



THE COMPLETE STORY OF  
THE BEATLES' REVOLVER

**ABRACADABRA!**

RAY NEWMAN



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## FOREWORD & ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I wrote this for fun. I'm not a music journalist, or a professional writer. The idea emerged from a few nagging questions I had about *Revolver*, which the band and their biographers seemed rather too happy to gloss over. Where did Paul McCartney really get the idea for Eleanor Rigby? Who taught George Harrison to play the sitar? And who did give John Lennon LSD for the first time?

Almost every morning for two years, I sat on the tube ploughing through one interminable Beatles memoir or another with highlighter and notebook in hand; I spent my lunch-breaks visiting libraries to read books on Hinduism; I spent weekends hammering away at a keyboard, trying to make all the new information make sense; I lay awake at night worrying about rumours of a Sunday Times journalist interviewing all of the same people as I was trying to get hold of.

And it has been fun. If no-one ever reads this, at least I know I'll never lose another pub argument about the Beatles. Or, for that matter, have to listen to *Revolver* ever again.

\* \* \*

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In my next edition of this small book, I look forward to thanking Peter Asher, Eric Burdon, Neil Innes, Donovan Leitch and others who didn't feel able to help me this time round.

**Ray Newman, London, July 2006**

# I

## “1... 2... 3... 4...”

*Revolver* is one of the greatest albums of all time, and I'm not the only one who thinks so. *Revolver* has appeared in the top 10 of lists of “the greatest albums of all time” in *Rolling Stone* magazine (2003), *NME* (1975, 2003), *The Guardian* (1997), *The Times* (1993), Channel 4 television (2005) and on many other occasions<sup>1</sup>. The company it keeps varies – Tom Waits' *Swordfishtrombones* was voted the 5<sup>th</sup> best album of all time by *NME* readers in 1985, but hasn't featured since – and its position on the list changes: sometimes it's below *Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band*, but in recent years it has more often been above, creeping towards (and occasionally achieving) the top spot.

What is it that makes *Revolver* a contender – why are people drawn to listen to it, and why do they invariably fall in love with it when they do? That *Revolver* is a good album has never really been questioned by critics, but in 1966, they were still excited about *Rubber Soul* which had been released only 8 months earlier. Brian Wilson of the Beach Boys memorably summed up *Rubber Soul* as containing “all good stuff”<sup>2</sup>, and he credits it with inspiring his own contender for the title “best album of all time”, *Pet Sounds*. Many of the 14 songs on *Revolver* (10 in the USA) were similar in style and instrumentation to those on *Rubber Soul*. Even the sound of the sitar, in a superficial sense at least, represents a retread of *Rubber Soul*. *Revolver* was, in fact, made to the same formula as *Rubber Soul*. That is to say that they both have the same number of songs, many of which are in the same styles - soul or rhythm'n'blues with ornamentations, or classically influenced

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1 [www.acclaimedmusic.net](http://www.acclaimedmusic.net)

2 As quoted in the booklet accompanying *Pet Sounds Sessions* box set (1997).

ballads, and folk-rock. Both albums start with an up-tempo bass-driven tune, and both feature a Ringo Starr vocal approximately midway through the running order. George Harrison himself said that there wasn't "much difference between *Rubber Soul* and *Revolver*. To me, they could be Volume 1 and Volume 2"<sup>3</sup>.

He's right, to a degree. There are songs on *Revolver* which, in musical terms at least, would have fit perfectly well on *Rubber Soul* – "Here, There and Everywhere", for example, or "Dr Robert". In fact, so similar in style are some of these songs that *Yesterday and Today*, an LP released only in the USA between *Rubber Soul* and *Revolver*, combines leftover tracks and singles from the former with four tracks from the latter without creating a noticeably jarring effect.

And yet these two albums sit on opposite sides of a gulf. Sure, *Rubber Soul* has a sitar on it, but there is nothing really Indian in the arrangement or playing. *Rubber Soul* was written and recorded after Lennon and Harrison first encountered LSD, but there is no song on the album which tries to capture the experience in sound though it makes itself felt, tentatively, in some of the lyrics. *Rubber Soul* was written and recorded whilst Paul McCartney was living a "Bohemian" lifestyle, but this is reflected only conservatively in his songs. *Revolver*, however, is characterised by the presence of all three of these influences, fully devoured and digested.

Another key difference between the two albums is that, whereas *Rubber Soul* is filled like the Beatles' earlier work with songs celebrating sex and sexual love, on *Revolver* all three songwriters have gone "beyond" writing simple love songs. That is not to say that they had lost interest in sex – Paul McCartney's authorised biography and its account of sexual escapades in Swinging London make that much clear – but rather that there was no longer such a thrill in writing about it in metaphor. There are no songs about "holding hands", "driving", "one night stands", or even anything as outright suggestive as "Girl". Instead there are explorations of loneliness ("Eleanor Rigby", "For No

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3 The Beatles, *Anthology* (Cassell & Co, 2000), p.212.

One”), innocence (“Yellow Submarine”, “Here, There and Everywhere”<sup>4</sup>), and the dream-state (“Tomorrow Never Knows”, “I’m Only Sleeping”). Only “Dr Robert” really carries on the practice of *double-entendre*, but for the purpose of talking about drugs rather than sex. Perhaps this is also attributable to the fact that both Lennon and McCartney were in steady but unsatisfying relationships, and therefore had more complex feelings to work out: the songs on *Revolver* are about relationships in their last throes.

Unfortunately, even if critics of the day had recognised that *Revolver* was a vast leap forward from *Rubber Soul*, they would soon be distracted from their admiration by its showboating and much-esteemed successor, *Sgt. Pepper’s Lonely Hearts Club Band* and its associated single, “Strawberry Fields Forever”/“Penny Lane”. *Sgt. Pepper* needs little summation: almost everybody who owns any records owns a copy of that album and in 1967 it had a powerful global impact with serious critics, the underground and, for want of a better word, the “overground” - meaning almost everybody else. People tell stories about hearing *Sgt. Pepper* for the first time which sound more like accounts of religious epiphany: there are almost no similar *Revolver* stories. A leap forward *Revolver* may have been, but it didn’t knock people for six like *Sgt. Pepper*.

What is perhaps most important about *Revolver*, however, is the very way in which it was created, with new influences being absorbed and then shared. This was the last album which would demonstrate so completely the band’s often noted “telepathy”<sup>5</sup>. In this instance, they were able to separate and explore their own interests, with their own circles of friends, but without every losing the underlying connection with the “hive

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4 Except, possibly, for the line “I want her everywhere”, which is either very sweet, or a reference to adventurous sex outside the bedroom.

5 Ringo Starr refers to the relationship between the four as “magical... telepathy” (*Anthology*, p.355); Jimmy Nicol, who replaced Ringo during a 1964 tour, said when interviewed on his return: “they have their own atmosphere, their own sense of humor. It’s a little clique and outsiders just can’t break in”.



mind". People talked, throughout 1965 and 1966, of the imminent breakup of the Beatles, but the band laughed them off: "I've just read about how I'm leaving the group, as well. What can you do about that!"<sup>6</sup>

This period of expansion saw Lennon, McCartney and Harrison absorb a range of new influences and promptly feed them back to the others. This meant that, even without any special interest in Indian music, Lennon was nonetheless able to draw upon its structures and sounds to shape his own music. Although Paul McCartney did not himself take LSD until much later in 1966<sup>7</sup>, he was able to evoke key aspects of the experience when writing "Yellow Submarine" in May that year<sup>8</sup>, and when helping to shape that quintessential evocation of an LSD trip, "Tomorrow Never Knows". After 1966, for whatever reason, they were less able or less willing to share experiences and discoveries in this way, and began really to drift apart.

Part of the appeal of *Revolver* might be in the very fact that it really represents the Beatles as not only great songwriters and performers, but as the quintessential "gang". The album has at least one which is a true group effort, and to which all three songwriting Beatles contributed substantially - namely, "Taxman". Everyone brings something fascinating to the mix - even Ringo Starr, whose drumming on "Rain" and "Tomorrow Never Knows" is astounding, and original. By contrast, by the time they started work on *Sgt. Pepper* at the end of the same year, a real sense of ownership of particular songs had emerged. They continued to share ideas, but never again intermingled

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6 Lennon, at a press conference in Los Angeles 29/08/65.

7 It's hard to find a firm date for McCartney's first use of LSD, but it was certainly no later than December 18<sup>th</sup> 1966 - he took it with Tara Browne, who died on that date. His took it for a second time on March 21<sup>st</sup>, 1967, meaning that there was a minimum of four months between his first and second "trips". See Barry Miles, *Many Years From Now* (Secker and Warburg, 1997), p.382.

8 As well as the general "trippy" mood, the song seems to draw specifically upon a particular hallucination experienced by Lennon, in which he imagined Harrison's house to be a giant submarine he was driving (*Anthology*, p.177).

them to the same degree as in the songs on *Revolver*.

**Q:** What's going to come out of the next recording sessions?

**John Lennon:** Literally anything. Electronic music, jokes... one thing's for sure – the next LP is going to be different. (*NME*, 11/3/66, p.3)

So, *Rubber Soul* is the last gasp of the “loveable mop-tops” whilst *Revolver*, a more varied and complex work, is the birth of the Beatles as fully-fledged rock stars. It is a futuristic album, in fact, which might explain its slow increase in reputation over the distinctly “period” *Rubber Soul*, as the rest of the world has caught up with it.

The following chapters expand upon the idea that *Revolver* represents a synthesis of Lennon, McCartney and Harrison's three distinct avenues of interest during 1965-66, namely LSD, India and Art.

## II

**HUNTING TIGERS OUT IN INDIAH**

I always used to fiddle with our wireless to get Indian music. I'd tuned into Indian stuff once by accident and I thought it was lovely, so after that I was always trying to get it on the wireless. I'm not saying this affected George. This was all before he was born. (Louise Harrison, George's mother, 1968)<sup>9</sup>

Indian restaurants, Indian food, Indian shops, Indian cinemas, Indian concerts, Indian plays, yoga, garus and contemplation are now all so much part of the London scene that when a grey Bentley drew into a Swiss Cottage petrol station recently and a 6 ft. 6 in. Sikh stepped out wearing a purple turban, green raw silk coat, white jodhpurs, gold slippers and an oriental dagger with a gem-studded hilt, the Irish attendant did not bother to take more than a passing glance. (*The New London Spy*<sup>10</sup>)

George Harrison's contribution to *Revolver* was India: Indian classical music, Indian instruments, and Indian religion. Most obviously, there is "Love You To". The inclusion of

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9 Quoted in Hunter Davies, *The Beatles* (Heinemann, 1968; rev. 2003), p.25.

10 Hunter Davies ed. (Blond, 1966), p.249 – a fascinating book, capturing a period when nightclubs were still places you could go for "supper"; the section offering advice on how to pick up gay sailors in London's then very rough docklands area has dated particularly badly.

this simple but formally correct piece of Indian classical music marks the first time that such a thing had appeared on a pop record in the West, as well as the emergence of a clearly individual voice for Harrison. The song is not highly regarded in its own right – Ian McDonald calls it “sourly repetitious”<sup>11</sup> – and what is more interesting is the way in which it flavours the album as a whole: Indian influences “infect” other songs on the album. This creates connections between otherwise very disparate recordings and gives the whole LP a subtle Indian flavour, easily discernible to those who are looking for it. Harrison provided the droning tamboura backing on “Tomorrow Never Knows”, inspired the “little Indian bit” in McCartney’s guitar solo on “Taxman”, and the vaguely “Eastern” guitar scales in “I’m Only Sleeping” and the much celebrated single b-side “Rain”, recorded in the same sessions. Harrison must take a lot of credit, therefore, for *Revolver*'s deserved reputation for originality and variety.

But how did a working class man from Liverpool, who was barely out of his teens, and had no formal musical training, come to introduce the world at large to this style of music? How did he make the sitar, which was once as obscure as the Shamisen or Cimbalom, a familiar sound in pop music for years to come? It seems in some sense to have been predestined.

When I first heard Indian music, it was as if I already knew it. When I was a child we had a crystal radio with long and short wave bands and so it's possibly I might have already heard some Indian classical music<sup>12</sup>. There was something about it

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11 *Revolution in the Head* (Pimlico, 1995), p.155.

12 Also note that through the 1960s, the BBC Third Programme – now BBC Radio 3 - was broadcasting regular recitals of Indian classical music on Saturday evenings, which Harrison might have heard. A less highbrow source might also have been the background music played in curry houses, cited as an influence by the Kinks as early as 1964 (Doug Hinman, *The Kinks: All Day and All of the Night* (Backbeat Books, 2004) p.32.

that was very familiar, but at the same time, intellectually, I didn't know what was happening at all. (Harrison, *Anthology*, p.196)

There seems to have been something in Harrison's very personality which primed him to be receptive. Many of the obituaries published after Harrison's death in 2001 give him the same title, or variations thereon: "The Quiet Beatle", or "The Quiet One"<sup>13</sup>. The suggestion in each case was not that Harrison was merely uncommunicative, but rather that he was inward-looking, and more "spiritually aware" than his colleagues.

There seems to have been something of a struggle between that tendency to spirituality, and an eager materialism: when not writing about Love and the destruction of the Ego, let us remember, Harrison was giving us "Taxman", with its unequivocally avaricious lyric. Tony Barrow, the group's PR man, recalls that:

George was the Beatle who kept an eye on the money. He would go to Epstein on a regular basis to check where they stood financially. He knew how much was due from EMI in royalties and wanted to know when the cheque would arrive.<sup>14</sup>

He spent his later years studying Indian religion, meditating, and driving his collection of expensive sports cars. Hare Krishna versus Formula 1 might be said to sum up his autobiography, in fact.

Nonetheless, when Brian Epstein found himself faced with the challenge of marketing the group, he did not see much mileage in publicising Harrison as "the Greedy Beatle". He saw

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13 "George Harrison was The Quiet One. The Shy One. The Serious One. The Sad One." Obituary, CNN.com, 30/11/2001.

14 *John, Paul, George, Ringo & Me* (Andre Deutsch, 2005), p.53.

some benefit in presenting them as clones of each other – matching uniforms, matching haircuts - but also realised that each Beatle needed something to set them apart. Picking on one obvious character trait for each member, he emphasised Lennon’s authority, McCartney’s good looks, Starr’s sense of humour and Harrison’s “shyness”. He actually was shy – it wasn’t just a PR construct - and he was certainly less of a natural showman than his band mates, as various press conferences between 1964 and 1966 demonstrate. In most cases, Harrison speaks only when addressed directly by journalists, or by Lennon and McCartney, who very obviously take the lead in talking to the press. As Derek Taylor, one of the many “fifth Beatles” and a close friend of Harrison’s, observed: “he was never the ‘public relations’ Beatle”<sup>15</sup>.

There is little evidence of a desire to push himself upfront in musical terms, either. Whether because he wasn’t allowed to “show-off”, or because he was not a very confident guitarist – Geoff Emerick is extremely disparaging of Harrison’s “fumble finger” playing (p.109, 133, 135) - there are no ostentatious guitar solos on the Beatles’ records, as there were on singles by The Yardbirds or the Kinks in the same period. His first song writing credit did not come until the introspective and misanthropic “Don’t Bother Me”, released on their second LP, *With the Beatles*. The song plays partly into the public image Epstein was cultivating for Harrison, but is also a sincere expression of irritation at being so thoroughly in the public eye at all times.

To write a song then, even one like "Don't Bother Me", helps to get rid of some subconscious burden. Writing a song is like going to confession... to try and find out, to see who you are. (*I Me Mine*, p.36)

Yoga and Hinduism, with their emphasis on peace and meditation, merely gave shape to that introspective, introverted

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15 *I, Me, Mine* (Phoenix Press, 2004), p.66.

tendency. Before coming upon Indian religion, however, Harrison encountered Indian music. The language he uses to describe his first encounter with a sitar is almost religious in itself:

The only way that I can describe it was my intellect didn't know what was going on and yet this other part of me identified with it. It just called on me. The pure sound of it and what was playing just appealed to me so much. (*Off the Record*, p190)

It was at Studio One, Twickenham Studios<sup>16</sup>, in the south west suburbs of London whilst filming the second Beatles feature *Help!* that Harrison first laid eyes upon the stringed instrument with its characteristic bowl-like body. Although the experience itself was profound, it was surely so despite the context. Director Richard Lester had dressed a scene set in an Indian restaurant – the “Rajahama” – with a group of white actors<sup>17</sup> miming to an Indian-sounding backing track. In the sequence in the film, they brandish a range of distinctly non-Indian looking flutes and bongo drums, but one plays a real sitar. This was presumably dug-up from the prop-room at Twickenham, or rented for the occasion. The various Beatles, who were finding the making of *Help!* a less exciting experience than their first film and were bored for long stretches, couldn't resist “having a go” on it.

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16 <http://www.twickenhamstudios.com/history.htm> has images of the band on set.

17 Not only were the Indians in the film played by white actors in make-up - amongst them Warren Mitchell (Alf Garnett) as Abdul, and Leo McKern (Rumpole of the Bailey) as Clang – but they are also highly stereotypical. The film treats them in much the same manner as had been the cinematic norm for some time: they are eye-rolling savages, cultists; ruthless, inscrutable villains. There is no record of Harrison being especially concerned at the way Indians are portrayed in *Help!*, although it is likely that this is part of the reason for his later disparaging comments about the film.

McCartney was even photographed with the instrument. It was Harrison, however, who was genuinely fascinated.

Despite the plainly irreverent context of this experience, it primed Harrison for further encounters with the sitar during 1965, and he kept his eyes and ears open for more information about Indian music. The next significant event in the story took place whilst the band were touring the United States in the summer of 1965. Mid-tour, the band took a two week holiday in Los Angeles, California. On the 24<sup>th</sup> of August, they hosted a party at the house they had borrowed - 2850 Benedict Canyon Drive, Hollywood. In attendance were members of Los Angeles folk-rock group The Byrds.

It was still pretty crazy when we were hanging out with The Beatles. It was like going to see the president, or something. You had to go down in a limousine and there were screaming girls on either side. Then, the guards would open the gates and you'd drive into the estate and they'd close again and everybody would be pressed up against the fence. (Roger McGuinn, *Off the Record*, p.174)

David Crosby and Roger McGuinn were well educated and from comfortable middle class backgrounds, and had come to pop music only after periods working as session folk musicians and on the café folk music scene. Their interest ranged from jazz, through blues and Celtic balladry, to what we now call “World Music”. In 1966, they were to record and release their own pocket *Revolver*, the astounding single “Eight Miles High”, which combines Indian influenced “raga”, psychedelic lyrics and Beatles-style harmonies. In 1965, however, they were yet to record anything demonstrating an Indian influence, though they shared Harrison’s nascent interest in the sitar. Although neither played the instrument, they were familiar with it through the



music of Ravi Shankar, of whom they were enthusiastic fans.

At that time, Shankar was the most famous Indian musician in the world. He had worked on soundtracks for the acclaimed films of Indian director Satyajit Ray<sup>18</sup>, and was *the* Indian musician as far as British and American audiences were concerned. He had also recorded in Los Angeles during the early 1960s, and Crosby had attended several of these sessions, which first-hand experience of Shankar's virtuosity made him a particularly keen advocate.

At that party in Los Angeles, Crosby, McGuinn and Harrison sat for some time discussing music and playing records which the Byrds had brought with them. They played guitar together and Harrison was undoubtedly flattered to be treated with such esteem by his knowledgeable and successful American peers. The Byrds were open about the influence Harrison's guitar style had had on their own music – they chose their signature 12 string guitars after seeing Harrison play one in “A Hard Day's Night” - and Harrison returned the favour shortly after meeting Crosby and McGuinn, when he recorded “If I Needed Someone” in their style for *Rubber Soul*. This friendship was to last for many years, but in the short term, the result was that, inspired by their enthusiasm for Shankar, Harrison bought copies of several of his LPs – probably including his “latest”, “Portrait of Genius” (1964) - and took them home to the UK to absorb.

It didn't take long for him to decide that he needed his own instrument, and he quickly found one, at “a little shop at the top of Oxford Street called Indiacraft – it stocked little carvings, and incense. It was a real crummy-quality one, actually.”<sup>19</sup>

Indiacraft was the retail arm of an importer based on Museum Street, near the British Museum. There were five branches scattered around Central London, including two on Oxford Street. Harrison probably refers to the branch at the more salubrious Bond Street end. The firm specialised in importing

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18 “Pathar Panchali” (1955), “Aparajito” (1957), “Parash Pathar” (1958), “Apur Sansar” (1959), etc..

19 Harrison, *Anthology*, p.196.

very cheap – and arguably tacky - Indian-made handicrafts, and selling them at a profit to people looking for a piece of the exotic to decorate their homes. Although thriving before the boom in “Indiana” of the late-sixties, Indiacraft benefited hugely from the craze, and was famous as the source of the many kaftan coats worn by London's hippy community. Post-colonial historian Robert J C Young:

India for many of us at that time was fully represented by Indiacraft, a shop bristling with goods from India, which appeared opposite Selfridges on Oxford Street in London, and which became the shrine where everyone went to buy their sticks of incense, beads and silk scarves, trying in vain to look like on the Kinks, the Moody Blues or George Harrison.<sup>20</sup>

As Harrison notes, the sitar itself was a cheap model probably intended to be decorative, rather than to be used in any meaningful way. It was certainly a far cry from the extremely expensive, hand crafted sitar Harrison was to buy on his first trip to India in late 1966. That model was made by Rikhi Ram, who is widely regarded as the maker of the best instruments in the world. At some point before April 1966, Harrison also procured a tamboura (or “tanpura”), which he brought along proudly to an overdub session for “Tomorrow Never Knows” in the back of one of his sports cars in a case “the size of a small coffin”<sup>21</sup>. The tamboura resembles a sitar, but is larger and has no frets. It is designed specifically for laying down a backing “pedal note” or “drone” over which other musicians play, and it was presumably not a challenge for Harrison to repeatedly hit one note for the duration of the song.

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20 "Burdwan in My Life" <<http://robertjcyoung.com/burdwan.pdf>>, p.3.

21 Geoff Emerick, *Here, There and Everywhere*, (Gotham Books, 2006), p.121.

Neither the poor quality of his first sitar nor a complete lack of instruction, however, stopped Harrison from learning to play, albeit in rudimentary fashion. He, the other Beatles, and in fact most of the mid-1960s rock royalty, had learned to play with cheap or even home-made guitars and amplifiers, and this was no different.

Harrison's fumbling persistence bore fruit when, with the instrument tuned like a guitar and an improvised, incorrect, and uncomfortable playing posture, he recorded a nonetheless effective instrumental overdub for Lennon's song "Norwegian Wood" on *Rubber Soul*.

I asked him could he play the piece that I had written, you know, 'Dee diddley dee dee, diddley dee dee, diddley dee dee,' that bit. But, he was not sure whether he could play it yet because he hadn't done much on the sitar, but he was willing to have a go. As is his wont, he learned that bit and dubbed it on after that. (John Lennon, *Off the Record*, p190)

Quite apart from Harrison's lack of ability, it also posed a challenge to engineer Norman Smith: "it has a lot of nasty peaks and a very complex wave form. My meter would be right over into the red, into distortion, without us getting audible value for money."<sup>22</sup>

These various factors combine to produce a sound which is somewhat mournful and rigid. The effort was worth it, however, as the sound elevates what is otherwise an effective Bob Dylan pastiche – which might have fit on any of the band's preceding three albums - into one of the Beatles' most enduring recordings. Lennon's lyrics deal with the experience of an illicit sexual encounter in a minimalist flat, and the mysterious, buzzing overdub underlines a sense of inscrutability and

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22 Lewisohn, *Beatles Recording Sessions* (repr. Bounty Books, 2005) p.65.

exoticism. It sounds “hip”. Much as television and film producers would use the sound of a sitar or a “bongo” to imply the presence of drugs where they couldn’t show them, Lennon uses the sitar here to hint at something outré which cannot be made explicit.

This was not the first time a sitar had been recorded for a pop song. The Yardbirds, an R&B band turned proto-goth psychedelic experimenters, hired Indian musicians to play a solo on their mid-1965 single “Heart Full of Soul”. Yardbirds manager Giorgio Gomelsky recalled:

When we were using the sitars, the problem we had was the Indian musicians could not count bars like we do. And you're doing this semi-live on a four-track machine. I was trying to tell them when to stop, and they couldn't stop. Jeff [Beck] was there listening to all these things. he went to the bathroom and started working.... he played me this sitar sound, through a fuzzbox.<sup>23</sup>

This trick was much imitated. Many “Indian” sounding records of the late 1960s actually feature guitars so processed. A 1968 American radio advertisement for Vox's famous “Wah-Wah” pedal makes much of how that device, more famous for its “crying” solo sound or its use on numerous funk recordings, can be used to simulate a sitar sound. Later in the 1960s, “electric sitars” were even released by guitar makers like Coral and Danelectro.

Before this turned into a “craze”, however, it is clear that several talented guitarists and songwriters on the London scene had noticed the sitar themselves at around the same time, in their never-ending search for novelty. Jimmy Page, later of Led

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23 Interviewed in Richie Unterberger, *Urban Spacemen and Wayfaring Strangers: Overlooked Innovators and Eccentric Visionaries of '60s Rock* (Miller Freeman, 2000), p.134.

Zeppelin, but then a crack session guitarist, claims to have owned a real sitar before Harrison.<sup>24</sup> Giorgio Gomelsky backs this claim up:

[Nobody] knew what a sitar was... Jimmy Page came to the recording session and saw this sitar... he actually went up, bought the sitar we were using on "Heart full of Soul" for fifty pounds off the Indian guy. (Ibid)

The Kinks' unusual sounding May 1965 single "See My Friends" is also often cited as an early example of the Indian sound. It doesn't feature any Indian instruments, but a guitar is treated so as to sound more "droning", in imitation of a tamboura<sup>25</sup>, and the tune itself has as its hook a very oriental sounding vocal full of sliding notes.

I got that idea from being in India. I always like the chanting. Someone once said to me "England is gray and India is like a chant". I don't think England is that gray but India is like a long drone. When I wrote the song, I had the sea near Bombay in mind. We stayed at a hotel by the sea, and the fishermen come up at five in the morning and they were all chanting. (Ray Davies, *Rolling Stone*, November 1969)

"Love You To" - "George wrote this – he must have quite a big influence on the group now. This sort of song I was doing

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24 *Guitar World*, January 1991, repr. 1998, p.76.

25 A sitar-like instrument traditionally used to create an underlying, low-pitched "drone" in Indian classical music.

two years ago...” (Ray Davies, reviewing *Revolver* in 1966)<sup>26</sup>

Ultimately, though, it is Harrison and The Beatles who gets the credit for the first pop recording to be released featuring the sound of an actual sitar, rather than an imitation. In the six month gap between the release of *Rubber Soul* and *Revolver*, Brian Jones of the Rolling Stones borrowed George's instrument and used it on “Paint it Black”, released on *Aftermath*. That recording has the distinction of being the first pop *single* to feature a sitar, but is hardly ground breaking – the sitar overdub is very much in the same single-note style as Harrison's contribution to “Norwegian Wood”. That kind of arbitrary shackling of the sitar to otherwise conventional pop songs would soon look naive, after Harrison took things a step further by actually writing a song which borrowed entire melodies and structures from *bona fide* Indian classical music.

It was during those “Norwegian Wood” sessions that Harrison first came upon an organisation which was to guide him toward an appreciation, and formal study, of Indian classical music: the Asian Music Circle (AMC), based in Finchley, North London.

When one of the cheap strings on his equally cheap sitar broke, Harrison found himself at a loss as to how to replace it. Thankfully, EMI had, in their vast and bureaucratic record section, the name and number of the AMC's founder, Ayana Deva Angadi, who they had occasionally turned to in the past as a kind of consultant on Indian music. George Martin seconded the suggestion of contacting Angadi in Finchley. The Beatles' producer and musical advisor was familiar with the Asian Music Circle. Before discovering the Beatles, when Parlophone was still a label known for its comedy and novelty recordings, Martin had produced several records for Peter Sellers, including, most notably, his 1960 collaboration with Sophia Loren, “Goodness Gracious Me”. On it, Sellers mimicked an Indian, speaking with a

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26 *Disc and Music Echo Magazine*, August 1966.

heavy accent. It was for, “Wouldn’t it be Nice”, a follow-up to this hit single that Martin called on the AMC to provide authentic Indian musicians. Recording “Wouldn't It Be Lovely” meant that Martin had prior experience of these unusual instruments, and had actually met many of the AMC's members.

It was Ringo – presumably because he had little to do in the studio, and was a personable young man – who was given the job of making the call.

“There’s a story in my family, which I don’t believe, that my father had never heard of the Beatles,” says Shankara Angadi, Ayana’s son. “He was heard shouting into the telephone: ‘Yes, but Ringo who?’ As luck would have it, we did have some sitar strings in the house, and the whole family went down to the studio at Abbey Road and watched them record, from behind the glass. My mother drew several sketches of them recording ‘Norwegian Wood’, which are still in the family.”

Buoyed by a warm response to “Norwegian Wood”, and more in love than ever with the sound of the instrument, Harrison went back to Ayana Angadi. He knew that his performance was weak by the standards of Indian musicians, however ground-breaking it had seemed on a pop record, and wanted to learn. So commenced a relationship which, although brief, was to shape the rest of Harrison's life. The AMC is usually summed up, in lazy paraphrases of Harrison's own line in *I Me Mine*, his scanty autobiography, as “The North London Asian Music Circle run by Mr Anghadi [sic]”, but it is in itself a fascinating story.

An interest in Indian culture was not a new thing in 1965, although it had not really penetrated the popular culture until then. In London’s Bohemian, mostly left-wing intellectual circles, people had been dabbling with an appreciation of Indian art for some time. Many of them were introduced to it by Ayana Angadi, and by his wife, Patricia.

“My father came to Britain in the 1920s<sup>27</sup> to finish a

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27 In 1924, according to Rozina Visram, author of *Asians in Britain: 400 years of history*, (Pluto Press 2002), p. 290.

degree in Mathematics he'd started at Bombay University. He was very striking looking, with long-hair and aquiline features, and that went to his head. He never really did any work, and just lived as a kind of toy boy to various socialist women for ten years or so. Then he met my mother. One version of the story is that she saw him from the top of a bus on Regent Street and said: I have to paint that man. Which is a euphemism," says Shankara Angadi.

Patricia Fell-Clarke was the artistically inclined wayward daughter of an upper-middle-class industrial family which had become wealthy making and selling paint. They, and much of London's middle class, were aghast at the idea of her marrying an unemployed Indian Trotskyist<sup>28</sup>, however charming. Despite abortive attempts by her family to buy him off, they did marry, and moved into the Fell-Clark's enormous town house on Fitzalan Avenue in Swiss Cottage, North London. It was from here, in the mid-1950s, that Patricia and Ayana Angadi began the slow process of bringing Indian art to the chattering classes. They imported musicians and dancers, putting them up and, in their own chaotic way, organising and promoting tours. Some musicians stayed, forming the core of a musical "repertory group" who, as well as performing in their own right, would back visiting celebrity musicians, or hire themselves out to record and film companies.

It was this informal organisation which eventually coagulated into the Asian Music Circle, picking up celebrity members along the way. Yehudi Menuhin was the AMC's President for some time, and Benjamin Britten Vice President. Menuhin's name, and Ayana Angadi's talent for self-publicity, meant that *The Times* from the mid-1950s onward frequently included advertisements for their lectures or concerts, as well as feature articles highlighting the growing interest in Indian music.

### In the music of India and Pakistan we

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28 He joined the labour party, and published several pamphlets under the name Raj Hansa (Ibid.).



shall hear music from the opposite spectrum: music... meant to unite us in meditation with the infinite, to produce a hypnotic mood in which we almost leave our physical envelope to join the universal in release and serenity. (Yehudi Menuhin<sup>29</sup>)

Harrison became a frequent visitor to the Angadis' home on Fitzalan Road in Finchley, North London, turning up several times a week in either a green Ferrari, or his black Mini Cooper, with Patti Boyd in tow. He would stay for dinner and play tapes of the latest recording sessions to the family. Shankara Angadi recalls being impressed by "Rain", on which he recognised an Indian influence, but less so by "Paperback Writer". "We told him that it was a step backward, that it was harmonically uninteresting," he recalls.

Harrison and Patti Boyd posed for a portrait by Patricia Angadi over the course of several weeks, sketches for which are prized possessions of Shankara's son Daniel.

There were, at that time, two incumbent sitar players on the AMC's "books", and it was one of them who was to be introduced to Harrison and become his teacher. Unfortunately, no-one seems to remember his name. "He was very generous with George, who impressed us with his dedication. He studied hard, and appreciated how difficult it was to learn the sitar well – there was no arrogance about this, even though, at times, the Beatles could be quite arrogant people. George would come every week and show us the exercises he had learned." Ian McDonald suggests that the sitar part on *Revolver's* "Love You To", although not credited, might have been played by the anonymous tutor, but it is more likely that Harrison played it himself with close supervision, according to Shankara Angadi.

Shortly before recording "Love You To", Harrison asked if the Angadis could facilitate a meeting with Ravi Shankar. They

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29 "East to West", *The Times*, September 13<sup>th</sup> 1965, p.2

did so, with the younger Angadis hosting at their parents' house in Finchley. Paul McCartney, also keen to meet the Indian sitar hero, turned up unannounced.

Shankara: "My sister went around afterwards collecting cigarette ends to sell at school. She was 13 at the time." The meeting was a success, although Shankar was not impressed by tapes of "Norwegian Wood" or "Love You To", and was later embarrassed to have underestimated Harrison's fame. He became Harrison's mentor, and they remained friends for many years.

Speaking of the difficulties of recording Indian music in London, Harrison described the sessions players provided by the AMC: "They have jobs like bus-driving during the day and only play in the evenings so some of them just weren't good enough. They were much better than any Western musicians could do, because it is in their natural style, but it made things very difficult." In these early sessions, Harrison would demonstrate to the session men what he wanted them to play, as he was unable to notate music in the appropriate Indian style (Davies, p353).

Harrison's interest in India was somewhat more profound than that of many of his peers, going beyond a desire for unusual sounds, or even an LSD inspired interest in "harmonics". Of his trip to India in September 1966, Harrison said "Ravi and the sitar were excuses... it was a search for spiritual connection"<sup>30</sup>; "Ravi's my musical guru... [but] this was only a stepping stone for me to see, because through music you reach the spiritual part"<sup>31</sup>.

The seeds of his fascination with Indian religion were germinated entirely by coincidence at around the same time as he first saw a sitar, but were to lay dormant for far longer. Only a month after filming the restaurant scene in Twickenham, Harrison had his first brush with yoga, or rather, with a yogi. This momentous event occurred on Paradise Island, in the Bahamas, on the 24<sup>th</sup> of February 1965 – Harrison's 22<sup>nd</sup> birthday. As the band filmed a scene in which Harrison, Lennon

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30 *Anthology*, p.233.

31 Miles, *Many Years From Now*, p.399.

and McCartney rode bicycles, hunting for Starr, who had supposedly been kidnapped by Evil Indians, a curious figure approached, bearing gifts.

The Goodyear blimp was up above and we were waiting for instructions and Swami Vishnu Devananda walked up; he was the first Swami I had met and obviously knew we were there... he told me years later that whilst meditating he had a strong feeling that he should make contact. (*I Me Mine*, p. 47)

I suppose that was the start of it all for me. It was a chance meeting – the guy had a little place on Paradise Island and somebody must have whispered in his inner ear to give us his book. (*Anthology*, p 171)

Devananda - “The Flying Swami” - was born in the South Indian region of Kerala in 1927, to a very poor family. Nonetheless, he educated himself, eventually joining the army in pursuit of an education. It was whilst serving in the army that he came across a pamphlet on the teachings of Swami Sivananda, and trekked to Rishikesh (the same Rishikesh later to be made famous by the Beatles), where he became a disciple<sup>32</sup>. In 1957 he set off to the USA with the aim of promoting his religion but, after some time in Canada, of which country he became a citizen, ended up in the Bahamas. There, he founded the Sivananda Ashram – a meditation centre – and then six others worldwide<sup>33</sup>.

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32 Official biography at

<http://www.sivananda.org/teachings/teachers/swamiji/swamiji.html>

33 Sivananda Yoga Centre, *The Sivananda Book of Meditation: How to Master the Mind and Achieve Transcendence* (Octopus Publishing Group - Gaia Books, 2003), p.8-9.

He is perhaps best known for making “peace flights” in an aircraft decorated with psychedelic designs. These included a memorable occasion in 1971 when he dropped leaflets over the Suez Canal, and another in 1983, when he flew his aircraft over the Berlin Wall and into East German airspace, causing a diplomatic incident. Both won his peace campaign a place in the headlines.<sup>34</sup> He made the news also after campaigning for peace in Northern Ireland with actor Peter Sellers. Though cynics might call him a self-publicist, his primary interest seems to have been in publicising the idea of a peaceful, borderless world, at some risk to his own person.

Most people think of yoga as a form of exercise – as a class to be taken at the local leisure centre – but Devananda understood it to mean something far less superficial when he used the term in his 1960 book *The Complete Illustrated Book of Yoga*. The book is still in print, and regarded by many as the standard “beginners” text on yoga. In its more than 300 pages are photographs demonstrating the poses and exercises necessary for the daily practice of yoga, with the intention not of toning a flabby behind but, rather, achieving a sense of unity with the world and everything in it. It was signed copies of this book with which the band members, excluding Starr, were presented; Starr was, remember, in the custody of Evil Indians (or, rather, sitting with director Richard Lester watching the action). It must have been something of a novelty for the Beatles who were the most famous people in the world, to be given an autograph rather than being harassed for their own. The 22 year old guitarist was not, it seems, quite ready yet to pursue spiritual enlightenment but, unlike his band mates, he did keep the book:

It's signed and dated 25 February 1965.  
My birthday. I've only recently opened it,  
since I became interested in India.  
(Harrison, interviewed in Davies, *The Beatles*, p.353)

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34 “Yogi Flies Over Berlin Wall”, *The Times*, Friday, September 16, 1983, pg.6.

As he says, Harrison didn't really start to study Indian religion in a systematic way until much later. His autobiography is littered with quotations from swamis and gurus of various branches of Indian religion and it is hard to say which particular strain he considered himself loyal to, if any. Hinduism, Buddhism, "Hare Krishna" and other Indian/Eastern religions are all descended from a common root – an *ur*-religion brought to India by nomadic Ārya people in around 2000BC<sup>35</sup>. They brought with them a set of religious texts called "Veda", or "sacred knowledge". It is because they all use these texts as a foundation that the disparate native religions of the modern Indian continent are known as "Vedic". What Vedic religions clearly share is a sense of openness and flexibility with regard to belief – there is no such thing as orthodox Buddhism, for example, and Hinduism is a term covering several sub-religions, some of which believe in a range of "Devas<sup>36</sup>", whilst others believe that the Devas are different faces of one God. The underlying features of these religions, however, are what appealed to Harrison.

Firstly, there is a belief in an underlying, eternal "Truth" - that there is sense in existence. Secondly, there is the idea that that Truth can be seen by anyone lucky enough to experience a moment of clarity, achieved through various acts of devotion, such as meditation, or visits to temple. Harrison was later to become a devoted meditator, and his dabbling in Indian music during 1965-66 can be seen as his groping his way toward Indian religion. That he gave up the sitar, more or less, after 1968 when his interest in meditation and yoga took hold suggests that need for order and sense in his life which the former had once

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35 For a concise summary of the relationships between various branches of Vedic religion, see *The World's Religions*, ed. Sutherland, Houlden, Clarke, Hardy (Routledge, 1988), p.569-659.

36 Devas are not Gods, though the word has the same root as "Deity" in English, and "Deus" in Latin. Rather they are invisible spirit beings, some of whom are elemental, but others of whom are almost like the imps or pixies of European pagan belief. All are powerful to a degree, and there are more than 1000 named Deva in the various spiritual texts.

provided was succeeded by the latter.

Harrison's interest in Indian music and religion was, if not inspired by LSD, then at least made possible by the sense of wonder and receptiveness to new ideas which the drug inspired in him. Lennon and Harrison became closer during 1965 and 1966 having shared experiences of LSD from which McCartney excluded himself, and it is no coincidence that several of Lennon's songs in this period echo, if not quite openly imitate, some of the sounds and themes of Harrison's. "Rain", the b-side to "Paperback Writer" released before *Revolver* in 1966, does not feature the sound of a sitar, but the chorus - "Ra-ay-ay-ee-ay-ee-ayn" - is a clear attempt to assimilate "eastern" sounds, although in the case the reference is Middle Eastern. Ringo Starr's drumming, too, is far from being a standard rock beat. Building on the unusual rolling pattern suggested by Paul McCartney for 1965's "Ticket to Ride", Starr came up with something which is "exotic" sounding, in some ill-defined way. Unlike Harrison, neither Lennon nor Starr seemed inspired to create pastiches of Indian music, but the idea of something from outside the Rhythm and Blues/Country and Western/Rock'n'Roll idiom seems to have inspired them. This is also evident in, for example, the tamboura drone underlying "Tomorrow Never Knows", and the "oriental" sounding backwards guitar figures on "I'm Only Sleeping". Even McCartney was obliquely influenced by the hint of India in the air in 1966, and he admits that the one-chord "vamping on an E-minor" which led to "Eleanor Rigby" was inspired by "Asian Indian rhythms"<sup>37</sup>.

John got his guitar out and started doing "Tomorrow Never Knows" and it was all on one chord... We would be sitting around and at the end of an Indian album we'd go, "Did anyone realise they didn't change chords?" It would be like, "Shit, it was all in E!. Wow, man, that is pretty far

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37 Miles, *Many Years From Now*, p.281.

out.” So we began to sponge up a few of these nice ideas. (McCartney in *Many Years From Now*, p. 291)

After *Revolver* was released, Harrison's interest in Indian music was not only public knowledge, but obvious. Ravi Shankar's fame grew as his association with the Beatles became known, and the sound of the sitar became less of a novelty than a bore. It appeared on film soundtracks and records by bands who, until recently, had been straightforward rhythm'n'blues groups, but were now Psychedelic. Little distinction was made between Indian classical music and LSD in the public's mind: they were both facets of the same trend.

[The] sitar has just become another bandwagon gimmick, with everybody leaping aboard it just to be 'in'. A lot of people will probably be saying I'm to blame anyway for making the sitar commercial and popular, but I'm sick and tired of the whole thing now, because I really started doing it because I really want to learn the music properly... The audience at Ravi's show was full of mods and rockers who, more likely than not, just want to be seen at the Ravi Shankar show. (*Off the Record*, p.207)

Sadly, although the AMC briefly benefited from a wider public interest in Indian music prompted by Harrison's advocacy, he was to break with the group late in 1966. Shankara Angadi: “My father was a difficult character, in some ways. He was chaotic, and never really pulled anything off he set out to do. He probably asked George for money, and that was the end of that relationship. We saw lots of him for six months, but then nothing. When I bumped into him at around the time of the

concert for Bangladesh in 1972 , he recognised me, and asked someone who I was. When they told him, I heard him say: 'Well, he's not as bad as his father.'

So, the quietly moody Beatle had become the quietly spiritual Beatle. Indian religion and Indian music provided him with a context for his introspective tendencies – he was not grumpy, but thoughtful; not misanthropic, but meditative. This gave him a stronger sense of identity, which helped him to hold his own against the more dominant Lennon and McCartney. At last, he had found something which was his and his alone, and on which the other Beatles deferred to him. For all the talk of surrendering the ego which was to ensue, Harrison's embracing of Indian religion and culture was more about gaining a sense of self than it was destroying the same.

In the Beatles' 1968 animated film *Yellow Submarine*, each member of the band is presented as a simplified caricature and, although irritating to the individual Beatles, those reduced representations do sum up how the public perceived each member of the band. The cartoon version of Harrison is a detached and peaceful figure. Significantly, it is the strains of *Revolver*'s "Love You To" which accompany his first appearance on screen as he stands on a hilltop with his arms crossed, eyes directed inscrutably to one-side, beard and mane flowing in the wind. He is presented as a guru, a messiah, a Rasputin-like mystic monk. It is *Revolver* which defined him as such.



## III

**PAUL McCARTNEY GOES TOO FAR\***

In the light of experience gained from operating HMS Dreadnought the Navy has made a number of changes in the arrangement of Britain's first all-British nuclear submarine, the Valiant, now back at Barrow after three weeks' contractors' sea trials. (*The Times*, May 25th 1966)

*We all live in a Yellow Submarine,  
A Yellow Submarine,  
A Yellow Submarine*  
(Paul McCartney, "Yellow Submarine",  
written May 31<sup>st</sup> 1966)

Paul McCartney spent his hiatus from the business of being a Beatle absorbing mid-sixties London's vital cultural life. He came back to the table with a bag of new ideas, and the confidence to be "pretentious" - to make their next album something more than a pop album. He wanted it to be a work of Art: "I for one am sick of doing sounds that people can claim to have heard before"<sup>38</sup>, he said.

Since early in the Beatles career, McCartney had felt a slight irritation at being perceived as "the cute Beatle", with the implication that Lennon was the brains behind the group. Even on *Revolver*, however, there are moments which remind us of

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\* For what is perhaps the fullest possible account of McCartney's life at the Asher's house on Wimpole Street, and his social set at the time, the reader is directed toward Barry Miles' *Many Years From Now* which, although partisan, is extremely comprehensive and readable.

38 *NME* (New Musical Express), 24/6/66, p.3.

how he developed that reputation. “Here, There and Everywhere” was a leftover from the *Help!* period<sup>39</sup>, and would have fit nicely on any of the preceding three Beatles albums. It is an excellent song in many ways but is also relentlessly sweet and calculatedly sentimental, after the manner of “Michelle” or “Yesterday”. Nonetheless, it is balanced by McCartney's other contributions to the record, which demonstrate a new-found adventurousness, and exhibit a range of styles not only unusual for McCartney, but at the cutting-edge of pop music.

The road away from cuddly balladeer to bold experimenter began at the end of 1964 when John Lennon ceased to conceal his marriage and children. He moved away from London to a prosperous but dull upper-middle-class enclave in Weybridge, Surrey, and tried (half-heartedly) to be a family man. In so doing, he all but abdicated leadership of the group, and if McCartney didn't take over, he did at least find room to stretch.

And he was well-placed to do so, both geographically and culturally. In November 1963, he too moved out of the shared bachelor flat and into a large middle class house. Unlike Lennon's house – “Kenwood” – Jane Asher's family home at 57 Wimpole Street provided plenty of stimulus: it was Bohemian, busy, and right in the centre of London's West End.

I lived a very urbane life in London... I had the metropolis at my fingertips with all this incredible stuff going on... and John used to come in from Weybridge... and I'd tell him what I'd been doing: “Last night I saw a Bertolucci film and I went down the Open Space, they're doing a new play there”... I do remember John coming in with his big chauffeur and Rolls-Royce, the big, lazy, almost

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39 McCartney remembers playing it for Lennon in Obertauern, Austria in March 1965, more than a year before work started on *Revolver*. Despite Lennon's apparent praise for the song, it was held back from both *Help!* and *Rubber Soul* (*Anthology*, p.209).

decadent life out in Weybridge and saying  
 “God man, I really envy you”.  
 (McCartney, *Sessions*, p. 15)

Asher and her family were an extraordinary group of people. Jane herself had been acting since she was 5 years old, in both films and on stage. When McCartney met her, she was a strikingly beautiful 17 year old who was not yet a household name, but whose star was distinctly on the rise. Like all of her family, she was also interested in music, and played several instruments.

Her father Dr. Richard Asher was a renowned psychiatrist, most famous for his 1951 article in the *Lancet*, in which he identified and named Munchausen syndrome, a condition which leads people to fake illnesses in order to get attention from doctors and other medical professionals. He demonstrated a creative streak in naming the illness, borrowing it from a series of fictionalised accounts of the adventures of the real life Karl Friedrich Hieronymus, Baron von Münchhausen (1720 – 1797), rather than simply giving it his own name<sup>40</sup>, as was standard practice. He spent most of his spare time “playing an out of tune grand piano”, and he also enjoyed taking pin-hole photographs of the view from the window of his ground floor den. He was a lively, occasionally eccentric individual, who once advised McCartney on how to get the benzedrine out of a nasal inhaler, for recreational purposes<sup>41</sup>.

Her mother Margaret Asher was a music teacher, who had formerly played oboe with several orchestras, and then worked at the Guildhall School of Music. When McCartney lived at Wimpole Street, she was giving private lessons from a well-

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40 Herbert A Schreier, Judith A Libow, *Hurting for Love: Munchausen by Proxy Syndrome* (Guilford Press, 1993), p.7.

41 All references from *Many Years from Now*, p.106-110 – Miles has the advantage of having met Dr Asher, and writes in part from first-hand knowledge. Dr Asher sadly killed himself in 1969, taking an overdose of barbiturates with alcohol to deal with a painful and recurring stomach complaint (*The Times*, 6/5/69).

equipped but unglamorous music room in the basement of the house.

Jane's brother Peter had also acted as a child but, like many young men, was captivated by pop music and had formed a band with his friend Gordon Waller. He and McCartney got on well, despite the difference in their upbringings, and he was later to work for the Beatles' Apple Corporation, and from there to go on to a career as a high-profile record producer in Los Angeles.

Jane's youngest sibling, her sister Claire, was also a child actress.

The house itself, as well as being conveniently placed for the cultural life of London, and in a tranquil, airy street, might also have been designed for the education of a curious young man. There were several pianos, stacks of classical music LPs, and the aforementioned music room, which became something of a base for Lennon and McCartney when working on increasingly rare joint compositions<sup>42</sup>.

The Ashers... were very perceptive people, highly intelligent and very musical. Although no one could ever say they had any taste for the avant-garde, they encouraged Paul in his musical self-education to experiment and to be free, musically, if he felt like it. (George Martin, *Summer of Love*, p.80)

Exposure to classical music in this environment opened McCartney's mind to the use of orchestral instruments on his songs, and the unequivocal success of "Yesterday" only encouraged him further. That song featured a tastefully arranged string quartet in the place of the other Beatles - there were no drums, bass or electric guitar. Brian Epstein and George Martin seriously discussed releasing the song as a McCartney solo single.

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42 Lennon's 1980 *Rolling Stone* interview; Miles, *Many Years from Now*, p.107.

It was not only a commercial success – though not released as a single, it has been covered more than 2500 times - but also impressed critics.

By the time the band came to record *Revolver*, McCartney seemed to find it hard to write an unadorned pop song, without either a French horn ("For No One"), brass band ("Yellow Submarine") or string octet ("Eleanor Rigby"). Compare these to Lennon's contributions to *Revolver*, which are lyrically and structurally adventurous, but built around drums, bass and guitars, without session musicians playing classical instruments, or even jazz musicians playing horns. The only adornments are electronic and even those, as we will see, are largely the work of McCartney.

McCartney had, like Brian Jones of the Rolling Stones, always been happy experimenting with a range of instruments - he played guitar, bass guitar, drums and piano, and Margaret Asher also taught him to play the recorder<sup>43</sup> during 1965. Lennon, by contrast, played guitar, but not especially well, and was uncomfortable, at best, behind a keyboard.

McCartney was not, however, musically trained – his learning had all been informal, with tunes picked up by ear. He still cannot read music, but in 1965 briefly flirted with remedying the situation, by having a few lessons in music theory with a "proper bloke at the Guildhall School of Music":

I went off him when I showed him "Eleanor Rigby" because I thought he'd be interested, and he wasn't. I thought he'd be intrigued by the little time jumps.  
(McCartney, *Anthology*, p.209)

That quotation is telling. It demonstrates a desire to not only mix with, but also to impress and be approved of by, the artistic establishment. Evidently the teacher in question was not

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43 Miles, *Many Years From Now*, p. 107

terribly supportive, but then it is surely somewhat egotistical to expect someone with a training in classical music to be especially impressed by a minimalistic and rhythmically uniform composition like "Eleanor Rigby", as a piece of classical music.

"Eleanor Rigby" was not only written almost solely by McCartney, but is also performed with only a small amount of help from his band mates. It represents a perfect synthesis of new influences, being not only musically adventurous (in pop terms, at least) but also lyrically advanced. It draws its themes and dramatic mode from social realist theatre and film, rather than from personal experience, or other pop songs. It marks the stretching of McCartney's imagination, with deftly sketched characters and narrative suggesting a gritty black-and-white "Wednesday Play"<sup>44</sup> concertinaed into 3 minutes.

In 1966, Jane Asher was acting in a version of John Dighton's farce *The Happiest Days of Your Life* at the Theatre Royal, Bristol. It was whilst visiting her there that McCartney claims to have come across the inspiration for the name "Eleanor Rigby".

I saw Rigby on a shop in Bristol when I was walking round the city one evening. I thought, 'Oh, great name, Rigby.' It's real, and yet a little bit exotic. (*Anthology*, p.208)

There was, in 1965, a firm called Rigby & Evans, with a premises across the road from the Theatre Royal, on King Street. It is likely that, as he rolled the words around in his mind, Rigby & Evans became "Evans & Rigby", and that the sound of this spoken aloud triggered a memory of the gravestone in Liverpool

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44 The BBC's series of weekly televised plays began in 1964, and included such ground breaking pieces as *Cathy Come Home*, *The War Game* and early works by Dennis Potter. Many were categorised by the press, somewhat derisively, as "kitchen sink drama", a term echoed by Lennon in his 1980 *Rolling Stone* interview, in which he refers to McCartney's habit of writing about "boring people doing boring things".

which is commonly supposed to have inspired the song.

The lyrics of the song developed, as seems typical of McCartney, after the tune. McCartney himself cites an early improvised lyric in *Anthology*: “Dazzie-de-da-zu picks up the rice in the church where a wedding has been...” (p208). Donovan Leitch, however, recalls hearing an early version of the song with quite different “nonsense” lyrics: “Ola Na Tungee/ Blowing his mind in the dark/ With a pipe full of clay<sup>45</sup>”. It’s interesting that, if Leitch recalls these proto-lyrics correctly, McCartney had almost (perhaps subconsciously) settled on Eleanor as his character’s first name.

The other song on *Revolver* with the clearest classical influence - “For No One” - is actually more influenced by Lennon’s earlier *Rubber Soul* tune “In My Life”. In short, both are pop ballads with baroque instrumental solos grafted on. In both cases, too, a persuasive case can be made for crediting George Martin with both the idea and execution of both solos.

As well as a general encouragement and facilitation of his interest in the more conventional side of classical music, McCartney’s relationship with the Ashers led him to become acquainted with the well educated “arty” crowd who were to become his most frequent social companions during the *Revolver* period. They were to take him beyond the formal “prettiness” of classical music, and into the realms of the often exciting, sometimes baffling, but rarely pretty, avant-garde.

I first met Paul in the summer of 1965... Together with John Dunbar and Peter Asher, I started Indica Book and Gallery in Mason’s Yard and Paul was very involved in painting the walls and putting up shelves. Paul designed and had printed the wrapping paper for the bookshop and helped design advertising flyers. (Barry Miles, *Many Years From*

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45 Donovan Leitch, *Hurdy Gurdy Man* (Century Books, 2005) p.76.

*Now*, p.xiii)

Barry Miles studied at Cheltenham Art College, where he pursued an interest in painting and “quickly fell into what then passed as a bohemian existence, listening to jazz, smoking pot and marching with CND”<sup>46</sup>. He moved to London in 1963, where he found work managing a bookshop. He used this position as an opportunity to push the writing of his favourite American “beat” poets and writers to other like-minded young men.

He and McCartney became good friends quickly. Miles would play McCartney records at the Hanson Street flat where he lived with his wife. He accompanied McCartney to “happenings” - performances at which the audience were expected to participate fully, and at which the boundary between the audience and performers all but disintegrated<sup>47</sup>. One such event was hosted by the AMM musical collective, under the leadership of eccentric Marxist composer and essayist, Cornelius Cardew:

About 20 people sat around on the floor, facing AMM who were making noises on instruments ranging from tenor saxophone and violin to various percussion instruments and wind instruments. A number of transistor radios stood among the instruments but were only rarely turned on... channels of static or distorted music from far-away stations were preferred... The audience was encouraged to contribute: Paul ran a penny along the side of an old-fashioned steam radiator and, after the break, used his beer mug as an instrument to tap. (Barry Miles, “Going Underground”, *The*

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46 Biographical information on Barry Miles from an interview by Mick Brown in *The Daily Telegraph*, 16/10/2002.

47 Miles, *Hippie* (Cassell Illustrated, 2003), p.165.



*Beatles: Ten Years That Shook the World*, p 238)

The impact on McCartney of this kind of music-making, which lacks any obvious sign of the melody or structural perfection which are trademark qualities of his, can nonetheless be seen clearly in a song as apparently childish and simplistic as “Yellow Submarine”. This seemingly humble strum-along tune, much ridiculed by critics<sup>48</sup> is richly embroidered with *musique concrete*<sup>49</sup>. Compare the description of a session for Yellow Submarine with the AMM event described above:

We needed all kinds of sound effects, and sandbags were bumped about while John blew bubbles and George made swirling sounds with the water... There was also a brass band... right there in the studio, not to mention a massed chorus made up of anybody and everybody who happened to be around at the time. (George Martin, “Off the Record”, p207)

The communal, participatory nature of this event echoes an AMM performance, and the Beatles continued to hold similar “parties” with guests in the studio up until the recording of the “The Beatles” (the “White Album”) in 1968. Their happenings, however, were ultimately more disciplined, having as their end the production of a releasable pop “product”.

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48 Mark Lewisohn observes that there are “two views of ‘Yellow Submarine’... It’s either a weak Salvation Army band singalong or a clever and contagious piece of pop music guaranteed to please the kids, the grannies and plenty others besides” (*Sessions*, p.80). He goes further in an interview with DJ Paul Ingles, however, saying: “I wouldn’t be unhappy if it wasn’t on that album” (<http://www.paulingles.com/Revolver.html>).

49 Rather obviously, from the French for “concrete” or “material” music, and referring to music produced using tape recordings or samples of natural sounds, e.g. the banging together of metal pipes.

As well as the minimalist *musique concrète* of Cardew's AMM, McCartney (and Miles) also pursued their interests in an emerging high art alternative to classical music, namely electronic music. They attended a lecture given by Luciano Berio, the renowned Italian electronic composer, in February 1966. One journalist described the event:

Everything that Luciano Berio does is interesting even when it isn't entirely convincing. Last night at the Italian institute he talked for almost an hour about his new work, *Homage to Dante* - mostly about what it was not, and what is the only possible way of creating a work of art, and suchlike topics. (*The Times*, 24/02/66, p.16)

At the lecture, Berio played a tape of his new piece *Laborintus 2 (Un Omaggio a Dante)*, which develops certain themes in Dante's texts, combining them with biblical texts as well as the work of T. S. Eliot, Ezra Pound and Edoardo Sanguineti. During the intermission, Paul was able to have a few words with Berio but the Italian embassy staff clustered around so closely that serious conversation was difficult. (Miles, *Many Years From Now*, p.234-5)

In Britain, Berio was notable for being the first electronic composer to have his work performed at the Proms, when his *Perspectives* - a series of oscillations and radio noises - was played, from tape, in August 1960.

It was also during this time that McCartney developed an interest in the music of John Cage, of whom Cornelius Cardew

was, at that time, a disciple<sup>50</sup>. He was particularly impressed by 4'33", which was four minutes of complete silence.

Another composer who impressed McCartney was, in turn, Cage's teacher, the German Karlheinz Stockhausen, who was later to appear on the cover of *Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Heart's Club Band*. McCartney was not only intrigued by his experiments with tape manipulation, but also particularly seems to have enjoyed dropping his name as evidence of his erudition.

There was a lot of experimental stuff that went on. George's Indian stuff and all of that. It was really just pushing frontiers, that's all we were doing. Everyone else was pushing frontiers too but perhaps we didn't necessarily like what, say, Berio was doing. There was only one Stockhausen song I liked actually! We used to get it in all the interviews "Love Stockhausen!". (McCartney, in Lewisohn, p. 15)

He missed seeing Stockhausen in person introducing a concert of his works at the Commonwealth Institute in London in December 1965 - The Beatles were playing a concert in Liverpool - but might have read the article published in the wake of that event in *The Times* on December 6th, or seen the television programme *Music on Two* on BBC2 on December 21st, when a Stockhausen special was broadcast. Stockhausen was everywhere in 1965 and early 1966, at least if you were the kind of person who read the broadsheets and watched the high-brow second channel.

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50 See Cardew's impassioned and somewhat hysterical denunciation of both Cage and Stockhausen in his book *Stockhausen Serves Imperialism and Other Essays*, in which he says that "The American composer and writer John Cage, born 1912, and the German composer Karlheinz Stockhausen, born 1928, have emerged as the leading figures of the bourgeois musical avant garde. They are ripe for criticism." (p.33).

Quite apart from the avant-garde European and American electronic music which McCartney came across, there was also the then cutting-edge BBC Radiophonic Workshop.

[The Workshop is] staffed by four creative assistants, three technicians, one engineer, and part-time maintenance personnel, who work in three specially equipped studios... [it] was set up in 1958 with a staff of only two... At the moment, it provides incidental accompaniments in the main and aims to underline atmosphere and extend dramatic impact. Many programmes are educations; children tend to listen with open ears and without preconceived notions.<sup>51</sup>

The Workshop was well-known amongst musicians as the best equipped electronic studio in the UK, rivalling that at the Westdeutscher Rundfunk studio in Cologne, Germany, and the Columbia Princeton Electronic Music Center in the USA. Whereas those institutions were used by a range of composers for the creation of “pure art”, the BBC Workshop had something of a “closed door policy”<sup>52</sup> to outside musicians, and a more practical purpose – namely, the low-cost production of music and sound effects for BBC television and radio programmes. It was music for the popular science fiction programme *Dr Who* which made it something of a household name, and which, almost inadvertently, exposed the public at large to the sounds of tape loops, *musique concrète* and manipulated electronic sounds generated by oscillators. McCartney would have heard Radiophonic Workshop music frequently, and also claims to have spoken to someone at the Workshop, probably Delia Derbyshire, about the possibility of an electronic backing for “Yesterday” in

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51 Hilary Haywood, “Sounds we never heard before”, *The Times* 22/07/67, p.7.  
52 Peter Manning, *Electronic and Computer Music* (OUP US, 2004), p.147.

1965<sup>53</sup>.

George Martin also gets some credit for fostering McCartney's interest in unusual electronic sounds:

In 1962 Parlophone issued a single called: "Time Beat/Waltz in Orbit", a compilation of electronic sounds, composed by a certain Ray Cathode - me! (*Summer of Love*, p.83)

George Martin played them [McCartney and Miles] the famous 1962 Bell Telephone Labs recording of an IBM 7090 computer<sup>54</sup> and digital-to-sound transducer singing "Bicycle Built for Two" in a thick German-American accent, which they loved. (This was also favourite late-night listening at Miles's flat.) (*Many Years From Now*, p.207)

This interest in electronics manifested itself practically in an ongoing series of experiments with tape recorders from 1965. Both Lennon and McCartney acquired Brenell Mark 5 tape recorders through their music publisher, Dick James, who was presumably keen to get their songs demoed on tape and then in print as soon as possible.

Being a small company, Brenell were able to meet individual demands far better than Ferrograph, who were heavy into Government orders and supplying the BBC. The Brenell was a very basic, but very well built three motor, three speed design... the Mark 5 introduced to the

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53 Miles, *Many Years from Now*, p.207.

54 According to Bell's official websites actually an IBM 704.

amateur/semi-pro an extremely versatile and very well made deck at a reasonable price. (Interview with Barry M Jones, author of *Brenell - True to Life Performance*)

The simplicity and versatility of the machine enabled both of the “senior Beatles” to experiment, but Lennon tended to use his machine more as a kind of notebook for sketching ideas and recording somewhat tuneless, rambling demos, whilst McCartney leapt straight into manipulating the sound – into using the tape recorder as an instrument in its own right.

I would do them [tape loops] over a few days. I had a little bottle of EMI glue that I would stick them with and wait till they dried. It was a pretty decent join. I'd be trying to avoid the click as it went through, but I never actually avoided it. If you made them very well you could just about do it but I made 'em a bit ham fisted and I ended up using the clicks as part of the rhythm. (McCartney, *Many Years From Now*, p.219)

McCartney was quick to share what he was learning, just as Harrison and Lennon had been quick to share their experiences with Indian music and LSD with him.

Paul constructed all these 'loops' of tape with these funny, distorted, dense little noises on them. He told the others, and they too, took the wipe heads off their recorders and started constructing loops of taped gibberish. (George Martin, *Summer of Love*, p.80)

Though McCartney talked of releasing an entire album of avant-garde tape experiments under the name *Paul McCartney Goes Too Far*<sup>55</sup>, he ultimately balked at the idea. In fact, he went so far as to head in quite the opposite direction, concealing his own experimentation by giving away his work to Lennon for use on his otherwise simple song "Tomorrow Never Knows". This compounded the public perception of Lennon as the "Clever Beatle", and of McCartney as a brilliant but conventional songwriter.

In reality, "Tomorrow Never Knows", like so many of the songs on the album, is a genuine group effort. Lennon's contribution, musically, was the simple vocal melody and the one chord around which the music moves. It is McCartney who deserves the credit for the distinctive other-worldly sound of the backing track, and Ringo Starr whose drumming has been so much imitated in recent years.

As well as the high-brow artistic interests that his central location and avant-garde contacts facilitated, McCartney's celebrity also gave him opportunity to monitor the work of other movers and shakers in the pop world. His mixing socially with British pop stars and producers at various nightclubs paid off in 1966 when, through Andrew Loog Oldham, then managing and producing the Rolling Stones, he was given the opportunity to hear an early tape of the Beach Boys "Pet Sounds".

Paul McCartney and I had enjoyed tea and smoke at my Hurlingham Road abode and awaited Lou's [Lou Adler] arrival... He was bringing his good self and an acetate of "Pet Sounds", which neither Paul or I could keep, since this was a time when personal tape recordings were not on or done... we settled into more tea, lots of smiles, more smoke... and a long, long listen and lot of wonder

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55 Miles, *Many Years From Now*, p.234.

from Paul and I. (*2Stoned*, p. 443)

In the wake of hearing “Pet Sounds”, McCartney would arrange a distinctly Beach Boys influenced introduction for his “Here, There and Everywhere”, although, as Ian McDonald rightly notes, the song itself is not much after the manner of Brian Wilson<sup>56</sup>. These small additions to *Revolver* give it yet another level of complexity and richness.

In March 1966, shortly before the *Revolver* sessions commenced, McCartney moved into a new house even nearer Abbey Road studios, at 7 Cavendish Avenue. This property McCartney at once set about making into a more expansive version of his room at Wimpole Street, even using the same architects who had refurbished the upper floor to handle the renovation work. His instruments were stacked around the place, along with his tape recorder and various pieces of art – by Magritte and others – which he had picked up during his virtual student days with the Ashers. This marked the end of an era, and also the beginning of the end of his relationship with Jane Asher herself, now that he had somewhere to bring women as and when the opportunity arose. He graduated, as it were, from his student lifestyle with the Ashers a mature, sophisticated man.

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<sup>56</sup> *Revolution in the Head*, p.168.



## IV

**THROUGH THE LOOKING GLASS**

I bought a clockwork bird in a gilded cage which I wrapped up carefully, just leaving the winding mechanism at the base exposed. Before handing it to John I wound it up. The imitation bird warbled loud and clear from its perch as John unwrapped the strange looking gift with an expression of sheer disbelief on his face. (Cynthia Lennon, *A Twist of Lennon*, p.128)

*You say that you've seen seven  
wonders*

*And your bird can sing*

*But you don't get me.*

*You don't get me.*

“And Your Bird Can Sing”

In the summer of 1964, John Lennon gave up on pretending to be a working class bachelor – Brian Epstein had thought that fans would be turned off if they knew John was married - and embraced his wealth fully. He bought a large house at St. George's Hill, Weybridge, Surrey, and set about becoming a bourgeois family man. St. George's Hill was, and is, a small and exclusive settlement populated largely by successful businessmen.

We liked Weybridge very much, just far enough out of London to have the feel of

the country with all the advantages of being within distance for John's work. The house we finally settled for was on the top of a hill, very secluded and in the select area of the St George's Hill Estate. A beautiful rambling wooded estate which provided seclusion and privacy for its tenants. (Cynthia Lennon, *A Twist of Lennon*, p.114)

Despite Cynthia's rosy view of the situation, her husband found things less idyllic. Although she thought that he was living "how a wealthy pop star should live" John missed night-clubs and rock-star parties. On top of that, the house was in a poor state of repair and so for much of 1965 the Lennons actually lived in the attic whilst workmen tore the place apart. Living in an attic with a wife he hadn't really wanted to marry, a child he hadn't planned to have, surrounded by middle-class, middle-aged neighbours, Lennon's life was far from "swinging".

Lennon watched TV, slept, ate and drank: "I was eating and drinking like a pig, and I was fat as a pig, dissatisfied with myself, and subconsciously I was crying for help. It was my fat Elvis period.<sup>57</sup>"

Lennon was cut off not only from his social life, but also from the studio which was the band's collective home, and the one place where he could really express his frustration. It actually took Lennon a full hour to drive from Abbey Road Studios to Weybridge, whereas McCartney could walk to the studio in his slippers. Lennon began to feel insecure. At the same time, and almost without trying, McCartney was usurping Lennon's dominant position in the group, and his place in the public imagination as "the clever Beatle" - "he and Paul got into a bit of one-upmanship over who knew the most about everything<sup>58</sup>" at this time, recalls Harrison.

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57 *Playboy*, January 1981.

58 Harrison, *Anthology*, p.109.

As might be imagined, the novelty of this situation wore off very quickly. Lennon evidently longed to be back in the thick of it, and pumped McCartney for information on what was happening “on the scene”. He began to spend increasing amounts of time away from Weybridge, night-clubbing and sometimes womanising.

I was very careful and paranoid because I didn't want my wife, Cyn, to know that there really was something going on outside the household. I'd always had some kind of affairs going. (*Rolling Stone*, 1970)

He wanted badly to escape, but evidently couldn't conceive of just upping-sticks and moving back to town – he had his family to think of, after all. At some time in April 1965, however, he found an escape route which he could take anywhere and at any time – for example, his den at Kenwood- and this was to influence him profoundly.

We must always remember to thank the CIA and the Army for LSD. That's what people forget. Everything is the opposite of what it is, isn't it, Harry? So get out the bottle, boy -- and relax. They invented LSD to control people and what they did was give us freedom. Sometimes it works in mysterious ways its wonders to perform. (*Playboy*, 1980)

LSD was first refined from ergot – a fungus that grows in grain – by Albert Hoffman, a scientist working for the Sandoz drug company, in Switzerland in 1938. Initially, his intention was to find a substance which could stimulate blood circulation, but after many tests, the drug was shelved. In 1943, five years after

his initial discovery, Hoffman pulled the substance off the shelf on a whim for further tests, and accidentally dosed himself, through his fingertips<sup>59</sup>. He had a bizarre series of hallucinations after even that small dose, which prompted him to carry out a series of more formal experiments on himself, the results of which he described memorably:

The dizziness and sensation of fainting became so strong at times that I could no longer hold myself erect, and had to lie down on a sofa. My surroundings had now transformed themselves in more terrifying ways. Everything in the room spun around, and the familiar objects and pieces of furniture assumed grotesque, threatening forms. They were in continuous motion, animated, as if driven by an inner restlessness. The lady next door, whom I scarcely recognized, brought me milk - in the course of the evening I drank more than two liters. She was no longer Mrs. R., but rather a malevolent, insidious witch with a colored mask.<sup>60</sup>

For a period thereafter LSD was manufactured industrially by Sandoz in small amounts and supplied to anyone with medical or scientific credentials who wanted to carry out further experiments, on the condition that any findings would be shared. There was considerable interest from the American CIA, and its predecessor the OSS, who noted the power of the substance, but seemed unsure what to do with it<sup>61</sup>. They thought

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59 Martin A. Lee and Bruce Shlain, *Acid Dreams: the complete social history of LSD* (Grove Press, 1992), p.xvii – xviii.

60 Albert Hoffman, *My Problem Child* (<http://www.psychedelibrary.org/child.htm>).

61 Lee and Shlain, *Acid Dreams*, p.3-43.

it might be a “truth drug” or perhaps the exact opposite – a way to render someone insane or insensible, and thus unable to reveal any secrets to the enemy.

It was a former OSS operative – Captain Alfred M. Hubbard – who spread the use of LSD beyond the laboratory and CIA Christmas parties. Convinced that there were real psychological benefits to the controlled use of LSD, Hubbard took it upon himself to encourage others to experiment with it and spent a great deal of time and energy locating supplies, shipping them around the world, and giving doses away to anyone who would try it. His enthusiasm was shared by the famous expatriate English novelist, Aldous Huxley, who took a similar psychedelic drug, Mescaline, in 1954. When Hubbard gave him LSD in 1955, he was astounded, and became an outspoken public proponent of the use of LSD for the “expansion of the mind”.

The popular view of LSD is that it makes you see things that aren't there. Although it can and does cause relatively trivial sensory distortions, a more serious and profound effect is the provocation of emotional experiences such as imagined returns to the womb, feelings of rebirth, visions of one's own death or dissolution, or moments of profound super-perception, like Huxley's, above. Although the phrase sounds clichéd and somewhat comical to modern readers, who have been exposed to literally hundreds of caricatures of mystic babbling hippies like Dennis Hopper's character in *Apocalypse Now*, early LSD really did seem “mind expanding”. Given that Freudian and Jungian psychiatry, both still popular in the 1950s and 60s, focused to such an extent on mining the subconscious mind and forgotten experiences, it's not hard to see the logical leap that took place: what if someone could *literally* believe themselves back in the womb, or *literally* experience their own death? Might this not help them process difficult feelings and emerge as better people, with a more realistic perspective on their place in the world, or in the universe?

Psychedelic therapy became popular in the late 1950s,

especially in California, where actor Cary Grant became another high profile user.

It is significant that some of the earliest proponents of the use of LSD were artists and writers. The beat poet Allen Ginsberg was one of the earliest members of Leary's experimental coterie at Harvard, following in the footsteps of Aldous Huxley. LSD gave some of its users the sense that they were seeing the world afresh, or more clearly. This translated into a greater appreciation for art, in some cases, but in others prompted creativity – by suggesting imagery, for example, or simply by giving the user a sense of freedom from constraint.<sup>62</sup>

In some sense, Lennon was predisposed to connect deeply with the LSD experience. In his 1980 *Playboy* interview he said:

Lewis Carroll, certain paintings. Surrealism had a great effect on me, because then I realized that my imagery and my mind wasn't insanity; that if it was insane, I belong in an exclusive club that sees the world in those terms. Surrealism to me is reality. Psychic vision to me is reality. Even as a child. When I looked at myself in the mirror or when I was 12, 13, I used to literally trance out into alpha. I didn't know what it was called then. I found out years later there is a name for those conditions. But I would find myself seeing hallucinatory images of my face changing and becoming cosmic and complete. (*Playboy*, 1980)

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62 *Ibid.* p.62. LSD is not the first drug to be used in this way. Samuel Taylor Coleridge, for example, found inspiration - specifically visual inspiration - for his poetry in laudanum, a cheaper alternative to opium. It sent him into a trance, where he saw a vision of a remote and beautiful idyll, immortalised in his poem "Kubla Khan".

As well as Lewis Carroll, Lennon had read Edward Lear – although he saw no obvious link between his work and Lear's<sup>63</sup> – and was a huge fan of the anarchic, surreal, proto-Monty Python comedy group The Goons.

Although in 1965 his lyrics were original and interesting, they were still conventional in their subject matter and style, and, before LSD, his fascination with surrealism and word-play was channelled through his comic writing, as published in two volumes, *In His Own Write* and *A Spaniard in the Works*, in 1964 and 1965 respectively, but which he had been writing since adolescence. In it, we see Lennon breaking free from “making sense” in the conventional sense which would not emerge fully in his song writing until after LSD:

In a little seashore pub in Bristow, a  
ragged gathering of rags are drinking and  
makeing melly (before sailing to sea in  
serge of grate treashy on a sudden Isle far  
across the ocean).

'Belay there me 'earty scabs,' says  
Large John Saliver entering. Pegging  
along towards some old saviours whom  
have soled the several seas. (“Treasure  
Ivan”<sup>64</sup>)

It is surely significant that Lennon's enthusiasm for this kind of writing waned after 1965. He first encountered LSD on the night of 27<sup>th</sup> March the same year<sup>65</sup>.

Klaus Voorman, the Beatles' friend from Hamburg, who also designed the sleeve for *Revolver*, was at that time playing in a band called Paddy, Klaus and Gibson, which he had joined in Hamburg in 1963. On the night of 29<sup>th</sup> March, they were

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63 *Anthology*, p.176.

64 *In His Own Write* (Simon and Schuster, 1964; repr. 2000), p.42.

65 Barry Miles, “The Real Acid Test”, *The Beatles: 10 Years That Shook the World* (Dorling Kindersley, 2004), p.138.

scheduled to perform at The Pickwick Club<sup>66</sup>. John Lennon and George Harrison planned to drop in to see the performance, but also had plans for dinner: they had been invited to dine with a dentist of their acquaintance at his London flat. It was he who introduced Harrison and Lennon to D-lysergic acid diethylamide, otherwise known as LSD, or Acid, for the first time.

In unbroadcast footage from the Beatles Anthology TV series, now available on DVD bootlegs, and transcribed online<sup>67</sup>, George Harrison identifies the dentist by name.

Presumably, there are good legal reasons why no-one has ever publicly identified John Riley as the man who supplied the Beatles with LSD on this monumental occasion. Suffice it to say that there was a John Riley practising dentistry in West London in 1965, and that he is known to have had access to LSD.

Tony Aspler is now a renowned wine critic in his native Canada. In the mid-1960s, he worked as a television producer for the BBC. He is notable, in Beatles lore, for having introduced Paul McCartney to Jane Asher. He was also, however, a good friend of Riley's, and was himself on the receiving end of an experiment with the hallucinogenic drug.

We – John, his girlfriend, Cindy Bury, and I, went down to Barcelona where a mutual friend, American producer Bruce Balaban was shooting a movie<sup>68</sup>. John slipped some LSD into Cindy's and my coffee.

How Riley got hold of his supply of LSD is not clear. Michael Hollingshead did not bring the first significant shipment of LSD to London until September 1965<sup>69</sup>. It is significant,

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66 Harrison, *Anthology*, p.177. The Pickwick Club opened on Great Newport Street in 1963, and was a "supper club", where celebrities enjoyed live music over dinner.

67 <http://www.bigomagazine.com/features05/BEAdircut.html>, retrieved 7/7/2006.

68 *The Texican*, 1966 (dir. Lesley Selander).

69 Lee and Shlain, *Acid Dreams*, p.115.



however, that Riley was a medical man; he would have known other dentists, doctors and scientists, and thus would have had access to the supplies of LSD in circulation amongst the medical and scientific communities. Dr Ronald Sandison, a British scientist, supplied Alfred Hubbard with his first dose of LSD in 1951, and experimented with LSD at Powick Hospital in Worcester in the early 1950s<sup>70</sup>; in 1963, a North London doctor called Samuel Leff was experimenting frequently with a private supply of LSD<sup>71</sup>, and killed himself in the process.

Riley was also “a swinger”, however, who knew various creative types like Aspler and Roman Polanski<sup>72</sup>. He may have got his LSD from the same place as Syd Barrett, later of Pink Floyd, who was reportedly experimenting with the drug in Cambridge in the summer of 1965<sup>73</sup>.

One common version of the story is summarised and debunked neatly by Barry Miles:

The standard version of the story is that the dentist's girlfriend looked after the bunnies at the Playboy Club and that she had obtained six hits from Victor Lowndes... in fact, the London Playboy Club didn't open until May 1966... but the acid could have come from Lowndes who became involved with the World Psychedelic Centre in London just a few

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70 Lee and Shlain, *Acid Dreams*, p.113; *A Century of Psychiatry, Psychotherapy and Group Analysis*, Ronald Sandison, Jessica Kingsley Publishers, 2001, p.39-40.

71 “The coroner said Dr. Leff's hobbies had been swimming, and intermittently to take the drug L.S.D (lysergic acid).” From the report of the inquest into Leff's death in *The Times*, 19/02/63, p.3.

72 “John made the teeth for Roman Polanski's vampire movie [‘The Fearless Vampire Killers’ (1967)]” (Tony Aspler).

73 Storm Thorgeson, a childhood friend of Barrett, reports that they got some LSD from a “supplier in London” (Mike Watkinson and Pete Anderson, *Syd Barrett & the Dawn of Pink Floyd: Crazy Diamond* (Omnibus 2001), p.35-37).

months later. (*10 Years That Shook the World*, p.138)

It is true, however, that John Riley's girlfriend in 1965-66 was Cindy Bury who went on to become the "bunny mother" at the Playboy Club, responsible for hiring, firing and managing the bunny-girls who worked there. Tony Aspler describes her as a "Canadian photographer". She was the sixth person at the dinner table that night.

Lennon, Harrison, Cynthia Lennon and Patti Boyd arrived in Harrison's brown Leyland Mini at Riley's flat at 1 Strathearn House, Strathearn Place, near Hyde Park, early in the evening. The street is lined with near-identical five storey Victorian town houses, painted white, and, even today is relatively quiet for Central London. They would have parked at the side of the road and approached the door, which opens almost onto the street.

Riley was described by Lennon as a "middle-aged swinger". Although he was older than any of the Beatles, Tony Aspler recalls him as "blonde, quite heavy set with the beginnings of a paunch – quite muscular, and would have made a good bouncer". That night, he welcomed them into his house. They ate dinner – so far, so ordinary – and then he all but forced cups of coffee on them. Lennon, in particular, recalls feeling pressurised to stay, and was evidently uncomfortable<sup>74</sup>. Cynthia Lennon, too, recalls the evening in nightmarish language, although that may be in part because she blames the break-up of her relationship with John on drugs. At any rate, Riley did convince them to stay, and to drink their coffee.

A dose of LSD can take some time to take effect – 20-30 minutes on an empty stomach, and longer if food has been taken<sup>75</sup>. In later life, having moved to Wexford in Ireland in around 1980, John Riley told one friend<sup>76</sup> that it was not he but

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<sup>74</sup> *Anthology*, p.177.

<sup>75</sup> Timothy Leary, Ralph Metzner and Richard Alpert, *The Psychedelic Experience* (University Book, 1964), p.101.

<sup>76</sup> Author's own interview with Hugh O'Neill, who knew Riley in the 1980s.

Cindy Bury who dosed the Beatles coffee that night. Whether this version of events is true or not, he evidently knew that they had taken the drug, and, being unsure what effect LSD would have on them, tried to convince them to stay in his flat. Suspecting sexual motives – that Riley wanted to hold “an orgy in his house” - Lennon insisted that they leave.

Riley came with them, following in his own car. Once they were on their way, the drug started to take hold. Four people dosed with LSD, unaware they have taken the drug, crammed into a Mini, in Central London traffic, being followed closely by a sinister medical man, is about as far as can be imagined from the ideal arrangement for a trip:

The first and most important thing to remember, in the preparation for a psychedelic session, is to provide a setting which is removed from one's usual social and interpersonal games and which is as free as possible from unforeseen distractions and intrusions... Trust in the surroundings and privacy are necessary. (*The Psychedelic Experience*, p.106)

Lennon and Harrison experienced a range of visual, auditory and temporal hallucinations. Time distorted; they saw fire, lights, and objects around them lose their solidity; things became louder. Their already fertile imaginations must also have helped fuel their intense visions. Eventually, having left the Pickwick, visited the Ad Lib – where they met up with Ringo Starr - and wandered around Regent Street, the party made it back to Harrison's house “doing 18 miles an hour”. The Lennons then stayed until the effects of the drug had worn off<sup>77</sup>.

For all it was a stressful and somewhat disorganised experience, both Lennon and Harrison were excited by it, and

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<sup>77</sup> For a full account of the experience, which it would be fruitless to repeat here, see *Anthology*, p.177-180.

found it a profound experience.

It was something like a very concentrated version of the best feeling I'd ever had in my whole life. It was fantastic. I felt in love, not with anything or anybody in particular, but with everything. Everything was perfect, in a perfect light, and I had an overwhelming desire to go round the club telling everybody how much I loved them -- people I'd never seen before. (Harrison, *Anthology*, p.177)

Lennon didn't rush into taking more LSD, however. Whether it was because he didn't have supply – whilst not illegal, LSD was hardly available in Boots the Chemist – or because that first trip seemed to last “for a month or two”<sup>78</sup>, Lennon waited almost five months before taking LSD again. In the intervening period, he kept his eyes and ears open for more information, with the intention of making his next experience more controlled.

The Beatles' experience in Los Angeles in the summer of 1965 was not only significant insofar as it furthered George Harrison's interest in Indian music, but also because it marked the second time he and Lennon took LSD. This time, the experience was a little more controlled - “we took it deliberately”, said Lennon in his 1970 *Rolling Stone* interview.

The Byrds, being based at the epicentre of the upcoming hippy revolution, were some steps ahead of The Beatles when it came to LSD, as was Peter Fonda, who arrived at the party whilst Harrison and Lennon were in the middle of their trip. He was wearing shades and tripping himself, so “kept coming over... saying, 'I know what it's like to be dead'” (Lennon, 1970). This experience directly influenced the lyrics of “She Said, She Said” on *Revolver*. It also, however, highlights an important contradiction evident in Lennon's LSD songs on the album – he argues against this kind of metaphysical pretension on the one

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<sup>78</sup> *Rolling Stone*, 1971.

hand, but in “Tomorrow Never Knows” and “I’m Only Sleeping”, fully embraced the tendency of those who use LSD to talk in terms of death or “ego-death”, sleeping and trance-like states.

This tendency was partly an inevitable response to the LSD experience:

[LSD] has also been used as "death therapy," to help dying people face the end more serenely and with less pain. Aldous Huxley, a dedicated advocate of such drugs, is reported to have taken LSD in his last days.<sup>79</sup>

During high-dose LSD sessions, subjects experience dying and report either personal sixth-circuit or genetic memories and forecasts. LSD has been administered to many dying patients because it seems to resign them to their forthcoming demise<sup>80</sup>.

In the popular imagination one name above all other is associated with the public advocacy of LSD - Dr Timothy Leary. Leary took over, in a sense, where Hubbard left off. Leary was a well-bred Catholic who had attended West Point Military Academy and served in the Army during World War II. He took his PhD in psychology in the late 1940s, and taught at the University of California at Berkeley and, later, Harvard. Leary stuck to the straight and narrow, more-or-less, until he came across hallucinogenic mushrooms and began to see in them, and by extension LSD, a way to get in touch more profoundly with his

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79 “A Remarkable Mind Drug Suddenly Spells Danger: LSD”, *Life* magazine, March 25th, 1966 (<http://www.psychedelic-library.org/magazines/lifelsd.htm>).

80 “The Four Futique Circuits”, *Musings on Human Metamorphoses*, Timothy Leary (Ronin Publishing, 2002) p.30.

own inner consciousness.

Timothy Leary found the LSD experience, though never less than astounding, occasionally negative: he felt paranoia and confusion. Aldous Huxley wrote in *The Doors of Perception*<sup>81</sup> of the need for something to anchor oneself in reality during a trip, and mentioned the *Tibetan Book Of The Dead*. Leary latched onto this idea. The idea that many of the intense religious experiences described by priests and shamans in various world cultures were, if not inspired directly by drugs, then at least a parallel experience, led him to adopt the *Tibetan Book Of The Dead* as a virtual handrail - as something to hang onto during a trip, so that it couldn't be toppled by random influences, or his own concerns. He promptly rewrote the *Book of the Dead* as a "manual", with precise instructions on preparing for, working one's way through, and coming down from a psychedelic experience<sup>82</sup>.

Lennon bought a copy of Leary's *The Psychedelic Experience* at the newly opened Indica Bookshop in April 1966 and made much the same use of it. He, in turn, promptly rewrote Leary's rewriting of the *Book of the Dead* as "Tomorrow Never Knows", borrowing references to "The Void" from "Instructions for use During a Psychedelic Session" (p.115 – 117) and a line from Leary's introduction: "Whenever in doubt, turn off your mind, relax, float downstream." (p.14)

These extraordinary images and ideas demanded something more than a standard guitar backing. As we have seen, Lennon was happy to indulge McCartney's avant-garde-isms, and this was precisely because he recognised in them a way to represent some of the effects of LSD. New experiences demanded new sounds. McCartney's tape loops and synthesised sounds, combined with a range of less obvious distortions provided by George Martin and Geoff Emerick, gave Lennon access to sounds which no-one had ever heard before and which did not exist *in reality*. They were sounds produced by the imagination, which

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81 Harper Perennial Modern Classics, 2004, p.57.

82 Lee and Shlain, *Acid Dreams*, p.108.

could be louder, more compressed, slower, or faster, than any live sound. Martin comments that, in manipulating his voice during the recording of “Tomorrow Never Knows” Lennon “wanted to make real the voice he had heard inside his head when he was reading the book”<sup>83</sup>. In other words, he wanted literally to put on tape an auditory hallucination. It's surely no coincidence that the way he described the sound was as that of a monk or the Dalai Lama. One of LSD's most powerful effects is to make otherwise Godless people feel a sense of religious awe at ordinary things, and Lennon must have been feeling momentarily devout when this idea occurred to him.

Although Lennon, George Martin and Geoff Emerick have variously claimed credit for the innovative use of backwards guitars and vocals on *Revolver* era tracks, it must surely be the case that they'd heard backwards sounds – tapes rewinding in the studio – but that, in the wake of LSD, Lennon seized on the sound as an accurate reflection of the sensory distortion he had experienced.

LSD didn't give Lennon new ideas as much as it freed him to pursue what came naturally to him: surrealistic imagery; soul-searching; the themes of death and sleep; and unnatural, exciting sounds.

Of course, his sense of humour remained, despite the somewhat po-faced weightiness of “Tomorrow Never Knows”: “Dr Robert” is the voice of the sarcastic, sceptical Lennon, commenting on his own fascination with LSD. The Doctor in the song, although specifically a reference to New York doctor Robert Freymann, who prescribed a range of drugs to wealthy celebrity clients after a high, is also a kind of combined caricature of John Riley, Timothy Leary and all the other somewhat sinister drug-addled medical men who, until 1966, had been the gatekeepers of access to the world of mind-expanding substances.

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83 *Summer of Love* (Pan, 1995) p.79.

## V

# WRITING & SESSIONS

The first *Revolver* song to make it to tape was, apparently, “Here, There and Everywhere” which McCartney demoed early in 1965 – he recalls playing a cassette of it to Lennon in the chalet they were sharing in Obertauern, Austria during the filming of *Help!*. Although it seems unlikely that McCartney would write such a strong song and then leave it lying around un-recorded for more than a year, his recollection of the event, tied as it is to the delivery of an evidently rare open compliment from Lennon, seems vivid<sup>84</sup> and accurate.

This anecdote illuminates nicely the writing process that Lennon and McCartney began to embrace after 1964, when they were no longer spending so much time together: McCartney would often write on the piano in his room at 57 Wimpole Street, recording his ideas in a notebook<sup>85</sup> or on his tape machine. Lennon, meanwhile, had his own small studio at Kenwood.

They still worked together on writing but certainly more on polishing and completing each other's work than starting from scratch, as they had often done in the past.

After “Here, There and Everywhere”, firm dates for the writing of specific songs become harder to identify. We do know that two more songs were demoed on tape in the long break from touring and recording at the start of 1966. There are many iterations of Lennon's “She Said, She Said” (at first titled “He Said, He Said”) and one of McCartney's “Eleanor Rigby”.

The inspiration for the musical approach and lyrics is covered on page 38, but there are also numerous accounts of the actual writing process which can be cross-referenced and which

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84 *Anthology*, p.209.

85 One of McCartney's notebooks -a cheap spiral-bound exercise book – was sold at Sotheby's in September 1998 for £111,500 (<http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/entertainment/171821.stm>).



more or less reconcile. McCartney's official biography describes him working on it at Wimpole Street, then with Donovan at his flat in Maida Vale, and finally at Kenwood with Harrison, Starr, Lennon and his childhood friend Pete Shotton<sup>86</sup>. Starr has claimed credit for the line "reading a sermon that no-one will hear"<sup>87</sup>, which modest claim doesn't seem unlikely. Lennon's claim to have written most of the song has, however, been roundly dismissed by critics and, notably, Pete Shotton.

On April 6<sup>th</sup> 1966 work began on actually recording *Revolver* – on committing to tape what had been, until that point, ideas or mere sketches. Enough songs had been written, and with a tour scheduled for the summer, work had to begin. So, the band put their efforts on the table before George Martin and set to work with him and his team of EMI engineers and technicians.

As had been the case for the preceding six albums recording was to take place at EMI Recording Studios, Abbey Road, St John's Wood, London.

### **Abbey Road & a Typical Session**

The studio complex was not especially large, having been converted from a sixteen room Victorian town-house by EMI in 1929. The conversion took two years and HMV studios opened in 1931. The exterior was left largely intact – white painted, but greyed by London rain and pollution. Edward Elgar was the first musician to make use of the studios, conducting a recording of *Land of Hope and Glory* in Studio 1. Others - Yehudi Menuhin, Sir Thomas Beecham, Sir John Barbirolli and, perhaps most importantly, George Formby - recorded there in the years that followed.

In fact, all of EMI's artists recorded there, using EMI

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86 *Many Years From Now*, p.283-4.

87 Interviewed by Jonathan Ross on *Friday Night with Jonathan Ross*, BBC1, 22.10.2004.

engineers, producers and disc cutters. It was possible for an artist, once signed to EMI, to have a successful career without ever stepping outside the EMI system. The Beatles entered that system in 1962, and rarely recorded anywhere but at Abbey Road. Between 1962 and 1966 they settled into a routine - Abbey Road became like a home to them: "In the end, we had the run of the whole building... I think we knew the place better than the Chairman of the company, because *we* lived there" (McCartney, *Anthology*, p.93).

Sessions never began before midday, and 7pm was the band's favourite time to start recording.

During recording, the Beatles would usually arrive together at the studio, having been picked up by Lennon's chauffeur, perhaps having stopped at McCartney's house to rehearse. The car - Lennon's Rolls Royce or Austin Princess - would pull through the gates and into the small rear car park where their van would already be parked. Mal Evans and Neil Aspinall would have arrived sometime earlier and unloaded their guitars and amplifiers, setting them up in whichever studio they were booked into on that day.

The band would enter through the "tradesman's entrance", rather than the front door<sup>88</sup>.

Inside, security guards - retired policemen or former soldiers, like university porters - in official looking black uniforms and peaked caps were reminiscent of the foyer of a minor government office in Whitehall. Institutional corridors led off toward an institutional canteen, institutional toilets, with institutional waxed toilet paper, and institutional offices. Each office was occupied by one of EMI's army of strictly graded, by-the-book managers, including Mr EH Fowler, the top man - Studio Manager<sup>89</sup>. "The whole building," recalls Nick Mason of Pink Floyd, "was painted throughout in a shade of green that I can only imagine was inspired by the KGB headquarters in the

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88 *Anthology*, p.93.

89 Emerick, *Here, There and Everywhere*, p.3.

Lubyanka.”<sup>90</sup>

Anyone you get who's been EMI trained really knows what he's doing. they actually used to have to come to work in ties and suits and white coats which is lovely, like another age! (McCartney, in Lewisohn, p.11)

Then, there were the three recording studios themselves.

Studio 1: vast, cold, and echoing - like a school assembly hall, with its waxed parquet floored and white painted wooden wall panels. The smell was of disinfectant, floor wax and dust. A staircase led up to the ceiling where the control room, like the bridge of a ship, looked out over the "shop floor". The mixing desks were expensive and solid – painted metal, with heavy industrial knobs and switches, which might have come from the dashboard of a tank, and shining rivets. The faders resembled the throttle controls from fighter planes. This was the high prestige, classical recording venue which made the studio famous.

You'd see classical sessions going on in number one - we were always being asked to turn down because a classical piano was being recorded in number one and they could hear us (McCartney, *Sessions*, p.8)

Studio 2: smaller, but still large, and still echoing, and with more parquet flooring and white paint – Geoff Emerick describes “filthy white walls” (p.180). It was, as George Harrison observed, a “big white room that was very dirty and hadn't been painted in years.” With his noted eye for detail, he recalled “these

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90 *Inside Out: a personal history of Pink Floyd* (Phoenix, 2005), p.88. Ian Hamer, who played trumpet on “Good Day Sunshine”, says “I don't really recognise these descriptions of it as a very formal place – Abbey Road itself was just like a workplace to me, but everyone was very friendly.” (Author's own interview).

old sound baffles hanging down that were all dirty and broken... this huge big hanging light... no window, no daylight."<sup>91</sup> The control room here was also up a flight of stairs. The cupboard under that staircase was a "toy cupboard", filled with items which were largely useless, except insofar as when banged together, rattled or hit, they made interesting sounds. There was a wind-up wind machine, tambourines, strange percussion instruments from Africa and Asia. In the studio itself were a Hammond organ, a piano, and a harmonium.<sup>92</sup>

Studio 3: the smallest studio, almost cramped, and used to record artists on a budget, or as a last resort when Studio 2 isn't available. The control room here wasn't up a flight of steps - it looked out straight into the room. Most of Revolver was recorded in Studio 3 and Studio 2.

The band would have entered whichever room they were working in to find Aspinall and Evans finishing the setting up of their instruments. George Martin would be in the control room with engineer Geoff Emerick and his assistant, Phil McDonald. Martin, Emerick and MacDonald, wearing sober shirts and ties, adhering to the strict EMI dress-code, would pop down the staircase or – in the case of Studio 3, along the corridor – to say hello.

Sessions usually started with cups of tea and cigarettes – and perhaps some toast or sandwiches. It was Evans' job to fetch these from the canteen, or prepare them in an improvised kitchen in the Studio, which the Beatles had earned the right to run with their superstar status.

Once they had settled in George Martin would stand with the band and they would decide amongst themselves which track to record, with the song's main author running through them on acoustic guitar or piano<sup>93</sup>. Emerick would often listen from the control room and try to anticipate any technical issues which might arise.

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91 *Summer of Love*, p.15 (quotation from *The South Bank Show*); see also Emerick, p.153.

92 *Anthology*, p.196.

93 *Summer of Love*, p.13.

Once they'd decided, they'd tell George Martin how they wanted the record to sound, often in quite abstract terms, and he would relay the requirements to the engineer, whose job it was to conceive of a way to achieve the requested sound. He, in turn, would then ask the white-coated studios technicians to carry out any electrical adjustments necessary, and/or ask the brown-coated maintenance staff to move amplifiers or instruments into the right positions. The engineer would then see to microphone positioning and set-up. There was a standard set-up prescribed by the EMI technical guidelines, which indicated which microphones should be used for which instruments, and how far away each should be placed; each engineer also had his own preferred set-up, with minor adjustments based on experience and the kind of sound the artist was after; in the case of the Beatles, Geoff Emerick started out using a variation on Norman Smith's set-up, but was willing to make severe adjustments, often in contravention of studio rules and regulations, in order to achieve not only the *right* sound, but also completely *new* sounds.

Once everything was ready, there would be wires trailing all over the floor, empty tea cups balanced on amplifiers or other flat surfaces, and everybody would be in their places with “cans” (headphones) on. In Studio 2, Martin and Emerick would be out of sight of the band up the staircase, and able to communicate only by coming downstairs or talking to them through the studio desk. In Studio 3, they would be face-to-face with the band through heavy glass.

The session would then go on, often for hours, until the band called it to a halt. Martin didn't always stay to the end of a session – despite regulations, sessions rarely finished on time – but would leave his engineers in charge.

In the meantime, members of the band would periodically retire to the echo chamber or toilets to smoke pot; dinner would be ordered and brought in by Mal Evans; visitors might pop in, though they were rarely welcome.

Eventually, Starr would grow tired – drumming is the

most physically strenuous job in most bands – or a natural pause in proceedings would occur, such as getting a good take of a particular track, and band members would make their way out to waiting cars. Sometime, an individual member might stay to tinker with his parts on a track, or all four members might hang around in the control room listening to playback of their evening's work. Sometimes, they made copies to take home.

### **Technical Innovations and Session Men in the Revolver Sessions**

It is another notable feature of *Revolver* that almost every track features some or other significant technical innovation. There are the big, obvious tricks – Leslie speakers, backwards tapes, speed manipulation – but no less significant are those less obvious technical innovations which are woven into the very texture of the tracks - those tricks of the trade which, to most listeners, are imperceptible. How many critics in 1966 appreciated the strides that Revolver represented in its use of compression, or the recording of the bass guitar? How many people acknowledged the tremendous struggle to push the limits of existing technology which was going on behind the doors of Abbey Road?

Between them, George Martin and Geoff Emerick contributed a great deal to the sound of the album – to its “punch”, its “metallic sheen”. The Beatles may have written the tunes, the lyrics, and set the mood of the album in so many ways, but it was to their producer and engineer they turned when their creativity could take them no further - when, for example, they wanted to create the sound of a thousand monks chanting.

“Tomorrow Never Knows”, as an openly experimental track, uses almost every innovative technique in the arsenal. For the vocals, Lennon knew what he wanted to hear, but it was Martin and Emerick who knew that to make the required sound it would be necessary to run the signal from the vocal

microphone through a re-engineered speaker from a Hammond organ, and then re-record it using two more microphones running into the mixing desk. George Martin recalls suggesting that, to get the sound, they'd need to find something like an Alpenhorn, which reminded Emerick of the horns in the Leslie speaker cabinet<sup>94</sup>. Emerick, however, claims sole credit in his recent book:

I kept thinking about what the Dalai Lama might sound like if he were standing on Highgate Hill, a few miles away from the studio. I began doing a mental inventory of the equipment we had on hand... perhaps there was one amplifier that might work, even though nobody had ever put a vocal through it. (Emerick, p.11)

The same track features a drum track which was recorded in what was then a ground breaking way: microphones were placed very close to the bass drum, and then the tape was slowed down on playback to create a heavier, deeper sound. The technique was taken a step further in the recording of “Rain” a week later. The drums on that track sound like no drum-kit on Earth - though many drummers have exerted themselves trying to emulate them - and that is largely because of unprecedented levels of electronic treatment. Emerick recalls nervously moving delicate and expensive microphones within the prescribed two feet of the bass drum to get the sound, worried that he'd “get a bollocking” from Mr Fowler if he were to find out (Emerick, p.13). He also ran the whole thing through a Fairchild limiter to give it more punch. Demonstrating that electronics weren't the only trick up Emerick's sleeve, he stuffed the bass drum with an old sweater to dampen it. Finally, as with “Tomorrow Never Knows”, the whole thing was slowed down.

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94 *Anthology*, p.211.

The Fairchild limiter was designed to catch very loud sounds and automatically duck the recording volume before distortion appeared on the tape. Emerick used it to “compress” the drums on “Rain”, as well as on other instruments on other tracks on *Revolver*. Applying compression to individual instruments boosts their apparent volume on tape and smooths out the signal – raising the volume of the quietest parts, and controlling (limiting) the louder sections. A whisper recorded with compression will be as loud as a shout, although neither will distort. Before compression was widely applied in recording, either musicians had to play carefully, at prescribed distances from the microphone, or the engineer had to manually boost the recording volume in, say, the chorus, but lower it in the verse.

Also, consider the apparently more conventional sounding “Good Day Sunshine” which features a similarly impossible horn section: louder than reality, more consistent than reality, and so processed as to sound almost synthesised.

Then there are techniques like close-miking, which barely qualify as the use of electronics, except that their very purpose is to emphasise the fact that the recording is not a representation of reality. When you take a photograph, you expect the resulting image to be an exact representation of the scene before your eyes. But there is a good reason why professional photographers use filters, distorting lenses, lights and retouching: the eye does all of these things itself. A flat photograph, without effects, rarely captures whatever it was that excited the photographer. The ear does similar things. Consider, for example, the experience of seeing a band live and being amazed by the performance, only to listen later to a recording of the same performance – a flat recording – and discover that it was sloppy, out-of-tune or otherwise unimpressive. Rock'n'roll has always relied on mechanical effects to reflect the *feeling* and excitement of live music, even in the days when the only electronics available were simple tape echo effects. But the Beatles wanted to go further with *Revolver*: they wanted to reflect the sensation of hearing the world under the influence of drugs. So, the exaggeration of reality



was taken a step further to convey to the uninitiated and sober listener something of the hyper-sensitivity of the senses induced by LSD and cannabis.

For example, “Eleanor Rigby” features a close-miked string octet<sup>95</sup>. Traditionally, classical instruments have been recorded in such a way as to make the recording process “invisible”; the listener should believe themselves in the room with the performers, hearing the music as if it had travelled only a few feet through the air. The Beatles recorded them in a less polite and altogether more intimate way. No-one would ever listen to a cello with their ear against the strings, and even if they did, they wouldn’t be able to listen to the other seven instruments in the same way at the same time. “Eleanor Rigby” presents another impossible but wonderful sound – the individual strings rasping and buzzing, as if bursting out of the speaker.

A final “big” innovation was Emerick’s technique for recording the bass guitar on “Paperback Writer”. The Beatles had, for some time, been frustrated at the lack of bass on their records compared to the US soul and pop records they were hearing:

The boys were listening to lots of American records and saying, “Can we get this effect?” and so on. So they would want us to do radical things. (George Martin, *Anthology*, p.206)

“Paperback Writer” was the first time the bass sound had been heard in all its excitement... For a start, Paul played a different bass, a Rickenbacker. Then we boosted it further by using a loudspeaker

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95 This same technique was used to record the rhythmic cello parts on The Beach Boys 1966 single “Good Vibrations”, although session dates suggest that there was no direct influence in either direction – merely great minds thinking alike.

as a microphone. We positioned it directly in front of the bass speaker and the moving diaphragm of the second speaker made the electric current. (Geoff Emerick, *Sessions*, p.74)

Oddly, having put so much effort into getting such a powerful bass sound, the technique wasn't used again on *Revolver*, and by the time of the *Sgt. Pepper* sessions EMI were convinced of the benefits of loud, punchy bass and had authorised the recording of bass by Direct Injection – running right into the mixing desk, rather than through an amplifier.

Even comparatively plain songs like “And Your Bird Can Sing” feature electronic manipulation, especially of EQ in the form of much added treble. Try to play “She Said, She Said” or “Dr Robert” at home and, even with the right guitars and amplifiers, the sound is elusive. That is, until you “crush” the sound into a narrow frequency range with lots of treble, for example by playing through a wah-wah pedal held open halfway. Not only is the treble boosted, but there is no balancing bass in the guitar sound on most of the tracks on the LP.

Although tape experiments have already been discussed in some detail in the chapter on Paul McCartney, we should also consider them in the wider context. Firstly, although “Tomorrow Never Knows” is the one place where they're very obvious, Geoff Emerick claims in his recent book that even the childish “Yellow Submarine” features avant-garde tape cut-up experiments. He says that “Being For the Benefit of Mr Kite” on *Sgt. Pepper* wasn't the first time that an instrumental overdub was created from existing tapes being cut up and pieced back together in “random” order, claiming that the brass band section on “Yellow Submarine” was created the same way, a year earlier.

Phil McDonald was dispatched to fetch some records of Sousa marches and after auditioning several of them, George

Martin and Paul finally identified one that was suitable – it was in the same key... [Martin] told me to record the section on a clean piece of two-track tape and then chop it into pieces, toss the pieces into the air, and splice them back together (p.131-2)

Perhaps it is because, in this case, the team were after something which sounded natural and which might pass for a real brass band, rather than the overtly weird sound on *Mr Kite*, that so little has been made of this early piece of experimentation.

## VI

# SMOKING HOT NEWNESS

*Revolver* wasn't so much released as it leaked out over the course of some weeks.

Firstly, there was the advance guard – a hot-off-the-presses *Revolver* sessions single, “Paperback Writer” backed with “Rain”, released in the USA in May and shortly afterwards, on June 10<sup>th</sup>, in the UK. Here was *Revolver* in microcosm – a kind of trailer for the LP – with compressed bass, backwards vocals, Indian influences, Beach Boys inspired vocals, LSD-inspired imagery, and heavily treated vocals. Their last single, released almost six months earlier, had been a double A-side with the folky, earthy “We Can Work It Out” and straight-up plastic soul tune “Day Tripper”. Whilst it can be hard to see the dividing line between *Rubber Soul* and *Revolver*, it seems fairly clear cut when you listen to those singles in succession.

Then in June 1966 Capitol Records, who licensed Beatles material for distribution in the USA, asked for any available tracks to fill out a manufactured “odds and sods” LP. It was their habit, up until *Sgt. Pepper*, to release shorter Beatles LPs than in the UK and then use the held-over tracks, with some b-sides, singles and maybe out-takes, to make up whole new albums. *Yesterday and Today* was released in the US on June 20<sup>th</sup>, giving the world a second taste of the *Revolver* sessions. By the time the album proper was released in the UK, five of the sixteen songs recorded at the sessions were already in the public domain, and a shrewd Beatle-fan could have guessed at something of the feel of the new album.

In late June 1966, when all of the tracks for the album had been finished, Klaus Voorman got a call from John Lennon asking if he'd be interested in working on the cover design. Voorman, of course said yes – as much as anything, it was a paying job, and he wasn't making much from bass-playing – and

was duly invited to the studio to hear the tapes for inspiration. They played him everything they had, and he was particularly struck by “Tomorrow Never Knows”. “I was overwhelmed,” he says<sup>96</sup>, and knew then that “it was my turn to come up with something really outstanding to fit the fantastic music.” He had taken the liberty of preparing a rough pencil sketch from memory<sup>97</sup>, with “all the hair and little figures”, which the band liked. So, as the scheduled release date approached, he retired for three weeks to his studio in the front room at 29 Parliament Hill in Hampstead, with nothing more complicated than some sheets of A2 paper, a pen and some ink. “I chose black and white 'cause every other cover was in colour,” he recalls; brightly coloured “psychedelic” covers wouldn't become a cliché for sometime yet, but by anticipating this trend and avoiding it, he assured *Revolver* a place in the pantheon of all-time great LP covers.

As the release date approached, and as Voorman beavered away at the cover design, the Beatles and their team settled down in the control rooms of Studios 1 and 3 for mono and stereo mixing. Put simply, mixing is the process whereby multi-track tapes of songs recorded on different days, perhaps in different studios, are copied across to one “master tape” from which the vinyl LP can then be cut. In fact, the process is more complicated than that, and extremely delicate. Firstly, there is the issue of deciding a running order – this task seems usually to have fallen to George Martin, at least as late as the recording of *Sgt. Pepper*:

My old precept in the recording business was always 'Make side one strong,' for obvious commercial reasons... Another principle of mine when assembling an album was always to go out on a side strongly, placing the weaker material towards the end but then going out with a

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96 Quotations from Klaus Voorman come from the author's own interview.

97 Reproduced in *MOJO* magazine, July 2006, p.77.

bang.<sup>98</sup>

It's hard to see if or how these principles influenced the line-up for *Revolver*, except that it certainly does finish on a “bang” with the extraordinary “Tomorrow Never Knows”, and that the three tracks preceding it - “Dr Robert”, “I Want To Tell You”, “Got To Get You Into My Life” - are amongst the weaker tracks on the LP.

Once the running order was settled, Martin and Geoff Emerick, supervised by the Beatles, would assemble all the master session tapes, with their boxes bureaucratically marked up with pencil indicating which of the several takes on the tape was considered “Best” and should therefore be used for the final LP. Phil McDonald, Emerick's tape operator and assistant, would thread the tapes and spool them to the right point – this sometimes took a while, although the beginning of each take was marked on the tape itself.

Martin and Emerick would then listen to each take and make decisions as to any manipulations that might be required. These could range from something as simple as Emerick “riding the faders” to boost the volume of one or more tracks in the chorus, to more complicated procedures like recording overdubs live alongside the mix. Other manipulations might include fading out a vocal track briefly to remove studio chatter (or in the case of “And Your Bird Can Sing”, drug-induced giggling) and the addition of further compression, equalisation (boosting of treble, bass or middle), or reverb across the track.

Once an acceptable mono master-tape had been assembled, Emerick and Martin would then repeat the process, without the Beatles, to create a similar (but not identical) stereo mix. This would usually be produced much more quickly, partly because all the tough decisions had already been made, but also because stereo was not mainstream in 1966, and so the stereo mix was a lower priority job.

The mono and stereo mixes of *Revolver* are consequently

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98 Martin, *Summer of Love*, p.148-9.

quite different. A full and impressive catalogue of variations between the various officially released Beatles tracks compiled by Beatles fans is available online<sup>99</sup>, but some notable variations include:

- A general sense of greater volume and "punch" in the mono mix
- Longer fade-outs on several tracks in the mono mix
- Differences in the tape loops between the two mono versions of "Tomorrow Never Knows", and between the stereo and mono version
- The bass is louder on the mono "Got To Get You Into My Life"; there are also considerable differences in the brass overdubs and some of the vocals, where additions were made during the mixing stage
- The backwards guitar fills on "I'm Only Sleeping" appear at different places, and at varying volumes, in the mono and stereo mixes

These mixes – mono and stereo – were delivered to EMI, along with test-pressings and Voorman's original artwork, which had been approved by a committee including George Martin and Brian Epstein. Sleeves were printed at one location, and the master tapes were used to press thousands of vinyl copies of the record. Finally, the sleeves and records were put together ready to be shipped to record shops, electrical stores, and high street shops all over Britain. On the 5<sup>th</sup> of August, *Revolver* was despatched into the waiting hands of the public.

On the whole, the LP was well received by critics. Peter Clayton, reviewing the LP for *Gramophone*, said:

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99 <http://www.columbia.edu/~brennan/beatles/index.html>

This really is an astonishing collection, and listening to it you realize the distance these four odd young men have travelled since that first record of “Love Me Do” in 1962 is musically even greater than it is materially... the impression you get is not of any one sound or flavour, but simply of smoking hot newness with plenty of flaws and imperfections, but *fresh*... such a diet of newness might give the ordinary pop-picker indigestion.

Allen Evans of the influential *NME* provided a superficial track-by-track summary of the album which seems to go out of its way to avoid passing judgement: “The latest Beatles album, *Revolver*, certainly has new sounds and new ideas.<sup>100</sup>” He goes on to single out the “catchy” false endings of “I’m Only Sleeping”; argues that “Yellow Submarine” will soon be a “household favourite” and naively asks how you could possibly relax whilst listening to the “outerspace noises” of “Tomorrow Never Knows”.

Other musicians, however, were certainly influenced by *Revolver*. The Bee Gees, then a very young beat group with psychedelic leanings and more conventionally pitched voices, entered a serious *Revolver* phase for some time afterwards, best exemplified by “In My Own Time” on their 1967 debut album, which was an out-and-out pastiche of “Taxman”/ “Paperback Writer”/ “Rain”. Pete Townshend of The Who must have heard an advance copy of *Revolver*, or at least “Tomorrow Never Knows”, as he went into the studio at the beginning of August 1966 to record a kind of pocket *Revolver* in the EP track “Disguises”, which features a droning backing, echoing, discordant sound effects and an “Eastern” tinged vocal.

The influence lasted long after 1966, however. *Revolver* sound-alike recordings – see the complete list on p. 97 - appeared throughout the following 40 years, and are still

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100 *NME*, 27/6/66, p.3.



appearing. Notable examples include the song “Let Forever Be” by the Chemical Brothers, UK dance music producers who admit to an obsession with “Tomorrow Never Knows”, and whose imitation goes far beyond casual homage, as Kari McDonald and Sarah Hudson Kaufman observe in their essay “Tomorrow Never Knows: the contribution of George Martin and his production team to the Beatles' new sound”<sup>101</sup>.

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101 Russell Reising ed., *Every Sound There Is* (Ashgate, 2002) p.152-5

## VII

# SESSION DATES

Based on dates given in Mark Lewisohn's exhaustive, meticulous and brilliant *The Complete Beatles Recording Sessions*.

Date	Songs Recorded
06/04/66	Tomorrow Never Knows ("Mark I")
07/04/66	Tomorrow Never Knows Got To Get You Into My Life
08/04/66	Got To Get You Into My Life
11/04/66	Got To Get You Into My Life Love You To ("Granny Smith")
13/04/66	Love You To Paperback Writer
14/04/66	Paperback Writer Rain
16/04/66	Rain
17/04/66	Dr Robert
19/04/66	Dr Robert
20/04/66	And Your Bird Can Sing Taxman
21/04/66	Taxman
22/04/66	Taxman Tomorrow Never Knows
26/04/66	And Your Bird Can Sing
27/04/66	I'm Only Sleeping
28/04/66	Eleanor Rigby

29/04/66	Eleanor Rigby I'm Only Sleeping
05/05/66	I'm Only Sleeping
06/05/66	I'm Only Sleeping
12/05/66	Taxman For No One
18/05/66	Got To Get You Into My Life
19/05/66	For No One
26/05/66	Yellow Submarine
02/06/66	I Want To Tell You ("I Don't Know"; "Laxton's Superb")
03/06/66	I Want To Tell You Yellow Submarine
08/06/66	Good Day Sunshine ("A Good Day's Sunshine")
09/06/66	Good Day Sunshine
14/06/66	Here, There and Everywhere
16/06/66	Here, There and Everywhere
17/06/66	Here, There and Everywhere Got To Get You Into My Life
20/06/66	Got To Get You Into My Life
21/06/66	She Said, She Said ("Untitled")

## VII

### SONG-BY-SONG & SONG INDEX

#### **Paperback Writer** (Lennon/McCartney)

This single, recorded during the *Revolver* sessions and released shortly before the LP, has a throwaway, Kinks-style lyric - the whole track is somewhat reminiscent of "Holiday in Waikiki" from the *Kink Kontroversy* (1965) - coupled with an excitingly produced track. The bass was recorded in a particularly ingenious way, using another bass speaker as a microphone. The harmony vocals are a nod to the style of the Beach Boys.

*See pages 25, 30, , 73, 76, 80*

#### **Rain** (Lennon/McCartney)

Similar in style to "Tomorrow Never Knows", this track, recorded during the *Revolver* sessions, was released on the b-side of the "Paperback Writer" single. Ringo Starr rates this as his best drumming performance with the Beatles. The lyrics are arguably fairly straightforward - a kind of inversion of "Good Day Sunshine", celebrating bad British weather. But obviously, there is much more to them than that - Lennon is saying that he really sees the world as it is, sees beneath the surface, thanks to LSD, but that everyone else is blind. To reflect the LSD experience, the track was played fast, and then slowed down, and features backwards vocals in the outro.

*See pages 9, 12, 25, 30, 71, 72, 76, 80*

\* \* \*

#### **Taxman** (Harrison)

Inspired musically by early funk records – its beat is “on the one”

- and, in the solo, by Indian scales. Lyrically, an expression of Harrison's "greedy Beatle" persona, and a decidedly reactionary protest against high levels of taxation in the wake of a General Election.

*See pages 9, 12, 13, 95*

### **Eleanor Rigby** (Lennon/McCartney)

An idea from McCartney with input from Lennon, George Martin and even Ringo Starr and Pete Shotton. It's chordal structure was inspired, McCartney has suggested, by the Beatles then shared fascination with one-chord Indian music; the orchestration and arrangement, however, is in the style of film composer Bernard Herrmann. The lyrics are in a vaguely social realist, *Play for Today* style. The name Eleanor Rigby comes from a combination of a Bristol wine merchants – Rigby & Evans – and a gravestone McCartney must have seen as a young man.

*See pages 7, 30, 37-38, 64, 73*

### **I'm Only Sleeping** (Lennon/McCartney)

A more oblique LSD song than "Tomorrow Never Knows", this echoes the latter's "relax and float downstream" with its own "stay in bed, float upstream". It also seems to answer "Tomorrow Never Knows" line "it is not dying" in its title. The lyrics might also, however, be something of a response to McCartney's interest in social realism – rock stars, before this song, did not often sing about themselves lying about in bed. Musically, like almost all of the LSD songs recorded during these sessions, it relies heavily on backwards tape effects and manipulated vocals.

*See pages 8, 30, 61, 79*

### **Love You To** (Harrison)

Barely a group performance in any meaningful sense, featuring only Harrison on multiple overdubs, and Starr banging a tambourine, accompanied by a group of semi-professional Indian musicians supplied by the Asian Music Circle. Shankara Angadi disagrees with Ian McDonald, but had to think hard before making a call: he thinks Harrison probably did play the sitar part, but with close supervision from his kindly and generous sitar teacher, whose name remains unknown.

*See pages 11, 21, 25-26, 32*

### **Here, There and Everywhere** (Lennon/McCartney)

Possibly written and recorded in demo form as early as March 1965, this unpretentious and sentimental love song was given minimal treatment in the studio, with no classical overdubs, and only a short Beach Boys influenced vocal harmony intro for decoration.

*See pages 7, 8, 34, 48, 64*

### **Yellow Submarine** (Lennon/McCartney)

McCartney says the song came to him as he was drifting off to sleep, playing with images and colours in his mind, and that he intended it as a children's song. Surely, however, it also owes something to the ubiquity of sinister Cold War submarines in the news and the cinema in the mid-1960s? And to Lennon's vision, during his first LSD trip in March 1965, of George Harrison's bungalow as being like a submarine they were piloting? Although dismissed as a silly children's song by many, it foreshadows a whole sub-genre of "toy-town" psychedelia (viz., the work of producer Mark Wirtz) and offers a fascinating early piece of hippy subversion: don't be scared of submarines – they're just big communes under the water. Ian McDonald suggests,

probably correctly, that the musical inspiration was Bob Dylan's "Rainy Day Women # 12 & 35".

*See pages 8, 9, 33, 37, 41, 74, 80*

### **She Said, She Said** (Lennon/McCartney)

An LSD song, inspired lyrically by Lennon's encounter with a tripping and irritating Peter Fonda at Benedict Canyon Drive in August 1965 whilst he himself was experiencing LSD for the second time. A sardonic, cynical flip-side to "Tomorrow Never Knows" - Lennon's own sarcastic response to the would-be profundity encouraged by LSD. The guitars are trebly in the extreme, in the style of *Rubber Soul's* "Nowhere Man". Although Lennon demoed this track extensively as "He Said, He Said" (tapes survive on bootlegs), it was actually recorded at the last minute in the sessions when the band realised they were a track short on the album, hence its exciting, rough and ready performance.

*See pages 60, 64, 74*

### **Good Day Sunshine** (Lennon/McCartney)

A kind of music hall, boogie-woogie plod inspired by the very hot summer of 1966. Not ground breaking, and the kind of thing that might have fit on *Rubber Soul* with ease.

*See page 72*

### **And Your Bird Can Sing** (Lennon/McCartney)

Lyrically cryptic, but possibly inspired by Cynthia Lennon's gift to her husband of a mechanical bird in a gilded cage, which horrified him, and almost certainly a comment on their marriage: she might have all the wealth that came with marriage to a Beatle, but she didn't "get" him, in either sense. Notable, again,

for some very trebly guitars, but this time playing a harmony riff.

*See pages 49, 74, 78*

**For No One** (Lennon/McCartney)

Classically inspired, with a pinch of Burt Bacharach, this stately ballad is a comment on McCartney's relationship with Jane Asher, and the lyrical flip-side to "Here, There and Everywhere".

*See pages 7, 37, 39*

**Dr Robert** (Lennon/McCartney)

An even more light-hearted riposte to his own "Tomorrow Never Knows", with a central "character" based on New York doctor Robert Freymann, who prescribed a range of drugs to wealthy celebrity clients, but which is also a kind of combined caricature of John Riley, Timothy Leary and all the other drug-addled Doctors who Lennon had come across. Musically, again, a *Rubber Soul* style track with trebly guitars and a punchy R&B beat reminiscent of "What Goes On", sung by Starr on the previous LP.

*See pages 7, 8, 63, 74, 78*

**I Want To Tell You** (Harrison)

Lyrical, a more sophisticated version of 1963's "Don't Bother Me" - an expression by Harrison of his shyness. This time round, however, he has attained a kind of self-awareness through LSD and a nascent interest in Buddhism and Hinduism which means he is able to analyse his attitude from a distance.

*See page 78*



**Got To Get You Into My Life** (Lennon/McCartney)

Notable for its close-miked, double-tracked session horn section and R&B screamer vocal – McCartney keeping his hand in after a run of ballads. Ian Hamer, who played on this track, recalls spending quite some time working out what he was expected to play, and feeling somewhat frustrated about it. Probably not about drugs.

See pages 78, 79

**Tomorrow Never Knows** (Lennon/McCartney)

In a sense, *Revolver's* signature track: an Indian drone, tape loops, treated vocals, thundering drums, LSD-inspired lyrics – everything is here. Oddly, the first track recorded in the sessions, though it is by far the most musically advanced piece on the album.

See pages 8, 9, 12, 18, 30, 47, 61, 62, 63, 70, 71, 74, 77, 79, 80

## VIII

# THE BEATLES LONDON, 1965 - 1966

### 1. **The Ashers' house**, 57 Wimpole Street

Paul McCartney lived here between 1964 and 1966. His room was on the top floor, overlooking Browning Mews. Peter Asher's room was next door, overlooking Wimpole Street. Dr Asher's surgery was on the ground floor. The music room where McCartney worked on his songs, both alone and with John Lennon, was in the basement. Wimpole Street is a short walk from Harley Street in Marylebone. Not as posh as Belgravia, and with rather more red brick, Marylebone has broad, quiet streets off which run hundreds of quiet mews and yards. Elizabeth Barrett Browning lived at number 50.

### 2. **Indica Gallery**, 6 Mason's Yard

Co-owned by John Dunbar and Barry Miles, and a regular haunt for Paul McCartney. John Lennon also visited frequently, and it was here that he bought the copy of *The Psychedelic Experience* which inspired "Tomorrow Never Knows". Eric Burdon of the Animals: "I maintained a flat in Dalmeny Court in London's West End, a stone's throw away from the Royal Palace. I was right above the Indica Gallery" (*Don't Let Me Be Misunderstood: a memoir* ).

### 3. **John Riley's flat**, 1 Strathearn House, Strathearn Place, Paddington

If John Riley was the man who introduced John Lennon and George Harrison to LSD, then it is likely that it happened here. Riley's dental surgery was in nearby Edgware Road.

### 4. **The Scotch of St James**, Mason's Yard

### 5. **The Bag o'Nails**, Kingly Street

### 6. **The Ad Lib**, corner of Leicester Place and Lisle Street

These three nightclubs were popular amongst the “trendiest” celebrities in 1965-66. The Ad Lib, which opened in 1964, was the first to cater to pop musicians, playing only black American music - soul and blues: the Ad Lib “was just a great club: great dance, pull birds, chat with unusual people.” (McCartney, *Many Years From Now*, p. 134). By 1966 the Ad Lib was somewhat out of favour - “it dwindled... and the next one was the Scotch of St James” (Ibid). Andrew Loog Oldham described the Scotch of St James: “You'd knock at the door and be auditioned through a peep-hole. Once in you'd travel downstairs via the twisting staircase... The Beatles, the Stones, the Yardbirds, Eric Clapton, Long John Baldry, Keith Moon, the Searchers all starred in the main room on their nights off... Lennon and McCartney, Jagger and Richards and I and our ladies would sit back in a dark corner and smoke and gloat.” (*2Stoned*, p255-6) Barry Miles: “The club was decorated with panels of Scots tartan but was so dark that the décor was unimportant” (*Many Years From Now*, p.140).

#### 7. **EMI Studios**, Abbey Road, St John's Wood

The Beatles recorded almost exclusively at Abbey Road throughout their career. They were based most often in Studio 2, although *Revolver* was recorded in both Studio 2 and 3.

#### 8. **Paul McCartney's house from March 1966**, 7 Cavendish Avenue, St John's Wood

McCartney bought this house early in 1965, but it needed extensive renovation. He was able to walk to Abbey Road from here in a matter of minutes, and hence was often the first Beatle to reach the studio.

#### 9. **Barry Miles' flat**, 15 Hanson Street, Fitzrovia

Fitzrovia is like a more genteel, less aggressively sexy Soho, on the opposite side of Oxford Street. A five minute walk from one of the busiest streets in London, there are streets lined with tall Victorian buildings which, even now, have little motor traffic. There are small restaurants, galleries, pavement cafés and clubs,

and almost every building seems to have a blue plaque upon it. Artists, actors, writers and other assorted Bohemians from Tommy Cooper to Samuel Beckett have made their homes here. It was presumably this atmosphere which appealed to Barry Miles when he moved here in 1964. This was a favourite hang-out for Paul McCartney in the 1960s.

**10. Donovan's flat**, Maida Vale [location unknown]

Where McCartney visited the Irish singer-songwriter to play him "Yellow Submarine" in May 1966.

**11. George Harrison's house**, Kinfauns, Claremont Drive, Esher, Surrey

**12. John Lennon's house**, Kenwood, Wood Lane, Weybridge, Surrey

"A 27-room mock Tudor mansion... in the exclusive St George's Hill estate," according to Tony Barrow (*John, Paul, George & Ringo*, p.142).

**15. The Asian Music Circle**, 18 Fitzalan Road, Finchley

The house from which Ayana Deva Angadi ran the Asian Music Circle.

**16. Brian Epstein's House**, 24 Chapel Street

Brian Epstein barely figures in the *Revolver* story, except as something of a bogeyman figure, trying to bully "the boys" into touring when all they wanted to do was stay in the studio and make great albums.

## IX

**AND YOUR BIRD CAN SING: A REVOLVER DISCOGRAPHY**

The discography is broken into three sections.

1. Records by the Beatles made in the run-up to *Revolver*, or in its wake.
2. Records by others which influenced *Revolver* in one way or another, including pop, classical and world music.
3. Records influenced by *Revolver*, which as well as demonstrating the impact of the record amongst musicians, might also help to fulfil a need amongst readers for “more of the same”.

**THE BEATLES*****Help!* (1965)**

“Yesterday” - Paul McCartney's first substantial practical use of classical instruments.

***Rubber Soul* (1965)**

“Norwegian Wood (This Bird has Flown)” - the first pop record ever released to feature a sitar, and the beginning of Harrison's association with the Asian Music Circle.

“In My Life” - with its baroque keyboard solo and a lyric dealing with subjects other than love or lust, this song provides something of a template for later Beatles writing.

***Yesterday and Today* (1966 – US only)**

An interesting demonstration, throughout, of how songs from *Rubber Soul*, *Revolver* and various singles of the period sit well together – as if, as George Harrison observed, they were two volumes of the same LP.

**“Strawberry Fields Forever” (1967 – 7” single)**

Six months on from “Tomorrow Never Knows”, and still many of the

same techniques are evident – the tamboura drone, the tape loops, the heavy compression.

### ***Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band (1967)***

“Within You, Without You” - Harrison's second attempt to compose in Hindustani style; very similar to “Love You To” but longer and with more ornamentation.

## **INFLUENCES ON REVOLVER**

**Beach Boys, “California Girls” (1965); *Pet Sounds* (June 1966)** – the former set a trend for elaborate classically styled additions to pop tunes, pre-dating even “Yesterday”; the latter McCartney heard from acetate early in May 1966, and again with Lennon at a press conference to launch the record a week or so later.

**Bell Labs/IBM 704, “Bicycle Built for Two” (1962)** – an experimental recording by the American telephone company, which has a primitive voice synthesiser singing Harry Dacre's 1892 composition which is better known by its refrain “Daisy, Daisy, give me your answer do...”. Arthur C. Clarke borrowed the idea for “2001: A Space Odyssey” in 1969.

**Bernard Herrmann, *Fahrenheit 451* (1965); “Psycho Overture” (1960)** – Herrmann's scores for these two films in particular were notable in that they were scored for strings/harp/percussion and just strings respectively. Whilst McCartney suggested Vivaldi as the main influence on “Eleanor Rigby”, George Martin claims to have cribbed from Herrmann.

**Bob Dylan, “Rainy Day Women #12 & 35”** - cited as a possible influence on “Yellow Submarine” by Ian McDonald in *Revolution in the Head*. He points out that McCartney met Donovan, his “co-writer” on the song, at one of Dylan's London concerts in May 1966, and that this tune had been released as a single two weeks before “Yellow Submarine” was written.

**Byrds, “Eight Miles High” / “Why” (March 1966)** – although neither side of this single feature a sitar, both songs feature “eastern” scales, and “Why” has a droning guitar. The press coined a new term to describe these songs – “raga rock”. The Byrds cite Ravi Shankar and John Coltrane as the direct influences on this sound. They had shared a studio with Shankar – Jim Dickson’s “World Sound Studios” – and their tour bus tape in 1965/66 featured one side of Shankar’s music.

**John Cage, *Williams Mix* (1952)** – the score for *Williams Mix* is long and complex, containing instructions for the cutting together of six tapes, containing city sounds, country sounds, electronic sounds, “musique concrete”, wind sounds) and quiet sounds. It’s a more interesting as an idea than it is to listen to.

**Karlheinz Stockhausen, *Gesang der Jünglinge* (1954-55)** – Stockhausen appeared on the cover of *Sgt. Pepper’s Lonely Hearts Club Band*, and was name-dropped by McCartney throughout 1965-68. This piece involves the manipulation of tapes containing sung sounds to change their pitch and speed. The high-pitched laughing sounds on “Tomorrow Never Knows” are directly inspired by this kind of experimentation.

**Kinks, “See my Friends” (May 1965); “Dedicated Follower of Fashion” (1965); “Sunny Afternoon” (1966)** – the first song on this list was the first pop recording to feature an Indian style “drone”, played on guitar. The second was a pioneering example of social realism in pop, being based on Ray Davies own observations of the pop and fashion scene. The third song is roughly contemporary with “Taxman” and deals with some of the same issues – high taxes on the rich.

**Lovin’ Spoonful, “Daydream” (1966)** – Ian McDonald suggests this song as the inspiration for “Good Day Sunshine”.

**Luciano Berio, *Laborintus II* (1965)** - this is the piece Berio played when McCartney saw him lecture in 1966. It is subtitled “for voices, instruments and tape”.

**Merseys, “Sorrow” (1966)** – Ian McDonald suggests that this song’s “rolling swing” influenced “And Your Bird Can Sing”.

**Peter Sellers & Sophia Loren, “Goodness Gracious Me” (1960)** – a novelty single released to coincide with the Sellers vehicle “The Millionairess”, and produced by George Martin. Martin was, at that time, considered primarily a producer of comedy records.

**Ravi Shankar, *Portrait of Genius* (1964); *Sound of the Sitar* (1965)** – two albums recorded by Shankar at World Pacific Studios in Los Angeles, and the most likely candidates for the particular examples of Shankar's work heard by Harrison at the end of 1965 on the recommendation of the Byrds.

**Ray Cathode (George Martin), “Time Beat” / “Waltz in Orbit” (1962)** – an early experiment in electronic music produced by George Martin, which he played to McCartney in 1965. The tunes were easy listening style pieces adorned, somewhat superficially, with electronic bleeping sounds.

**Rolling Stones, “Paint it Black”; “Mother's Little Helper”; “Lady Jane”; *Aftermath* (1966)** – the first two songs feature sitar played by Brian Jones. The latter was a high profile example of baroque instrumentation on a pop tune which was almost certainly an influence on “For No One”.

**Ron Grainer/BBC Radiophonic Workshop, “Dr Who” (1963)** – Grainer wrote a conventional theme tune, and Delia Derbyshire worked on it to make it more appropriate for the tea-time children's sci-fi show. The end result is an unearthly concoction of whooshing, bleeping, ringing sounds which was probably the most commonly heard piece of pure electronic music in the mid-1960s. It was played at the beginning and end of every episode of “Dr Who” from November 1963.

**Supremes, “Where Did Our Love Go?” (1964); “Baby Love” (1964); “I Hear a Symphony” (1965)** – the Beatles always listened to and learned from Motown. Ian McDonald cites these three songs in particular as influences on “Got to Get You Into My Life”.

**Yardbirds, “Heart Full of Soul” (May 1965)** – the first pop recording session to feature a sitar player, but not the first pop single to do so. The version of the song with the sitar sounded, frankly, terrible



and wasn't released at the time. Instead, a version featuring Jeff Beck and a fuzz-box doing the same job came out and was an influence on the general interest in Eastern sounds from 1965 onward.

## SONGS INSPIRED BY REVOLVER<sup>102</sup>

*That is to say, songs **obviously** inspired by Revolver – there are many others which would not have featured a sitar but for “Love You To”, and which were surely written in the moment of excitement following hearing the album, but which do not **sound** like Revolver. It should also be noted that this list is entirely subjective: many people will listen to the songs below and shrug, unable to hear the slightest resemblance to anything on Revolver.*

Ballroom, “Baby Please Don't Go” (1966) – featuring a droning, one-chord backing, and descending into a sea of shuddering, howling tape loops and backwards vocals, Los Angeles production wunderkind Curt Boettcher turns this blues song into a harmony vocal version of “Tomorrow Never Knows”.

**Bee Gees, “In My Own Time” (1967)** – from their debut album, a straight imitation of “Taxman”/“Rain”, in a style that would now be called “power pop”.

**Chemical Brothers & Noel Gallagher, “Setting Sons” - *Dig Your Own Hole* (1996)** – an electronic invocation of Starr's drumming on “Tomorrow Never Knows”, and Noel Gallagher singing through something like a Leslie speaker. For a detailed analysis of the similarities between the two tracks see the essay “Tomorrow Never Knows: the contribution of George Martin and his production team to the Beatles' new sound” by Kari McDonald and Sarah Hudson Kaufman in *Every Sound There Is*, ed. Russell Reising (Ashgate, 2002), p.152-5.

**Chemical Brothers, “Let Forever Be” (1999)** – another “Tomorrow Never Knows” imitation, but with something of the rhythm

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102 See also Bruce Gordon's extensive list of *Revolver* “rip-offs” at [http://www.silentbugler.com/Lets\\_Be\\_The\\_Beatles/Albums/Revolver.htm](http://www.silentbugler.com/Lets_Be_The_Beatles/Albums/Revolver.htm)

of “Taxman”.

**Cotton Mather, “40 Watt Solution”, “Last of the Mohicans” – *The Big Picture* (2002)** – the former is yet another imitation of “Rain” and “Tomorrow Never Knows” by an American band often criticised for wasting their talents on straight-up pastiche of their musical heroes.

**Jam, “Start!”, *Sound Affects* (1980)** – why didn’t the Beatles sue when Paul Weller borrowed the bass-line from “Taxman”? In a period when Weller was recording cover versions of “Rain” and “And Your Bird Can Sing” for fun, and using the rear cover of *Revolver* as some kind of sartorial manual, it’s no surprise that he felt the need to express his love for the album publicly in some way.

**Kinks, “Dead End Street” (1966)** – I wouldn’t want to try to make Ray Davies admit it, but this track is inspired by “Eleanor Rigby” in mood, and in the mournful trumpet passages, though of course with a unique Kinks twist in the music hall bridge and chorus.

**Lee Mallory, “That’s the Way it’s Gonna Be” (1966)** – more *Revolver*isms from Los Angeles producer Curt Boettcher. This time, there are lyrics about rain, like “Rain”, and then a whole range of studio tricks: varispeed, backwards tapes, and exotic instruments. This time, however, it’s a koto.

**Monkees, “Salesman”, “Pleasant Valley Sunday”, “Daily Nightly” - *Pisces, Aquarius, Capricorn and Jones Ltd.* (1967)** – it’s surely no mistake that the former track, which happens to open this album, should be reminiscent of “Taxman” with its stinging rhythm guitar part. “Pleasant Valley Sunday”, which was also issued as a single, is an obvious attempt to imitate “Paperback Writer” in tempo, mood and, most noticeably, the twanging guitar riff. Finally, “Daily Nightly” is after “Tomorrow Never Knows”, with echoing, detached vocals, “outerspace sounds” and backward tape all over it.

**Pink Floyd, “Lucy Leave” (1966)** – the group’s first demo tape in late 1966 featured a re-recording of this 1965 Syd Barrett R&B tune with a new guitar solo, this time very clearly Indian sounding, in an

obvious response to *Revolver*.

**Rolling Stones, “My Obsession”, “Connection” - *Between the Buttons* (1967)** – the drums on the former track, recorded in August 1966, are virtually identical to “Taxman”, and the vocal harmony climaxes throughout the song are reminiscent of “Rain”. On the latter track, the guitar which answers Jagger's vocal is surely an imitation of “And Your Bird Can Sing”.

**Rolling Stones, “Child of the Moon” (b-side of “Jumpin' Jack Flash”) (1968)** - a late effort from the Stones, a “Rain” pastiche recorded two years after the “Paperback Writer”/“Rain” single was released – evidence, if evidence be needed, that “Rain” was ahead of its time.

**Rutles, “Joe Public” - *Archaeology* (1996)** – the first Rutles album, *All You Need is Cash*, jumped straight from perfect pastiches of *Help!* era Beatles to perfect pastiches of *Sgt. Pepper* era Beatles. This track fills in that gap.

**Utopia (Todd Rundgren), “Life Goes On”, “Take it Home” – *Deface the Music* (1980)** – a pastiche of “Eleanor Rigby”, with synthesised strings, and an attempt to imitate a *Revolver* or *Rubber Soul* era rock tune.

**Who, “Disguises” (1966)** – another “pocket *Revolver*”, with a “Taxman” / “Rain” inspired bass-line, swirling, pounding “Tomorrow Never Knows” backing, Eastern-tinged sneering vocal, and heavily compressed sound.

**Zombies, “A Rose for Emily” - *Odessey and Oracle* (1967)** – musically similar to “For No One”, with touches, both lyrical and musical, of “Eleanor Rigby”.

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## WEBSITES

<http://www.acclaimedmusic.net> – a database of “best of” lists from the music press in the last 30 years.

<http://www.beatles-discography.com> - a comprehensive, readable and irreverent Beatles discography which started life as a website and is now a book.

<http://www.bigomagazine.com/features05/BEAdircut.html> – details of unreleased out-takes from the *Anthology* TV series.

<http://www.brenelltape.co.uk/> - Barry M. Jones' definitive guide to Brenell tape recorders.

<http://www.columbia.edu/~brennan/beatles/index.html> – a comprehensive list of variations between different mixes of Beatles tracks.

<http://www.geocities.com/~beatleboy1/> - an astounding collection of Beatles interview transcriptions.

<http://www.paulingles.com/Revolver.html> – DJ Paul Ingles' archive of interviews on *Revolver*, prepared for his 2006 anniversary Public Radio show.

<http://www.psychedelic-library.org> – a vast collection of rare books and articles on psychedelic drugs.

[http://www.silentbugler.com/Lets\\_Be\\_The\\_Beatles/Albums/Revolver.htm](http://www.silentbugler.com/Lets_Be_The_Beatles/Albums/Revolver.htm) – an admittedly subjective list of songs which are “rip-offs” or rewrites of Beatles songs.

<http://www.sivananda.org/teachings/teachers/swamiji/swamiji.html> – official website.

<http://www.twickenhamstudios.com/history.htm> – official website.