not as popular in Pittsburgh as other Greek dances. In desperation one day, she brought with her and gave to me a copy of "Misirlou" - an Arabian Serenade by Roubanis [N. Roubanis. *Misirlou*. New York: Colonial Music Publishing Company, 1927, 1934, 1941. Note that this is a *Beguine*, not a *Tango* as some folk call it.]. She suggested that this music would come as close to the right kind of music as anything she could find, and so we adapted the dance to this tune.

When we first performed this dance as "Kritikos" on the above mentioned program at Stephen Foster Memorial Hall in Pittsburgh on March 6, 1945, I carefully explained to the audience that the dance had been adapted. After the program the girls, who had learned to like the dance very much, suggested using it as a "theme dance" on other programs and demonstrations, and thus it began to move off-campus and into the larger folk dance world. Monty Mayo, leader of the Community Folk Dance Group of Pittsburgh at that time, introduced it in New York. Michael Herman first listed it in his catalogue, Standard F-9044, a "Pittsburgh Greek," and eventually suggested calling it "Misirlou" to avoid confusion with the genuine Kritikos. The dance was first notated by Mimi Kirkell and Irma Schaffnit in their book: *Partners All, Places All*, E.P. Dutton and Company, 1949. I introduced this dance at Oglebay Park camp during the Labor Day weekend of 1948. I was delighted to find this dance enjoyed by the Oglebayites and by the folk dancers elsewhere. (continued on next page)

## Misirlou (continued)

As the dance has gone its way, interesting "folk lore" has attached itself. For example, the Girl Scouts in this area call it the "Snake Dance." A student at Duquesne, who had never seen the title of this dance in print, once wrote me for information concerning the availability of this record and referred to this dance as "Misery Lou." We still get a good laugh out of that and at times refer to it that way ourselves. Here endeth then, the story of Misirlou. (Dorsh. "How Misirlou Came Into Being" in *Viltis* 17:5 (October-November 1958), p. 21-2)

### BUT THE STORY CONTINUETH, BRUNHILDE:

Anne Pittman learned *Misirlou* at Oglebay and introduced it to Southern California in the early 1950s, ("Misirlou" in *Let's Dance* (April 1962), p. 15) and this *Beguine* lilted along, changing but little. In the late 1950s, the Armenian community of Southern California either adopted or inspired the linked-little-fingers handhold, set the dance to Armenian renditions of that Latin *Misirlou*, and inspired a new family of dances, the *Armenian Miserlou* (in this *Problem Solver*).

### ORIGIN OF MISIRLOU VARIATIONS / HASAMISU / NEVER ON SUNDAY:

Art Schrader observed "A circle dance from Greece as done by the Youth Group in the Greek Orthodox Church in Buffalo," and presented the resultant *Syrto* at Oglebay Institute, 1955 and at an unspecified Pittsburgh Camp. ("SYRTO Taught by Art. Schrader." in *Oglebay Institute 1955* (syllabus), 1955; *Texas Folk Dance Camp 1967* (syllabus), 1967, reprinted from "Hasamisu" Folk Dance House dance instruction sheet) Although Schrader used Liberty Record 17-B, *Panagiositsa*, a *Syrto* with Helen Yianakakis singing, the dance is identical to *Misirlou* and *Misirlou Variations*.

### MISIRLOU HITS THE BIG-TIME:

In 1960, *Never On Sunday* (words and music by Manos Hadjidakis) became the first foreign song to win an Academy Award (Mattfeld. *Variety Music Cavalcade 1620-1961*, 1962) and spent 14 weeks on the Top Ten list (Brooks. *I've Heard Those Songs Before*, 1981), inspiring in 1967 the musical *Illya Darling* with new lyrics by Joe Darion (Lewine and Simon. *Songs of the American Theater*, 1973) and yet more lyrics by Billy Towne in 1968 (Gargan and Sharma, *Find That Tune*, 1984). And what does this have to do with *Misirlou*? Well, Bob Wischnick (or Wiechnick), formerly of Wheeling, WV (Mynatt and Kaiman. *Folk Dancing for Students and Teachers*, 1968, p 74) learned *Misirlou* from Buffalo-area Greeks (sound familiar?), allegedly added two *Hasapiko*-like variations to the *Misirlou* motif, called it *Hasa Misu*, and set it to *Never On Sunday*. The name, perhaps derived from *Hasapiko* and *Misirlou*, later became *Hasamisu* and was said to represent the "real" Greek dance from which *Misirlou* was derived (Stan Isaacs, rec.folk-dancing newsgroup, August 12, 1994). Whether Schrader or Wischnick/Wiechnick "discovered" *Misirlou Variations* really doesn't matter now, since they both learned from the same source, that Greek Orthodox community in Buffalo.

By the way, our Greek Orthodox friends here in Austin translated *hasamisu* as a rude phrase meaning "Go engage in sexual intercourse with yourself." When you stop laughing, consider this: unless Buffalo Greeks or Bob W. perpetrated the name as a jest, it illustrates a problem of accepting "fakelore," the problem of translating significance from one culture to another. At least one recreational group in America is named "Always on Sunday." Good thing they didn't name themselves "Hasamisu!"

### AND NOW:

The subsequent and continuing decline of international folk dancing has not diminished the popularity of *Misirlou* as Greeks around the world embrace it as their own, providing an example of the phenomenon that folk dancers legitimize with the label "reverse osmosis." Lest you fret further for the future fortunes of faux *Kritiokos*, know that also Eurythmics teachers and Surfers preserve it:

I taught some folk dances at a summer program for eurythmics teachers [...] Of course we had to do *Miserlou* and they told me how the dance had come to be. [...] the Beach Boys recorded a version of *Miserlou* (instrumental only). It's on their *Surfin' USA* album. It's a bit faster than the *Miserlou* I'm used to - obviously I need to go back and dance the original *Kritikos/Syrtos Haniotikos* to it. (Warren Kubitschek, rec.folk-dancing newsgroup, August 15, 1994)

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## Misirlou (continued)

What's Eurythmics? Well, it's obviously no kin to Eugenics else we might not have *Misirlou/Never On Sunday/Hasamisu* to dance. Quoting Jere Paulmeno: "I encourage folk dancers to dance *haniotiko syrto* to its native music. The traditional music of Crete is beautiful in its own right, thrilling to dance to, and requires no foreign substitution." ("Comments & Letters" in *Viltis* 44:4 (December 1985), p. 34)

We had danced *Misirlou* and *Never On Sunday/Hasamisu* for some years when George Lowrey presented a rather different dance (resembling the Greek *Slow Hasapiko*) to *Never On Sunday* at the 1967 Texas Camp. Quoting George's directions: "This particular version probably originated in California." (*Texas Camp 1967* (Syllabus))

And Brunhilde? Art Hurst cites the *Carnegie-Mellon Alumni News* of June, 1980: "Mrs. [Brunhilde E.] Dorsch retired in May after 42 years with Duquesne University's School of Music." (Art Hurst, rec.folk-dancing newsgroup, August 9, 1994)

PARTIAL DISCOGRAPHY, most compiled by Joel Ackerman:

|                                              |                                                                 |                                                    |
|----------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------|
| A Night at the Middle East<br>6497b2         | Festival 3505a1<br>Festival 4804b1                              | RCA Victor 203029a<br>RCA Victor 255047            |
| AB Phon X211, Unidentified<br>Arabian        | Festival F-3001b1<br>Festival F-3505                            | RCA Victor 268019<br>RCA Victor 27730, Arturo      |
| Abdelahad 102, Anton<br>Abdelahad            | Festival FLP-1505<br>Festival, Kolo Festival 804b<br>(Slav-Art) | Arturos<br>RCA Victor 4129a1<br>RCA Victor 472851a |
| Alkawakeb, 102a                              | Fiesta 45-908, Irving Fields                                    | RCA Victor 477769                                  |
| Atlantic A-1417, The Cardinals               | Folkraft 1021                                                   | RCA Victor 9085, Seymour                           |
| Balkan 570a                                  | Folkraft 1060a, Greek Dance                                     | Rechtzeit                                          |
| Balkan S-7000a                               | Orchestra                                                       | Refine R-7707, Buddy Lapata                        |
| Bigtop 45-3103, Johnny and the<br>Hurricanes | HMV B9694, Freddy Martin                                        | Roper 515b                                         |
| Camden 321b1                                 | Hector 638b                                                     | Slavtone S2                                        |
| Capitol 351, Skitch Henderson                | Kismet 142a                                                     | SMC Pro-Arte 1257, Tonyde                          |
| Capitol 5750, The Four Amigos                | Kolo Festival 804-B, 45-4804                                    | Leva                                               |
| Checker 905, Earl Washington                 | Kolo Festival KF-804, Sloboda                                   | Standard 131a                                      |
| Columbia 10072 (CCO 4029),<br>Maria Karelas  | Tamburitza orch.                                                | Standard 9044a                                     |
| Columbia 36360, Xavier Cugat                 | Liberty 290, Sofia Vembo                                        | Standard T-131a, Charles                           |
| Columbia 36390, Harry James                  | Liberty 78b                                                     | Magnante                                           |
| Columbia 7217-F (CCO 4029)                   | Liberty Record 17b,                                             | Standard T-2002, Alfredo                           |
| Columbia 7217-F, 10072-78                    | <i>Panagiositsa</i>                                             | Mendez                                             |
| Decca 25151, Woody Herman                    | Mercury 70123, Terry Shaw                                       | Standard T-2009, Harold Grant                      |
| Decca 50005, Jose Morand                     | Mercury 70145, Xavier Cugat                                     | United Artists 1622, 234 <i>Never</i>              |
| Diamond 2009, Jan August                     | MGM 30007, David Rose                                           | <i>On Sunday</i>                                   |
| Don Pablo 102, Don Pablo                     | Mood M-158, Leon Merian                                         | Victory 78b                                        |
| Doric D-8758, Carl Hatsis                    | National 7013, Charlie Ventura                                  | Worldtone 10001-2/3a                               |
| Educational Dance Recordings<br>FD-3         | Primo ZTSC-90754, Paul Bruno                                    | Worldtone 10006a                                   |
| Electra EKL-206                              | RCA Victor 1620                                                 | Worldtone 10025b                                   |
|                                              | RCA Victor 202138, Herbie<br>Fields                             | and LPs by Chubby Checker<br>and Dick Dale         |

## FORMATION:

Line or open circle, leader at R end; hold joined hands shoulder-high. If that isn't cute enough for you, then follow East Coast directions that offer the specious option of hooking little fingers or holding handkerchiefs between dancers. East Coast directions also state "Slight hissing should accompany the dance." Hissing is a sign of approval in Greek folk dancing, so use your judgment.

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## Misirlou (continued)

The rather rare shoulder-hold recommended in one description did not last long in our aging folk dance population of stiff-shouldered senior citizens.

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### BARS ACTION

4/4 Introduction. Different recordings use different introductions.  
No action.

#### The original Misirlou.

- 1 Step to R onto R foot (ct 1), touch L toe in front of R foot (ct 3), swing L foot in a CCW circle around behind R foot, turning a bit to L to follow the swing (ct 4).
- 2 Step behind R foot onto L foot (ct 1), facing to R, walk forward and CCW around the circle 2 steps onto: R foot, L foot (cts 2,3), with R foot by L ankle, lift R knee and swing R knee CCW around in front of L leg, turning 180° CCW to face to R and CW around the circle (ct 4).
- 3 Walk forward and CW around the circle 3 steps onto: R foot, L foot, R foot (cts 1,2,3), leaving L foot in place behind R foot, bend L knee to raise L foot a bit off the ground (ct 4). Don't forget to lilt up on ct 4.
- 4 Walk backward and CCW around the circle 3 steps onto: L foot, R foot, L foot (cts 1,2,3), turn to face center to repeat the dance. *By 1952, bar 4 had become a grapevine pattern in scattered locations: step back onto L foot, step to R onto R foot, step in front of R foot onto L foot. One unfortunate book, filled with other mistakes, goes so far as to present the original bar 4 as a "variation" of the grapevine bar 4!*

*Note: Achieve a gentle lilt throughout the dance with 2 tricks: take longer steps and bend the knees a bit (cts 1 and 3 of each bar), and take shorter steps and straighten knees (cts 2 and 4 of each bar).*

*Note also: Some folk and contra dancers prefer to dance Misirlou one beat ahead of these directions, making it more similar to the Kritikós. It's an interesting exercise that demonstrates the arbitrariness of the dance, but it really annoys some people. So do what you like at home, but try to fit in with the group when you go dancing.*

Misirlou mou i glikasou i matia  
floga m'echa anapsi mesa stin kardia.  
Ach ya chabibi ach ya leleli ach!  
Ta dio sou chili stazoune meli oyme.

My Misirlou, your sweet glance  
enflames my heart.  
Ah, woe is me, ah, my dear one, ah!  
Your lips taste like honey.

Ach, Misirlou, magiki ksotiki omorphia.  
Trela tha murti den ipofero pia.  
Ach tha seklepso mesa ap'tin Arapia.

Ah, Misirlou, magic exotic beauty.  
Madness has seized me, I can suffer no more.  
I will steal you away from Arabia.

Mavromata Misirlou me treli.  
Floga m'echi anapsi ena sou fili.  
(Misirlou ala zi mesa sto fili.)  
(I zo i mu ala zi mesa sto fili.)

Dark-eyed Misirlou drives me insane.  
Enflame me, do your kisses.

Ach ya chabibi ena filaki ach!  
Ach to glyko sou to stomataki oyme.  
(Ap todu kosu to stomataki oyme.)

Ah, woe is me, just one kiss.  
Ah, your sweet lips are my undoing.

A little research about composer Nicholas Roubanis uncovered some of his writings: approximately 8 works on Greek liturgical music; a rumba medley arrangement of *Quiéreme mucho*, *Bésame mucho*, and *Misirlou*; and music and Greek lyrics for *Misirlou* as a love song in "bégúine" rhythm. And interestingly, Roubanis's wife was a former handmaiden to the queen of Greece.

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## Misirlou (continued)

Spanish lyrics by J. Pina (remember, Roubanis wrote *Misirlou* as a Latin dance):

Cuando alegre tu sonries mujer  
dejando tu amor resplandecer  
aunque quiera olvidarte nunca podre  
tienes aprisionado todo mi ser.

Oh, MISIRLOU,  
del oriente la flor eres tu.  
Tu mirar es destello de inspiración.  
Que deja embelezado mi corazón.

Cuanto dolor  
si es que ingrata tu niegas mi amor.  
Juro nunca vengarme de tu traición  
aunque viva en el mundo sin corazón.  
Ah, ah, MISIRLOU.

When happy you smile, woman  
leaving your love to shine  
although I would want to forget you never decay  
you have imprisoned all my being.

Oh, MISIRLOU,  
from the east a flower are you.  
To see you is a gleam of inspiration.  
What you leave enraptures my heart.

How much sadness  
if it is that ungratefully you refuse my love.  
I swear never to take revenge on you treachery  
although I would live in the world without heart.  
Ah, ah, MISIRLOU.

English lyrics by Fred Wise, Milton Leeds, and Sydney King Russell

Desert shadows creep across purple sands.  
Natives kneel in prayer by their caravans.  
There silhouetted under an eastern star,  
I see my long lost blossom of Shalimar.

You, MISIRLOU, are the moon and the sun, fairest one.  
Old Temple Bells are calling across the sand.  
We'll find our Kismet answering love's command.

You, MISIRLOU, are a dream of delight in the night.  
To an oasis sprinkled by stars above,  
Heaven will guide us, Allah will bless our love.  
Ah, Ah, MISIRLOU.

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## NEVER ON SUNDAY or HASAMISU

### FORMATION:

Open circle, leader at R end; HANDS NOT JOINED, BUT HELD HEAD-HIGH to snap fingers on cts 1 and 3 of each bar. Join hands shoulder-high in line or open circle to repeat of the dance. Some places snap fingers during only the introduction and dance the rest of *Never On Sunday* holding hands.

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### BARS ACTION

4/4 Introduction.  
1-7 Snap fingers on cts 1 and 3 of each bar.

1. The basic *Misirlou* motif, as described above.  
1-2 Pattern A: step-touch, grapevine to R, swing around to L.  
3-4 Pattern B: fast three to L, hold, and fast three backward to R.  
5-8 = 1-4 (dance the motif again).

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## Misirlou (continued)

Now - break the basic motif between patterns A and B and insert so-called "Hasapiko" variations:

### 2. Fast threes.

- 1-2 = Pattern A.
- 3 Walk forward and CW around the circle 3 steps onto: R foot, L foot, R foot (cts 1,2,3), swing L foot in a CW circle around in front of R foot, turning to R to follow the swing (ct 4).
- 4 Walk forward and CCW around the circle 3 steps onto: L foot, R foot, L foot (cts 1,2,3), swing R foot in a CCW circle around in front of L foot, turning to L to follow the swing (ct 4).
- 5-6 = Pattern B.
- 7-12 = 1-6 (dance the motif again).

### 3. Slow two.

- 1-2 = Pattern A.
- 3 Step in front of L foot onto R foot (ct 1), swing L foot in a CW circle from behind R foot around in front of R foot (ct 2), step in front of R foot onto L foot (ct 3), swing R foot in a CCW circle from behind L foot around in front of L foot (ct 4).
- 4-5 = Pattern B.
- 6-10 = 1-5 (dance the motif again).

Join hands in a line or broken circle and repeat the dance from the beginning.

This sequence of 3 figures seems to prevail across the country, but other variations do occur. Here follow several, courtesy of Carol Smith of Milwaukee and Sanna and Mars Longden of Chicago, allegedly learned from a visiting folk dancer from California:

### 4. In and out.

- 1-2 = Pattern A, lowering hands during cts 3-4 of bar 2.
- 3-4 Pattern B: fast three **into the center**, sweeping hands up and crying "*Oh-oh-PAH!*" (cts 1-3), hold (ct 4), and fast three backward **out of center**.
- 5-8 = 1-4 (dance the motif again).

### 5. Turn to R.

- 1-2 = Pattern A.
- 3-4 Pattern B: fast three to L, hold, and fast three **turning once CW** to R.
- 5-8 = 1-4 (dance the motif again).

### 6. Turn to L.

- 1-2 = Pattern A.
- 3-4 Pattern B: fast three **turning once CCW** to L, hold, and fast three backward to R.
- 5-8 = 1-4 (dance the motif again).

### 7. Armenian Misirlou. Remain facing center throughout.

- 1-2 = Pattern A.
- 3-4 Pattern B: fast three **in grapevine pattern** to L (front-side-behind), hold, and fast three **in grapevine pattern** (behind-side-front) to R.
- 5-8 = 1-4 (dance the motif again).

Remember that, as in Greece, variations are seldom called. Be polite when you visit other groups and try to adapt to the different sequences being danced around the country. You might enjoy them and hey, the Greeks won't mind!

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**NEVER ON SUNDAY** - long sequence as presented by George Lowrey at the 1967 Texas Camp.

FORMATION:

Line, leader at R end, hands joined shoulder-high.

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BARS ACTION

4/4 Introduction. Again, different recordings have different introductions.  
No action.

Step, behind, step, behind, step-lift-3-4.

- 1 Step to R onto R foot (ct 1), step behind R foot onto L foot (ct 2), repeat (cts 3,4).
- 2 Step to R onto R foot (ct 1), swing bent L knee in a wide CW circle to raise L foot in front of R knee (cts 2-4). Note: women use smaller movements to raise L foot over R ankle.

Step, cross, step, close to L.

- 3 Step to L onto L foot (ct 1), step in front of L foot onto R foot (ct 2), step to L onto L foot (ct 3), step beside L foot onto R foot (ct 4).

Grapevine to R, step-swing, step-swing.

- 4 Step in front of R foot onto L foot (ct 1), step to R onto R foot (ct 2), step behind R foot onto L foot (ct 3), step to R onto R foot (ct 4).
- 5 Step in front of R foot onto L foot (ct 1), swing R foot in a CCW circle, pivoting to L on L foot (ct 2), step in front of L foot onto R foot (ct 3), swing L foot in a CW circle, pivoting to R on R foot (ct 4).

Grapevine to R, step-swing-lift.

- 6 = 4 (repeat grapevine).
- 7 Step in front of R foot onto L foot (ct 1), swing bent R knee in a wide CCW circle to raise R foot in front of L knee (cts 2-4). Note: women use smaller movements to raise R foot over L ankle.

Step back, step back.

- 8 Step back onto R foot (ct 1), step back onto L foot, swinging R heel inward across L instep (ct 3).

Dance bars 1-8 to the end of the music, which drops bars 13 and 16 at one point.

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## Misirlou (concluded)

James J. Fuld (*The Book of World-Famous Music*, rev. & enl. ed. New York: Crown, 1971, p. 388) presents the complex history of this song, highlights of which include various editions, all published around 1960:

*Ta Pedhia Tou Pirea* = the children of Piraeus

First line: *Ap' to parathyro mou stelno ena dhio ke tria ke tessera fili a*

*Les enfants du Parea* = the children of Piraeus

*Never on Sunday* = jamais le dimanche

English lyrics by Billy Towne:

Oh, you can kiss me on a Monday, a Monday, a Monday is very, very good.  
Or you can kiss me on a Tuesday, a Tuesday, a Tuesday, in fact I wish you would.  
Or you can kiss me on a Wednesday, a Thursday, a Friday and Saturday is best.  
But Never, Never On A Sunday, A Sunday, A Sunday, 'Cause that's my day of rest.

Most any day \_\_\_ you can be my guest, \_\_\_ Any day you say, \_\_\_ but my day of rest.  
Just name the day \_\_\_ that you like the best, \_\_\_ Only stay away \_\_\_ on my day of rest.

Oh, you can kiss me on a cool day, a hot day, a wet day, whichever one you choose.  
Or try to kiss me on a gray day, a May day, a pay day, and see if I refuse.  
And if you make it on a bleak day, a freak day, a weekday, why you can be my guest.  
But Never, Never On A Sunday, A Sunday, the one day I need a little rest.

End of **MISIRLOU**.