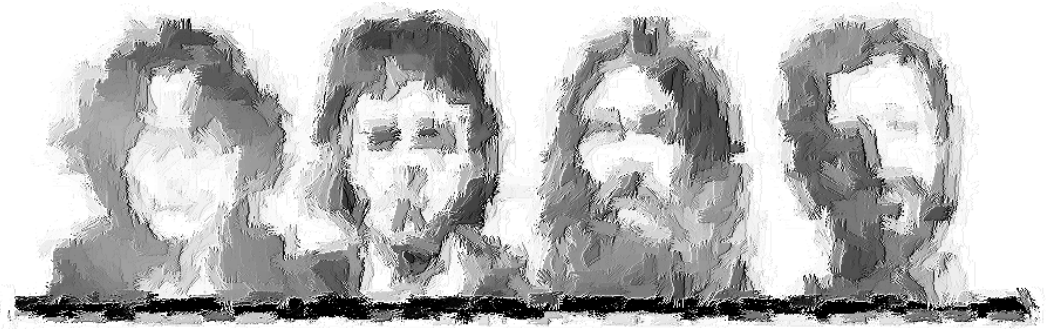
Save the Beatles!

The Rescued Albums: 1970-1982



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The Rescued Albums: 1970-1982

ISBN 978-0-578-68028-6
First Edition, April 2020

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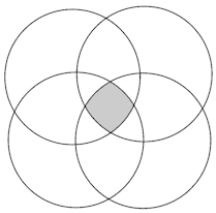


It is not to ring the bell backward
Nor is it an incantation
To summon the spectre of a Rose.

Prologue

> *"...whenever you listen to too much of the solo stuff, it kind of becomes a drag, you know? But you put 'em next to each other, alright, and they start to elevate each other... and then you can hear it. Huh! It's the Beatles!"*
>
> – Dad, *Boyhood* (2014)

Every Beatles fan has done it. You take your favorite songs from the solo Beatles and put them on a single tape, CD or playlist to create a sort of *Frankenstein's Post-Breakup Beatles Album*. I'll never forget hearing Paul's "London Town" on the radio in 1979, followed immediately by George's "Blow Away." The DJ said something like, "Hey! We got your Beatles reunion right here!"

With the advent of YouTube, iTunes, Spotify, Pandora, Tumblr, Blogger, et. al., you can now find an endless supply of such playlists, though they all seem to be variations on a theme. Basically, all of these lists should be titled *My Favorite Greatest Hits of the Former Beatles*. They tend to be made up of the familiar songs from the 70s, collected with only passing regard for style or date or sequence — basically just like *any* greatest hits album: Nice to have together in one place, I suppose, but also not very interesting to anyone but the list's creator.

Some playlists are at least a step up from that. Consider, for example, the so-called *Beatles' Black Album* created by actor Ethan Hawke and referenced by his character in the quote above. Hawke's three discs (his track listings are now widely available) include all of the familiar hits, and he throws in a few album tracks as wild cards along the way. In the words of his character, the music was "carefully found, arranged, and ordered" to get it just right. Another character chimes in: "*Very* arranged and *very* organized, over and over again..."

Even so, he has mixed eras freely, and sequenced in a surprisingly haphazard, if also sometimes overly obvious, way. For example, he clumsily places "Beautiful Boy (Darling Boy)" (John, 1980) between "Bluebird" (Paul, 1973) and "What is Life?" (George, 1970). He opens disc three with John's "Grow Old with Me," then cloyingly follows it with five tracks containing the word "love" in the title. He treats an entire decade of music as if it happened all at once. Frankly, his discs are something of a slog to get through.

There's nothing inherently wrong with these collections. They are fun to make, fun to listen to (up to a point) and no doubt immensely satisfying to their creators. There is no reason to discourage anyone from having fun with Beatles tracks, group or solo. It feels almost like every fan's sacred obligation to explore the question of what it would sound like to put the Beatles back together again.

This book engages in an activity which may seem similar on the surface, but is very different at its core. Here you will find a different methodology, in service to a very different goal. This book explores in great detail what might have happened to the art of the Beatles in the 70s if they had recorded exactly as they did — that is, separately — but then pooled their recordings as dictated by market and creative forces, and applied the same album assembly techniques used to build their classic albums. In other words: What if they had recorded separately, but assembled and released together?

There are reasons to think they could have done such a thing, including the fact that they discussed something along these lines amongst themselves in September of 1969. We also have significant resources at our disposal to figure out how it might have worked, and what the results would have sounded like.

It's a fun pursuit, but also a serious one. It involves detailed analysis of structures from their original albums, as well as a deep dive into how those structures made the most of their materials, and how the artistic processes and decisions worked on both micro and macro levels. It involves new critical analysis of the solo materials, removed from the context of sometimes exasperating solo albums, with an ear toward understanding the music within the post-1970 group dynamic, as well as the shifting popular tastes and evolving music industry.

The idea is not to weave a fantasy narrative, as much fun as that might be, but to consider the artistic and marketing decisions that might have been made by the Beatles' creative team with the music they produced in roughly the first decade after their last group recordings. In the process, we will explore the inherent nature, features and limits of the ever-mysterious Beatle Magic.

The surprising result is a revelation which has been hiding in plain sight all these years. Put simply, the magic of the Beatles *can* be reanimated, and their voices *can* once again elevate one another with powerful — even *thrilling* — results. Music that you know well, and some that you might not, springs to life in seemingly impossible ways. When the creative arcs of the four artists are carefully brought back into sync, it turns out they were in a sort of unseen sync all along. And, when allowed to run its course, this musical thought experiment teaches a shocking but essential lesson that every Beatles fan simply must learn.

Preface

In the fall of 1981, when I arrived for my freshman year at the University of Minnesota, I carried with me exactly one Beatles album, if you can call it that: The "blue" greatest hits package. I did not even own the "red" version, because the family across the street had purchased that one, and we had a deal with them to share the four discs. I did also carry a couple of solo albums, and a handful of cassette mix tapes, including a large segment of a "Beatles A to Z" broadcast taped from radio in the days after Lennon's death. Unfortunately, I only started my tape at "I Feel Fine."

Perhaps more important than the records and tapes, however, was the book I carried and could not put down. *The Beatles: An Illustrated Record*, by Roy Carr and Tony Tyler, was my Beatles bible. Not even six months after its release, my copy was already heavily worn and nearly memorized as I arrived in Minneapolis from my small hometown — where the Ben Franklin was our record store, and their bin had a separation card for the Beatles, but only one sad copy of *Beatles '65* to separate.

One of the first things I discovered about my new home was that the record store in Coffman Union stocked *imports*. That offered the previously unimaginable possibility of owning the Beatles' catalog in the exact configurations that God and the Beatles had originally intended, as trumpeted by Carr & Tyler. (The second thing I discovered was that a whole lot of bin space in that store was given to an up-and-coming local artist named Prince, who eventually obtained large chunks of my disposable income.) It turned out that Beatles imports came into stock only sporadically, and it took nearly the full four years to complete my collection, but eventually I got them all. The Carr & Tyler book served as both shopping list and syllabus to my Beatle studies. In the end, plenty of my college textbooks stayed pristine, while those albums became highly studied acquisitions.

Solo albums were considerably easier to obtain, and I filled my checklist from the Musicland in Dinkytown, and an independent record store down the street known as Positively Fourth Street. Again, the book served as my guide in this wilderness, and I took my time working on my collection. When finances allowed (and between Prince releases), I would purchase an album, and play it over and over until I knew every detail. In some cases I moved on to the next title quickly, but some would keep me entertained for months before I needed a new fix.

Though I knew Carr & Tyler's reviews in advance of hearing the music, I inevitably found that I didn't always agree with them. Their tone began to feel a little too flippant and dismissive. They were harsh toward some music that I liked very much, and raved about things that I found less compelling, even annoying. They were clearly "John fans," and took every opportunity to elevate his work over that of the others. This is understandable given the timing of its publication (spring of 1981),

but seriously undermined their credibility as the shock of Lennon's murder faded, and I gradually got to know the actual music.

Like many people my age, with no firsthand memories of the Beatles as a group, it was actually Paul's records which first caught my attention, mainly due to their ubiquity on FM radio. Carr & Tyler, however, savaged much of Paul's solo work, and for reasons I could not understand. It was almost as if his ubiquity was itself a bad thing. The more solo albums I got to know, the more the reviews seemed skewed in perplexing directions. To my uninitiated ears, Paul's work seemed to have a wide range of quality, just like John's, George's, and Ringo's. Each former Beatle had good moments and bad. I would learn later that many critics and fans in the 70s heard the music through the lens of the 60s and the band's breakup. But having been only six years old when the Beatles broke up, and having not heard of any of them until the mid-70s, I had no such lens. I just heard the music, free of all that emotional overhead. I have always considered that to be a very great advantage, and I believe it to be critical to this project.

So, as I got to know the music, I put the book down, and have seldom picked it up since. Despite being grateful to Carr & Tyler for guiding me into the Beatles' musical universe, I learned to trust my own instincts, which have been honed by a formal education in music, five years in radio, ten years in a recording studio producing, arranging and engineering, and decades working as a composer, conductor, and professional vocalist, keyboard player and guitarist.

Through my extensive adventures in music, I became able to hear popular music through the filters of radio and music industry insiders — those generally non-artistic people whose decisions often have oversized artistic impacts. I learned the techniques and importance of properly contextualizing music while producing programs of choral music for public radio. And I came to understand audience expectations first hand by playing bass guitar for years in a Beatles-obsessed band — where we always played whatever song a partying audience member might call out, even if we'd never played it before. In our greatest triumph, we once opened a show for Badfinger, the closest thing I have to a bona fide Beatles connection.

This book is not about me. I offer this background only to give you a sense of where my ideas and opinions come from, and to make it clear that I take this subject very seriously while also hopefully not *too* seriously.

While writing this book, I got a new car that came with a three-month free trial to one of the satellite radio services. Of over 150 channels, only one appealed to me, and so my kids and I listened to *The Beatles Channel* eight days a week for those three months. It reminded me again of how much I love the Beatles' music — group and solo — and how much I want to share that love in a way which hopefully gives other fans, like you, something new to consider.

Author's Note

This project began with the notion that I would simply create a few playlists, post them on YouTube, and be done. I didn't think of it as anything more than a few days of fun listening and tinkering over a holiday break. I certainly didn't expect to spend over two years researching and writing about this. Indeed, the idea of adding to the large pile of Beatle books already out there would have seemed foolish had I thought of it, and it didn't even cross my mind at first.

But I quickly realized that, despite having a fair amount of knowledge about the band and the solo artists, I didn't have *enough* information to either fully satisfy my curiosity or to create the best possible finished product. With much of this music being meaningful and even sacrosanct to so many people, including me, attempting what I imagined would require great care and consideration, if only to satisfy myself. Once that principle become obvious, so did my own deficiencies for meeting it. Likewise, after some serious searching, it became apparent that the resources I needed didn't actually exist, at least not quite. That's when it became a book project.

For example, I felt like I really needed to understand how the Beatles assembled and sequenced their classic albums, not from a fan's perspective, but from the artist's perspective. This would involve much more than simple track lists. I needed to better understand the rhythms and influences (inside and outside) that put pressure on their recording and release schedules. This required a different kind of chronology than is typically available. I wanted to know more about how the group dynamic evolved musically, beyond all of the conventional shorthand, which seems a lot less reliable once you start considering the quality of the sources, and the effects of time. This involved charting things that I had never seen charted before. Most of all, I needed greater clarity on how it worked that the four voices interacted with and elevated each other when they were at their best — both inside the studio and on the finished records. This required closer looks at all of those interactions.

I recognized that I needed to revisit *all* of the solo records, even those which had languished into obscurity, and especially those I found so unpalatable that I hadn't listened to them in 30 years. I could state from memory the general chronology of each solo career, but needed to know more about how those careers remained intertwined even as the final group recording session faded into memory. I had a vague sense of how the music industry changed in the 70s, but needed more knowledge of the context in which hypothetical Beatles albums would have been assembled and released. This type of deep understanding was essential before I could begin poking and prodding the music to see what it could do.

After only a short time it dawned on me that I was actually setting out to play a very elaborate version of the same parlor game that Beatles fans have been playing for decades. But I wanted to do it with actual knowledge, and a thorough under-

standing of the creative processes used by the artists. I realized that, since I would have to assemble the necessary resources myself, and since I had to develop some method of quantifying and channeling the creativity of the Beatles, other fans might like to join the game. Arming people with more Beatle knowledge seems like a noble endeavor, and there would be obvious limits on what I could accomplish by myself. Other fans, armed with the same knowledge, might come to completely different conclusions. That possibility is intriguing, and baked into this project (more in the next section, *Using This Book*).

If we believe that albums are art, then creating new ones — even when doing so as a thought experiment — is an artistic enterprise. The popular solo tracks are pretty well known. What is not known is how a different context can change how they interact with each other, how they can be heard afresh, and how overlooked or under appreciated tracks might *become* essential. That is the charter of this book.

As such, it's important for me to be clear that an essential portion of this book is about how the Beatles assembled their classic albums. Only through understanding that can we move to using those principles on the solo material to assemble albums as they might have. Only through deep understanding of the real world landscape of group and solo music can we make different but *informed* artistic decisions with the solo materials. That makes this a book of music criticism — a connect-the-dots project, if you will — and not a history. You will likely find no new anecdotes or quotes in these pages. Instead, you will find a critical and detailed look at the structure of the classic Beatles albums, new assessments of the music of the solo years, and attempts to marry those two sets of ideas into something special.

In other words, I am not interested in *describing* the music, or retelling the same old stories about how that music came to be, or even labeling tracks "great" or not (though I will, albeit with a different sort of granularity). I am much more interested in *understanding* and *illuminating* the music, because it is my belief that, in order to fully appreciate the solo works of the former Beatles, you simply *must* listen to them next to those of the other former Beatles. When you do, they gain unexpected life — well, *some* of them. That is what I will attempt to show in these pages.

Let me close by underlining something important, and that is to acknowledge how much you already know about the Beatles. I will assume that you are a fan, like me, and you've probably read a whole lot of books about the band, as have I. As such, I don't feel like I have to retell those stories you've already heard many times. When it comes to the Beatles, it seems like every story has been told and retold until we can recite them in our sleep. And when I say, "How Do You Sleep?" you know before I finish speaking what stories I'm talking about.

But if you don't, don't worry. You are still entirely welcome here, and I promise that you'll get everything you need in order to make sense of these ideas, even if sometimes it may be a reference to another book. Basically, I think it's fair to say that *literally millions* of people are *literally experts* on the Beatles, and I want to

acknowledge that you are potentially such a person. In fact, since you are reading this book, there's a decent chance that you could have *written* this book. I want to openly acknowledge that.

Setting aside your level of knowledge, I'm also pretty confident that you, like me, have tried to imagine what might have happened musically if the Beatles had not broken up when and how they did. We've pondered the music they might have made together in the 70s, if only they had found a way around their differences. Even though we know how unlikely that was, given the undulations of vitriol between the various parties, we find ways to set that aside and just wonder: *What if?*

That curiosity is all you really need in order to enjoy what I have put together here. You do not *need* encyclopedic knowledge about the group to enjoy these pages, but it shouldn't be a problem if you have it. I'm going to assume that you know the basics, probably more, and I will retell familiar stories only as absolutely necessary to understand and illustrate these ideas.

Also, you do not need to agree with me, and you probably won't. I accept that, and celebrate it! Ultimately, my goal is just to forge a new path through the first decade of the solo years, and open up new avenues of enjoyment for you, Beatle fan that you already are.

Using This Book

By the time you finish this book, I hope you have a new way to enjoy the recordings made by the former Beatles in the 1970s. To that end, here are some important considerations while reading this book.

First, you will get the most out of this if you actually *listen to the records* to fully understand my comments and ideas. This can mean listening to individual tracks as they are discussed, but more importantly it means actually listening to the new connections between tracks that I will offer. I say this because I believed, at first, that I knew this music well enough to do these thought experiments in my head. Then I tried them and discovered that I was dead wrong. Actually listening to two tracks together is completely different from *imagining* listening to them together. No matter how well you know the solo catalogs, your ears can tell you things that your memory cannot.

So, when I tell you that "Junior's Farm" sits shockingly well next to "What You Got" (chapter 15), I do not want you to take my word for it. Nor do I want you to think about the idea and accept or reject it without actually listening. Through actual listening, and playing around with this music, I learned things and made unexpected discoveries. Tracks I thought I knew well sounded *different* than I remembered. When I pulled at the threads of the solo years, it became clear why that happened, and I want you to share in those revelations. Perhaps you will have new ones of your own. But revelations like I've had cannot be imagined. They must be *heard* and *reproducible*. While reading, plan to get out your turntable! (I suppose you could just fire up YouTube, but how much fun will it be to dust off those old albums?)

Second, I also hope that the listening will make you want to continue the conversation when you finish reading. Since you may disagree — perhaps passionately — with my criticism and artistic suggestions, I want to make it possible for you to respond, and for discussions to develop. Consider this book an invitation to collaborate, rather than something you simply read passively. I am genuinely interested in your ideas.

I also want to make it easy for you to use the resources I have created to either tweak what I have done, or simply scrap it and create your own hypothetical albums, whether based on the principles and techniques established here, or on your own.

All of this, and more, is available at:

SaveTheBeatles.com

With a one-time, free registration, plus verification of your book purchase, you will have unlimited access to enhanced versions of all research materials, including

the inevitable corrections and amplifications, and be able to post your own ideas and participate in ongoing discussion.

Most chapters are titled with a single word, as are some sections within the text. On the home page of the site, you can enter that word (for chapters with multi-word titles, use the first word) to be taken directly to the moderated discussion of that section of the book. I moderate all of the comments myself, and read every single submission, responding as appropriate, or just letting the discussion take its course. I moderate to guarantee that every post is worth the time to read for those who have bothered to show up. I genuinely want and appreciate your feedback.

Additionally, through the web site you will have access to the podcast, which introduces each side of each fictional album, as well as other topics related to this project. Please join the project! I look forward to meeting you there.

Conventions

- The **survey period** for this project runs from the release of "Give Peace a Chance" (69-Jul) through *Milk and Honey* (84-Jan). Recordings made before or after this point are not considered.

- Recordings not officially released during the survey period, even if they were released later, are considered to have been **"in the vault."**

- ***Album Titles*** are italicized.

- **"Song Titles"** are in quotes within bodies of text, but not in track listings.

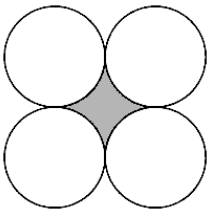
- **Pseudonymous releases** are defined as projects in which the identity of the participating Beatle was intentionally obscured.

- The silence between tracks is called a **rill**. When mentioned, rills are given in seconds plus decimal parts (not frames). Rills in parentheses indicate a cross-fade, with the first sound of the following track beginning that many seconds before the last sound of the previous track. First and last sounds are defined as any discernible non-silence at the boundary of a fade, be it fade in or out. (Specifying a minimum dB is problematic due to limitations of LPs.) By design, some cross-fades result in portions of tracks not being audible.

- SLS stands for "silly love song."

Save the Beatles!

Part I
Division



I think, again, of this place,
And of people, not wholly commendable,
Of not immediate kin or kindness,
But of some peculiar genius,
All touched by a common genius,
United in the strife which divided them.

1
Circles

> *There will be one Beatle there, fine. Two Beatles, great. Three Beatles, fantastic. But the minute the four of them are there…that is when the inexplicable charismatic thing happens, the special magic no one has been able to explain. …you'll be aware of this inexplicable* presence.
>
> — George Martin, quoted by Chris Thomas[1]

As the summer of 1969 faded, the Beatles lurched apart, never to reassemble. Among the final sounds they made together were the epic guitar and drum features for "The End," the unison vocal chant of "Carry That Weight," and the ethereal, timeless, pristine harmonies of "Because." During those heady final days, they also strolled a nearby crosswalk for arguably their most iconic photograph. As final statements go, it is hard to imagine one more confident, successful, and powerful.

For the better part of a decade, the four musicians had moved in tandem, musically and personally, and scaled artistic heights previously unimagined in popular music. But once the final note of *Abbey Road* was in place, each artist, now a superstar in his own right, began forging a new musical path, surrounded by new circumstances and collaborators. Instead of bearing one quarter of the artistic burden, each would now carry that weight alone.

John Lennon began the solo era in earnest[2] by releasing singles and eventually dropping the familiar "Lennon/McCartney" songwriting credit. Ringo Starr took the advice of friends and recorded an album of standards for his mum. George Harrison produced and performed with other acts before pouring his back catalog onto a triple album. Paul McCartney retreated to his farm, and rented a four-track recorder with which to doodle.

In the decade that followed, each former Beatle went on to gradually, and somewhat painfully, develop his own style and identity as a solo artist. Just as they had lurched apart, each now lurched forward, with wildly uneven results. After multiple false starts, Paul routinely topped the charts as a quasi-solo act. The other former Beatles also eventually topped the charts, if less routinely. By 1980, however, both George and Ringo had been dropped by a record company, and neither Ringo nor John had recording contracts of any kind.

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[1] *The Beatles Recording Sessions*, pg. 174

[2] Experimental and "found sound" recordings are not considered here.

This is not how anyone imagined the solo era would turn out.

To be sure, each former Beatle has made at least *some* great records since leaving the group. Each had at least a couple of big hits. Each made at least one album that is considered a classic all on its own. Some of those albums are positively beloved.

THE HITS: 1970-1983

Solo releases that went to #1 in either the US or UK or both

				
ALBUMS	*Imagine* *Walls and Bridges** *Double Fantasy+*	*McCartney** *Ram^* *Red Rose Speedway** *Band on the Run* *Venus and Mars* *Wings at the Speed of Sound** *McCartney II^* *Tug of War*	*All Things Must Pass* *Living in the Material World**	
SINGLES	"Whatever Gets You thru the Night"* "(Just Like) Starting Over"+ "Woman"^+	"Uncle Albert/Admiral Halsey"* "My Love"* "Band on the Run"* "Listen to What the Man Said"* "Silly Love Songs"* "Mull of Kintyre"^ "With a Little Luck"* "Coming Up"* "Ebony and Ivory" "Say Say Say"* "Pipes of Peace"^	"My Sweet Lord" "Give Me Love (Give Me Peace on Earth)"*	"Photograph"* "You're Sixteen"*

** US only ^ UK only + Posthumous*

All too many solo releases, however, met a much different fate. Some, nearly unlistenable, were disdained or savaged by critics and fans alike. Others, despite better quality, were virtually ignored, selling poorly and making no discernable impact on the culture or other recording artists. Today, some of these releases are unknown to all but the most die-hard fans.

The Misses: 1970-1983

Releases that did not make the top ten on either the US or UK charts




ALBUMS	*Some Time in New York City*		*Thirty Three & 1/3* *George Harrison* *Somewhere in England* *Gone Troppo^*	*Beaucoups of Blues** *Ringo's Rotogravure* *Ringo the 4th^* *Bad Boy^* *Stop and Smell the Roses** *Old Wave^*
SINGLES	"Cold Turkey" "Mother"* "Love"* "Woman Is the Nigger of the World"* "Mind Games" "Stand By Me" "Borrowed Time"+ "I'm Steppin' Out" *+	"Back Seat of My Car" "Give Ireland Back to the Irish" "Venus and Mars/Rock Show" "Letting Go" "London Town" "I've Had Enough" "Arrow Through Me" "Getting Closer" "Old Siam Sir" "Tug of War"* "So Bad"	"Ding Dong, Ding Dong" "This Song" "Dark Horse" "You" "Crackerbox Palace" "Blow Away" "Wake Up My Love"*	"Beaucoups of Blues"* "(It's All Down to) Goodnight Vienna" "A Dose of Rock 'n' Roll" "Hey Baby"* "Wrack My Brain"

** Did not appear in the top 40 ^ Did not appear in the top 100 + Posthumous*

In the fall of 1969, it would have been inconceivable that the public might hate or ignore or forget an album by a former Beatle. Fifty years later it is the norm, not the exception.

Despite this variability in overall quality and sales, Beatle-related solo records remained highly profitable even as the clinkers started to pile up. From the perspective of EMI/Capitol, breaking up the Beatles looked like it might be something of a windfall, at least initially. Instead of one album per year, they might release four or more. In those early days, singles appeared even more frequently. In 1971, John Lennon told an interviewer, "Between us now, we sell ten times more records than the Beatles did. Individually, if you add them all together, we're doing far better than we were then."[3]

Such a statement really amounts to classic Lennon hyperbole. It simply never was true, and never would be. The public's near-Pavlovian conditioning to buy any Beatles product did not transfer well to the former Beatles, and quickly began to fade, accelerated by the highly uneven quality of the solo records. Eventually the

[3] *Beatles Diary*, pg. 41, interview with Michael Parkinson, July 17, 1971.

releases were of interest only to a stable core of fans rather than the public as a whole. To this day, Beatle-related records sell in surprising quantities, but the phenomenon clearly favors re-releases of group material and a handful of better-known solo projects. A large swath of solo material languishes unremembered, or unloved, or both.

Indeed, despite periodic profitability, the sales differences between the classic group albums and the solo releases are stark. The highest-selling[4] solo album, McCartney's *Band on the Run*, is certified at 3.3 million copies — significantly less than the lowest-selling Beatles album, *Let It Be*, certified at 4.1 million.[5] Moreover, the combined certified sales for *all 37* solo albums from 1970 to 1983,[6] just under 30 million, is roughly equal to the reported worldwide sales of *Sgt. Pepper* — or *The White Album* — or *Abbey Road* — or even the greatest hits package known as *1* — take your pick. In the words of Ron Nasty, "Ouch!"

Listening to many of those solo albums can be painful and frustrating. Even when the music is good, there is always something *missing* — and there's no mystery about what that is: It is missing *the other Beatles*. And while it's tempting to blame this single, self-evident factor for all of the vagaries of the solo years, that would be a mistake. Digging deeper, two additional major reasons become apparent — descended from the first, but also distinct from it. Before attempting to rescue any of this music, we must explore these three key factors which contributed to the frustrations of Beatle solo records in the 70s.

Magic

At its simplest, the problem of the solo years is that the recordings could not benefit from the virtuous circle of collaboration, within which all of the group recordings were made. That circle, filled with its own special mystery, is what we tend to call *Beatle Magic* — for lack of anything more explanatory — and *that* is the first and most obvious thing that the solo recordings lack.

That term, "magic," obviously covers a lot of territory, but it amounts to this: Within their virtuous circle, each Beatle had challenged, supported, and cajoled the others into the highest level of writing, performing, and recording. Extremely talented individually, their collective resonance amplified, honed and filtered those talents. Strong competitive instincts also led each of the three principal guitarists/songwriters to try and outdo the others, continually putting upward pressure on

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[4] See Appendix IV, *Certified Sales*, for more on how sales figures are used in this book.

[5] Before *Revolver* in 1966, UK and US albums had different configurations, muddying the waters for sales figures considerably. It is highly likely, however, that the Beatles sold well over 4 million copies of each and every track from those early albums, just spread across a variety of collections.

[6] This is the survey period for this book, and will be referred to as "the 70s."

everyone's game. And despite being all personally charming, charm was yet another quality that was amplified when they were together.

After the breakup, each solo artist was without those familiar and essential foils. The other Beatles were simply not there to offer criticism, ideas, or encouragement. They were not there to add their distinctive voices and playing, or to inspire that little extra something in all the other players. They were not there to work a song until it became the best it could be, and thus hold each other to their uniquely high standard. They were not there to diffuse and distribute the burdens of fame and the artistic demands placed upon them.

Outside of their virtuous circle, no individual former Beatle could make up for what had been lost. It isn't that they didn't have enough talent or skill or charm to succeed on their own, but rather that the conditions no longer framed those attributes for best advantage. Weaknesses which had been disguised or mitigated were suddenly revealed. Strengths which had been highlighted or amplified were now left bare. Where the four Beatles had once balanced each other in so many ways, no equivalent was available in the post breakup recordings.

To compound matters, everything they did as solo artists was (and is) inevitably compared to what they had done *before*, something of an impossible standard. Not only could they never be individually what they had been together, but each solo artist struggled to be even *one quarter* of that. Famously greater than the sum of their parts, without each other it was all parts, no sum.

These cracks began to show as soon as they stopped working together. Despite their attempts to put a good face on this, and our own desire to view the solo years in the most favorable light, the hard truth is that for every source of creative stress relieved by the breakup, a bunch more were created. Beyond lawsuits and finances, the basic burdens of a solo career — fronting, writing, recording, promoting — were exponentially greater on each solo artist. None of them was prepared for it in 1970.

Lennon and Harrison mistakenly believed that fans would follow them enthusiastically in new artistic directions — experimental/political and spiritual, respectively. Both started down creative paths which quickly led to their nadirs as recording artists. McCartney appears to have been caught off-guard by even the *thought* of a post-Beatles existence, and was upended personally and creatively when it became a reality. Having thrived in a "group" environment, he would spend the next decade trying to recreate that with other musicians — an utter impossibility. Starr, without the same reserve of creative talent, had made no provisions for a solo career, and was caught chasing musical styles and pursuing non-musical endeavors in the hopes of developing a satisfying second act.

Interestingly, the contract that the Beatles signed with EMI in 1967 actually did imagine a world in which the Beatles recorded separately. It provided specifically that all solo releases would be considered "group" product until 1976. The Beatles themselves, however, made essentially no preparations — either contractual, musical

or psychological — for solo careers. Even Harrison, who famously described himself as "not a Beatle anymore" as the group departed Candlestick Park in 1966, appears to have made no serious plans for a solo career until it became a necessity. He would later recall, "I didn't really project into the future. I was just thinking, 'This is going to be such a relief – not to have to go through this madness anymore.'"[7]

Making even small preparations could have eased the transition when the moment came — a moment which was inevitable, even if no one within the virtuous circle truly wanted to think too hard about it. Of course, it is just as likely that preparing for the end might have actually hastened it, undermining the Beatle Magic even as they continued to work together. Ultimately, there is no way to fault them for doing it as they did, despite what we know to have been the consequences.

Still, it's easy to imagine a scenario in which, having acknowledged that they would break up eventually, each Beatle could have tested the waters of a solo career while retaining the group as a backstop. Perhaps, for example, Lennon and Harrison might have made pop recordings instead of experimental recordings as their first solo releases. McCartney might have turned some of his famous demos, such as "Come and Get It" and "Goodbye," into a full-fledged solo release.

In such a world, inevitable failures would have been mitigated while each artist learned the ropes and created a new identity. Call it a "soft breakup," if you will, in which the ultimate result is something more like a fading out of the band era, and a fading in of the solo era. Such an approach might have at least avoided the bad blood and public feuding which developed.

There is certainly also a case to be made that doing it that way would not have made things better. Mistakes might have still been highly embarrassing, and the famous creative tensions might not have been mitigated enough to save the group. Solo careers might have stalled or failed to materialize at all, as was the case with other bands from the same era. Consider that no member of the Rolling Stones, The Who, CSN, the Beach Boys, Led Zeppelin, Pink Floyd, the Moody Blues, the Byrds, Genesis, the Police, or Fleetwood Mac had thriving solo careers concurrent with membership in the group. Perhaps it is not possible.

The more tantalizing outcome, however, is that each Beatle would have had the entire group creative apparatus available to polish those solo releases and avoid the worst mistakes. Even if he wasn't producing the solo Beatles, George Martin might have been available as an editor and critical pair of ears to steer projects toward better artistic outcomes. This, in turn, might have led to a golden era of solo releases which coexisted peacefully with progressively less frequent, but highly-anticipated, group releases.

The lack of preparation for a soft landing meant that the schism, when it came, was sudden and complete, including severing the creative relationship with Martin.

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[7] *Rolling Stone*, "Remembering Beatles' Final Concert," August 29, 2016, Jordan Runtagh

As we will see in following chapters, this latter severance may actually have been the most significant aspect, since it led directly to the two other critical ways in which the solo years were ultimately burdened.

Dilution

From the start, each solo recording project began with the need to fill a whole lot more vinyl. On a typical 14-song Beatles album, John and Paul each provided two or three songs, to go along with five or six that started as solo compositions but were finished together. George eventually contributed one track per album side, and Ringo needed no more than one vocal feature — which he generally did not write — and not on every release.

That 14-song standard, used in the UK during the 60s, eventually faded, and pop albums in the 70s typically needed only ten tracks,[8] but now each former Beatle had to provide *all* of them. At the very least that amounted to a *doubling* of past requirements even for Lennon and McCartney — who also no longer had each other to turn to when they got stuck. For Harrison, this amounted to breathing room at first, and burden later. For Starkey, the burden increase is almost literally immeasurable.

This fact alone led to considerable dilution of the material. John Lennon, since he didn't always have 10 great songs available when he started recording an album, filled holes with either substandard originals, quasi-jams or, on some releases, tracks by Yoko. Paul McCartney, despite being the most prolific former Beatle by far, still eventually filled out albums with trifles and novelties such as "links" or tracks by other members of Wings. George Harrison dutifully pounded out enough new material to fill his albums, in the process building his songwriting chops, but also producing a seriously uneven catalog. And Richard Starkey, who authored only two complete songs during his Beatle years, was left to rely on other songwriters or co-writers who frequently let him down. All four eventually resorted to generic filler such as covers and instrumentals.

Just how much of the solo material is either substandard or pure filler is a highly subjective thing. Some fans might reject the notion outright, or severely underestimate how much material could be discarded. Conversely, some might throw out *everything* as obviously inferior to the classic Beatles tracks.

To avoid both instincts and actually quantify the problem, I have listened carefully to 568 solo tracks recorded during the survey period for this project, which runs from "Give Peace a Chance" in July 1969, to *Milk and Honey* in January 1984. That amounts to 456 officially released tracks, plus 112 outtakes, some of which have

[8] 30 of the 37 albums in the survey period (1970-1983) have nine to 12 tracks.

since been officially released.[9] I listened to everything both in its original context, the albums or singles on which the music was first released, and also out of context, typically in alphabetical or random order. With each listen, I attempted to put aside my long-held feelings about the music, and tried to hear it as if for the first time.

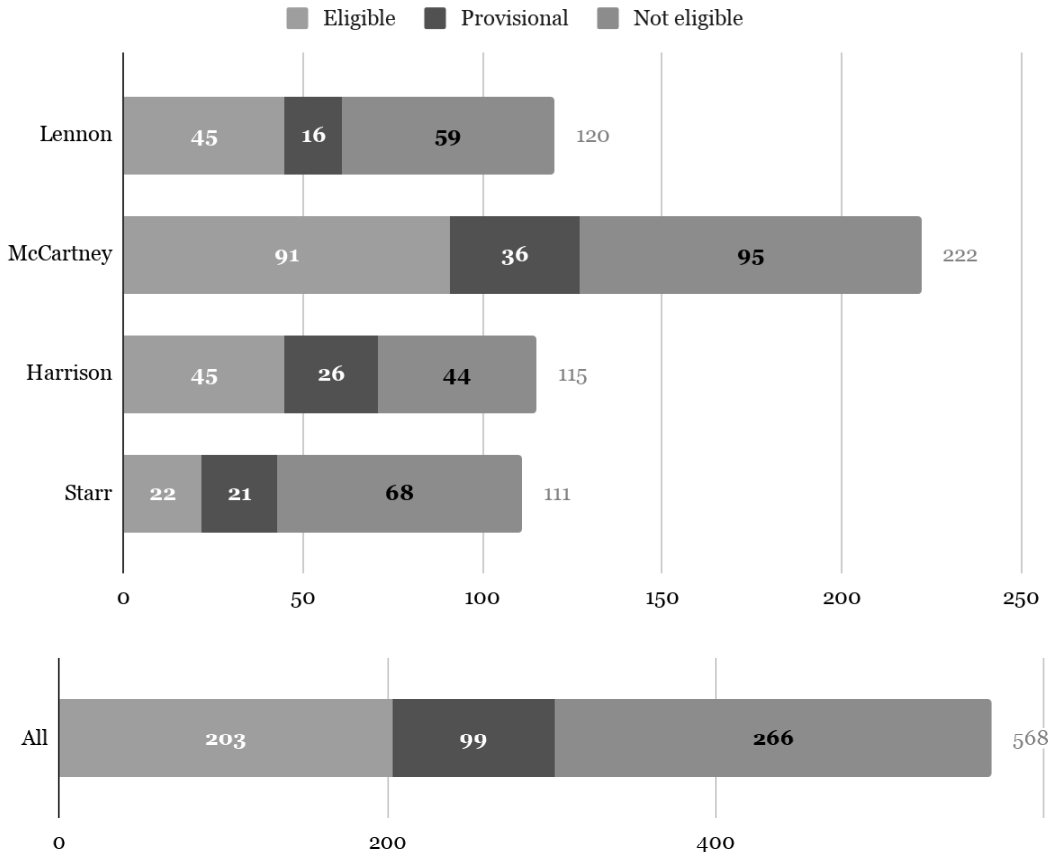
I also tried to listen with an ear for how each song/track would have sounded to the Beatles' creative braintrust at the time it was recorded. That's obviously a highly speculative endeavor, but it draws on what we know from their actual group releases, what they said about each other's work in the 70s, and the choices each made as a solo artist. It's obviously still guesswork, and certainly subject to debate, but at least it's *informed* guesswork.

What I heard was sometimes very similar to what I had always heard: a robust mixture of qualities, styles, subjects, fashions, successes and failures. I heard evolutions, and the occasional hint of revolutions. Stretching and experimentation became visible, craftsmanship and routinization were revealed, as were lethargy, indifference and sloppiness. I encountered many unexpected reactions when listening this way, and it changed my opinion of a significant number of recordings. Most importantly, through this type of de-contextualized, track-focused listening, it quickly became easy to distinguish between works which were robust, imaginative, and truly worthy of the Beatles name, and those which were not.

This led to the creation of a simple and highly subjective rating scale called *Beatle Quality*, which measures the likelihood that a given track would have met the rigorous content and quality standards that the Beatles always held themselves to. There are three possible outcomes for each track: eligible, not eligible, and provisional. Provisional is used to acknowledge that a song/track *might* have been eligible if the circumstances were just right and it filled a need. For any tracks not marked eligible, I attached a reason for the designation, generally using one or more of the following categories: content, quality, style or filler. (Appendix III, *Distinct Works Catalogs,* contains the complete and detailed outcome of this listening and categorizing, along with some recording information and a thumbnail review for each track.)

By comparing how many tracks received each designation, it becomes possible to see in a broad way the level of dilution which affected the solo years:

[9] It does not include 27 tracks found on official releases by John or Paul which are either the work of Yoko Ono or a member of Wings. Unless the former Beatle either wrote, co-wrote, or sang lead, he was essentially serving as a guest musician on someone else's track. Such things would never have been considered for release by the Beatles.



By this admittedly unscientific method, a scant 36% of the available tracks would have been immediately eligible for inclusion on a group project. Conversely, roughly two of every three tracks would have been either questioned or outright rejected by the group if they had been working together.

Though I did not set out with any goal in mind, and did not monitor the totals as I listened, it's hard not to notice that the number of truly great tracks in the band's second decade (203) is roughly equal to the total number of (great) tracks from their first decade (215). Further, they made roughly three times as many albums in the 70s (37) as in the 60s (13), and roughly two-thirds of that, or almost the exact amount as the increase, is not up to the group's original standard. It suggests a practical limit on just how much greatness the Beatles could collectively generate in a given period of time. That was a surprise.

Before moving on, I want to address one objection certain to arise. It is tempting to think that *anything* done by a former Beatle is, by definition, "Beatle quality." How, you might ask, could a song written and played and sung by John Lennon or Paul McCartney *not* be considered "Beatle quality?" Isn't it true that the Beatles

could have put anything they wanted onto a Beatles album and called it "Beatle quality?" Didn't they create and define that concept in the first place, and could they not have redefined it in any way they chose?

Of course, they could have. But one assumption central to this project is that the Beatles of the 70s would have maintained the same exacting quality standards that they exhibited in the 60s, even as the music went inevitably in different stylistic directions. For those who know the group catalog inside out, it is a rather simple and instinctive thing to sort through which of the solo music meets that standard and which does not — even if it isn't exactly possible to define the concept of "Beatle quality" any further. Indeed, dilution is a problem for the solo years exactly because some tracks just obviously do not meet the standards the group had carefully established and maintained.

Interestingly, evaluating the solo music based on its "Beatle quality" is very different from listening to it in its actual context. It requires going back to a moment when all that the world knew of Beatle music was what the group had created. There were no solo records, and essentially no disposable or substandard group records. Up until that point, the group had maintained very strict lower limits in terms of song and recording quality, filtering out the lesser material and enhancing even the best material to a higher level of excellence.

In effect, listening for "Beatle quality" is about returning to 1970 and using the filters which would have been in use by fans listening then. At the dawn of the solo era, fans were still conditioned to expect that same high "Beatle quality" from the solo Beatles. Where we are used to the idea that lesser tracks were a regular occurrence, a necessary evil, and an inevitable consequence of the breakup, listeners back then were surprised and deeply disappointed. "Beatle quality" is about listening with raised expectations, so dilution is recognizable as the serious problem it became.

In order to believe that a track like "Aisumasen (I'm Sorry)" might have made it onto a Beatles album, and thus come to redefine "Beatle quality," one must also accept the corresponding belief that the Beatles would have abandoned all of their innate standards, and in effect exited the virtuous circle while marketing it as if it still existed. We won't let them do that. We will, instead, attempt to find a way to maintain the virtuous circle even as it allows for some different working methods. Despite not recording together, they will still hold each other to those original strict standards, and eliminate anything which does not rise to that level.

So we can be sure that Paul, George, Ringo and George Martin would not have let John get away with something as poor as "Aisumasen (I'm Sorry)," and Lennon would have begrudgingly accepted their verdict. To a degree, measuring "Beatle quality" is about listening as George Martin might have: from a stool in Abbey Road studios, with an ear tuned to what the Beatles were capable of, and the clear-eyed ability to say no when something was not up to snuff. Famously, Martin did this

again for Paul McCartney on several occasions, and the result was a noticeable uptick in quality for the resulting projects.

Without anyone to say no, or even nudge the individual Beatles back toward the quality standards of the early years, lousy songs got recorded, and lousy records got made. For the fans, each new solo release meant simply putting up with the lousy while waiting for the good. Great musical moments still happened, of course. But now, instead of being concentrated on one release as they had been in the Beatle days, they were scattered far and wide, across multiple releases. You had to buy a whole lot more records, and listen to a whole lot more non-great musical moments, to find the good stuff. The die-hard fans did, and the rest of the world began to tune out, all as a result of this dilution.

Context

A third, less obvious, critical issue joins the lack of Beatle Magic and the dilution of material as an essential explanation for some of the disappointment of the solo years. This is the problem of *inelegant contextualization* — the process by which singles and B-sides are chosen, and tracks are made into albums.

The strange but undeniable truth about the former Beatles is that their best music as solo artists is still very difficult to identify when heard in the way we first heard it — that is, on solo albums of widely varying quality. It's true that *some* of their great music can be identified that way. To be sure, some became highly visible as hits. But not even the hits necessarily represent their *best* music, by any means. Some of the best music is locked in prisons of mediocrity and must be freed. Some great music is obscured by album concepts that are either thin (*Mind Games*), dumb (*Back to the Egg*), bland (*Somewhere in England*), or inexplicable (*Goodnight Vienna*). Some great music is almost literally hidden, either thrown away as space-filling B-sides or tucked into vaults gathering dust.

In short, and somewhat surprisingly, there exists a body of great solo Beatle music from the 70s which is not widely recognized as such. It can be found between the cracks of the better known music, but is essentially "lost" because it was not properly contextualized — that is, not given the best chance to shine. These tracks were counted as "eligible," even if that designation might seem surprising.

These are tracks like Lennon's "What You Got" and "Meat City," McCartney's "Soily" and "Warm and Beautiful," Starr's "Wings" and "Down and Out," and Harrison's "Deep Blue" and the exquisite "Be Here Now." This list is by no means exhaustive. And if you look at those titles and think, "So what?" then the point is made. Each of these tracks, heard in a different context, might have become a classic.

In seeking the best music from the solo Beatles, therefore, it's important to realize that though we start with tracks, we must look *past* individual tracks. Listening to an individual track and saying, "Yeah, that's great," or "Not so much," — in other

words, determining its BQ score — is only a starting point, and misses a crucial piece. Since one track can elevate (or drag down) another, finding the absolute best music from the solo years actually means seeking *combinations* of tracks that create something like the virtuous circle found on all of the classic Beatles albums. We're looking for cases where two or more tracks sound *better* together — that is, where the proverbial whole is greater than the sum of its parts. As such, the key to finding the best music of the solo Beatles is to treat tracks as building blocks rather than ends unto themselves.

Examples of this phenomenon abound in the Beatles catalog. "Getting Better" and "Fixing a Hole" are really just serviceable songs, but as a set they lift each other to a new level. "Dear Prudence" can stand on its own just fine, but emerging from the contrails of "Back in the USSR" it gains an indefinable shimmer. Pull any portion out of the long medley on *Abbey Road* and it becomes clear just how slight the material really is. The individual ideas are barely even sketches. It turns out that, once the Beatles got really good at creating individual tracks, they became experts in *aggregation* — with the help of George Martin, of course.

As such, a track with a high BQ that is not generally recognized as great represents a potential opportunity. The question to be asked then is: Could something else from another Beatle gel with this track and make it sound better? Honestly, we can't expect that to happen every time. Some tracks are just terrible, and some are just loners. But in my listening (see above), finding a plausible match happened more often than I would have guessed when I started. It's something like a big game of *Concentration*.

As we will see, George Martin employed specific techniques to make sure that every Beatles track was afforded an opportunity to be heard in its best light. During the solo years, however, after Martin had been excused by all four former Beatles, there was no independent pair of ears to recognize where the strengths of one song might lift another, or at least conceal its deficits. There was no one to put two songs by different Beatles next to one another in a way which made each sound better than it did alone. Martin was, among many other things, a master at assembling parts of varying quality into unified and satisfying wholes.

Martin learned the important principles behind this aspect of the art during his formative musical education, then developed and honed his techniques over a decade of working with other artists before meeting the Beatles. By carefully and properly placing every track, he did things for the Beatles' music which are almost invisible, yet were essential to their success. This represents one of Martin's major, if generally less-appreciated, contributions to the band's success on record. (His techniques will be discussed in detail in Part II.)

In the beginning, he applied his techniques to album running orders without consulting the Beatles, who showed no interest and were far too busy to be bothered anyway. He was the expert, they were the neophytes. He was the boss, they were the

employees. He was the A&R man, they were the talent. He was the packager, they were the commodity. He knew the industry, they were fans with a toe in the door. He was the teacher, and they were…

Well, the analogy breaks down because they appear not to have been very good students on this subject. One thing which is painfully obvious during the solo years is how little the individual Beatles learned about what Martin had been doing in terms of properly contextualizing their music. It is depressingly rare to find tracks elevating each other on solo albums, and much more common to find them bringing each other down. This is a major difference from what happened in the 60s.

For Harrison and Starkey, this actually shouldn't be much of a surprise. The documentation shows that neither of them was involved in any significant way with the sequencing of any Beatles albums, beyond perhaps giving some ideas to the process, and their approval to the final result. But McCartney and Lennon were deeply involved in the assembly of both *The White Album* and *Abbey Road*. In the case of the former, Lennon, McCartney and Martin spent a famous 24 hour session pulling the pieces together and creating the necessary and memorable connections between tracks. In the case of the latter, the same three artists built the medley together (despite John's later disavowal), and smoothed it to perfection.

But after showing obvious skill with his sequencing of *John Lennon/Plastic Ono Band*, Lennon's later assemblies show none of the subtlety brought to the task by Martin and McCartney. Indeed, of the former Beatles, only McCartney appears to have consistently applied principles descended from lessons Martin was teaching. Paul's careful running orders make significant contributions to the perception of his music in a way that none of the other former Beatles could match, and the choices he made often amplified his gifts as songwriter, arranger, and producer, even when the material was not his best. He did not always get it right, as we will see, but he did much better than his former bandmates.

Therein lies the real tragedy of the Beatles in the 70s. Each of the former Beatles produced both great and terrible records, but it is important to recognize that each of them also threw away songs that, in the right context, might have become classics. The whole decade became something like a fractured version of *The White Album*, only with no editor, no balance, no context, no segues, and worst of all, no strength from unity. They didn't even have the benefit of simple *context*, in which their own individual songs might have sounded better just by being heard next to the best songs from their fellow Fabs.

These are, then, the three primary reasons that the records of the solo era could not match the success of the Beatles: The loss of Beatle Magic, dilution of material, and lack of proper contextualization for the good music they did create. These are certainly not the *only* reasons, but it is for *at least* these reasons that even in their finest post-breakup moments none of the former Beatles ever again reached the

creative summit on which they once stood together. There were close calls, and some damn fine records, but nothing again with that same *resonance*.

Frankly, in retrospect it seems unreasonable to have expected that from them individually, severed as they were from such an essential source of strength. But, naïvely, we did expect that, and were duly disappointed — at least to a degree — because each solo Beatle was forced to work with six arms tied behind his back.

2
Filters

When the four were together as the Beatles their creativity had two filters — first of all, each other, and, secondly, [George] Martin. That they should lose both simultaneously made it inevitable that their music might occasionally become self-indulgent and undisciplined — something which happened to all four at one stage or another. Perhaps in many ways it's highly creditable that each accomplished as much as he did during the '70s.

— Bob Woffinden, *The Beatles Apart*

The solo careers of the former Beatles were far too varied and complex to be summarized by any three principles, of course. That's a little like trying to describe a stand of trees from a satellite image. Such a view is not entirely without merit, but makes only a reasonable place to start. You can see the general shape, but will miss more or less all of the nuance.

Though some things went wrong for the former Beatles, plenty of things went right. When things did go wrong, there were many reasons, large and small. Sometimes successes offset failures, and sometimes vice versa. Some things, good and bad, were quickly forgotten, others not so much. Most importantly, perhaps, is to acknowledge that things simply didn't turn out as anyone expected or hoped when the group broke up. Indeed, despite being filled with unique vagaries, each solo career was, in its own way, disappointing.

From our satellite view of the solo Beatles in the 70s, we can see that their recordings exhibit virtually none of the timelessness which characterized the work of the group. The music they made together in the 60s transcended the era, and continues to defy time, seemingly existing outside the confines of tastes and fashion. It somehow finds a new audience in every generation. So much of what they wrote and recorded still sounds every bit as fresh as it did when first released. As a result, the group's catalog retains its commercial value, as well as a surprising degree of cultural relevance. Together, the Beatles soared, and their appeal remains nearly universal.

In contrast, almost everything they recorded separately in the 70s seems hardwired to the ground of the decade. Not only does it not soar, but it increasingly sounds dated, flat, and anything but timeless. There was precious little transcendence, a distinct lack of freshness. Their ability to rise above the currents of culture and fashion seemingly evaporated with the turn of the decade.

Still, every solo Beatle has, to this day, a robust fanbase. Almost every single solo album has both adherents and detractors. Arguments persist about who had the "greatest" solo career, or made the most "underrated" or "overrated" solo album. "Best" and "worst" lists litter the web, and fans still argue about who was the "genius" of the Beatles — whatever *that* means.

In the process of processing, so much has become blurred. In fact, it has gotten to the point where solo music sometimes gets lumped into collective memory with the group tracks. All too many non-Beatlefans think "Imagine" and "My Sweet Lord" were Beatles records, and "Hey Jude" was by Paul McCartney. For most of the world, there is barely any distinction between the group and solo eras. Beatles were, and always will be, Beatles.

To make more sense of it all, we need to come down from our satellite and take a nominally closer look. In subsequent chapters we will zoom in on the solo music and subject it to great — perhaps even *microscopic* — analysis. But for now, let's come down to, say, treetop level, and fly over each solo career individually. Here we can see some of the themes which led to the vagaries, and get a sense of when and how things when wrong and right.

Each of the following sections begins with a work summary, including a chart of all albums released by the artist during our survey period, which includes all albums from *Sentimental Journey* (1970) to *Milk and Honey* (1984).

The chart contains three elements:

- Approximations of *initial sales* for each album (see Appendix IV, *Certified Sales,* for more information about the use of sales figure in this book)

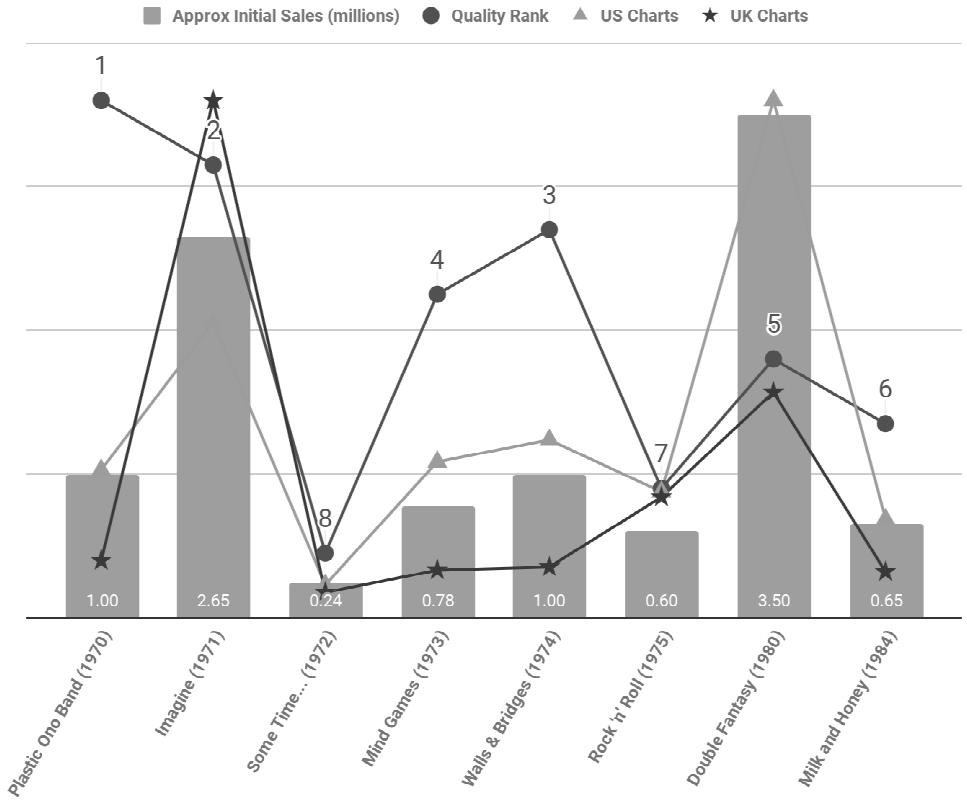
- A plot of the *chart scores* for each album from both the UK and US (see Appendix V, *Chart Scoring,* for an explanation of this calculation)

- *Quality rank* for each title, indicating best to worst based on critical consensus and conventional wisdom (there will no doubt be quibbles)

In addition, three words are given as the basis for exploring each career in overview. At treetop level, no attempt is made to rummage through all of the underbrush, but merely suss out the big themes, especially those which will be relevant to fusing the music into rescued Beatles albums.

John Lennon

8 studio albums / 6 non-album tracks / 89 distinct core studio works
Unbridled / Uneven / Conventional



Best	*Plastic Ono Band* (1970)
Better	*Imagine* (1971) *Walls and Bridges* (1974) *Mind Games* (1973)
Worse	*Double Fantasy* (1980) *Milk and Honey* (1984) *Rock 'N' Roll* (1975)
Worst	*Some Time in New York City* (1972)

John Lennon burst out of the Beatles like a sprinter off the starting block. He had a direction, and the need for speed, but surprisingly little fuel. When the race turned out to be a marathon, he quickly ran right into trouble.

With almost no songs stashed in the proverbial vault, he chose to let his muse set the schedule, a decision which eventually came back to haunt him. Where the Beatles had generally used deadlines for focus, Lennon's solo career would careen in mercurial fashion, like a billiard ball on a wobbly table. He popped up here and there, always with a new persona, a new issue, something to sell, and a handful of partially finished songs.

He followed his instincts, and the cultural currents, not really setting down roots until much later. He didn't even stop to put together a new band, but merely picked up players along the way.

Perhaps most significantly, he yoked his future to that of another artist, just as tightly as she yoked her future to his. The merits of this decision will no doubt be debated in perpetuity, but one thing is for certain: Yoko Ono had an oversized impact on the solo music and career trajectory of John Lennon.

In the end, we must sadly admit that his solo years were something of an artistic disappointment, especially given his seminal work as a Beatle. It's hard to recreate what fans might have imagined the future would hold for him in 1970, but whatever it was, they likely did not get it. Only a few of his works proved significant and timeless, but thankfully those were as memorable as many Beatles records. Unfortunately, much of his solo work had little or no cultural impact. Perhaps if he had survived to have a third act things might have been different. But there is no way to know, and speculating about what John Lennon might do next always was, and always will be, a pure guessing game.

Unbridled

The most satisfying art that Lennon made as a solo artist was also his earliest. Like an unbridled horse, he charged into the studio in 1970 and knocked down anything in his way. He poured everything of himself that he could into the music and, for the first time in his career, there was no one there to reign him in.

He then stuck to more or less the same approach for the rest of his career, with generally diminishing returns. Throughout the 70s, he recorded in short bursts, utterly unwilling to labor too long over his recordings. Instead, he sought to capture the sheer force of his performance, an approach which fueled those diminishing returns as the songs became less sharp, and began to gallop around and around the same track.

No producer could have reigned him in because he wouldn't have tolerated it. Phil Spector didn't even try. Jack Douglas didn't even try. Indeed, even deadlines no

longer could truly reign him in. He had earned the right to set his own pace and path and paradigm, and appears to have done so without a second thought.

As a result, much of his finished solo music sounds unbridled — a characterization he would no doubt relish. To some, this is what makes Lennon's work in the 70s distinctive. To some, it represents a let down from the exacting standards of the Beatles. To the general record-buying audience, it mattered not at all. When the records were good, the public bought them, but that happened only sporadically. He got surprisingly little special treatment in record stores or radio playlists either for being a former Beatle or for making spontaneous records. The goodwill he had built as a Beatle could not survive a long series of career decisions that the public either didn't understand or didn't like. As a result, his record sales frequently disappointed.

After his death, however, all of that dissipated. What the public generally remembers of John Lennon's solo years — which must be more accurately characterized as duo years — are those several timeless records, the stories of his late life away from the public eye, and the tragic consequences of reentry.

It would be wrong to lament his lack of discipline as a recording artist if it weren't for what we know he could produce when there were reasons to focus. Most people who made music with John said he was one of the greatest rhythm guitarists to play with, and a generous collaborator. Examples of this abound. Many people acknowledge his ability to pull a new song seemingly out of thin air when the occasion demanded ("All You Need is Love"). But without the bridle of the Beatles, he rarely reached that next gear of ingenuity and imagination.

Uneven

Each of John Lennon's solo albums was an adventure in quality control. Great highs often sat directly next to great lows. Fans may differ on which tracks are which, but there is little question that something good was always right around the corner, as was something much less good. Unlike his former compatriots, he did not move in *cycles* of good and bad, but intertwined them almost continually.

As such, none of his solo albums are *entirely* satisfying. Each has skippable tracks, uncomfortable or unsatisfying bits of music which might as well not even be there. Because he did not attempt anything in the way of a large artistic statement on record — nothing approaching a traditional "concept album" — his albums are easy to disassemble, a process which makes the best music easier to extract and appreciate, but lays bare the presence of considerable amounts of lesser material. This is likely the reason that each new Lennon compilation album, made as it is from only the best material, yields a new audience who will have no idea there were ever any lesser tracks.

Interestingly, the relative quality of each track is more dependent on his songwriting than on any other single element of the recording. His vocals rarely disap-

point, and he generally surrounded himself with excellent musicians. Though the arrangements periodically could be questioned, and production values were an ongoing concern, his ideas always emerged at center stage. When tracks failed, the song itself was typically the culprit.

Explaining this may require a closer look at his environment. Notably a chameleon and sponge, Lennon routinely absorbed, reflected and amplified whatever was around him. Within the Beatles, these abilities constantly fed the virtuous circle. Outside of the Beatles, and without their singular focus, he appeared more diffuse, more likely to wander and, since he was less likely to be surrounded by excellence, less likely to amplify excellence.

In shorthand, as a solo artist John Lennon wandered in quality because he could, and because no one and nothing offered him the structured environment in which his talents and skills would be nudged continually toward their highest level. The Beatles had been a miracle for him, and it was not repeated.

Conventional

The mantle of "most experimental Beatle" floats between Lennon and McCartney, but which artist led that charge is irrelevant because both experimented and innovated with abandon. Once the group dissolved, however, Lennon appears to have lost that aspect of his creativity. His solo compositions and recordings are utterly conventional, all the way through his reentry in 1980.

The industry may have contributed to that since popular music settled into very clear "lanes" during the 70s. But that same argument could be made about the 60s, when the lanes were even more rigid to begin with. The Beatles continuously crossed over those boundaries, ultimately erasing some of them, blurring or rearranging others, and creating new lanes seemingly at will.

Famously, the novelty of studio wizardry had worn off for Lennon, but it would be wrong to reduce his innovations to mere recording technique. With the Beatles, he also made innovations in the pop form, lyrical content, and instrumentation. He brought about seismic shifts in the position of popular music — and the makers of that music — within the culture, and the ways in which celebrity might be harnessed.

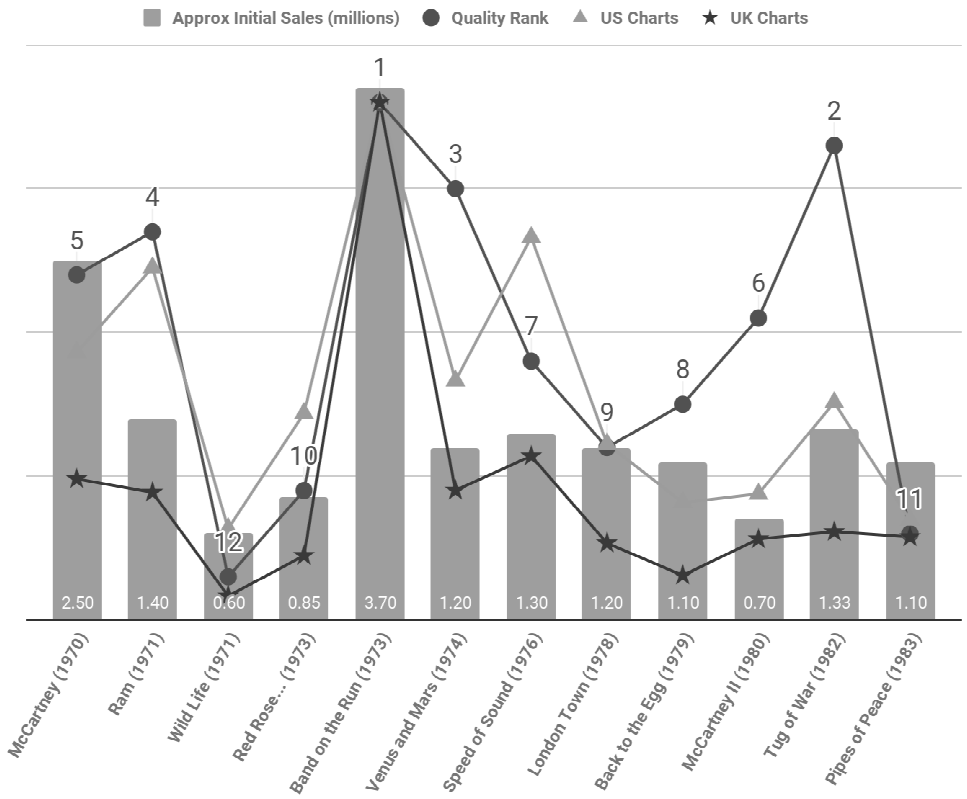
His initial solo work, the sound collages with Ono, suggested that he might be verging on a new era of innovation which, truthfully, not many fans were eager to follow. Few lament the end of that thread, and Lennon may have been deterred there by low sales and harsh reactions. But it would have seemed impossible even then that the volatile and imaginative Lennon would settle into anything approaching conventionality. Yet "conventional" is a regrettably sufficient word to summarize much of his post-Beatles output. The edges of imagination were sanded off. The forms were often stock. His great imagination appears impeded.

There is nothing in his solo catalog even approaching the intensity of his late Beatles work, and comparing anything he recorded in, say, 1974 to anything from 1969 yields a distinct puzzle: How could these be the same artist? Perhaps it is unfair to lament innovations he did not make, or roads he did not travel, but the 70s were likely poorer for it, as was Lennon's artistic catalog.

The John Lennon of the 70s was not the same artist as the Lennon of the 60s. Key circumstantial differences likely contributed to the shift, not the least of which were the breakup of the Beatles and the marriage to Ono. Beyond these, and the simple advancement of age, lie a great many factors, some of which we will never know. Such is Lennon's complex artistic legacy.

Paul McCartney

12 studio albums / 29 non-album tracks / 167 distinct core studio works
Reinventing / Churning / Selling



Best	*Band on the Run* (1973) *Tug of War* (1982)
Better	*Venus and Mars* (1975) *Ram* (1971)
YMMV	*McCartney* (1970) *McCartney II* (1980) *Wings at the Speed of Sound* (1976) *Back to the Egg* (1979)
Worse	*London Town* (1978) *Red Rose Speedway* (1972)
Worst	*Pipes of Peace* (1983) *Wild Life* (1971)

When the Beatles broke up, Paul McCartney effectively crawled in a hole for six months, becoming invisible enough that rumors of his demise actually took root. We know now that he was utterly unprepared for the eventuality of a breakup, had barely even considered the possibility, and sank into a deep depression, from which only resuming work in a new way could extract him.

After pulling himself together, letting it slip that the group had broken up, and selling a whole lot of copies of his first solo album, he set about trying to force lightning to strike again. Through seven (!!) iterations, Wings would never be the Beatles, but they certainly would be big. At their peak — a year-long world tour in 1975-76 — Wings reestablished McCartney as a household name, and he effectively assumed the mantle of Beatlemania. Now rumors took root of him having been the heart and soul of the Beatles all along, which he did little to quell.

For those not paying very close attention, that is the entire story — no lousy albums, no singles which did not go to number one, no flailing about to establish a post-Beatles persona, no revolving door on the Wings dressing rooms. Anyone paying attention, however, knows better. Indeed, almost every McCartney triumph is balanced by a misfire of some sort, even as he became by far the most commercially successful former Beatle.

His superpower, beyond perpetual melodic fertility, may very well have been the ability to shake off whatever happened and just keep making music. Indeed, through sheer determination, he made his best solo music when his chips were down, and success seemed least likely.

Reinventing

After they stopped touring, Paul McCartney had successfully sparked a reinvention of the Beatles with the concept for *Sgt. Pepper*. He had tried again, less successfully, with the *Magical Mystery Tour* film, and later with the *Get Back* project. The long medley on *Abbey Road* might even be considered another attempt at reinvention, and Paul was in the process of pitching still another — the idea that they might go out and play small clubs, unannounced — when John Lennon pronounced him "daft" and quit the band.

Little did Paul know when the Beatles broke up that he was about to become the king of the pop music reboot.

It began with his own sense, during the fall of 1969 and the winter of 1970, that he was being forced by circumstance to essentially start his career over, almost as if from scratch. He did so in fits and starts, and in his early solo days, there were real questions about whether a successful post-Beatles McCartney would ever emerge.

Though it's fair to call his solo career a series of reinventions, he founded it all largely on principles learned with the Beatles. He would be part of a *band*, not a solo act. His band would record and tour, make public appearances and TV specials. It would be like an extension of his family, like some sort of musical commune. And just like the Beatles, he intended it to be a wholly democratic institution, with each member as important as any other to the band's sound and public identity.

Not much of this worked out the way he imagined. Famously, there were perpetually new iterations of Wings, with each successive line-up effectively a reboot of a reboot. The musicians were of widely varying temperaments, styles, and staying power. Stories of Paul's perfectionism and autocratic style were legion. On two occasions, the core of Paul, Linda and Denny Laine were abruptly abandoned by the rest of the band. At other times, members departed before the public even knew their names. There was no way to disguise the fact that every new Wings album featured a new line-up.

Unsurprisingly, Paul's success came despite the faux construct of Wings, built on his fame and prolific songwriting chops. Even there, however, Paul continued to remake himself. Each new album had a new sound to go along with the new names. He continued experimenting with musical styles and lyrical limits. Even as his sound settled firmly into the pop mold, he continued to evolve his own distinct voice. This can be heard most dramatically by comparing *McCartney* to *McCartney II*. Separated by ten years, and despite the same name and face on the cover, the two albums are barely recognizable as coming from the same artist.

To a degree, the reinventions ended in 1983, and Paul settled into a sound he would more or less stick to in succeeding decades, even as he continued moving through a long list of collaborators. Thus, the 70s for Paul McCartney must be seen

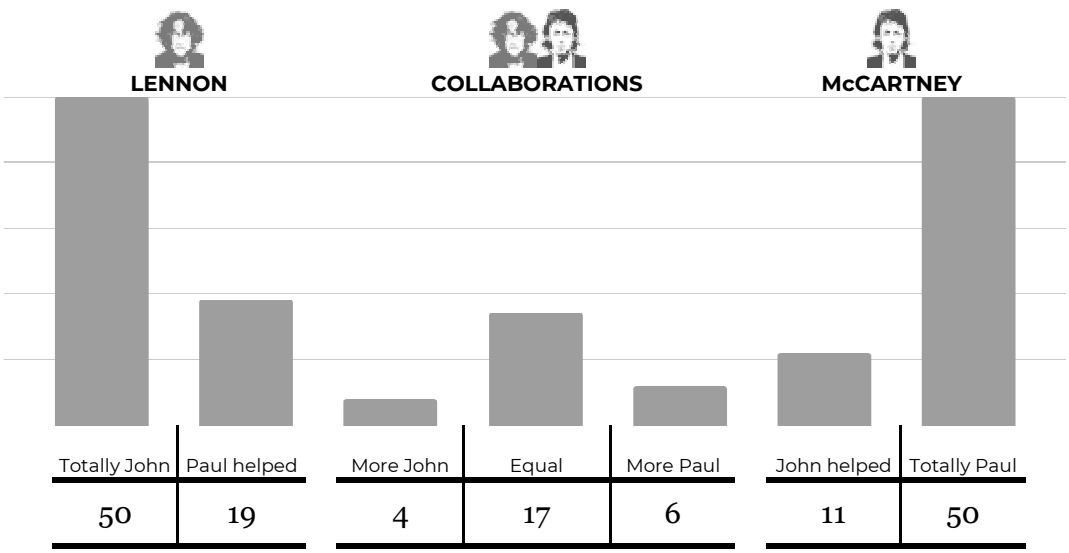
as a laboratory. He experimented freely, flailed a bit, got his footing, and then found his solo voice, but only through a long series of reinventions.

Churning

In the decade after the breakup, Paul McCartney churned out by far the most songs of any former Beatle — and it isn't even close. But this represented a dramatic shift from when the group was together.

There are 157 songs recorded by the Beatles which are credited to "Lennon/McCartney" or one of its variants.[1] John and Paul each gave at least one interview in which they worked through the entire catalog, creating a sort of "who wrote what" inventory. Their accounts agree far more than they disagree and, when tallied, yield an astonishing statistic: Each wrote exactly 50 of these songs by himself, while the remaining 57 were collaborations ranging from helping each other with finishing touches, to writing "nose-to-nose."[2]

Beatle Songs Credited to "Lennon/McCartney"



[1] "What Goes On" is credited to "Lennon/McCartney/Starkey," while "Flying" and "Dig It" are credited to "Lennon/McCartney/Harrison/Starkey."

[2] The supporting data can be viewed in Appendix VI, *Beatles Recordings*.

It's not clear whether McCartney accelerated his output or had merely been holding back, but in the second decade of their careers, Paul lapped his former partner, 215 to 98.[3]

Of course, quantity is not quality. Like Lennon, not all of McCartney's solo songs are classics. But the simple ability to keep generating new songs at such a pace meant (and continues to mean) that even if the current song isn't a classic, the next one might be. This allowed Paul to keep churning out albums even as critics complained about the quality of the songs, with apparently inevitable new classics born on what seemed like a fairly regular basis.

Selling

McCartney's ability to generate new melodies seemingly at will is legendary. Less noticed, however, is his absolute mastery of the twin crafts of songwriting (a very different discipline from melody-writing) and recording. Words and music and guitars and drums may be the vehicle, but craft is often the driver, and throughout the 70s McCartney consistently demonstrated his commitment to finishing his work well, so that his records would always be positioned to sell well, even if the songs might not be the best.

Though not every McCartney song is a gem, there is hardly a song in his catalog that does not feature a coherent structure, an attractive chord progression, well-formed openings and closings, and satisfying dramatic architecture. Even when his lyrics are nonsensical, they have an inner logic, true rhymes, interesting word play, and some sort of compelling imagery. Likewise, his recordings have always been carefully polished, regardless of the quality of the song, thus elevating even so-so songs into a place where they might be commercially successful.

Among his collaborators in Wings, this perfectionism often became unbearable. Guitarists hired for their prodigious chops found themselves being told exactly how to play a solo. Drummers with unique personal styles were referred to McCartney's performance on record so they might recreate on stage exactly what he played in the studio. In too many cases, tracks presented to the world as band creations were actually the work of a solo Paul.

Thus, Paul's dedication to pure craftsmanship frequently placed a strain on all musicians around him, even as it yielded significant commercial successes. Over and over throughout the 70s (and beyond), Paul positioned all of his work with commerciality in mind, even when art was a simultaneous consideration. As such, it has

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[3] This includes all songs considered for this project, some of which were not released. 14 of Lennon's 98 are with collaborators, mostly Yoko. 13 of McCartney's 215 are with collaborators other than Linda, mostly Denny Laine. An additional 80 are credited as "McCartney/McCartney," though it has long been acknowledged that this was for royalty reasons only.

always been clear that McCartney does not think of art and commerciality as either/or. He clearly tries to make commercial records, and if art also happens, so be it. Importantly, the reverse could not be said.

The net effect may very well be that he did not produce, in that first decade or since, anything with quite the same obvious artistic heft as *John Lennon/Plastic Ono Band*, even while generating over twice as much music. But that is not to say there isn't a considerable amount of art, and heft, in his catalog.

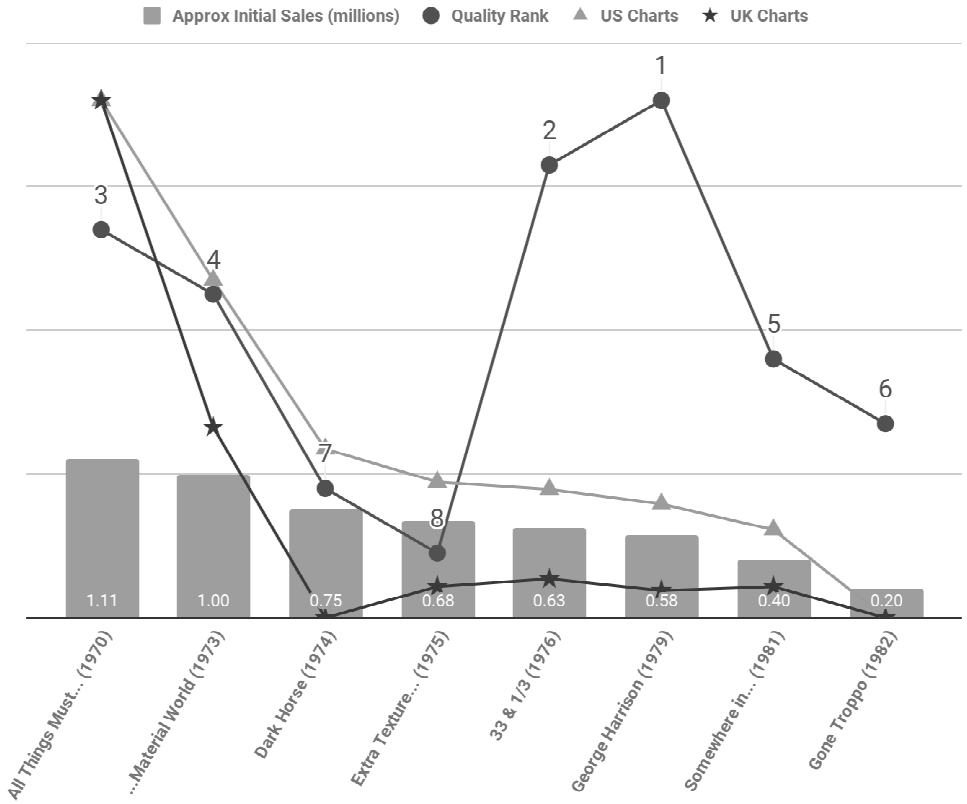
Art comes in many shapes and sizes, and Paul's art can often be found where it might not be expected. Where the world came to dismiss Paul's work in the 70s as merely a collection of "silly love songs" (hereafter known in this volume by its acronym: SLS), the careful ear recognizes much more. Indeed, the very song which christened that term is an absolute masterpiece of melodic, stylistic, structural, and production craftsmanship. It even works on the meta level of directly addressing critics. That it is not "Mother" is utterly irrelevant.

To say that Paul's output in the 70s is *commercial* might sound something like an insult, but the reality is that creating a commercial sheen required an incredible amount of work, and yielded a wide range of music, with a wide range of meanings and, unfortunately, a wide range of quality. But it's important to note that describing his work as commercial is actually not a comment on its relative artistic value in any way. It would be wrong to assume any sort of mutually exclusive relationship between the two criteria.

Unfortunately, this would have been much easier to see were there not so much actual dross in McCartney's 70s catalog. Instead, however, critics and the public continually pummeled Paul's reputation with well-justified accusations of slightness, and a yielding to the banalities of pop. Though some of this criticism was tied to the perception that he broke up the Beatles, and therefore more harsh than his work deserved, there are also good cases to be made for such assessments — especially when comparing his 70s output to the Beatles. And therein lies the rub: Just like the others, no matter what he might have produced after the Beatles, it would always be *after* the Beatles.

George Harrison

8 studio albums / 4 non-album tracks / 97 distinct core studio works
Maturing / Sliding / Enlightening



Best	*George Harrison* (1978) *Thirty Three & 1/3* (1976)
Better	*All Things Must Pass* (1970) *Living in the Material World* (1973)
Worse	*Somewhere in England* (1981) *Gone Troppo* (1982)
Worst	*Dark Horse* (1974) *Extra Texture (Read All About It)* (1975)

George Harrison began to emotionally divest from the Beatles about the same time he first heard sitars on the set of *Help!* He was the first of the four to see the emptiness of fame, and by 1966 had found something which meant more to him than any job or band ever could. His spiritual journey inhabited and fueled the rest of his life.

He was famously not present at the meeting when John Lennon announced that he was seeking a "divorce" from the Beatles, but when word reached him, he apparently had no reaction whatsoever. When confronted with questions about the group in early 1970, he blithely declared that they would likely be recording again soon.

This is not to suggest that he wanted that to happen. His non-reaction merely indicates the degree to which he viewed playing guitar with the Beatles as a job, rather than a way of life. Beyond tasting a new spirituality, by the time of the breakup he had also tasted musical freedom, and a different paradigm for recording, by working with a handful of other artists, including Bob Dylan. Those experiences convinced him that it wasn't the music-making he had tired of, merely the Beatles.

Always a junior partner in that endeavor, he started to imagine the freedom to record all of the songs he had stashed away, without having to compete with Lennon and McCartney for precious vinyl real estate, or secure their willingness to play on the records. In Phil Spector, he found the perfect partner-in-crime, someone who not only listened to his demos, but convinced him he could make a massive hit record all by himself.

When it became apparent in 1970 that the Beatles were not going to resume recording any time soon, Harrison realized his dream, and it set him up for a shocking degree of early solo success. Unfortunately, such things are notoriously difficult to maintain or repeat, and his burst out of the solo gate would set expectations for the following decade that he simply could not meet.

Maturing

George Harrison is a rare case of a songwriter who learned his craft entirely in the public eye. The first song he ever wrote, "Don't Bother Me," was heard by countless millions of people, despite being the work of a rank amateur.

His creative maturation is a beautiful thing to explore. It covers early pop classics like "If I Needed Someone," works through an Indian phase which most regarded as curious but tolerable, then touches gold with "While My Guitar Gently Weeps," "Something," and "Here Comes the Sun."

Yet even those classics do not represent Harrison at his most creatively mature. An argument can be made that he didn't reach his absolute peak until "Handle With Care," but a broad look at his entire career finds him actually reaching his final — and very high — plateau around the time of *George Harrison*. This seminal album includes perhaps his most commercial song ever, "Blow Away," along with a host of

finely crafted, interesting, and genuinely beautiful songs — a most welcome moment of graduation.

The path was not a straight one. Despite developing the ability to pound out new material as needed, his uninspired songs are considerably less inspired than any by Lennon or McCartney. At his worst, the songs are incomprehensible, and that fact, combined with vocal troubles and a reduction in his recording standards, led to a swift downfall midway through the 70s. By the time Harrison got his feet under him again, his work did not matter anymore to the world of popular music, and his focus on writing trailed off, which is a terrible shame.

Though he learned his craft largely through proximity to Lennon and McCartney, in later years he recorded loving covers of Cole Porter and Hoagy Carmichael, and was quoted professing a new love for some of those *other* influential songwriters of the 20th century. This may have been the final ingredient he needed to reach his songwriting potential. Whatever it was, George Harrison had taken unprecedented opportunity and combined it with diligence and a willingness to make mistakes, and turned himself into another of the 20th century's greats.

Sliding

A phenomenal thing happened when Harrison was no longer yoked to the other Beatles: His guitar-playing changed instantly. Compare anything he played on *All Things Must Pass* to anything of his on *Abbey Road* and he sounds like a completely different guitarist. The slide technique came to dominate his work as a lead guitarist, and it became his signature through the rest of his career.

The change appears to have come about during his time playing with Delaney & Bonnie in December of 1969, thus making it simultaneous with the breakup. This was likely then reinforced by the presence of Pete Drake during the recording sessions the following summer. Drake added distinctive, country-style slide guitar to several tracks on *All Things Must Pass*, and appears to have encouraged and influenced Harrison significantly.

From that point on, much as he had the sitar before, George committed to mastering this new sound, and using it at every opportunity. From a practical standpoint, it meant that his solo work really did not dovetail with his Beatles work at all, in terms of his pure guitar playing. There is a hard line between them, and his style of playing on solo records formed the heart of his personal sound.

Though admirable in his dedication, the net result was a sameness to his arrangements and playing which, though distinctive overall, contributed to the problems of his mid-70s recordings. Though the desire for a clean break is understandable, in some ways the change made his records almost unidentifiable as being from a former Beatle, which inevitably hurt him in the marketplace when the songs themselves were not the best.

Enlightening

No discussion of Harrison's post-Beatles work would be complete without acknowledging that spirituality moved front and center to his art at the moment he no longer played with the Beatles. Whether this was a new personal commitment on his part, or it had been simmering beneath his Beatle façade for a long time is not clear. Obviously, his interest in Indian mysticism became part of the Beatles identity, but some of the language he began to use during his solo career, particularly the word "Lord," would have had no place on a Beatles record.

Indeed his biggest hit ever, "My Sweet Lord," could never have been a Beatles record for at least three reasons. First, it contained the word "Lord" in the title. Second, it built its fadeout on repetitions of the Hare Krishna chant. And third, it would have sounded familiar enough to not make it past their keen editing. Though some may consider this a loss to the Beatles catalog, it is unlikely that John, Paul or George Martin would have seen it that way.

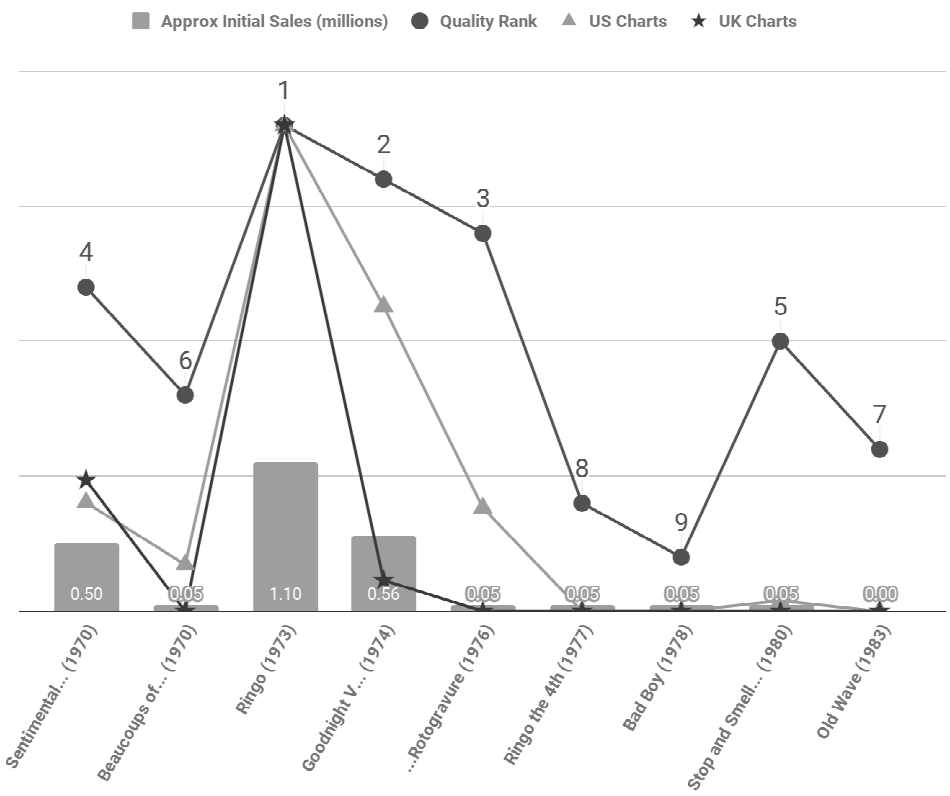
Indeed, as time passed, Harrison's music began to proselytize in a most uncomfortable way. Though fans have always seemed to appreciate George's spiritual identity and focus, they did not always appreciate being preached to on his records. Indeed, his lyrics at times seemed dismissive of those who did not share his beliefs, and/or did not see the value that he placed on spiritual pursuits.

Likewise, his continued fascination with Indian music came to put a barrier between him and the fans. This was particularly true when he engaged his mentor Ravi Shankar to open his *Dark Horse* tour. Fans expecting a rock show, found themselves listening to long sets of Indian music which, though high in quality, did not resonate with his particular western audience. This led him to a period of scolding in his music, which did not enamor him to critics or the public.

Eventually, this less tolerant phase of his music passed, and later songs based on spiritual concepts were considerably more open and gentle. But a certain amount of damage could never be undone, and his solo work was scarred as a result. The time he spent in these doldrums may very well have come at his peak opportunity for success, and the opportunity was missed.

Ringo Starr

9 studio albums / 7 non-album tracks / 103 distinct core studio works
Searching / Splashes / Friends



Best	*Ringo* (1973)
Better	*Goodnight Vienna* (1974) *Ringo's Rotogravure* (1976)
Worse	*Sentimental Journey* (1970) *Stop and Smell the Roses* (1981) *Beaucoups of Blues* (1970)
Worst	*Old Wave* (1983) *Ringo the 4th* (1977) *Bad Boy* (1978)

When the Beatles broke up, Richard Starkey was simply out of a job, and while that may sound like a reductionist characterization, it is the literal truth, the musical truth, and the psychological truth. And he knew it.

He had been the last to join the band, long after Lennon, McCartney and Harrison had bonded, and had always been the least secure member of the group, fourth in the pecking order, and for obvious reasons. Recall the story of his tonsillitis, and the ease with which Jimmie Nicol slipped into (and out of) the group. Recall the heartless treatment, and subsequent fall into obscurity, of Pete Best. Recall the days during *The White Album*, when Starkey quit the band, and McCartney simply slid over to the drum kit. In all of these cases, the group swapped drummers literally without missing a beat.

To the outside world, he was an essential part of the greatest band of all time, but he knew the situation from the inside. Though not excluded from contributing ideas, he was generally on the periphery of the group's creative braintrust, simply because he did not have those skills. Recall the days of recording *Sgt. Pepper*, when, by Starkey's own account, he was bored out of his mind most of the time, and passed the hours playing games with Mal Evans and Neil Aspinall off in a corner of the studio.[4] His playing and his voice may have been an essential part of the group sound and chemistry, but where else would that distinctiveness apply? Without the prospect of another group project, Starkey was left in a very bad place. The hard-working Liverpudlian, whose original ambition was to be a hairdresser, was hardly suited to a life of leisure, as would become painfully obvious.

The other Beatles certainly felt protective of him, and that would ultimately prove his salvation — to a degree, for a time.

Searching

The problem for Starkey in the fall of 1969 was that he was the only former Beatle with no real prospects for a second act. There were threads to explore, including vocalist, actor, and general "entertainer," but these were speculative, and not in his fundamental nature. The prospect he faced was that of being a star without an act, in the days before fame itself could be considered an occupation.

So, in the early days after the break-up, he rode his fame, and natural charm, for what it was worth. To his credit, he did explore his options thoroughly, making regular appearances on television, in movies, and as a drummer on some famous records. Most importantly, he maintained good relationships (most of the time) with his former bandmates, gigged whenever possible, and fished around for whatever it meant to be Ringo Starr in a post-Beatles world.

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[4] This has been told enough times that it even made it into the company-line *Anthology* book, p. 242.

Thus, to talk about Starkey as a *recording artist* in the early 70s seems a bit presumptuous and misplaced. That was only one possibility he explored, to about the same degree as several others, and the results were not encouraging. He was not Paul, who checked all of the boxes for "recording artist" right out of the gate. He was not like John, an Artist in a greater sense, which happened to include recording. And he was not like George, with a cauldron of musical potential bubbling furiously beneath the surface, just waiting to be set loose.

Starkey was, and is, a journeyman — in the best possible sense. His journey through the solo years would have many different stops, and though he would prove very adaptable, nothing would ever "come easy."

Splashes

In all of his record-making, Ringo was entirely at the mercy of the creative people surrounding him. When they were good, as with the Beatles, he had the capacity to rise to it, and provide exactly what was needed. When they were mediocre, uninspired, or overly mercenary, as was too often the case in the 70s, he met them there. He threw his hat in with a lot of idea people along the way, and the quality of the ideas varied widely. In almost every case, the result was exactly as you might predict by looking at the creative names.

With George Martin et. al., Ringo made a warm and aspirational, if awkward, solo album. With Pete Drake, he wandered into the country mainstream. Richard Perry hosted the party that brought about a fleeting return to greatness. With Arif Mardin, he became pure product. With Vini Poncia, he hit a sad nadir of empty musical extrusion. With Russ Ballard and Joe Walsh, things looked up, but by then the die had been cast.

In a very real sense, there is no such thing as a "Ringo Starr record." Starkey did not "make" records so much as *participate* in the making of records. Those around him had much more impact on the finished product, and generally did not know how to best build a project around his unique instrument. His face may have been on the cover, and his voice may have provided the common thread for all the tracks, but he mostly seemed to stand outside of the projects, as if merely trying on the suit rather than wearing it. There is less of the person in the music than the typical pop star, but only because that is not his game.

This is not to say that Starkey was devoid of ideas, or unable to make great records. Obviously, he made a small handful of incredible records. From time to time, his music made great splashes in the waters of pop. The point is more that he never found the right creative team to provide sustained success as a recording artist. Though it seems fair to wonder if such a team ever could have existed, it also seems almost certain that opportunities were missed because it didn't.

Friends

Of all the solo Beatles, Ringo did the most work with famous collaborators. It started with his eponymous hit album, but became the closest thing to a successful formula that he ever had. The list of famous names on Ringo's albums is long and well-known, but his best studio foils were also his first: the other former Beatles.

His best collaborator, by far, was George Harrison. Though there is some mystery in how they wrote (or did not) together, the anecdotes and highly successful outcomes suggest that Starkey generated ideas, and Harrison helped refine them — in a way that fed back into Ringo's own sensibilities. A concrete example can be found in the *Let It Be* film, where the two are briefly seen hammering out "Octopus's Garden," with George obviously helping Ringo locate the chord changes he is imagining. Where other collaborators handed things to Ringo and he performed them, George worked to bring Ringo's ideas to their best possible incarnation, then helped turn them into great records.

Paul McCartney, though famously estranged from the rest of his former bandmates through most of the 70s, did make contributions to three of Ringo's albums, and even invited him to play on *Tug of War* in 1981. Of the former Beatles, his songs were the least successful for Ringo, though the two would share many warm moments in later years.

John Lennon appreciated Ringo as a drummer, enjoyed working with him in the studio, and used him on multiple occasions in the early post-breakup years. In exchange, he gave one track and a couple of ideas to each of Ringo's three mid-decade albums — where styles came and went like grooves in a record. Though Lennon's contributions didn't all hit the mark squarely, they did have the advantage of being *right for Ringo* — something few non-Beatle songwriters accomplished.

What Ringo always needed was collaborators willing to figure out the right way to use his unique attributes. He was unlike any other vocalist, unlike any other drummer, and unlike any other popular personality. As a result, it's probably fair to say that the range of possibilities for him was smaller than many other artists. But when someone took the right approach, which happened more often than not when he worked with other former Beatles, the results could be very special. It just didn't happen very often.

To keep things interesting, Ringo worked with a wide variety of musicians, famous and not, after the Beatles. For the most part, they appear to have had good intentions, but simply could not crack the nut. As such, the resulting records only occasionally show Ringo at his best, and it's not really his fault. In truth, Ringo's voice was often treated by his collaborators as a sort of placeholder — a rare instrument that no one quite knew how to play.

So what would have been right for Ringo? Another band? Sticking with the film career? Semi-retirement? Heading home and becoming the hairdresser he always

wanted to be? It is an impossible question to answer. Without songwriting royalties, he couldn't just retire, so the reinventions continued to come. A life of talk shows and career retrospectives is a terrible thing to wish on anyone.

The obvious answer came only many years later, with the creation of the All-Starr Band. Not only are the friends famous, talented, and well-meaning, but they all manage to have fun for adoring crowds wherever they go. They all "make show" and entertain together, highlighting what might have been Ringo's best option all along. If not entirely ideal, it at least casts this former Beatle in a very flattering light.

3
Phases

> *"...whatever we do we are not splitting up the Beatles. This is the Beatles—we don't differentiate." So even though none of the others appeared on ["Yesterday"], it was still* The Beatles*—that was the creed of the day.*
>
> — George Martin, quoting Brian Epstein[1]

In many ways, we tend to think of the solo era as just another phase in the evolution of the band. Though the former Beatles would all have bristled at this notion, preferring to think of themselves as finally out from under the Beatle mantle, they actually laid the foundation for us to think that way, and reinforced it many times.

To begin with, as referenced in the quote above, "Yesterday" set a precedent they would always maintain that Beatle records did not need to include all four Beatles. At the outset, this was an artistic choice, but beginning with *Revolver*, other factors came into play. Ringo was not needed for "Eleanor Rigby." John was absent for undocumented reasons on "Love You To." Neither John nor George participated in "For No One." And Paul famously left the studio in a huff when it came time to record "She Said She Said" — the first documented occasion when a Beatle would be missing for reasons of personal strife between the bandmates.

Having given themselves permission to complete records in this way, the reasons for being absent eventually multiplied, ranging from not liking the song being recorded, to being supplanted by the songwriter on their instrument, to convalescence after a car accident. Whatever the reasons, fully 28 of their 215 core recordings include less than all four Beatles, and seven include only one.

A parallel precedent was established in their earliest sessions: The Beatles didn't have to play or sing everything themselves — even their own natural instruments. Guest musicians were welcomed, and simply subsumed into the sound. Early uncredited examples include Andy White famously playing drums on "Love Me Do" and "P. S. I love You," and engineer Norman Smith tapping the hi-hat on "Can't Buy Me Love." The band generously began to acknowledge George Martin's regular contributions on *With the Beatles*.

More prominent guest performances began in 1965 when they hired John Scott to add flutes to "You've Got to Hide Your Love Away," and the string players to complete "Yesterday." Though many guests would remain uncredited, those with the

[1] *Maximum Volume*, pg. 263

most prominent contributions sometimes did find their names on the album sleeve, such as Anil Bhagwat and Alan Civil on *Revolver*.

The phenomenon shifted, and arguably reached its peak, with Eric Clapton's iconic work on "While My Guitar Gently Weeps." Now a guest was playing an instrument that the Beatles actually played, namely lead guitar, but was invited to add something distinctive to the group's sound from the outside, and was credited for doing so on the sleeve. The same happened with Billy Preston, who also received credit by name in multiple places.

Even if you exclude Martin's 40 guest appearances, and Billy Preston's 12, there are still 60 Beatles tracks which include musical performances by non-Beatles. The precedent was clear: No matter who performed, or didn't, during a Beatles recording session, it was still *a Beatles record*.

It may seem like a giant leap to believe that the group could have simply decided not to record together at all while continuing to release records under the "Beatles" umbrella. In truth, it is barely a leap at all. Indeed, when the group broke up, the recording process changed only slightly.

Since individual Beatles had already been performing solo overdubs on songs for years, the biggest change after the breakup was that they no longer recorded the backing tracks together.[2] Psychologically, this is a significant difference, of course, but in a practical sense, it is relatively small. Their approach to backing tracks had evolved substantially through the years, and as time wore on there were cases where little or nothing was left of the backing track when the recording was completed.

Given the difficulties associated with being in the same studio together, it would have made great sense for the band to decide among themselves that each member could work wherever, however, and with whomever he pleased — just like breaking up — but with the critical difference that the group would come together to sort through everything when the time came to release a new album. Far from revolutionary, this would have been a rather slight *evolutionary* change to their recording technique, comparable in scale to the one they made in allowing McCartney to be the only Beatle on "Yesterday." Such a simple, *intentional*, change could easily have accommodated the group's shifting needs, ranging from logistic, to temperamental, to emotional, to artistic, to stylistic.

This would have amounted to them simply becoming *independent artists* who *fused* their work together — a very natural progression which had been happening informally for quite some time. Indeed, they had laid the groundwork for such a psychological shift all along the way, which becomes clear when you reconsider the actual creative phases that the group went through.

We typically think of the Beatles' career as having three distinct parts: early, middle and late. The delineations are pretty well established and understood. The

[2] Greater detail on the Beatles' recording process will be found in forthcoming chapters.

early period is the Fab Four years, from the very beginning through *Help!* The middle period is the psychedelic era, from *Rubber Soul* through *Magical Mystery Tour*. The late period is the fractures and breakup, from "Lady Madonna" through *Let It Be*. These dividing lines are easy enough to recognize that if a new generation of listeners came to the band with no advance knowledge, we can safely assume they would probably end up with exactly the same designations.

Splitting it up this way, however, misses important aspects of how the band's art actually developed. Those typical lines of demarcation create a neat *dramatic* arc, which is easy to understand and absorb, and they work reasonably well along the axes of sound, fashion, influence, general cultural knowledge and musical/lyrical maturity. While these are certainly heavyweight aspects, they are not necessarily the most important ones to understanding the band's creative and artistic evolution.

Other more subtle changes in their circumstances and priorities also brought about three different phases which are equally obvious once pointed out, but tend to be obscured. Partly this is because they do not begin or end at specific moments, but rather overlap, with transitions between that are dissolves rather than jump cuts.

In their nature, these alternate distinctions are actually much more useful because each transition includes both a change in their primary activities, and a realignment of their relationships with each other as artists. Recognizing these alternate phases not only provides a useful frame for understanding the band, it also makes it easier to join the adventure of imagining a considerable expansion to their final phase.

Phase One - Fraternal Show-Makers

In their first phase, which began when the band formed, all of their activities were channeled toward entertaining the audience right in front of them — and having fun doing it. They stood on a stage of some sort, played music for whoever was there, and were either enjoyed or not. If the legends are to believed, most of the time they succeeded in having a lot of fun. The music they played was chosen entirely from the music they had grown up loving: rock and roll records, for the most part, but also some of McCartney's favorite Broadway and Tin Pan Alley standards. As new records came out that they liked, songs were added to the act.

If an audience wanted to hear something specific, they played it. If they didn't know it, they learned it, or bluffed their way through it. Along the way they built a massive catalog of repertoire that they could call on at any moment. Between songs, they learned how to engage in banter with the audience, and perpetrated some legendary on-stage antics. Famously, in Germany, their stage shows went on for hours, and the task at hand was laid out in very plain instructions: "Mach Schau." The Beatles played music, and had fun, and made show — a *lot* of show.

4
Tiers

> *Once all the recording is finally complete there is an important task still remaining: all tracks need to be put into a running order (sequencing). This has a significant effect on the way a listener here's a record, particularly for the first time. Imagine starting the* Sergeant Pepper *album with "A Day in the Life;" there would be nothing left after the first track.*
>
> — George Martin[1]

The first sound on the first classic Beatles album is . . . a count-off.

The last sound on the last classic Beatles album is . . . a single plucked guitar string — ironically, one which leaves the song unfinished.

Between those two iconic bookends stands a sprawling landscape of music and sound and imagery and culture and fashion and unparalleled artistry. We love it, and most of the time that's enough. At other times, we want to understand it, at least a little, and see if we can figure out just how and why it engaged us and continues to engage us after so many years and countless listens.

George Martin, at least, might discourage us from the endeavor:

> *I am not sure how much cold-blooded analysis has to do with one's passion for a work of art. It is a bit like falling in love. Do we really care if there is the odd wrinkle here or there? The power to move people, to tears or laughter, to violence or sympathy, is the strongest attribute that any art can have. In this respect, music is the prime mover: its call on the emotions is the most direct of all the arts.*[2]

He was describing his initial reaction to "Strawberry Fields Forever," but his point has broader applications. Some elements of artistry can never really be understood, and we should accept that. At its highest levels, such as with the Beatles, art is *mostly* mystery. Like many artists, even the Beatles themselves didn't exactly understand what they had wrought. Every release was the result of hundreds of ideas and decisions — many subconscious, instinctive, and at times even random. Each song, track and album was created *within* a complicated context, and released *into* a

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[1] *Summer of Love*, pg. 150

[2] Ibid. pg. 13

complicated context. Trying to understand all of that could take a lifetime and still leave us wanting.

Acknowledging this truth is about respecting the art. Thinking too much can render art into a cold, distant, intellectual experiment. Thinking too little, however, leaves potential degrees of appreciation unexplored. The sweet spot in the case of the Beatles is to listen closely, as so many fans actually do, and see if we can catch the echoes of what hides behind the art, in that intricate veil of sound we love.

Specifically, for the current project, we need to distill and understand a little more about the group's techniques and principles of album assembly in order to experiment with extending them. This is both easier than it sounds and harder. On the one hand, we have complete access to everything they did, and an ever-increasing amount of documentation about how and why they did it. The information we need is potentially right there for anyone who seeks it. On the other hand, the thing we're looking for may simply defy description. Even looking straight at it, we may not be able to see it.

I am convinced that we can learn important things, enough to guide us in imagining a new era for the Beatles. Still, nothing is guaranteed. The search is akin to a *divination*, which may or may not reveal the as yet unseen. The best art often guards its secrets well, even when they hide in plain sight.

The artworks in question are the classic Beatles albums, of course. Each is a collection of music which, in some mysterious way, is greater than the sum of its parts. As such, we are interested here in the sum, not the parts. In other words, we want to understand how the tracks were put together, and how they interact to create that distinct whole.

We will use the standard UK catalog because these are the albums assembled directly by the Beatles and/or George Martin. As such, there are ten albums to consider, and though this list will be familiar, there are two essential omissions.

ALBUM		*TITLE* Recorded	Producer	Studio(s)	RELEASE
B03		*Please Please Me* Feb 63	Martin	EMI	63-Mar
B06		*With the Beatles* Jul-Oct 63	Martin	EMI	63-Nov
B11		*A Hard Day's Night* (UK) Jan-Jun 64	Martin	EMI, Pathé Marconi (Paris)	64-Jul
B13		*Beatles for Sale* Aug-Oct 64	Martin	EMI	64-Dec
B16		*Help!* (UK) Feb-Jun 65	Martin	EMI	65-Aug

B18		*Rubber Soul* (UK) Jun-Nov 65	Martin	EMI	65-Dec
B20		*Revolver* (UK) Apr-Jun 66	Martin	EMI	66-Aug
B23		*Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band* Nov 66 - Apr 67	Martin	EMI, Regent	67-May
B29		*The Beatles* ["The White Album"] May-Oct 68	Martin	EMI, Trident	68-Nov
B33		*Abbey Road* Feb-Aug 69	Martin	EMI, Olympic, Trident	69-Sep

Magical Mystery Tour is excluded because, in its UK incarnation, it is not a full album, and the US version (which ultimately became the official version) was essentially a compilation assembled by marketers, not the Beatles. *Let It Be* is left off because it was assembled by Phil Spector, working partly from specifications given by Allen Klein and Michael Lindsay-Hogg, with little or no input from the Beatles' creative braintrust regarding its final form. Indeed, we will use that album's significant deficiencies to illuminate critical principles present in other albums and utterly missing there (see chapter 10).

Each of these ten albums is a complete artistic statement, one that transcends any track or tracks. These statements, though impossible to extract and summarize, are found in the aggregation of music and words and visual imagery. In each case, songs and ideas and images bounce off of one another, together creating a space in which each piece of music is heard differently than it might be on its own. With or without a central theme, the music forms a unified *set*.

These spaces get progressively more sophisticated, and it's important to note that there is no regression. Each new release is fundamentally different and more complex than the last. In multiple cases the new whole is barely recognizable as continuous from its predecessor. This has caused endless and unresolvable debates about overall "greatness," a blurry distinction which is essentially beside the point. All such comparisons between albums are apples to oranges.

The level of surprise was arguably most noticeable with *Rubber Soul* and *Sgt. Pepper*, but similar sentiments are generally heard in discussions of all the late albums. Each was its own individual revelation.

In the five albums before *Rubber Soul* this transcendence may not be immediately obvious. They appear at a glance to be merely collections of unrelated — or *barely* related — tracks. The two movie soundtracks do have obvious tie-ins to the films, but they collect music that did not actually inform the plots in any significant way, and do not offer any obvious progression in themselves. The other three albums do not even have such a slight thread, but that absence is deceptive. There is much more going on in these apparently simple assemblies than may be obvious at first.

5
Blueprints

> *The product has to be impeccable, technically and artistically. What is more, it must have soul. It must lift the emotions of the listener. It must come from the heart.*
>
> — George Martin[1]

When George Martin first proposed that the Beatles make an album of original material after only one really good recording session, he was taking a different type of risk, but with good reason.

> *After the success of "Please Please Me" I realised that we had to act very fast to get a long-playing album on the market if we were to cash in on what we had already achieved. Because, while a single which sells half a million doesn't reap all that great a reward, half a million albums is big business.*[2]

Documentation shows that Martin's decision to make a full album with the Beatles actually came *before* the release of the single, a detail convenient to leave out because his strategy ran directly counter to what EMI typically did with new pop artists. Albums were seen as a product for a much different, older market. When Martin proposed it, there was initial skepticism within EMI that a group like the Beatles could sustain an album of 14 tracks musically, let alone make the more expensive product profitable among their young audience.[3]

Martin intuited otherwise, in large measure because of their personal charisma, and what he had seen on a visit to Liverpool shortly after their initial audition.[4] His first instinct was to record a live album in the Cavern Club to capture the electric atmosphere which surrounded the Beatles there. When this proved logistically impossible, he turned back to studio recording, and pursued it with the same vigor he had always given to all Parlophone artists.

From the beginning, his approach to crafting their albums was equal parts commercial and artistic. He knew from experience that, even with great tracks skimmed

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[1] *Making Music*, pg. 277
[2] *All You Need is Ears*, pg 130
[3] *Maximum Volume*, pg 109
[4] *All You Need is Ears*, pg 124

off the top and issued as singles, the remainder could be carefully assembled into packages that would yield maximum impact. Additionally, he believed that for an album to compete in the marketplace, a coherent whole had more of a chance than something slapped together.

Martin had honed these instincts for a decade on comedy and novelty records, but his naturally methodical nature would not have allowed a casual approach anyway. His years of musical training, industry experience, and appreciation of classical forms gave him all the tools he needed to do it right. But it is important to note that, without this strategy, the Beatles might always and only have been a "singles" band. Instead, they were set on the path which included albums from the very beginning.

Though Martin is quoted in various places saying that it wasn't until later that track sequencing was treated as part of the art form, the albums themselves argue otherwise. He and EMI hedged their bet on that debut album by including the earlier singles (something they would never do again), but the tracks were utilized carefully in context with the other music. Where a traditional sequence would have put the singles and B-sides up front as the first four tracks on the album, Martin diverged, using them to fill what he perceived as important slots in the overall running order.

Even on that first long-player the tracks were ordered so that the collection would engage listeners at the beginning, keep their attention through the flip of the disc, and send them out with a bang at the end. In many ways he was already employing the same principles and forms used by classical composers, which have much in common with the comedic forms that Martin had helped exemplify with artists like Peter Sellers and Spike Milligan. He also realized quite quickly that, if the Beatles were to remain a *band*, he could not favor one over the others, and would have to play diplomat with the young, competitive, ego-driven artists.

Consider the running order of that famous debut album:

Side A	**Side B**
1. "I Saw Her Standing There"	1. "Love Me Do"
2. "Misery"	2. "P.S. I Love You"
3. "Anna (Go to Him)"	3. "Baby It's You"
4. "Chains"	4. "Do You Want to Know a Secret"
5. "Boys"	5. "A Taste of Honey"
6. "Ask Me Why"	6. "There's a Place"
7. "Please Please Me"	7. "Twist and Shout"

The layout seems very straightforward, as if just a simple collection of contemporary music by a new band. To a potential buyer looking at the sleeve in a record store, roughly half of the song titles would have been familiar — a definite plus for the record company. The other songs might have seemed intriguing if you paid attention to the various names of band members and songwriters, or read Tony Barrow's breathless liner notes — which was much the same marketing hype as was

found on many albums of the era. Some of those unfamiliar songs actually would have been unfamiliar to even the band's loyal fan base in Liverpool because they were so new.

The album is often described as being made up of the Beatles' stage act, and that is without question the provenance of the covers and several of the originals. These are, after all, echoes of their *Fraternal Show-Makers* phase (see chapter 3). But that characterization significantly understates the sophistication of this release. There is much more going on here than first meets the ear.

To understand just what that much more is, start by considering the following two setlists. The first is from shortly before the famous *Please Please Me* recording session of February 11, 1963, and second is from the following day. Songs which made the album are highlighted.

17-Jan-1963 - Majestic Ballroom, Birkenhead	**12-Feb-1963** - Astoria Ballroom, Oldham
1. *(Unknown)**	**1. I Saw Her Standing There**
2. Shimmy Like Kate	2. Sweet Little Sixteen
3. Whole Lotta Shakin' Goin' On	**3. Chains**
4. P.S. I Love You	4. Beautiful Dreamer
5. *(Unknown)**	**5. Misery**
6. Chains	6. Hey Good Lookin'
7. A Taste of Honey	**7. Love Me Do**
8. Please Please Me	**8. Baby It's You**
9. Three Cool Cats	9. Three Cool Cats
10. *(Unknown)**	**10. Please Please Me**
11. Anna (Go to Him)	11. Some Other Guy
12. Hey Good Lookin'	**12. Ask Me Why**
13. Hippy Hippy Shake	13. Roll Over Beethoven
14. I'm Talking About You	**14. A Taste of Honey**
15. Devil in Her Heart	**15. Boys**
16. Some Other Guy	16. Keep Your Hands Off My Baby
17. Ask Me Why	**17. Do You Want to Know a Secret**
18. Roll Over Beethoven	18. From Me to You
19. Love Me Do	19. Long Tall Sally (encore)
Album tracks not played:*	***Album tracks not played:***
Misery	*Anna (Go to Him)*
Boys	*P.S. I Love You*
Baby It's You	*There's a Place*
Twist and Shout	*Twist and Shout*

**The three songs listed as unknown were presumably recent originals, since covers and older originals would have been recognized by the fan who created this list. The three most likely titles to fill those spots would therefore have been, "I Saw Her Standing There," "Do You Want to Know a Secret?" and "There's a Place" — though not necessarily in that order. "Hold Me Tight" might also have been in that mix, though it was much older. We can, however, be sure that "Misery" was not among them, since it had not yet been written.*[5]

[5] *Many Years from Now*, p. 94

The two setlists are wildly divergent from one another, but *both* are also widely divergent from the album. To say that the album is derived from the stage show suggests, first, a stable and proven setlist which made up most shows at the time and could be tweaked into an album based on success on the stage. A review of other setlists from the same era shows that the Beatles did not have such a thing. They were still playing anything and everything, as the spirit moved them. Further, Martin's characterization suggests that he simply asked the group for a recent set list, pulled out part of it, tweaked it a little bit, and then plunked it down on vinyl, which would have been a quite reasonable approach to take.

But these setlists show definitively that this is not what happened. From descriptions of the session,[6] the Beatles came in with a few songs that they definitely wanted to record, namely their most recent batch of originals, some of which had only just been tried out in concert. These were then augmented by selections from their vast warehouse of covers. The selection of which covers to record is presented as something of an afterthought. The group spent much more time on the originals, and knocked off all the covers in a couple of hours.

In terms of selecting material, Martin was faced with a complicated problem. An album of all covers might have the greatest potential with an audience not already familiar with the group, but he already knew that it wouldn't have satisfied the Beatles, or the new song publishers which he had just helped them acquire. Given that their track record with new material was pretty good (if short) at that point, he was tasked with striking the right balance.

He had to trust his own instincts about whether the new songs were high enough quality, but also about which covers would best show off what the band could do, without stepping on their creativity. He needed a batch of songs that both represented the band well and worked *together*. The exclusion of "Hold Me Tight," and the discussion about "Twist and Shout," both reported in many sources, exemplify this process. Not a part of either setlist, the recording of "Hold Me Tight" ultimately did not satisfy the quality requirements, while "Twist and Shout" struck both the band and Martin as a good choice, despite not being in their current stage show.

Since the Beatles created their own setlists, and George Martin created the album running order, we get an immediate look at how Martin's sensibilities differed from the group's, and how he shaped them in the process of converting their stage show to a salable commodity. We get a glimpse of how his discipline was imposed upon them without stifling them, an incredible accomplishment.

Sequencing an album has at least some things in common with sequencing a show. Start big and end big are two important principles. If there is padding, put it in the middle where no one will notice or remember. Pace yourself, and make sure

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[6] *The Beatles Recording Sessions*, p. 24 (in addition to many others)

there is variety along the way. Make the best music stand out, and be careful where you place the hits (or, in this era, the *would-be* hits).

Paul's new song, "I Saw Her Standing There," opened both shows and the album, confirming that everyone agreed about its strength. It was even allowed to replace the expected opener, "Please Please Me," which had already been released as a single and would become the album's title track, defying conventional wisdom. Similarly, once "Twist and Shout" had been recorded, it was clear to Martin that that should be the big finish, though the Beatles themselves were not even performing it live at the time (that would change, of course).

The Beatles weren't quite sure what to do with their earlier single, "Love Me Do." In one set it's used to close the show, despite being a pretty lousy closer. Perhaps that is why it was used in the middle of the following show, with another, much more energetic rocker, "Long Tall Sally," closing things out. Martin placed it exactly in the middle of the album, albeit in a place of honor as the side two opener. Again, this was not the typical placement for a hit at that time.

Both shows put "Please Please Me" with "Three Cool Cats." Perhaps this is only incidental, but we do know that they were confident enough in the latter song to have used it in their Decca audition. Whether they proposed it for their debut album is not known, but it's hard to imagine Martin thinking that would be a good display of their abilities. Perhaps he remembered it from the failed demo.

Beyond these simple observations, the only other conclusion to be drawn is that neither setlist exhibits much in the way of discipline or polish. As we know, the group was riding on enthusiastic crowd reaction, which meant they could probably do no wrong. This contrasts vividly, however, with Martin's ultimate track sequence, which is a model of discipline in every way.

To fully understand what is happening on the album, we need to do a little x-ray exploration. Rather than consider it by song title, we will look at other important aspects of each song which will help understand why it may have been placed where it was. For example, consider the following x-ray of *Please Please Me* by song source:

Side A	**Side B**
1. Original	1. Original (single A-side)
2. Original	2. Original (single B-side)
3. Cover	3. Cover
4. Cover	4. Original ("internal" cover)
5. Cover	5. Cover
6. Original (single B-side)	6. Original
7. Original (single A-side)	7. Cover

We can clearly see that Martin has placed original songs in places of great importance, including the beginning of each side, and the end of side one. We can even suppose that he might have intended the same structure on side two, but wisely

6
Structure

> *The revolutionary new Columbia Long Playing (LP) Microgroove Record plays up to 45 minutes of music on one 12-inch record, or approximately six times as much music as conventional shellac records. After more than a decade of preparation, the world's greatest symphonies, concertos, tone poems and chamber music are now held in their entirety on one album-length record. Available, too, are sparkling collections of lighter music and popular songs, by leading artists.*
>
> — Columbia Record Catalog 1949[1]

Despite all of the detail packed into Mark Lewisohn's indispensable book, *The Beatles Recording Sessions*, there is hardly a word about how tracks were assembled and sequenced into albums. There are a few passing mentions of principles, such as this one from the final *Rubber Soul* mixing session:

> *Three more songs were needed… Balance was everything in 1965; a 13-song album was just not done.*[2] *Fourteen meant seven songs per side and everything hunky-dory.*[3]

Occasionally, he mentions that it was Martin who made many of the creative decisions until the Beatles became competent, engaged, and available to contribute. Again, for *Rubber Soul*:

> *On 16 November George Martin worked out the LP running order and telephoned it over to Abbey Road. … "It was the first album to present a new, growing Beatles to the world. For the first time we began to think of albums as art on their own, as complete entities."*[4]

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[1] Pg. 1; https://archive.org/details/columbiarecordca00unse_0

[2] Actually, the Beatles had already done it once with the 13-song *A Hard Day's Night* soundtrack, and would do it again with the 13-song *Sgt. Pepper*.

[3] *Recording Sessions*, pg. 68

[4] Ibid., pg 68, 69

Even when Lewisohn describes the mammoth 24-hour session which assembled *The White Album*, the subject receives only a relatively few words:

> *Even working in the tried and trusted George Martin formula of opening each side of vinyl with a strong song, and ending it with one difficult to follow, the 31 songs were just too varied and wide-ranging in styles to slip easily into categories. In the end…there was an* approximated *structure, the heavier rock songs…mostly ended up on side C, George Harrison's four songs were spread out one per side, no composer had more than two songs in succession and each side lasted between 20 and 25 minutes. And, as a joke, most of the songs with an animal in the title…were placed together, in succession, on side B.*
>
> *Another decision was to link each successive song, either with a crossfade, a straight edit or simply by matching the dying moment of one with the opening note of the next.* The Beatles*, like* Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band*, had none of the customary three-second gaps between songs.*[5]

Here we have a clear elucidation of some of the principles we observed at work in the earlier albums. They are worth extracting:

- Each side must open with a "strong" song.
- Each side must end with a song that is "difficult to follow."
- Grouping songs by style or theme or content is appropriate.
- Harrison's (and presumably Starr's) work should be distributed evenly.
- No composer gets more than two songs in a row.
- How songs relate to one another, or not, is artistic territory.
- Balance between sides is important.
- Each side lasts 20 to 25 minutes.

There's actually quite a lot there, but it feels like only a start. For something more elaborate, we can look to Martin's own comments elsewhere. He described some of his basic principles in an article from 1983 (emphasis added).

> *Once all the recording is finally complete there is an important task still remaining: all tracks need to be put into a running order (sequencing). This has a significant effect on the way a listener hears a record, particularly for the first time. Imagine starting the*

[5] Ibid., pg. 162

> Sgt. Pepper *album with "A Day In The Life;" there would be nothing left after the first track. We must* ***attract attention in the beginning, sustain interest in the middle, end the first side with a feeling of satisfaction yet leave the listener wanting more. The second side is similar, although the need for a good opening is not as great as on side one,*** *and* ***the finale should ideally clinch the whole album with its last notes****.*
>
> *One always tries to have a good number of single tracks in an album and if I had five tracks out of ten that I thought were hits I would probably place them at one, two, five, six and ten to get maximum effect. But, leaving commercial considerations aside,* ***the flow of the album is by far the most important factor****.*
>
> ***Distances between tracks, too, have to be considered.*** *Some pieces require a little silence before the following track starts. (Although in Jeff Beck's album* Blow by Blow *I deliberately chose to overlap the tracks with each other, running the album almost like a disc jockey to maintain the pace.)*
>
> *There is a final small consideration.* ***I try hard to make each side last the same amount of time*** *— as far as is possible. For one thing, keeping playing time down to* ***20 minutes per side*** *gives me a chance to make the record sound louder without distortion. Also, when that album is issued on cassette, an even running time avoids an embarrassing wait at the end of the tape for the "turn over" side to finish running — another commercial consideration.*[6]

Though this is still a rather brief and somewhat generic summary, we get some useful elaboration about techniques he did use with the Beatles.

1. The album opener must "attract attention."
2. The end of side one must provide "satisfaction," yet be less than ultimate.
3. The side two opener plays a role like the album opener, but less restricted.
4. The album closer is the "finale," and must "clinch the whole album."
5. Tracks in the middle of sides need only "sustain interest."
6. Commercial considerations do play a role in sequencing.
7. "Flow" is more important than commercial considerations.
8. Silence between tracks, or lack thereof, is a creative consideration.
9. Album sides should be of roughly equal length.
10. 20 minutes is about the right length for a side.

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[6] *Making Music*, p. 277

7
Facade

When it came to compiling the album, I tried to edit it together in a very tight format, and in a funny kind of way when I was editing it it almost grew by itself; it took on a life of its own.

— George Martin, regarding *Sgt. Pepper*[1]

When considered in chronological order, it becomes clear that the Beatles mastered the simple album form over their first five albums, coming out of the gate with surprisingly mature albums, due largely to Martin's depth of experience. Then they gave the form a nudge, a kick, and a shove over their next three albums, with their final two representing further explorations and variations on a theme.

Though it's widely acknowledged that the Beatles were pioneers in the overall movement toward albums as whole artistic works, other artists would take what they did and expand on it, ultimately reaching peaks that the Beatles did not. In truth, the Beatles only set the table for more ambitious projects to come. Perhaps their greatest gift to the form is the mere introduction of the idea that there could be such a thing as a "concept album." Though there are earlier examples of such a thing,[2] it wasn't until *Sgt. Pepper* that the world of popular music really started to think in such terms. Suddenly everyone wanted to do segues, eliminate banding, and create synergy between the music and the "look" of the album.

Yet, despite its reputation, *Sgt. Pepper* was more like a critical step toward more ambitious works than an actual realization of it. It introduced the language that many other artists would use, but itself had not much to say. Its success was built partially on the exceptional music, craftsmanship, and synchrony with the cultural moment, but the album reached a whole new level of success largely because of what it caused the audience to *believe* about it — that it was an integrated whole, and somehow greater than the sum of its parts. Obviously, there was at least some truth in this perception — one which endures over 50 years later — but it is instructive to pull at this thread a bit in service to the current project. We need to know *how* it was put together, and *why* that works.

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[1] *Summer of Love*, pg. 150

[2] Two Franks — Sinatra and Zappa — are credited with earlier examples of concept albums in pop music. Some suggest that Woody Guthrie invented the form in 1940.

To a degree, and from the very beginning, all albums have been "concept" albums. That is obvious if you accept that a "concept" is simply whatever unifies a collection of music — the reason for collecting the recordings together in the first place. Without concepts, no albums. The concept might be as simple as "music by the same composer," "songs by the same singer," or "songs about the same holiday." The concept of the first album ever, in 1909, was "Tchaikovsky's Nutcracker Suite." Even albums without any obvious concept always have one. The sampler disc which came with my first CD player[3] included a seemingly random collection of popular and classical music, but there was still an underlying concept: "This is what digital music sounds like."

In terms of concept, there was an obvious difference between *Sgt. Pepper* and what had come before. If the concept of earlier Beatles albums was, "Here are some songs by the Beatles," *Sgt. Pepper* added a layer which might be summed up as, "Here are some songs by the Beatles pretending to be another band putting on a psychedelic show." The reality, of course, is that this more elaborate concept informed just a small subset of the tracks during the recording process, and even then mostly through style — along with the sense of freedom that the artificial construct gave to the artists — rather than the actual content.

In reality, most of this "concept" was added in the process of assembly. The Beatles had recorded a collection of psychedelic set pieces — individual *tracks*, as always — but carefully assembled them into that famous whole by using essential bracketing material to create the illusion of integration. Even while acknowledging its outsized impact, and obvious status as a classic, this assessment now dominates critical thinking about the Beatles' most famous work, and has in some quarters from the moment of its release. For example, Richard Goldstein, reviewing the album for the *New York Times* in June of 1967, was not taken in:

> *The Beatles have shortened the "banding" between cuts so that one song seems to run into the next. This produces the possibility of a Pop symphony or oratorio, with distinct but related movements. Unfortunately, there is no apparent thematic development in the placing of cuts, except for the effective juxtapositions of opposing musical styles. At best, the songs are only vaguely related.*[4]

George Martin, far from denying this, knew all too well how it had been accomplished, and eventually discussed it openly. One short example:

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[3] The Technics SL-P2, 1985.

[4] Richard Goldstein, "We Still Need the Beatles, but …", *New York Times*, June 18, 1967

> *This reprise just about manages to convince us that we have been listening to a rounded and coherent performance, when we have in fact been listening to a series of little side-shows, each with its own distinct personality.*[5]

Ringo was more succinct, describing the album's tracks, and their relationship to the concept, from within the group:

> *...it was going to be a whole show, but after two tracks everybody started getting fed up and doing their own songs again.*[6]

John Lennon, famously hot and cold about the music of the Beatles, tended to come down cold on the idea that *Sgt. Pepper* had much of a concept:

> *When you get down to it, it was nothing more than an album called* Sgt. Pepper *with the tracks stuck together. ...what else is on it musically besides the whole concept of having tracks running into each other?*[7]

And on another occasion:

> Sgt. Pepper *is called the first concept album, but it doesn't go anywhere. All my contributions to the album have absolutely nothing to do with this idea of Sgt. Pepper and his band, but it works, because we said it worked, and that's how the album appeared. But it was not put together as it sounds, except for Sgt. Pepper introducing Billy Shears and the so-called reprise. Every other song could have been on any other album.*[8]

It is important to realize, however, that accepting this fact, and parsing just how they did it, reveals an even more astounding accomplishment than the album gets credit for. With such perilously slight thematic threads, the public perception was largely shaped and fueled by the title track, its remake, a few sound effects, three segues, the absence of silence, four costumes, four moustaches, and a set of iconic photographs.

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[5] *Summer of Love*, pg. 65
[6] Ibid., pg. 64
[7] *Anthology*, pg. 253
[8] *All We Are Saying*, pg. 197

April 1966-June 1966

Revolver

To see if we really understand how George Martin was working when creating album running orders, we will embark on three proof-of-concept projects before entering the Wild West of solo recordings. These are relatively safe projects, the goal of which is just practice, even if the results are interesting in some way.

For the first, we will start with the raw materials Martin had to work with when sequencing *Revolver*, and see if, by applying his principles, we come up with the same running order. Along the way, we may see some of the music a little differently, and hopefully understand why the album came out as it did.

This works as a proof-of-concept because there appears to be no documentation available anywhere describing how or why he made the decisions he did, nor is there any description of how involved the Beatles were. In this era, the Beatles themselves, though engaged in the recording process up to and including the sequencing, had many other things still on their plate, including preparation for their final tour, and all of the burgeoning furor about Lennon's interview with Maureen Cleave. By all accounts, they may have given their input, and even been present when decisions

APRIL 1967-MARCH 1968

Magic Myst

Introduction

Imagine that, while viewing the rushes for *Magical Mystery Tour*, someone in the Beatles' creative braintrust had told Paul, "I don't think this film is a good idea. Let's just put out a new album instead." At that point, they had quite a few tracks in the can, including all of the ones which were slated for the film plus a few more. The question this raises is whether there is another psychedelic masterpiece, a la *Sgt. Pepper*, just waiting to be assembled from parts that were available at that moment.

For our second proof-of-concept project, we will apply George Martin's assembly techniques to this collection of miscellaneous Beatles tracks that were recorded together, but never assembled into a complete album. The object is to get some practice with Martin's guidelines, and see what the attempt tells us about these tracks that might help explain why no such thing ever came about.

Recall that the vinyl releases associated with the film were well-received, but hardly worthy follow-ups to the magnum opus of the previous summer. Both were actually weak compromises.

In the UK, not wanting to gouge their fans or portray the music as on the same plane as *Sgt. Pepper*, the Beatles assembled and issued an innovative six-song double-EP, within a colorful and mysterious package. Despite their best efforts, it was a somewhat underwhelming release. It opened with the title track, but sort of trailed off at the end with "Blue Jay Way," feeling only half-finished.

In the US, marketing instincts prevailed, and a complete album was hobbled together, against the group's wishes. The double-EP's six tracks were placed on side one, and side two was a blank assembly of tracks from recent singles. Despite this dilution — fully six of the 11 tracks had been previously released — the album promptly went to number one.

From an assembly standpoint, it's interesting to note that the US and UK releases use different running orders for the new tracks. In fact, the booklet included with the double EP shows the lyrics in a different order from what was heard on the records. The US release follows the printed booklet, but the whole mess speaks to the disheveled nature of the product.

We will set both pseudo-assemblies aside and start anew.

Materials

For now, let's assume that they would have been aiming for a December 1967 release, at about the same time as the film eventually aired, if maybe a couple of weeks before that in order to make the Christmas gift-giving season. The list of materials available at that point would have looked like this:

January 1969-January 1970

January

Introduction

The Beatles' rehearsals and recording sessions of January 1969 may be the most misunderstood and unfairly maligned in their entire history. While it's undeniable that both the resulting album and film were disappointing, that isn't the fault of the songwriting, or singing, or playing — which are all uniformly excellent. Indeed, many of the finished songs are widely regarded as classics. It isn't the fault of the project's central concept, which even George Martin agreed was "a fantastic idea."[1] It isn't even the fault of the alleged "bad vibes," which people who were there, including Glyn Johns, say have been vastly overstated.

What is at fault, quite simply, is exceedingly poor assembly. For our third and final proof-of-concept project, we will collect the materials recorded in and around January of 1969 and attempt to apply George Martin's principles of assembly to the one Beatles album he never got to touch. As you might imagine, it turns out that there is a great album still waiting to be found in these tracks, and it will take Martin's techniques to bring it out.

Famously, the Beatles had set about making an album of them playing *together* like they had in the old days, and that's exactly what they did during the sessions. It worked remarkably well, and the resulting tracks sound like nothing else they had recorded in recent years. Though they initially thought they would rehearse and record the new songs live in front of an audience, that aspect wasn't really required to accomplish the underlying goal.

Unfortunately, there were actually *two* underlying goals, one held by Paul McCartney and the other held by John Lennon, which were subtly different and caused confusion throughout the project. Where Paul wanted the Beatles to record *like they used to* — i.e. playing together as a band — John wanted the Beatles to record *like they used to* — i.e. without excessive studio "trickery." It's a subtle, but crucial, distinction. To Paul, the project was about renewing camaraderie and rebuilding the old Beatle Magic. To John, the project was about a return to immediacy and "honesty" in recording. Though not exactly incompatible goals, the divergence haunts the project to this day.

It is what happened *after* the sessions ended, however, that truly doomed the music. Instead of polishing the recordings in mixing, and pushing toward the goal of creating a collection worthy of their name, the Beatles punted. They gave Glyn Johns two shots at doing the job for them, but he was caught between multiple charters —

[1] Indeed, it was an echo of his very first idea for recording the band, which did not come to pass, but would have involved transporting recording equipment to the Cavern Club in Liverpool in 1963.

yet another charter imposed the idea of showing the Beatles in the studio, "warts and all" — and assembled albums which met none.

Then they dumped it all on an outside producer who had no business trying to fix a broken Beatles project. Though conventional wisdom has it that Phil Spector "rescued" the *Get Back* project into *Let It Be*, that is obviously a dubious claim because almost all of his creative decisions were exactly wrong. He added inappropriate orchestrations, rushed through unskilled and insensitive mixing, retained unnecessary studio scruff, and sequenced the tracks in the worst way.

Further dooming the album in post-production, graphic designer John Kosh created funereal packaging that — somewhat intentionally — made the project feel like a tombstone.[2] Even the marketing hyperbole on the back cover touting the record as beginning a "new phase" reads like an excuse, doing no favors to the music.

Perhaps worst of all, Michael Lindsay-Hogg and his editing team turned the documentary film into an elegy for a band which had not, in fact, broken up. Indeed, his rough edit of the film, which the group screened together in July of 1969, may have actually helped push them over the edge.

What they might have done instead with the album is what they actually did with two of its singles. Paul McCartney and Glyn Johns polished the rooftop recording of "Get Back" until it shone like a diamond. No one who bought that single would have ever guessed the conditions under which it was recorded. Later, George Martin and the engineers at Abbey Road applied their considerable skills to "Let It Be," retroactively supplying the typical Beatle sheen to a track recorded live in a wild studio still under construction. In each case, the versions released as singles sound nothing like Spector's later, clumsy mixes, and demonstrate that respectability for the individual *Get Back* tracks was only ever a careful remix away.

Better mixes alone, however, would not have resulted in better assembly. For that, we need to engage the artist who knew the Beatles best, and how to get the most out of everything they recorded.

Materials

Though the Beatles famously recorded snippets of many, many songs during the sessions in January 1969, the vast majority were never considered candidates to make the final album. As they jammed, however, the Beatles gradually began to identify songs which were original, complete, and good enough to work on. These nine titles will form the core of our materials list, and are discernible from the set list for the rooftop concert, together with related studio sessions.

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[2] "Beatles Art Director on Secrets of the 'Abbey Road' Cover" David Browne, *Rolling Stone*, August 9, 2019

In order to guarantee George Harrison a presence on the project, his 12-bar blues original, "For You Blue," was plucked from an earlier session. Alas, no equivalent track exists for Ringo.

The *Get Back* Nine

B-192 "Dig a Pony" (John)
B-189 "Don't Let Me Down" (John)
B-185 "For You Blue" (George)
B-188 "Get Back" (Paul)
B-190 "I've Got a Feeling" (John/Paul)
B-193 "Let It Be" (Paul)
B-187 "The Long and Winding Road" (Paul)
B-191 "One After 909" (John/Paul)
B-194 "Two of Us" (Paul)

Altogether, however, those nine tracks total only about 30 minutes of music — really not enough for a full album in 1969. This problem, compounded at one point by the removal of "Don't Let Me Down" for use as a B-side, beset all attempts to turn the material into a full album, and resulted in the unfortunate addition of obvious padding in each version.

The *Get Back* Scruff

"Dig It"
"Get Back (Reprise)"
"Maggie Mae"
"Rocker"
"Save the Last Dance for Me"
"Teddy Boy" (demo)

Working from Martin's playbook, we will resolve not to use anything which smacks of filler, eliminating all of this scruff from consideration. Further, recognizing that crispness and polish would best serve this particular collection of recordings, Martin would have insisted that this not be some sort of *audio vérité* document of the sessions, but scrubbed to perfection. As such, all of the studio banter would have been removed without hesitation.

Helping things is the fact that the filmmakers eventually identified two additional songs which would be featured in the film, and asked that they also be featured on the album. This adds the significant tracks, "Across the Universe" and "I Me Mine," to the pool.[3] Now, with 11 tracks available, we have about 36 minutes of music — enough in minutes, but still a little light in tracks. The Beatles clearly could have gotten away with this, but two more tracks became available before the album would have been assembled.

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[3] In this experiment, we are disregarding the proofs-of-concept, *Magic Myst* and *Flying*.

The stellar single "Ballad of John and Yoko," backed with "Old Brown Shoe," was recorded in mid-April 1969, and though neither track was part of the *Get Back* project, they are both simpatico with the tone of the material.

If we wanted to look further, there are many other songs referenced in the movie which might be considered. But this needlessly complicates things. This is enough music, and the right music, for the project which they undertook in January of 1969. So the assembly begins with this list:

B-150 "Across the Universe" (John)
B-195 "The Ballad of John and Yoko" (John)
B-192 "Dig a Pony" (John)
B-189 "Don't Let Me Down" (John)
B-185 "For You Blue" (George)
B-188 "Get Back" (Paul)
B-212 "I Me Mine" (John)
B-190 "I've Got a Feeling" (John/Paul)
B-193 "Let It Be" (Paul)
B-187 "The Long and Winding Road" (Paul)
B-197 "Old Brown Shoe" (George)
B-191 "One After 909" (John/Paul)
B-194 "Two of Us" (Paul)

Not a bad collection at all, and even a cursory glance at the lyric sheets for these songs reveals a pretty clear theme: comings, goings, movement, travel, pathways, wandering, restlessness, seeking, and even disorientation.

"I'm traveling on that line..."
"I'd hate to miss the train...All these years I've been wandering around..."
"Get back to where you once belonged..."
"You can penetrate any place you go..."
"...so glad you came here..."
"The long and winding road...will never disappear"
"Two of us riding nowhere... Two of us Sunday driving..."
"On our way back home...We're going home."
"You and I have memories longer than the road that stretches out ahead..."
"Caught the early train back to London..."
"They call me on and on... They tumble blindly as they make their way..."

Though certainly not a robust "concept" for an album, it is an important undercurrent running through everything, which might be used in some way as a unifier. Indeed, the month in which the bulk of this album was recorded is named after Janus, the Roman god of doors, transitions and new beginnings.

Assembly

No less than four attempts have been made to turn this material into something worthy of the Beatle brand — five if you count the second disc of *Anthology 3*. None of them really works, and for good reasons.

Get Back/Let It Be Versions

Get Back (1) Glyn Johns, May 1969	***Get Back*** (2) Glyn Johns, Jan 1970	***Let It Be*** Phil Spector, May 1970	***Let It Be...Naked*** Paul McCartney, Nov 2003
Side One 1. “One After 909” 2. “Rocker” 3. “Save the Last Dance...” 4. “Don't Let Me Down” 5. “Dig a Pony” 6. “I've Got a Feeling” 7. “Get Back”	**Side One** 1. “One After 909” 2. “Rocker” 3. “Save the Last Dance...” 4. “Don't Let Me Down” 5. “Dig a Pony” 6. “I've Got a Feeling” 7. “Get Back” 8. “Let It Be”	**Side One** 1. “Two of Us” 2. “Dig a Pony” 3. “Across the Universe” 4. “I Me Mine” 5. “Dig It” 6. “Let It Be” 7. “Maggie Mae”	**Side One** 1. “Get Back” 2. “Dig a Pony” 3. “For You Blue” 4. “Long and Winding...” 5. “Two of Us” 6. “I've Got a Feeling”
Side Two 1. “For You Blue” 2. “Teddy Boy” 3. “Two of Us” 4. “Maggie Mae” 5. “Dig It” 6. “Let It Be” 7. “Long and Winding...” 8. “Get Back (Reprise)”	**Side Two** 1. “For You Blue” 2. “Two of Us” 3. “Maggie Mae” 4. “Dig It” 5. “Long and Winding...” 6. “I Me Mine” 7. “Across the Universe” 8. “Get Back (Reprise)”	**Side Two** 1. “I've Got a Feeling” 2. “One After 909” 3. “Long and Winding...” 4. “For You Blue” 5. “Get Back”	**Side Two** 1. “One After 909” 2. “Don't Let Me Down” 3. “I Me Mine” 4. “Across the Universe” 5. “Let It Be”
	Drops: “Teddy Boy” **Adds:** “I Me Mine” “Across the Universe”	**Drops:** “Rocker” “Save the Last Dance...” “Don’t Let Me Down”	**Restores:** “Don’t Let Me Down” **Drops:** “Dig It” “Maggie Mae”
Running time: 42:26 Music: 28:52 Chatter: 3:35 Filler 9:59	Running time: 43:58 Music: 33:48 Chatter: 3:47 Filler 6:23	Running time: 34:42 Music: 32:00 Chatter: 1:21 Filler 1:21	Running time: 34:58 Music: 34:58 Chatter: — Filler —

Our Assembler begins by discarding any notion of *audio vérité*. All of the studio chatter will be removed, and these tracks will be polished extensively to sound finished and wholly professional. Care in mixing can mitigate a lot of sins.

This can and would be done with integrity, in the same way the “Get Back” and “Let It Be” singles were polished. No rules about overdubbing or studio “trickery” need to be broken — beyond the degree to which they already were by the Beatles themselves. Remember that the “no overdubs” policy was always somewhat tongue-in-cheek, and broken by the Beatles on multiple tracks.

Second, the running order will adhere to the strict principles George Martin has always used for the Beatles. The curiously disappointing *Let It Be…Naked* demonstrates plainly that merely scrubbing the tracks of Spector's work and remixing them in the same "warts and all" manner does not eliminate the problems. It inadvertently confirms yet again that sequencing matters.

This assembly starts, like all others, with an attempt to locate the proper pole tracks. This isn't really as hard as the project's reputation would suggest. Truth be told, there is only one track in this collection which can reasonably be considered an opener, and Glyn Johns found it: "One After 909." It is upbeat, optimistic, and features strong vocal and instrumental performances from everyone involved. It also features John and Paul singing lead together, which had become a rarity by this point, but is always a delight. The song also has the advantage of provenance, being a remake of a song from their earliest days. It makes a wonderful first sound for the album, better than anything else on the list.

Further, if the album is generally to be about beginnings and endings, openings and closings, and movement from one place to another — which the lyrics strongly suggest — then there could hardly be a better choice of opener than a song about train travel written in their pre-Fab days. It properly sets the stage for the "concept" which will inhabit the album.

Three tracks present themselves as potential album closers. "The Long and Winding Road" has the benefit of sentiment, but would leave a too-sticky feeling here, just as it does at the end of the "blue" greatest hits package. It is definitely good enough to be a pole track, and does contain a sense of closure, so we will slot it instead at the end of side one. "Let It Be" has a strong enough anthemic quality, and does come to a real close (rather than a fade), but isn't especially hard to follow. As the closer of *Let It Be…Naked*, it leaves the album feeling incomplete. But, like many McCartney tracks, "Let It Be" is very versatile, and could work in many different spots in the sequence. We will hold that one out for the time being.

Instead, to close the album properly, we will turn to the one track that *is* difficult to follow, being grand in scope but plaintive in quality, while also arguably the most substantial work on the album. Though perhaps not as obvious a choice for album closer as "A Day in the Life" was, "Across the Universe" has a mystical quality which drifts off dreamily at the end, beautifully symbolizing the ultimate motion — from somewhere to everywhere. The sound of birds taking flight, from the original mix by George Martin, makes the perfect send-off, a realization of all the talk of movement.

Glyn Johns also realized the value of this track, and placed it as the penultimate song on his second version of the album. Regrettably, he followed it with a sloppy "reprise" of "Get Back" that muted its effect, but he at least got partway there. His line-up might have been improved if he had taken a lesson from Martin and moved the reprise to *before* Lennon's powerful closer, as on *Sgt. Pepper*. But that earlier

reprise was a tight restatement of the album's central theme, performed in a different fashion. This one is just more of the same. It adds nothing, while also being overly sloppy. It is best left in the can.

As we look for the remaining pole track, the opener for side two, it's worth noting that "I Me Mine" is a classic "problem" track, in that it will require the most careful placement of any song on the album. Wherever it ends up, it will have a large effect on the tracks which surround it, and poor placement will yield undesirable results. This is not to say that it is in some way a "lesser" track, which is clearly not the case, but its sentiments are tricky. It has the potential to sour whatever it follows, and certainly will at least *frame* whatever follows it — unless the following track can serve as a direct response.

In Phil Spector's formulation, "I Me Mine" sours a wasted "Across the Universe" in the dead space at the middle of side one. He then uses a piece of light filler to provide some distance from what follows, which could then be just about anything. We will pick up on something Spector teed up but missed.

If you simply remove "Dig It" from between the two tracks, you discover something miraculous. "Let It Be" is essentially the perfect response to "I Me Mine," while also being in a relative key.[4] The resulting segue makes an incredible moment of heightened tension followed by welcome release. Each track gains strength.

But the problem of how to set up "I Me Mine" remains, and there is no good solution. Since it is strong enough to be a pole track, not right to open the album, and would benefit from some space between it and whatever precedes it, we will slot it in as the opener for side two, with Paul's masterwork in tow. This solves the problem nicely, and also allows some essential space after "The Long and Winding Road."

1A. One After 909 (J/P) . . . **1Z. Long and Winding Road (P)**	Ballad of John and Yoko (J) Dig a Pony (J) Don't Let Me Down (J) For You Blue (G) Get Back (P) I've Got a Feeling (J/P) Old Brown Shoe (G) Two of Us (P)
2A. I Me Mine (G) **2B. Let It Be (P)** . . . **2Z. Across the Universe (J)**	

Next, we turn to ways to extend the album opener and set up the two closers.

Only one track is entirely simpatico with the album's opener. "I've Got a Feeling" also features John and Paul singing lead together, albeit in a variation they have never used before: singing two different but intertwined melodies simultaneously.

[4] The A minor of "I Me Mine" to the C Major of "Let It Be."

Happily, the track's loose feel makes a nice contrast to the tightness of "One After 909." It also can lead us right to another track which extends the feel, namely Paul's "Get Back" — which happens to be in the same key. The three songs together find the Lennon/McCartney songwriting team at both ends of their joint career, something which was clearly on their mind, based on their choice of cover photo for *Get Back*.

Setting up our selected closer turns out to be more difficult. Nothing jumps out of the list, and it's actually better to move on than try to solve this now.

Properly setting up "The Long and Winding Road" requires some care. Whatever it is must be, at least in some way, the absolute opposite. It cannot be weepy, or even pensive, and also must be faster. This eliminates "Don't Let Me Down" and "Two of Us." It should not be another Paul song, but something at least reasonably close in concept, to avoid a too-jarring transition. Only one track really fits these parameters, and happily it is John's own long and winding travelogue, "The Ballad of John and Yoko," which works very well in that spot.

After the heavy one-two punch that begins side two, something light is in order. Of the remaining tracks, "For You Blue" is the best to fit that bill.

1A. One After 909 (J/P) **1B. I've Got a Feeling (J/P)** **1C. Get Back (P)** . . . **1Y. Ballad of John and Yoko (J)** 1Z. Long and Winding Road (P)	Dig a Pony (J) Don't Let Me Down (J) Old Brown Shoe (G) Two of Us (P)
2A. I Me Mine (G) 2B. Let It Be (P) **2C. For You Blue (G)** . . . 2Z. Across the Universe (J)	

This leaves us with two holes in the running order, and four songs with which to fill them. Believe it or not, there are only a couple of ways that these four tracks can be configured that will actually show each in its best light.

"Dig a Pony" can't really be paired very well with either "Two of Us" or "Don't Let Me Down." Frankly, it sounds too random next to either of these, whether before or after. But it sits remarkably well next to "Old Brown Shoe," a song that manages to resonate by virtue of a sort of shared randomness. So we split these four tracks into two pairs:

"Dig a Pony" / "Old Brown Shoe"
"Don't Let Me Down" / "Two of Us"

A quick listen shows that the first of these pairs belongs on side one, and the other on side two. Indeed, though they have been listed alphabetically for consideration, it turns out they are in the perfect order already.

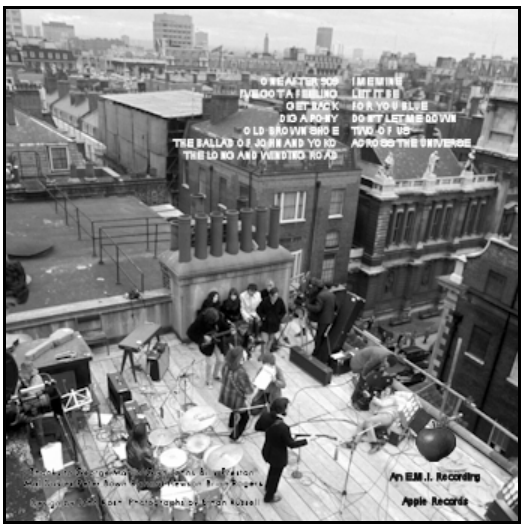
1A.	One After 909 (J/P)
1B.	I've Got a Feeling (J/P)
1C.	Get Back (P)
1M.	**Dig a Pony (J)**
1N.	**Old Brown Shoe (G)**
1Y.	Ballad of John and Yoko (J)
1Z.	Long and Winding Road (P)

2A.	I Me Mine (G)
2B.	Let It Be (P)
2C.	For You Blue (G)
2M.	**Don't Let Me Down (J)**
2N.	**Two of Us (P)**
2Z.	Across the Universe (J)

Despite the way it came together, with some positions filled based on what remained, this running order meets all of Martin's requirements. There is strength and high quality in all of the pole positions. Followers and setups genuinely resonate with their partners. Relatively weaker music is found in the middle of each side, and the overall flow was well-served by each decision. With that, this proves the smoothest and most satisfying assembly of this music yet.

January

Principle Recording: January 1969 - January 1970
Release: February 1970



Side One

1. One After 909 (Lennon/McCartney)
2. I've Got a Feeling (Lennon/McCartney)
3. Get Back (Lennon/McCartney)
4. Dig a Pony (Lennon/McCartney)
5. Old Brown Shoe (Harrison)
6. The Ballad of John and Yoko (Lennon/McCartney)
7. The Long and Winding Road (Lennon/McCartney)

Side Two

1. I Me Mine (Harrison)
2. Let It Be (Lennon/McCartney)
3. For You Blue (Harrison)
4. Don't Let Me Down (Lennon/McCartney)
5. Two of Us (Lennon/McCartney)
6. Across the Universe (Lennon/McCartney)

Make It Yourself

Total Running Time: 42:10

Tk	Rill	Title	Source	Dur
C3-A1	—	One After 909	[1]	2:43
C3-A2	0	I've Got a Feeling	[2]	3:27
C3-A3	0	Get Back	[3]	3:12
C3-A4	2.0	Dig a Pony	[2]	3:34
C3-A5	1.0	Old Brown Shoe	[3]	3:16
C3-A6	1.2	Ballad of John and Yoko	[3]	2:57
C3-A7	1.0	Long and Winding Road	[4]	3:41
			Total:	22:53

Tk	Rill	Title	Source	Dur
C3-B1	—	I Me Mine	[2]	2:24
C3-B2	0	Let It Be	[3]	3:50
C3-B3	1.7	For You Blue	[2]	2:26
C3-B4	1.0	Don't Let Me Down	[3]	3:32
C3-B5	0	Two of Us	[2]	3:03
C3-B6	(19.0)	Across the Universe	[5]	3:58
			Total:	19:17

[1] *Get Back*, chatter removed
[2] *Let It Be*, chatter removed
[3] *Past Masters, Volume Two*
[4] *Anthology 3*
[5] *Past Masters, Volume Two*, track 13, original speed restored (104% to D Major)

NOTE: Descriptions of edits and crossfades, with sample audio, are available at **SaveTheBeatles.com**.

Discussion

When you listen to the individual tracks recorded by the Beatles in and around January of 1969, *you just can tell* that it should have made a really good album. They tried a new way of working, and it really *worked*. It created yet another new sound for the group — nothing like they had ever sounded before, and yet still wholly *Beatles*. The songs are uniformly very high quality, and there are genuine masterworks present from John, Paul and George.

The travesty of *Let It Be* and all of the other versions, therefore, is that they turn such great material into such lousy albums. When this is the case, you have to look to assembly as the explanation. Beyond the running order, this includes packaging, promotion, photography, and a host of other elements — tangible and intangible. It all conspired to torpedo this project. The Beatles are at fault for letting it happen, but they had different fish to fry.

So they can be excused for thinking that Spector had worked a miracle. Their expectations were so low that almost anything he did would have exceeded them. Lennon actually alluded to this in his famous assessment of the album in his 1970 *Rolling Stone* interview. After declaring that Spector "made something" out of the tapes, he inadvertently revealed his low level of expectation: "When I heard it, I didn't puke." As a result, they simply couldn't see how badly Spector had whiffed.

In contrast, what becomes obvious with a running order based on George Martin's principles, and the prospect of better packaging and promotion, is that there has always been a great album hiding there, waiting to be brought out. *January* allows all of the great work to get its due, and allows the Beatles to be who they wanted to be when they started recording on the project. By removing the veil of bad assembly, we hear just how much fun this album must have been to make, and how much serious thought is hovering just beneath the surface.

The opening trifecta sets a beautiful table. The three songs form a mini-suite that isn't too precious and probably would have even satisfied Lennon. It is three great songs strung together that sound stronger in each other's company than they ever could scattered throughout the album. They feature John and Paul writing together and singing together, and establish clearly that this is not some tossed-off product — which would surely have *disappointed* Lennon, who really wanted to break the mystique. (Yes, he would have been satisfied and disappointed simultaneously.)

When the first rill comes, the Beatles shift gears, and make their way down a fascinatingly long and winding road, four tracks that build in strength, while never sounding too serious. The result is a lift to McCartney's ballad, which otherwise always sounds too weepy. Here its weepiness is mitigated by the jaunty song which sets it up. It feels like an *appropriate* response which resonates well with Lennon's travelogue. The side ends with a wistfulness that, in context, doesn't sound maudlin.

With the flip of the disc, George's micro-masterpiece offers some vitriol, but not without justification. The track would always be hard to swallow, but in other formulations it brings the album to a halt. Here it sets up a tension which is immediately and thoroughly released by Paul's anthem, in a way which acknowledges that the beefs are valid, but that there are other options for response. George's fun 12-bar number then demonstrates a tacit agreement with Paul, one that sounds even more pleasantly light after two heavy pieces.

But then, after all this, the album veers into its most significant territory. "Don't Let Me Down" was completely wasted by relegating it to a B-side. It is a powerful song, performed powerfully by the band on the rooftop, a lament that is as pure as John Lennon ever wrote. When the emotions settle, we find McCartney sidling up alongside him to tell a little story which serves as a reassurance of sorts. In this context, "Two of Us" sounds wistful and sad, while never going too deep into melancholy. Its evocation of remembering and traveling along the road together frees John, allowing "Across the Universe" to shine in a way it never has before. In closing the album, it sounds like a statement for the ages, immune from the usual criticisms. In one way it sounds like a Beatles throwback to an earlier incarnation, and in another it sounds unlike anything else they ever recorded, a feature which is hard to recognize anywhere else it is found.

Because *January* is free of the chatter and scruffiness, it highlights the fact that these tracks sound like *group* tracks, and this album like a *group* album, in a way that even *Abbey Road* does not. There is a very palpable sense throughout of the four Beatles sitting in a studio *together*, face to face, playing and singing simultaneously, pounding out this material, applying their considerable abilities to songs which they may have thought, deep down, might not be worth it. (If they thought that, they were wrong.) They soldier on, incredibly hard-working studio artists that they were, and give their all to the material, which deserves proper contextualization, and comes to life once it gets it.

The effort pays off because of the unique combination of high quality songs and this playing *together* — on the soundstage, in the studio, and on the rooftop. These tracks, when you can listen without all of the heavy subtext found in other incarnations, are a revelation in this regard, and the act of getting this group to play together again is the real fruit of McCartney's original idea, accomplishing John's slightly different goal at the same time. Not only do they rely very little on studio "trickery," they sound like the old camaraderie has truly been reanimated.

George Martin's principles, though hardly foolproof, gives us a window into how the Beatles worked, and how much they had going for them outside of all their talent, intelligence, good looks and charm. What *January* really shows is that learning from Martin is essential to understanding the Beatles, and we can now see that it has the potential to rescue even more difficult collections of music.

11
Fusion

If people need the Beatles so much, all they have to do is to buy each [solo] album and make it — put it on tape, track by track, one of me, one of Paul, one of George, one of Ringo, if they really need it that much. Because otherwise the music is just the same only on separate albums. And it's far better music.

John Lennon, October 25, 1971[1]

Recall the three main issues which haunted the solo Beatle output in the 70s: Lack of Beatle Magic, dilution and contextualization. The first of those is utterly beyond repair since the four Beatles never played together again. Indeed, they were never again even in the same room. We cannot retroactively sprinkle Beatle Magic onto individual tracks, like pepper onto a salad.

Maybe someday someone will invent an algorithm that allows us to hear what solo George might have played on "My Love," or how Paul's bass and backup vocals might have lifted "Imagine" to yet another level. Or maybe similar software could give us Ringo drumming on "This Guitar (Can't Keep from Crying)," or John writing a saving counterpoint for "Morse Moose and the Grey Goose." If that were to happen, it would certainly be fascinating, but not in any way a reanimation of the group's special chemistry. That is gone. Forever.

Amazingly, however, we *can* address the other two deficiencies, and in doing so, potentially generate a *new* type of Beatle Magic. We can remove the dilution altogether, by just dropping the tracks which are not of sufficient *Beatle Quality*. We can also create better contextualizations by using what we now know of George Martin's album assembly techniques. In this way, we have the potential to genuinely reanimate the interplay at a meta level, allowing them to elevate one another from afar, and avoiding the need to get them back together in the studio.

As noted at the outset, the rescued Beatles albums, or what might be better called *fused* albums, are actually hiding in plain sight. This is not a new idea. Many fans — perhaps *most* — have thought this at one point or another. But finding and rescuing them is not nearly as simple as throwing the greatest hits, or even just your favorite tracks, together. Go ahead and do that for your own personal listening pleasure, but it is a far cry from considering and applying the techniques and sensibilities used by

[1] *The Beatles Tapes from the David Wigg Interviews*

George Martin and the Beatles to try and divine a glimpse of what *they* might have done. For that, much more is needed.

Obviously, a glimpse is all we can hope for. We can never know for sure what they might have done. There are too many variables, and *we* are not *them*. Since predicting the Beatles in the 60s would have confounded anyone who tried, it's reasonable to assume the same about the 70s. They certainly would have surprised us, and it's impossible to discern surprises they never thought up.

There is, however, a reasonably good chance that even if they had been collaborating on some level, the imagined Beatles of the 70s would have written many of the same songs that the former Beatles actually did. Certainly not all. Some were born out of difficulties they wouldn't have had, and would disappear from a slightly altered narrative. Likewise, different circumstances would no doubt have brought about other songs which, in the real world, didn't get written. But we will assume, for the most part, that the songs they actually wrote would likely still have been written, and probably on roughly the same schedule. That's all we have to work with.

As far as putting them together into albums, once again we can only speculate. But we can use close observation, along with the existing documentation as enumerated in the previous chapters, to help us learn their techniques and make an *educated guess* at what they might have done. We should get something which can give us at least a hint, and maybe more. While, at heart, this is mostly just a fun guessing game, it is much more fun when you learn everything you can from what they actually did, and *try to think like them*. Impossible? Yes, of course. Worthy of our time? Indeed, yes.

Narrative

In order for us to imagine that the Beatles might have continued working together in 1970, we also have to imagine that something changed. The parameters and sequence of the breakup are well-known, and most observers agree that a moment of no return was reached only when Paul announced the schism on April 10, 1970. Before that, the rift was private, and potentially still resolvable. After that, all were hardened into their corners.

Not that there wasn't still hope, even then. Both George Harrison and George Martin were quoted later as saying the Beatles were expected to record together again very soon. John Lennon was famous for recanting past statements and decisions, even those that were harsh and seemed absolute. But Paul's announcement resulted in a media frenzy, despondency among the fanbase, and a variety of emotions among the band members, including relief. Once out of the bottle, that genie could not be recalled or reigned.

October 1969-October 1970

Dream

Introduction

At Christmas of 1970, you could have purchased five very different Beatle-related solo albums as gifts for your favorite Beatle fan. That's a lot of music to sort through. How would you decide? Just go with your favorite Beatle? Trust the reviewers? Buy the album for the single you liked on the radio? The one with the coolest cover? Buy them all — at a significant cost?

What if, instead, there had been a double album by the Beatles available that Christmas? Would you have cared that it was recorded differently?

Indeed, you might not have realized that anything was different. This first *real* fused Beatles album would have felt warm and familiar in some places, and yet different enough in others to tell you that something new was afoot. But that much had been true for *all* Beatles albums. The Beatles of the 70s would have been *expected* to sound different from the Beatles of the 60s.

The album most certainly would have sold in the many millions — likely more than the combined sales of those five solo albums.[1] Even if it didn't, by some weird chance, outsell them, it would have trounced them all artistically. The individual former Beatles said many times in interviews that money could not motivate them to stay together or reunite, but the music might. So, despite their *Anthology*-era reversal on that, the argument for creating this album isn't really about record sales. It's about the fact that the combined album actually produces a better representation of who the four artists were, individually and collectively, at that moment.

Even in our slightly altered narrative, this album would have been assembled at a very tense moment, and the participation of all parties would have been difficult to obtain. Yet it is an undeniable fact that, despite what was happening *between* the band members, all four Beatles made plenty of music in the 12 months following the completion of *Abbey Road* — a total of seven full platters of 12-inch vinyl. There were more than enough finished recordings for multiple projects, solo and group.

If this collection of recordings had been handed to our Assembler for curation, he would have been forgiven for tossing up his hands in dismay. But once he started listening and culling, he would have quickly realized that there was actually far too much great material here to fit on a single album. Indeed, it would once again take a double album just to accommodate the great stuff. And unlike its double-album predecessor from 1968, the filler could have been kept out completely, with plenty of *usable* songs still available for solo projects when all was said and done.

Entering this world of music is a little like following Alice into the rabbit hole or, as the Beatles themselves once imagined, stepping into Nora's multilayered

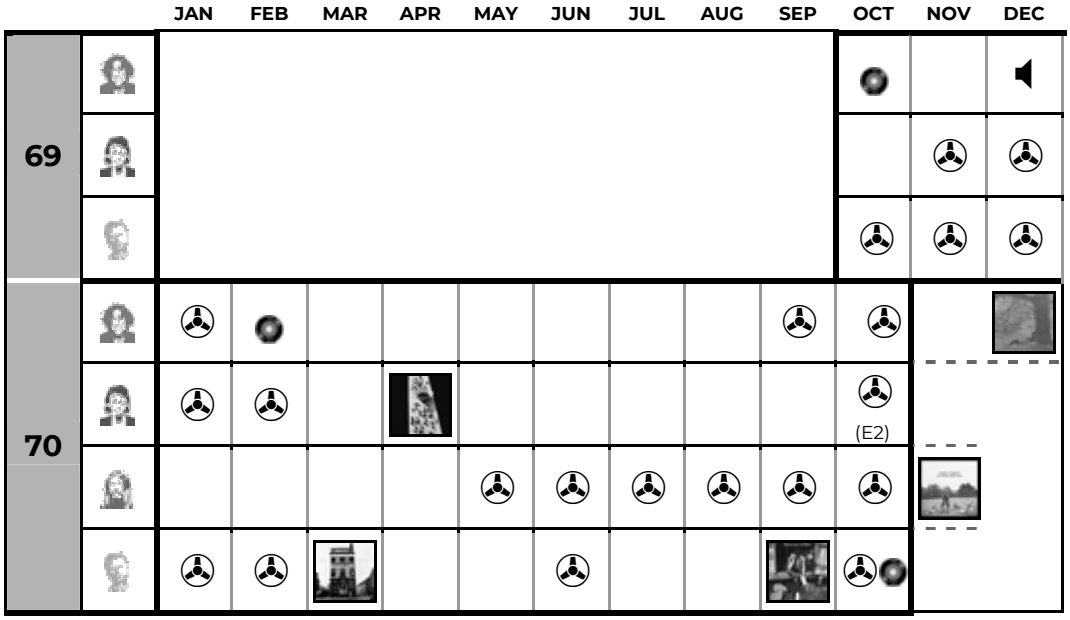
[1] Reportedly somewhere around 5 million altogether. See Appendix IV, *Certified Sales*, for more on how sales numbers are calculated and used in this book.

dollhouse. There are certainly many curiosities, unexpected twists, and a general sense of disorientation. Frightening moments coexist with the comic and absurd. But when you finally emerge, a mysterious sense of something special — a sense of wonder — hangs in the air.

Recording

October 1969 - October 1970

Studio Recording Concert(s) Single Release



Shortly after John Lennon's private revelation that he was quitting the band, which came on September 20, 1969, Richard Starkey became the first Beatle to officially begin work on a non-experimental solo album. Encouraged by his bandmates to have a go at a collection of standards, he engaged George Martin to oversee the project. Martin, in turn, recruited a veritable who's-who of arrangers — Quincy Jones, Maurice Gibb, Elmer Bernstein, Klaus Voorman and even Paul McCartney — to create a vehicle for the Beatle most likely to need a little help from… experts. When released the following March, *Sentimental Journey* became the first proper solo studio album from a former Beatle.

It sold quickly at first, on the strength of Ringo's name alone, but made only a fleeting appearance on the charts. Sales of the lightly-promoted album plummeted as fans realized that it bore little in common with Beatles records. It became very clear, perhaps even during the sessions, that this was not the right path for Ringo's solo career.

November 1970-September 1971

Beggars in a Gold Mine

Introduction

After the presumed (essentially guaranteed) success of a first real fused album, we are left with a series of pressing questions: Would the Beatles be willing to work together this way again? How would this type of collaboration affect the business dealings? Would such projects heal old wounds, make things worse, or change nothing? Would they replace solo albums, or somehow coexist with them? Would the fans keep coming back to future releases like this with the same enthusiasm?

These are all unanswerable questions, of course. But for our purposes here, we will make a couple of assumptions. First, the fans would have been relieved and pleased and spent money with an abandon approximating previous group releases. Second, the record company would have been happy with the flowing cash, easing some of the business stresses.

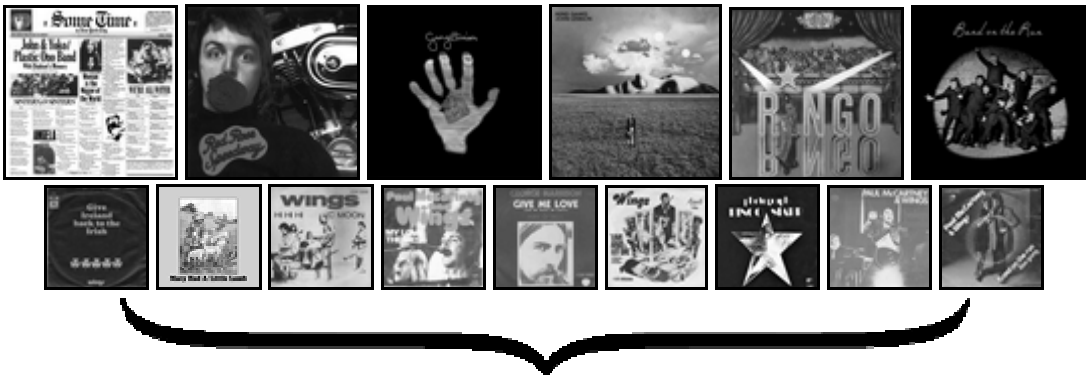
Third, within the band, some tensions would have been relieved, but others might have arisen. The studio sparring would have been avoided by simply working with other musicians. For the moment, Paul would have been satisfied to work on his own, but as the one who most enjoyed being a Beatle in the studio, that satisfaction would not (and in fact, did not) last long. John would have enjoyed the freedom from pressures and expectations that hovered over group sessions, but likely also been frustrated that some of his work — including at least one masterwork — didn't see the light of day. George would have been delighted not to be a session musician for Paul — despite having adopted that role with a number of other artists, including the two other former Beatles, during this era. More importantly, he would have been happy that his songs received the respect they deserved. Ringo would have been relieved to still have a standing gig, but also started to recognize the need to diversify since so many Beatle-related sessions were now using other drummers. Given less pressure, though, he might have avoided his worst missteps of the era.

In 1971, the reality of bona fide solo albums would have become an issue. Three of the four Beatles would have had significant material left off of *Dream*. Though embryonic solo projects had been trickling out since 1968, the new and obvious abundance of music would have created an unproductive glut on the market if all four artists released at will, competing head-to-head with one another and the group — which we know because it actually happened. In addition to working out procedures for creating the new group albums, this would have been the time when managing the release schedule became an ongoing issue. We can easily imagine the old theme of inter-group competition emerging with new variations.

Still, a new paradigm might also have emerged, whereby solo releases were slotted in the first nine months of the year, with a group project being the goal for the major holiday sales season. Indeed, the first of these might have been the imagined *My Sweet Lord* album made from George's leftovers (see the previous

October 1971-November 1973

Be Here Now



Introduction

Even in our imagined and slightly altered reality, 1973 would have been the tenth anniversary of the Beatles' first number one hit in the UK. This means that, even if the group was collaborating on some level, the bootleggers would still have brought out the unauthorized compilations for the anniversary if the group didn't. There would have been no choice but to match them.

As we know, that's exactly what happened, and it meant that, like it or not, the solo Beatles spent this era making music in the long shadows of their former selves even more directly than usual. Though the proposition of this ghostly competition was probably quite daunting, the end result was almost entirely positive on many levels. The two official double album retrospectives ("red" and "blue") sold like the old days, banishing the bootleggers, and all of the solo projects of the era got positive bumps as a result.

Since there was clearly not enough new music for a group album in 1972, we will assume that the retrospectives, or something very similar, would have been part of the altered landscape late in the year to fill that gap. Since we can safely assume they would have sold just as well then, perhaps even better, and filled everyone's coffers nicely, it's fair to wonder what motivation the Beatles might have had to come together again for another group project. The answer is surprisingly simple: They all *hated* nostalgia.

None of the Beatles ever wanted to coast on — or even be reminded of — what had gone before. They discarded it, discounted it, dismissed it, almost as if they wished it had never happened. John Lennon, particularly, expressed disdain for all the work of the past. It all sounded "old" to him, and even "dishonest." Only what he was doing *right now* held any value to him.[1] The others were all quoted with variations on, "We aren't dead yet!" If nothing else, they all wanted to move on. In an irony that would not have been lost on a real life Sergeant Pepper, they were unwilling to be harnessed as objects of gauzy nostalgia.

But the overwhelming success of the greatest hits albums might have brought them together for that specific reason: to create a sufficiently forceful response. They needed to say to the world, "Forget all that. We have. Look what we're saying and doing today." Competing with themselves, they would have wanted to outsell those compilations just to prove they could.

Harrison, who got the closest to the retrospectives, also penned the most pure response in his elegant and moving song, "Be Here Now." Regrettably, it got buried in the middle of an unfortunately disposable solo album. Extracting this particular

[1] This is an incredibly important point to remember when interpreting anything Lennon said in interviews about his past work. He often hated it just because it wasn't *now*.

song and reassigning it to the group gives it the power to sum up plainly and gracefully how all four Beatles felt:

> *Remember, Now, Be Here Now*
> *As it's not like it was before.*
> *The past, was, Be Here Now*
> *And it's not what it was before—it was*

What fans may not realize is that all four former Beatles recorded such responses, but they were scattered and diluted over multiple solo projects. And those responses were not harsh, or simplistic, or angry, or even particularly dismissive. Indeed, they were tinged with wisdom.

That said, they did a whole lot of grousing in interviews around this time, even as the music they made showed them maturing, and regarding their history with slightly more nuance. Heard separately, there are only hints of this reckoning on the solo releases. You can hear nods toward the fun of the past in a lyric here, a track there, a vocal inflection, a guitar lick, a distinctive pair of hands on a keyboard or fingerboard, the return of an old collaborator, or one distinctive voice hovering behind another.

Rather than trying too hard to separate themselves from the past, as they had largely been doing since *Abbey Road*, their collective musical reaction, if assembled, allows that those years shaped them (and us), and that there was value — *selective* value — to be found there. They never *said* this in so many words, but their music always said more than their spoken words, and definitely does so here.

Had they chosen to continue the meta-Beatles approach — and, based on their presumed success with it, we have no reason to think they would not have — this reckoning with, and newfound calmness about, the past would have been distilled, and the whole world would have heard something remarkable. Part of our assumption in this exercise is that, at every turn, the four principle artists would have found ways to satisfy two distinct desires: balancing the need to advance solo careers with the nagging sense that the Beatles still had something to give as a unit.

Creating a collective vinyl response to the reanimation of the old days could have fulfilled the latter goal in elegant fashion, being unsentimental, touched with humor, and only passingly self-referential — avoiding a trap that snared John Lennon on multiple occasions, and would do the same to all three surviving Beatles at various points. The earlier triumphs, while once again appreciated, could have been firmly pressed back into the archives, and gently superseded by a collection of highly sophisticated, modern recordings that acknowledge where the Beatles have been, while also demonstrating an ongoing, evolving relevance.

But another primary motivator for coming together would likely have been a

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Matt Hurwitz, January 1, 2004
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Recording the Imagine *Album*
imaginejohnyoko.com/recording-the-imagine-album

Usenet Guide to Beatles Recording Variations, Version 2
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General Resources

BeatlesBible.com
BeatlesInterviews.com
The-PaulMcCartney-Project.com

Live links available at **SaveTheBeatles.com**

Song and Album Index

*These songs and albums are discussed in the text, separate from grid listings. Page ranges in **bold** represent a primary discussion of the title.*