

Taylor Swift kicks off UK Eras shows as some fans wonder if singer is ready to say 'So long, London'

AP

Taylor Swift fans enjoy parsing the singer-songwriter's lyrics for references to her romantic life and insights into her state of mind.

But the pop superstar's fans in the U.K. didn't have to listen closely to her latest album, "The Tortured Poets Department," to get the sense that Swift had soured on the country's capital city after long making it a regular hangout and then her second home. The record's fifth track is titled "So Long, London."

As Swift brings her blockbuster Eras Tour to London's Wembley Stadium this weekend, some Swifties therefore are wondering if they are witnessing the beginning of an extended goodbye.

London isn't ready to see her go. The area around Wembley was transformed for the shows, with fans posing in front of a giant mural of the singer and traveling stairs christened "Swiftie Steps" and other tributes.

Swift announced that 88,446 people were in attendance at Friday's show in what she called "the most exhilarating city in the world." Among the famous attendees: Prince William celebrating his 42nd birthday at the show and posing for a photo with Swift along with two of his children, Prince George and Princess Charlotte.

Swift gave fans a wink and a nod toward her London life during one of her two solo acoustic surprise songs: a piano medley that opened with the London-set "The Black Dog" and segued into "Come Back, Be Here" and then "Maroon."

In addition to this weekend's shows, Swift will return to Wembley for five more in August to close the tour's European leg.

London is the only city on the tour where Swift is stopping twice. Some worry the arrangement may represent a swan song of sorts, while others think it just reflects a new era in Swift's bond with the Big Smoke. Whether "So Long, London" turns out to be a final chapter or a bookend to her valentine to the city, the song "London Boy," Eras is arriving as an emotional milestone.

"Her relationship now kind of assumes London won't be somewhere she will be. It's not like there is an American football player living here," said Maggie Fekete, 22, a Canadian graduate student who credits the London references in Swift's music with orienting her when she moved to the city three years ago. "I think there will be a lot less London in her music, which is sad."

Stella Elgood, 25, of London, said Friday she assumed Swift would sing "So Long, London" at some point during her eight nights in the city but that Swift "will always be welcome."

"Especially since she dated Harry Styles, she's been here in the Zeitgeist," Elgood said.

For those who haven't been paying attention, Swift had a series of romances with famous British citizens (including Styles in 2012) that ended last year, when she started dating Kansas City Chiefs tight end Travis Kelce. The speculation surrounding "So Long, London" and a mournful companion song that mentions a London pub, "The Black Dog," stems from the 2023 breakup of Swift and English actor Joe Alwyn, who were

together for over six years.

Alwyn is assumed to have inspired “London Boy,” a song from her 2019 album “Lover.” A special-edition “Lover” CD included what appeared to be a January 2017 diary entry in which Swift talked about being “essentially based in London” but trying to lay low. British tabloids later reported that Swift spent much of the COVID-19 pandemic sheltering with Alwyn in north London.



A fan poses for a photo outside Wembley Stadium ahead of Taylor Swift’s first London concert, during her Eras Tour, in London, Friday June 21, 2024. (Lucy North/PA via AP)

The Sun newspaper reported in December that the multiple Grammy-winner had bought a large property in the area and was remodeling it to be her base in Europe. After Swift released “The Tortured Poets Department” last month, however, a writer for the British edition of ELLE magazine observed that Londoners had an opening “for an all-American A-lister who can slot into her place in our collective consciousness.”

“We had Swift before we lost her to her record-breaking, box office-breaking Eras Tour and now, it would appear that her vacant position has been filled by Zendaya,” writer Naomi May playfully posited before listing the various locations the American actor had been spotted with her longtime boyfriend, British actor Tom Holland.

Either way, the capital is putting on quite a show of its own to make sure Swift and her fans feel appreciated. Guides are offering walking, bus and taxi tours that retrace her footsteps, including a kebab shop whose owner says his establishment is supplying sandwiches for the singer and her crew on Friday.

Before the end of August, Swifties can partake in a full diet of Swift-themed brunches and dance parties, or ride the London Eye Ferris wheel accompanied by a string quartet playing her music. Souvenir stalls in Camden Market, one of the places mentioned in “London Boy,” stocked up on Swift-specific caps, T-shirts, bags and stickers in preparation.

Amy Unsworth, 34, who is from a small town near Manchester, England, and was born a month before Swift, said Friday that the singer’s ties to the U.K. and vice versa extend beyond the capital.

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“I feel like as a Northerner I have an affinity with her,” Unsworth said, noting that Swift wrote many of the songs on her “Evermore” album while in England’s Lake District with Alwyn.

“It’s hard to know how she feels right now, being back, given her history.”

Unsworth isn’t worried Swift will turn her back on the U.K. Swift said from the stage that her British fans “have been some of the most supportive people in my corner since I started making music.” Swift performed in London for the first

time at age 17, when she appeared at the student union of Kings College London.

“I think she will come back” after Eras, Unsworth said. “She has too many dedicated fans not to come back. She’s built up too much momentum here to just forget about us.”

Zachary Hourihane, who co-hosts a Swift podcast called “Evolution of a Snake” and posts YouTube and TikTok videos under the name Swiftologist, said Thursday that it’s too soon to know whether the singer will retain her honorary citizenship or part ways with London. As her fans know all too well, only time will tell with Taylor.

“Taylor is someone who retraces her steps a lot. Things are never really over with her. She likes to revisit things that have finished,” he said. “Let’s be realistic about it. Her relationship, even if it is, ‘so long, goodbye,’ she has good reason to be in London and good money to make there.”