

THE BEATLES



<i>Recording years</i>	<i>Main genre</i>	<i>Music sample</i>
<i>1962-1970</i>	<i>Classic pop-rock</i>	<i>I Am The Walrus (1967)</i>

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PLEASE PLEASE ME

Album released:

March 22, 1963

V A L U E
3 3 4 3 4

More info:



Tracks: 1) **I Saw Her Standing There**; 2) Misery; 3) Anna (Go To Him); 4) Chains; 5) Boys; 6) **Ask Me Why**; 7) Please Please Me; 8) Love Me Do; 9) P.S. I Love You; 10) Baby It's You; 11) Do You Want To Know A Secret; 12) A Taste Of Honey; 13) There's A Place; 14) Twist And Shout.

REVIEW

There can hardly be any disagreements that **Please Please Me** is literally the «weakest» Beatles album, not just because it was their first one but also because, being their first one and all, it was recorded in such a rush: a record-setting 9 hours and 45 minutes of studio time altogether, from a young band with very little studio experience. Already guided by George Martin as the eye-opening studio guru, for sure, but by February 1963, the band and their producer had not yet even gotten to know each other all that well. The band's original compositions were still few and far between: John Lennon as of yet somewhat struggling as a songwriter, Paul McCartney arguably feeling a little bit more self-confident, but stuck hands and feet in a typically early-Sixties simplistic teenage mindset, George Harrison not even beginning to look up to his «elders», and then there's always Ringo — or, rather, there was *beginning* to always be Ringo, having quite freshly replaced Pete Best and not yet «proven» as an integral part of the band.



In short, there is no need to prove to anyone that **Please Please Me** represents the tender infancy of the Beatles. For most bands, such «tender infancy» is, at best, giggly-cute, at worst, confusing and ugly, but in both cases, normally, there is no good reason to listen to this music for a second time other than research purposes. And yet **Please Please Me** still stands up — despite all the flaws, the silliness, the rampant naïveness, and ‘Ask Me Why’, which might just be the worst Beatles original ever composed (and is *definitely* the worst original Beatles song composed by John Lennon).

It all begins with "love, love me do / you know I love you". When the Ramones wrote lyrics like that twelve years later, they were taken as smart, ironic, streetwise minimalism. When the Beatles wrote them, they were sternly serious, or, more accurately, they did not give a damn — the words never mattered at the time, except for the stipulated convention that it had to be something about «love». As an artistic statement, ‘Love Me Do’ has even fewer credentials than a Sesame Street composition (the latter ones have educational value at least). Big question, then: why does it stick so sorely in the head, much more so than the average Dave Clark Five or Billy J. Kramer & The Dakotas song? Melodically, it has very little going for it other than the main harmonica part, and the repetitive vocal melody that partially replicates it.

But there is this little matter of the Beatle-specific hook: the resolution of that melody during the extended "so plea-ee-ee-eeese..." bit — I’d bet my head on it that a hypothetical Billy J. Kramer would have been able to come up with everything in this melody *but* that particular resolution, which so admirably breaks up the monotonousness of the main part of the verse. In other words, we start out «simple, stupid», then add a tense «longing» effect with the "please", then bring it all to a natural conclusion with an accappella moment of half-comic «spookiness». It might seem stupid, but there is a touch of suspense, maybe even some primitive mystique, in the song — which makes it stand out among dozens of technically similar compositions of 1962, and explains its rapid chart success (No. 17 on the UK charts at the time), achieved, by the way, without any serious marketing / promotional campaign.

There is no such element of mystique in the follow-up single, ‘Please Please Me’, which, instead, concentrates on overwhelming joy, conveying it with as much effect as a standard four-piece band in 1963 could be capable of. Lennon’s harmonica is triumphant rather than menacing this time, the joint vocal harmonies sound as if George Martin was pushing them in a «Beethoven for teens» direction, and, again, the Beatle-specific hook: the "come on come on..." crescendo that nobody else could think of delivering at the time. The Dave Clark Five would later shamelessly steal that technique for ‘Any Way You Want It’ — but even if they had enough talent to more or less convincingly replicate the mood, they still did not come up with the better song.

It is interesting that, for all of the band's Hamburg- and Cavern Club-acquired reputation as rough and tough onstage performers of genuine rock'n'roll, **Please Please Me** features only one genuine self-penned «rocker». I have always thought that, perhaps, had the Beatles started their recording career one or two years later, when mainstream fears towards «aggressive music» had already slightly diminished, they may not have had to endure the reputation of «softies» compared to the Stones' tough guy image; on the other hand, had they started out later, they would not be so much in the lead — let alone the fact that there is no use in all these ifs and buts.

In any case — the one rocker in question is a stupendous rocker. Paul's "one, two, three, FOUR!" countdown that opens the song was specially glued on to the final master tape from another take — a genius decision, giving the album an energetic blast-off start, again, sounding like nothing before it. The idea behind the LP was to give the audiences a slight approximation of a Beatles live show; clearly, this was incompatible with George Martin's perennial quest for sonic perfection, but the few «live» elements that they did incorporate still gave the record a huge advantage. To me, the main hero of 'I Saw Her Standing There', however, is the *other* George: it is his lead work, both in between the verse lines and on the solo, that gives the song its genuine tough edge. The vocals, harmonies, lyrics may all be «teen fluff» (although the "she was just seventeen" bit was slightly risqué at the time), but George's echo-laden licks, some of which seem to be imitating 1950s guitar gods such as Scottie Moore, are the true grit of the song. The transition into the instrumental section is one of the ass-kickingest moments in Beatle history.

As for the other originals, I have always thought of 'Misery' as tremendously underrated — not only does it have a fabulously catchy melody, but there is something deeply disturbing as well about how the bitter-tragic lyrics of the song clash with its overall merry mood: how is it possible to sing lines like "without her I will be in misery" when the singer is clearly having a hard time preventing himself from toppling over in spasms of laughter? (The *truly* disturbing realization about it is that the song might easily have reflected John's genuine feelings about his affairs). The rest is fluff indeed, ranging from passable ('P.S. I Love You' — Paul in his songwriting infancy stage) to quite awkward (the already mentioned 'Ask Me Why': the most *fake* song John ever wrote, trying to convey an atmosphere of care and tenderness of which he barely knew anything at the time — the whole song is a mess of poorly strung together clichés that are really grating).

'There's A Place' is frequently found in comparisons with the Beach Boys' 'In My Room' due to both of them exploring the topic of «loneliness» in the lyrics, but if we dig from there, there is no question that the Brian Wilson song is the better of the two — its slow, melancholic musical backing fully matches the word, whereas the Lennon song is upbeat and optimistic

(but not devoid of subtlety: its harmonica blasts are notably sterner and sadder than the ones on 'Please Please Me'). Still, the vocal harmonies are beyond reproach.

Of the six covers, Arthur Alexander's 'Anna' is a fantastic achievement — on the instrumental plane, the band extracts and amplifies its main melodic hook in the form of a finely shaped, mysteriously resonating guitar riff; and in the vocal department, John finds a good way to let go of the self-restraining mannerisms of traditional black R&B and actually convey a believable tragic atmosphere in the bridge section. Goffin and King's 'Chains' is given to George, who does a fine job of transposing his natural slight tongue-tiedness onto the song's message of love confusion; and the Shirelles' 'Baby It's You', like so many other songs the Beatles did, simply converts the original's excessive «roundedness» into sharper angles. One might argue that at this particular juncture, John was actually a better singer than songwriter: his sandpaperish approach to sentimental R&B gives the material a sharper, more street-wise edge than any other white interpreter's at the time, with a unique combination of scream, roar, and nasal twang on the high notes ("can't help myself!...") that has an air of instant believability to it. He would never get better as a singer than he already is on this album — but he would never get worse, either, all the way up to his dying day.

It is useless to speculate on whether **Please Please Me** already sows the seeds of the grand successes to come. The Beatles certainly do not come across as enthusiastic revolutionaries when you listen to Paul telling us how he is coming home again to you love, or even when John is screaming his head off throughout 'Twist And Shout', trying to beat the Isley Brothers at their own game (I think he *did* beat them — except, of course, the Isley Brothers probably did not need to go home and nurse their voices with cough drops after the recording session). But it also never really seems as if they *just* went into the studio to record some songs, knock off an LP and be done with it. All of the little things I have mentioned show ambition, and lots of it: a strong desire, right from the start, to be the very best at what they are doing, otherwise there is no point in doing it in the first place. And there is a clear understanding of the long-playing record as the proper medium to do it — a realization that it is a bit humiliating when your fourteen song-long collection consists of two well-written hit singles surrounded by a sea of useless filler.

Which is why **Please Please Me**, after all these years, holds together quite fine as an album, unlike 99% of pop-oriented LPs from 1963 (too bad for the Wilson brothers, who did not start properly understanding the LP's potential until **All Summer Long**). It is slight, occasionally clumsy, lyrically trivial, not devoid of very strange decisions (such as saddling Ringo with 'Boys', a tune that was perfectly fine when the Shirelles did it, but predictably earned him a gay image with cer-

Only Solitaire

Artist: *The Beatles*

Album: *Please Please Me (1963)*

George Starostin's Reviews

tain audiences), yet it is unmistakably Beatles, and everything that is unmistakably Beatles deserves an endorsement without any need for meditation on the subject. And anyone who tries to slight it *too* much should just try to remember the names of at least ten other pop LPs from 1963 without calling on the Internet for help. Might be a chore even for some of those who had already struck their teens back in the day.





WITH THE BEATLES

Album released: **V A L U E**
November 22, 1963 **3 4 4 3 4** **More info:**   



Tracks: 1) It Won't Be Long; 2) All I've Got To Do; 3) All My Loving; 4) Don't Bother Me; 5) Little Child; 6) Till There Was You; 7) Please Mister Postman; 8) Roll Over Beethoven; 9) **Hold Me Tight**; 10) You Really Got A Hold On Me; 11) I Wanna Be Your Man; 12) Devil In Her Heart; 13) **Not A Second Time**; 14) Money (That's What I Want).

REVIEW

By the time **With The Beatles** came out in late 1963, the boys were already superheroes all over Europe, with the «super-» bit neatly provided by the success of 'She Loves You'. But at this point, they did not yet need to «prove» anything — what they did was still seen simply as pop music, and there was no conscious, openly perceivable drive on their part to «push boundaries» or whatever. They were simply writing more songs the way they felt these songs should be written, and that is what is so exciting about those early records, one hundred percent pure and free of any intellectual pretense: natural innocent genius, not at all burdened with reasoning and calculation (admittedly, they were happy enough to have George Martin do some calculations for them if the need ever arose).



Reviews of the album often (almost always, in fact) start with expressing admiration for the front sleeve. Ooh, black and white! wow, standing in the shadows! dark! disturbing! what a far cry from the silly smiling faces on **Please Please Me!**

progressive and intelligent! look at what Gerry and the Pacemakers, or Freddie and The Dreamers were putting on *their* album covers at the time. No comparison whatsoever. Frankly, I am not all that sure that the album cover (although it does look cool) is really such a tremendous achievement. What is much more interesting is that **With The Beatles** manages to sound fairly «dark» *without* any actual help from the blackness of the album sleeve. Well, maybe not «dark» as such, if by «darkness» we mean Jim Morrison or Black Sabbath — but I have always felt that there was a very significant line separating **With The Beatles** from **Please Please Me**, perhaps even one of *the* most underrated lines in Beatle history (and Beatle history knew plenty of those lines). It is the line that separates lightweight from heavyweight; and it is no coincidence that it was only **With The Beatles** that the first «serious» musical critics started suspecting there might be something of use for them in that air.

One thing that need not confuse us are the lyrics. At this point, neither John nor Paul (nor George, who makes his songwriting debut on here) showed any care for the words; the epitome of «wordy cleverness» to them was finding a line like "it won't be long 'til I belong to you" ("be-long — belong", get it?), and the rest generally just rearranges all the love song clichés extracted from wherever they happened to hear them first. (That's what you get for sticking to crude rock'n'roll values and ignoring The Songbook — at least the Tin Pan Alley people knew their Merriam-Webster). But it is not likely that, before Bob Dylan got the Fab Four interested in the magic powers of language, either John or Paul invested a lot of time and work into the words, or had any high thoughts of those words. Later on, John would make it a personal hobby to look upon the Beatles' legacy with a critical laser-eye, and demolish the stupidity of the lyrics in particular (Paul's, preferably, but his own were not exempt from self-criticism either). In 1963, however, none of them were teenagers any more, and they must have understood how silly it all sounded to the average «grown-up» person — yet, apparently, they did not give a damn about it.

Nor should we. The lyrics merely followed the conventions of the times, which certainly does not apply to the music. Take 'It Won't Be Long', for instance. On the surface, it is just an upbeat tune about... well, find the quote in the previous paragraph. But, for some reason, I have never thought of that song as «happy». The main melody rather shows a clear Shadows influence, and Shadows mostly wrote «shadowy» music — that British variant of surf-rock with a spy movie atmosphere. Now there is no spy movie atmosphere in 'It Won't Be Long', but its meat and bones are tough, and its colors disturbingly grayish.

And then there are the vocals. Any other vocalist would probably sing the lines "since you left me, I'm so alone, now you're

coming, you're coming on home" with all the proper tenderness and sympathy that they require. Not John, who never in his life stooped to simulating emotions on his songs. But instead of just being all out wooden about it, he sings it... probably in the same way he would be greeting his wife Cynthia after a hard day's night: pretending to care, but in reality not giving much of a damn. As a result, both 'It Won't Be Long' and the immediate followup, 'All I've Got To Do', have a surprisingly emotionally hollow sound — but they still work. (A good way to sense this would be to play 'All I've Got To Do' back-to-back with any of those Yoko-period Lennon ballads on which he really cared, like 'Julia').

So genuine sugary sentimentality is left in the care of Paul, right? Not quite. It certainly rears its head on the record's only old-fashioned sappy number, a cover of 'Till There Was You' from *The Music Man*, but nowhere else. Even there, the sentimentality is tempered with class: Paul learned the tune from Peggy Lee, who already performed it in a poppier, more rhythmic, slightly Latinized arrangement when compared to the orchestral sludge of the original — and still the Beatles almost completely reinvented the music, coming up with a complex melody played on twin nylon-stringed acoustic guitars (and featuring one of George's first brilliant solos).

But a song like 'All My Loving' is anything *but* sentimental; or, rather, sentimentality is merely one of its side effects rather than the main attraction. It started out as a country-western tune, actually (traces of that history can still be found in George's Nashville-style solo), but ended up becoming a fast pop-rocker; and any lesser band would have simply settled for placing the emphasis on the catchy vocal melody, but what really pushes 'All My Loving' over the threshold is the rhythm guitar work from John: the rapidly strummed triplets that drive the verses are technically unnecessary, but, being there, they give the illusion that the song is played thrice as fast as it would be otherwise, and shift the focus away from Paul's vocalization, closer to what almost looks like a bit of subconscious paranoia.

Finally, in comes George with his first original offering, and while 'Don't Bother Me' is simply a preliminary stage in his songwriting maturation, it is *decidedly* dark, not to mention how much the title really reflects George's persona: "please go away, leave me alone, don't bother me", I believe, should have eventually been etched on his tombstone. A big hooray to whoever had the idea to double-track the vocals: the trick magically transformed the stuttering, insecure delivery on 'Chains' and 'Do You Want To Know A Secret' into a thick, threatening rumble-grumble. Careful: one step further in that direction, and no more teen pussy for George! (Or, rather, he would have to start borrowing from the special Mick Jagger/Keith Richards brand).

Part of why **With The Beatles** has this darker aura around it lies in it being almost totally dominated by John, which was

not the case on **Please Please Me**: he is the main composer and/or «spiritual presence» on more than half of the songs, whereas Paul bears primary responsibility for only three of the tracks — the third one, still unmentioned, is 'Hold Me Tight' which I have always perceived as one of his weakest ever tunes, if only because the vocal melody resolution (the "it's you — you, you, you-ooo-ooo" bit) comes across as excessively silly.

John, on the other hand, further extends his reputation by throwing in three excellent interpretations of Motown material, turning the Marvelettes' cutesy-flimsy 'Please Mister Postman' into a rip-roaring personal tragedy, the Miracles' soulful 'You Really Got A Hold On Me' into the same tongue-in-cheek, slightly sarcastic stab as 'It Won't Be Long', and delivering Barrett Strong's 'Money' with enough evil glee to make us all believe that that is what he wants indeed — not that hard to do once he has already established his lack of a proper tender heart on the previous tracks. Real nasty guy, Mr. Lennon, without any attempts to mask it.

From a sheerly musical point of view, it would take too much time to list all the new tricks that the band introduces here (besides, it has all been written about a million times already), so I will just mention one obvious thing — the complexity and creativity of vocal harmonies on **With The Beatles** completely dwarfs **Please Please Me**. That this is going to be a seriously voice-oriented record is obvious from the very start: in the place of the energetic, but not particularly surprising "one two three four" of 'I Saw Her Standing There' we have the multi-flanked assault of "it won't be long yeah — YEAH — yeah — YEAH" which, to the best of my knowledge, comes from nowhere at all. There is no «beauty» as such in these harmonies that get ever more trickier as the album progresses (no comparison with The Beach Boys, who had a strictly Heaven-oriented approach), but there is a wonderful dynamics, warranting your undivided attention.

In effect, **With The Beatles** might be said to introduce the unspoken motto of «leave no spot unfilled». Not only is there supposed to be no filler, the idea is that there should be no «filler within non-filler», that is, the songs are not supposed to have any wasted moments. Gaps between verse lines? Fill them in with counterpoint backing vocals. Instrumental passages? Make them either reproduce the verse melody or construct an economic solo that makes perfect sense and is easily memorable, rather than merely respects the convention that there be an obligatory instrumental passage. And so on.

Admittedly, it does not always work. The curse of pop repetitiveness strikes hard on the overlong chorus to 'Hold Me Tight', and even harder on 'I Wanna Be Your Man', a song that John and Paul originally wrote for the Rolling Stones, and, honestly, I think they should have left it at that: the Stones arranged and performed it as an eerie sexual menace, with a supertight, take-no-prisoners attitude, next to which the Beatles' comparatively «relaxed» performance and, especially,

Ringo's near-comical vocals (as opposed to Jagger's evil predator gloating) lose hands down. (It did give Ringo a more assured and natural live solo spot than 'Boys', though). Personally, I have never been a big fan of John's 'Little Child', either, a somewhat sub-par R&B composition, only lifted out of mediocrity by an over-pumped tour-de-force on harmonica, which John must have been trying to literally «blow to bits» during the session — even Sonny Boy Williamson II could have appreciated that.

But none of this really matters, because the major goal of **With The Beatles** was to stabilize the band's position as accomplished artists, and that goal is clearly fulfilled. In addition, the record just might feature the best ever balance in Beatle history between covers and originals: the covers, although ranging from Motown to Chuck Berry to musicals, are all strong, inventively rearranged, and sit fairly well next to the originals. (On **Beatles For Sale**, the band would be falling back on covers for lack of free time to come up with more originals rather than out of free will, and that had its negative effect on the final results). **With The Beatles** often gets a little bit overlooked next to the great big breakthrough of **A Hard Day's Night** and its all-original cast, but in the story of the Beatles' evolution it may actually have played an even more important role.





A HARD DAY'S NIGHT

Album released:

July 10, 1964

V A L U E
3 5 5 3 4

More info:



Tracks: 1) A Hard Day's Night; 2) I Should Have Known Better; 3) If I Fell; 4) I'm Happy Just To Dance With You; 5) And I Love Her; 6) Tell Me Why; 7) Can't Buy Me Love; 8) Any Time At All; 9) I'll Cry Instead; 10) **Things We Said Today**; 11) When I Get Home; 12) You Can't Do That; 13) I'll Be Back.

REVIEW

Time has solidified the status of **A Hard's Day Night** as that one early Beatles album you have to get if you are only going to get one (although the World Health Organisation has officially stated that only a person in dire need of medical help would settle for only one early Beatles album) — if only for the formal reason that this is the only early Beatles album which consists entirely of originals; the next one in line would only be **Rubber Soul**, belonging to the period where the band was already entering artistic maturity, and so there is no better point in time than **A Hard Day's Night** to witness them in all the glory of unspoiled youthful innocence.



It is true that, in the UK at least, **A Hard Day's Night** sort of turned the whole idea of a movie soundtrack on its head. In the US, which the Beatles had only just finished conquering in early '64 with the success of 'I Want To Hold Your Hand', it was released as a proper soundtrack — seven songs on Side A and a bunch of movie-related instrumental versions of Side B (including, among others, a very stylish Duane Eddy-style reworking of 'This Boy' as 'Ringo's Theme' — this is the track

played in the movie when Ringo takes his solitary stroll upon «leaving» the band). But at home, the second side was completely unrelated to the first: six more songs, all of them originals, that had nothing to do with the movie. Yet formally the album remained a «soundtrack», perhaps intentionally and subtly provoking the casual fan into thinking that, from now on, every recording even a collection of toothpaste commercials with the Beatles' name on it might still be worth buying for some great pop music.

As for artistic growth, the true strength of **A Hard Day's Night** lies in the small details rather than in any conceptual framing. At this point, experimentation was not yet an integral part of the band's career: as much as they did try out new ideas and approaches, it did not seem as if anybody was too obsessed about «pushing the limits» at the time. John and Paul were bursting with melodies, not innovative concepts, and the only global thing that **A Hard Day's Night** proved to us was that Lennon and McCartney no longer really needed all those covers from other people — in other words, their self-confidence as songwriters had reached peak levels.

For one thing, up until that moment, the Beatles had a hard time coming up with original gritty rockers: other than 'I Saw Her Standing There' and, to a lesser extent, 'She Loves You' (really more of a «loud pop song» than a genuine «rocker»), they preferred to rock out on their cover versions ('Twist And Shout', 'Roll Over Beethoven', 'Money' etc.). Now, with 'Can't Buy Me Love' they showed the world that they could just as easily craft a fast, kick-ass pop-rocker along with the best of them; and on the other end of the spectrum — with 'You Can't Do That', that they could leisurely rock out in a mean and nasty manner, holding their own on the same field with contemporary R&B heroes and blues-rockers (I suspect that 'You Can't Do That' was John intentionally pulling a Mick, or at least intentionally trying to be mean and lean in order to scrub away some of that good-boy reputation and finally start playing on the ultra-cool side of the scruffy rhythm-and-blues people — it did not really help, but at least he got it out in the open).

At the opposite end of the pop scale, 'And I Love Her' establishes Paul as the epitome of an independent, fully self-confident lyrical balladeer for his generation — placed at approximately the same strategic juncture on the LP as 'Till There Was You' was on the previous album, and showing that the band no longer requires the services of Meredith Willson to feed its fans with wonderful roses and sweet, fragrant meadows. Granted, we have not yet entered the Age of Seriousness, and Paul still cannot write a decent non-clichéd lyric to save his life, but here, the clichés work as a sort of minimalistic device: there is a solid charm in "I give her all my love / That's all I do / And if you saw my love / You'd love her too" which sits perfectly at home with the equally minimalistic four-note acoustic «Spanish» riff driving the song. And to conclude with a

bit of self-confident teasing, at the end of the song that minimalistic riff is forcefully rammed home with four more definitive bars («yes, this song is simple and naive, but you will never forget this coda anyway»).

That said, at this time John still represents the dominant presence in the band. To be sure, most songs were still written collectively, yet Paul's stamp is strongly felt only on 'And I Love Her', 'Can't Buy Me Love', and 'Things We Said Today' — an almost pitiable three out of thirteen! (This might actually explain some of the extra-ordinary old school fan worship towards the album, although now that in the era of «poptimism» Paul has largely replaced John in terms of significance in the public eye, the explanation no longer holds water). And by this time, John's songwriting had reached a level of perfection from which it would never fall back again (except for those short periods when he would be derailed by avantgarde temptations or politics).

Of course, not all of his songs here are equally deserving. On Side B, the rather unfortunate 'When I Get Home' frequently gets the flack for being cruder and less coherent in its melody than the rest (although the chief culprit is usually the lyrics: word-wise, it is like the little imbecile brother of 'A Hard Day's Night' — in my case, for some reason, the line "I'm gonna love you till the cows come home" and *especially* its almost solemn, triumphant vocal delivery have always been a particular irritant). To throw in another nitpick, 'I'll Cry Instead' suffers notably from the lack of a guitar solo: it is quite a respectable little pseudo-rockabilly number as such, but way too repetitive as a result. Most importantly, these two tunes just do not look particularly imposing against the background of everything else.

But although John is overrepresented on the album and Paul is underrepresented, now that I think of it, the starkest contrast on the record is between the best songs of each one of them — and that contrast, funny enough, is just the opposite of the public's general opinion on their artistic and personal natures, since it is John who is primarily responsible for the brightest song on the album and Paul who is behind the creation of the darkest one. Coincidence, or one of those «stereotypes suck» kind of moments?..

The brightest song is, of course, 'I Should Have Known Better'. Its glorified anthemic nature feels utterly artificial against John's personality as we know it (even as we see it in the movie in which he sings it), and yet it is probably the most successful attempt they ever made at capturing the mood of «first love feeling», swaying innocent teenagers all over the world. Three ingredients combine to make it into this kind of mind-blower: John's massive harmonica runs, triumphantly overwhelming all the other instruments for miles around; George's brilliantly minimalistic solo which, once again, makes the right choice in mimicking John's already perfect vocal melody rather than trying to invent something different; and the

singing, of course — all the prolonged notes that bookmark the verses from both ends, all the "whoah-whoahs", all the sexy "oh-oh"s and dips into falsetto in the bridge section, so many individual snares within so short a track, and not a single ounce of croony sentimentality in sight. Anybody who is incapable of reflecting and radiating pure joy at the sound of this song is probably in very deep psychological trouble.

The darkest song is, of course, 'Things We Said Today'. The lyrics are actually stronger here than on 'And I Love You', but whether they really fit the doom and gloom of the tune is questionable. There is a little bit of irony in the words, but, overall, the theme of separation is much better indicated by the music: although the tempo is relatively fast and the rhythm is quite toe-tap-provoking, the minor mode of the song provokes an entirely different reaction. And as the whole thing eventually fades away on the same melody that opened it, it becomes *the* first in a relatively short line of «wholesale tragic» Beatle songs.

Actually, I would say that in general, there is a certain drift in **A Hard Day's Night** from Side A to Side B: the movie-related songs are, perhaps predictably, lighter, brighter, and fluffier, whereas as we get to the second side, the mood becomes darker and denser. John allows himself to be a nasty jealous guy on 'You Can't Do That', Paul goes all melancholic on 'Things You Said Today', and even the opening drum crack on 'Anytime At All' would probably seem a bit out of place, had they wanted to put that song in the movie as well. Then it all ends with 'I'll Be Back', a song that vies with 'Things' for the title of «saddest» — only barely losing out because the vocals do not quite manage to outshine the ominous tingle of "you say you will love me...".

It's just these little things, really, that elevate **A Hard Day's Night** above the general «good pop album» status. It may be all about trivial sentiments dressed in simple musical forms, but never in simple musical clichés. The slamming chord that opens the title track; the falsetto peaks on 'I Should Have Known Better'; the deletion of the verse/chorus opposition on 'If I Fell'; and so on and on and on, from the bright lights of Side A to the relative darkness of Side B.

There is nothing genuinely «revolutionary» about the album, because the songwriting and the artistic personae of John and Paul had already become fully formed on **With The Beatles**. There is simply a sense of a sort of completeness: it is the ultimate «light-pop» experience of its epoch, and an experience that could not even theoretically be reproduced once pop-rock had gotten out of its infancy stage. It is, at the same time, utterly naïve / formulaic *and* hunting for genius musical decisions. Genius musical decisions would, of course, be quite plentiful in years to come, but the virginity would be lost forever. Look at all the «twee-pop» bands of today — many of them are quite fine, but nobody in their right mind strives to

close up that hymen, understanding well enough that it is impossible. As of the 2010s, naïveness and innocence in attitude is reserved for the likes of Taylor Swift or Ed Sheeran — mainstream puppets that are almost always the laughing stock of «advanced» music listeners. The miracle of **A Hard Day's Night** is in that, even today, «advanced» music listeners may easily listen to it without laughing it off, and cherish it as one of the greatest pure pop albums ever made.

P.S. A few words about the movie are probably in order as well. Time has been a little less kind to the movie than the accompanying album, I think. In 1964, it was seen as an even more colossal breakthrough: Richard Lester showed the world that a «pop artist movie» could actually be seen as an individual work of art, not just a dumb vehicle for the current teen idol to show off his charisma. That alone was a staggering discovery, rendering insignificant the fact that most of the Beatles could barely act (fortunately, Lester had the good sense not to ask them to act, so most of the time they were just being themselves — good news for John, worse for the rest of them), or that most of the jokes, puns, and gags, now that you look at them with a fresh eye, aren't really all *that* funny. (One exception is the cut-in scene between George and the advertising executive — some truly wicked dialog out there, as relevant for us today as it was fifty years ago, if not more so). Nevertheless, even if the movie is not as hot on its own as it is sometimes proclaimed to be, it is still one of the most fascinating — and, in a way, «authentic» — documents of its era. For best effect, watch it on a double bill with *Viva Las Vegas* and savor the difference.





BEATLES FOR SALE

Album released:

Dec. 4, 1964

V A L U E
3 4 5 2 4

More info:



Tracks: 1) No Reply; 2) **I'm A Loser**; 3) Baby's In Black; 4) Rock And Roll Music; 5) I'll Follow The Sun; 6) **Mr. Moonlight**; 7) Kansas City/Hey Hey Hey Hey; 8) Eight Days A Week; 9) Words Of Love; 10) Honey Don't; 11) Every Little Thing; 12) I Don't Want To Spoil The Party; 13) What You're Doing; 14) Everybody's Trying To Be My Baby.

REVIEW

Critical tradition dictates quite precisely that **Beatles For Sale** should always be docked half a point, one star, or the + sign next to **A Hard Day's Night**, its luckier elder brother from the same year. It is one of the few Beatles albums that makes no easily detectable giant steps forwards; in fact, it is *objectively* the only Beatles album that makes one small step *backwards* by re-introducing the six obligatory cover tunes, where the previous record had seemed to so effectively obliterate this custom; most importantly, the four band members are standing in a transparently autumnal mood on the front cover, all of them dressed up as «babies in black», worn and torn by heavy touring, annoying socializing and never-ending bloodsucking demands from the music industry.



Critical tradition may be square and boring for us iconoclasts, but, admittedly, it does not arise out of nothing at all (other than coordinated whimsy of shady individuals, as certain conspiracy theories would have us believe). It is certainly well documented that the boys were getting tired, particularly of having too many other people make the decisions for them, and it does seem to be true that, with their constant international touring (recording sessions took place in between the band's

major US and UK tours in the fall of '64), they simply did not have the time to come up with enough original material to fill a complete LP. It is unquestionably true that, on the whole, the sound of **Beatles For Sale** is less happy than that of **Hard Day's Night** — the album does, after all, begin with three «downers» in a row, and John is no longer contributing even a single teenage ode to joy *à la* 'I Should Have Known Better'.

Speaking of the covers, after decades of listening I still stand by the opinion that 'Mr. Moonlight' is one of the unluckiest choices in covers that the band ever made. The [Dr. Feelgood version](#), which they copied with unusually little imagination, had it registered as a soul ballad with an almost crooning atmosphere, barely compatible with John's usual singing voice; where his frenzied and desperate screaming worked so well on something like 'Anna', since the song had a tragic heart from the very beginning, it feels rather wasted on the bridge sections of this particular tune. The only clever touch was to replace the original rudimentary guitar solo with an eerie Hammond organ passage, which gives the recording a proto-psychedelic vibe; but certainly no Beatles song in which the instrumental, rather than vocal, part is the best part of the song could really count as successful.

However, apart from that minor misstep, **Beatles For Sale** is anything *but* a «step backwards» in the ongoing story of the Beatles' artistic development. Any detailed song-by-song analysis, such as performed by Alan Pollack, for instance, would immediately reveal just how many new itty-bitty-beatly «trifles» make their first appearance here: whenever the guys were locked in the studio with George the Fifth at the helm, be they exhausted or well-rested, they were never content, like so many of their peers, to simply repeat the same old formula. «Beatle-quality» had to mean «creative», even if, for the time being, this meant being «creative» on an old piece of Carl Perkins boogie.

So, just a few things off the top of my head. Buddy Holly wrote 'Words Of Love' in 1957, and he must have been so proud to have come up with that melody that he did not bother properly polishing it with all the studio care it required (admittedly, in 1957 the studio itself may not have been ready for this, both from the technological and the sociological points of view). Play the original and the cover back to back, and the first thing you notice is how much juicier the main guitar line is sounding. Where Buddy is satisfied with just occasionally letting out that high-pitched piercing tone, George uses it on every note, getting a warm, jangly effect — tender and cordial, yet still without a trace of cheap sentimentality. With John out there behind him, partially doubling his work on a second, barely audible guitar, the effect is otherworldly, and even if the solo break, faithfully following Holly's original, is no more than two different phrases played over and over again, I would not mind an infinite loop. Yes, Buddy wrote the song, but the Beatles completed it, bringing the song to such

perfection that I could not imagine anybody ever doing an even better job on it. (Here's [Jeff Lynne's tribute version](#) for you, for comparison — big-ass whooping drums with Jeff, as always, and guitars which honestly sound like sanitized compressed trash next to George and John's succulent tones).

Laying on echo effects was one of the band's favorite tricks ever since **With The Beatles** at least, but they took it one step further when they applied them to 'Rock And Roll Music' and 'Everybody's Trying To Be My Baby', giving those old rock'n'roll chestnuts a proto-arena-rock feel instead of the more subdued, chamber-like feel of the originals. As a result, the effect of 'Rock And Roll Music' has completely shifted: Chuck did this song just like he did all the rest — with his friendly (and just a tad creepy) smile, inviting all the young ladies and gentlemen out there to try out this brand new hot dance like they would try out a new brand of ice cream. *This* rendition notably demands that you yell your head off, instead of dancing your legs off: because of the echo effects, John's all-out-there screamfest, and Paul's somber bass, it is far more aggressive and anthemic than Chuck ever intended it to be. Ditto with Carl Perkins, when they start laying that thick reverb on Harrison's vocals (on the other hand, this approach did not seem to work so well with 'Honey Don't', so they just ended up giving it to Ringo, driving up the comedy effect instead); and note also how all of George Harrison's solos go at least one octave higher than Carl's in the original version, raising the bar on tension and recklessness.

Now, about the originals. First, we are all taught by biographers that it is here, and nowhere else, where John started to fall under the Dylan spell and take a healthier attitude towards the lyrics — hence, 'I'm A Loser', a somewhat tentative, but determined, first attempt to climb out of the mire of teen-pop clichés. The famous "although I laugh and I act like a clown / beneath this mask I am fearing a frown" would hardly count as a significant lyrical breakthrough today, but for the Beatles in 1964, it was a milestone. It is debatable if we can really point to 'I'm A Loser' as the true beginning of John's «no bullshit allowed» phase, where everything had to be either strictly tongue-in-cheek or strictly heart-on-the-sleeve, but, in any case, there is increased «character complexity» here, and that be good: deep psychologism is not gained overnight, after all. Also, behind all that lyrical debate what often gets lost is that melodically, 'I'm A Loser' is a big step on the road toward folk-rock and country-rock as their own genres: those little licks George throws in between each of John's lines predict both the Byrds *and* the Beatles' own subsequent mastery of the style on **Rubber Soul**. ('I Don't Want To Spoil The Party' is another good example of the same style, though the song itself is less often remembered than 'I'm A Loser').

Second, McCartney is quickly learning how to put genius and corn in the same package, coming up with his first genuinely great softie. Curiously, 'I'll Follow The Sun' is usually said to have been written around 1960, which might explain the man

dragging it out of the storeroom for lack of time to write something new; but maybe it is a good thing that it was given four years of fermentation. Now it sounds a bit Searchers-style, what with the folksy melody and the harmonic layering and all, but more homely and sincere, due to the production and the clever alternation between group singing and Paul's solo lines. Just a year and a half separate this from the thematically similar 'P.S. I Love You', but that song screamed NAÏVE all over the place, and this one spells WISENED — big reason why Paul still performs 'I'll Follow The Sun' in concert, on occasion, but hardly ever the other one (not that anyone would mind).

Third, shortly after discovering feedback on the single 'I Feel Fine', they also discover the potential of the fade-in — on 'Eight Days A Week'. Much of the band's experimentation was done randomly, «just for fun» etc., but one big difference of the Beatles' approach to experimentation is that they rarely *kept* their experimental results if they weren't sure that they had come out somewhat meaningful and were appropriate for the song in question. So, before we go «a fade-in on 'Eight Days A Week'? big deal! who the heck cares?», let us listen to the fade-in and, perhaps, understand that it works here as the teen-pop equivalent of a crescendo, which the band had no special means of producing at that time (they would need an orchestra at least). 'Eight Days A Week' is another one of those ode-to-joy songs, cruder and simpler than 'I Should Have Known Better', and never one of my favorites in that genre (for one thing, too repetitive — a solo break couldn't have hurt, and the "hold me, love me, hold me, love me" refrain also seems too roughly hewn), but the fade-in suits it perfectly — it is really the opening ten seconds of the song, from the first faraway notes to the breakout of "ooh I need your love babe..." that clinch it for me.

Fourth, the Beatles discover the value of... silence. While the more famous songs of Side B have always been 'Eight Days A Week' and 'Every Little Thing', I have always held a soft spot for 'What You're Doing', because of the important role with which they entrusted Ringo — hold the melody for the first few bars on his little old drummer's own, before introducing the looped electric riff (very similar in texture, by the way, to the one that would soon make the Byrds famous with 'Mr. Tambourine Man'). Then, once the song is done, they repeat the same trick once again before fading out — as if saying, «hey, it was quite cool in the beginning, surely you want us to do it one more time? heavier on the bass this time, right?»... and it works.

Fifth, 'No Reply'. You know what is probably the single most gripping thing about 'No Reply'? The odd beat. The song is formally in 4/4, but only the bridge, actually, is in *standard* 4/4; on the main part of the song, Ringo plays something trickier, shifting the location of the strong beat from bar to bar, which is probably why Chris Hillman of the Byrds described

the song as «funky». That might have been the reason the Beatles never played the song live — the tricky pattern might have been too much for Ringo to keep up properly during actual show time. Listen to the early demo bits on **Anthology 1** and see how much less interesting the song is at the beginning of its life journey; listen to the completed version and hear just how much the stuttering confusion of its rhythm agrees with the perturbed state of mind of its protagonist. Had the song been written by the likes of, say, the Dave Clark Five, they would never have taken the time to embellish it in this particular manner, and it would have forever remained just a normal, average, run-of-the-mill pop song from 1964.

In the end, it's just all those little things that make **Beatles For Sale** as essential a Beatles album in your catalog as everything that surrounds it. It takes its cue from the second half of **Hard Day's Night**, not the first one, and overcomes it in terms of diversity, jangliness, and, in a way, «darkness». Artistically, it is still dominated by John, which is a good thing, because Paul as dominant personality would only be acceptable once the band had fully embraced its wild-experimental-frenzy phase (otherwise, they might have drowned in excess sentimentality); but overall, it is still very much a group effort, and, ultimately, another success, if not necessarily another «triumph». Skipping the album in your exploration of the Beatles' legacy is possible, but only if you are *really* seriously pressed for time.





HELP!

Album released:

Aug. 6, 1965

V A L U E
3 4 5 3 4

More info:



Tracks: 1) *Help!*; 2) The Night Before; 3) You've Got To Hide Your Love Away; 4) I Need You; 5) Another Girl; 6) You're Going To Lose That Girl; 7) Ticket To Ride; 8) Act Naturally; 9) It's Only Love; 10) You Like Me Too Much; 11) Tell Me What You See; 12) I've Just Seen A Face; 13) Yesterday; 14) Dizzy Miss Lizzy.

REVIEW

Although the overall critical reputation of **Help!** traditionally holds it in more esteem than **Beatles For Sale** — no doubt, due to the presence of such titanic breakthroughs as the title track and 'Yesterday' — I do believe that if we place it in its proper context, it may safely be concluded that it is *here*, really, that the band allowed themselves a bit of a creative sag. In fact, relatively little was heard of The Beatles throughout the first half of 1965, as they'd spent a large chunk of that period «undercover», shooting for their second movie in various locations around the world and taking a rather extended break from touring; their only new record releases from January to June were the «teaser» singles — 'Ticket To Ride' and 'Help!' itself — which certainly whetted public appetite but could hardly satisfy the hunger for another Beatles LP. Meanwhile, this (somewhat illusive) «procrastination» was giving other artists plenty of time to catch up.

Thus, the Stones came up with 'The Last Time' and 'Satisfaction', finally proving their worth as original songwriters and creators of a whole new type of rock'n'roll sound; the Kinks pumped out single after single in a continuous journey of



putting the «British» back into the British Invasion; **The Beach Boys Today!** tremendously raised the stakes in the pop-rock business on the other side of the Atlantic; The Byrds were pressing from behind the lines with their ability to fuse folk and rock into a single whole; and, of course, Bob Dylan himself was going electric. Things were really happening — and this time around, the Fab Four would find themselves surrounded with mighty impressive competitors, both on the UK and the US scenes. Suddenly, the idea of «progress» — the understanding that the popular music field was the perfect space for honing one's creativity and using it to transform the world — was up in the air in a way it hadn't been since at least the Jazz Revolution; and having helped, to a far greater extent that they may have realized themselves, to open those floodgates, The Beatles were now founding themselves challenged to defend their royalty status against the rising tide.

In all fairness, *Help!* — the movie — was hardly a great defensive move in this situation. Where Richard Lester's first experience with the boys bordered on the biographical and, at least in some places, read like a smart jab on the relation crisis between the older and younger generations, *Help!*, with its absurdist and lightly parodic plot, was clearly just a comic excuse for a bunch of Beatle-acted gags and a handful of Beatle-mimed songs. For sure, quality-wise it was still miles ahead of the average contemporary Elvis movie, but only because the gags were seriously funnier and the songs, written by the Beatles themselves rather than commissioned from a bunch of disinterested (and probably underpaid) court songwriters, were incomparable. In retrospect, this helps a lot: amusingly, every time I rewatch it, *Hard Day's Night* seems to shrink a little bit in stature, while *Help!*, on the other hand, seems to grow — not because it is the better movie of the two, but simply because *A Hard Day's Night*, with its sociological pretense, has far more potential to be overrated from the start, while *Help!*, with its «look-at-me-I'm-so-unabashedly-shallow» lack of ambition, may be too much of an initial disappointment for the viewer to notice the finer qualities of its humor. ("*He's out to rule the world!... if he can get a government grant.*")

But even if time helps correct a bit of balance, there is still hardly any doubt that of the two «proper» Beatle movies, *A Hard Day's Night* is bound to forever hold the status of critical darling — and it doesn't help matters, either, that PC pundits these days would be more than happy to bounce upon *Help!*'s dated racial stereotypes ("*look what you have done with your filthy Eastern ways!*") and casting choices (e.g. Jewish actress Eleanor Bron playing an Indian woman). More importantly, The Beatles themselves simply have much less agency in their second movie: for one of the very few times in their entire career, they look here as if they're playing second fiddle to the system. (In fact, the movie actually works better if you decide to view it as a subtle *metaphor* of the system itself — the fanatical Indian cult striving to get Ringo sacrificed to their gods should be seen as the record industry trying to subjugate the band's independence and bend them to their will... and, of

course, you can never hide from the sharks of capitalism, who'll get you both in the Alps *and* in the Bahamas). I wouldn't be surprised to learn that quite a few people may have temporarily lost faith in the Fab Four upon returning from the movie theater on a late summer night in 1965, feeling that a certain barrier that separated them from the laughable movie career of Elvis had just been pushed to the side.

The good news was that, unlike in Elvis movies, the soundtrack of *Help!* continued to be completely and utterly unrelated to the movie itself, with none of the songs specifically written for or adapted to the purposes of its plot and atmosphere; like **A Hard Day's Night**, the resulting album — at least, in its proper UK form, not the US release that intersperses the movie songs with Ken Thorne-arranged instrumentals — could not even be suspected of being a «soundtrack» if heard outside of the proper information context. Nor could it be accused of not containing plenty of «tactical», if not necessarily «strategic», breakthroughs. But on the whole, it wasn't jaw-droppingly amazing, either, *especially* at a time when things like 'Like A Rolling Stone', 'Satisfaction', 'See My Friends', and 'My Generation' were beginning to snatch the musical crown away from Jazz and place it on the head of Rock as music's chief cutting-edge creative force.

To be fair, most of the album was recorded rather hurriedly, over a week-long session in mid-February 1965 right before the Beatles flew over to the Bahamas to begin shooting for the movie — and if we are drawing strict chronological lines between the «adolescence» and «maturity» of rock music, I'd still place those winter months in the first category, which gives the Fab Four a good excuse if you feel like they need an excuse. Some might feel they don't, though, because even the most lightweight numbers recorded during that session are still excellent pop songs in their own right, and what's wrong with that? Each of them continues to nurture some special vibe, dissolving the «feel-of-formula» — the secret Beatles trick that places their «filler» on a whole other level compared to, say, The Dave Clark 5.

Thus, it is easy to dismiss something like Paul's 'Another Girl' — whose swinging rhythm, at first, would seem to denounce it as just an attempt to capitalize on the formula of 'Can't Buy Me Love', that is, something decidedly beyond the Beatles' dignity. But then 'Can't Buy Me Love' was an exhilarated, drunkenly-delirious explosion; 'Another Girl', in comparison, is a pretty gloomy song with a subtle context. Paul expressly sings the verses in a tired, morose, and a tad threatening manner: the way he intones "*you're making me say that I've got nobody but you / but as from today, well, I've got somebody that's new*" has always made me suspect that the protagonist is really bluffing his way out of a conflict situation here — the 'Another Girl' in question is just a phantom invented to trick his partner into backing down and submitting, and throughout the song, the singer is feeling quite nervous about whether the bluff is going to be successful. With the addition of some

rather weird bluesy lead lines, alternating between high-pitched aggressive stings and rambling, paranoid licks (all of it played by Paul himself because George apparently had problems working out the perfect mood), 'Another Girl' is more than just self-derivative filler — it's a cute little psychological maneuver. (It's also possible that the song might have been subtly referring to some tensions in Paul's relations with Jane Asher at the time — and it is slightly symbolic that in the movie, it is the song that the Beatles play upon their arrival to the Bahamas, while frolicking around on the beach with some local beauties... infidelity check!).

Interestingly, the exact same topic of friction between the two lovers dominates 'The Night Before', the second out of three «pure McCartney» creations at the February sessions. 'The Night Before' is, in fact, a thematic prelude to 'Another Girl' — the guy sees diminished passion in the girl's behavior, so then he tries to salvage the relationship by calling on the remedy of jealousy. The song, too, may be treated as filler, but it is also a cool example of how the Beatles smoothly merge blues and pop — the instrumental introduction consists of several bars of «tough» guitar-driven rock'n'roll in the vein of 'Some Other Guy' or 'Leave My Kitten Alone', and then *wham!*, ten seconds into the song we forget all about the instruments as our attention is completely switched over to the gorgeous vocal trade-offs between solo Paul "*we said our goodbyes...*" and the rest of the band ("*ah, the night before...*") who conflate their group harmonies with Paul's in what has sometimes been described as their adoption of the «hocket» technique.

Again, there are subtle mood swings here that find no immediate analogies in contemporary pop: the first two lines, with John and George picking up Paul's line and footballing it high up in the stars, symbolize the atmosphere of lovers' bliss, then in the third line those harmonies return crashing back to Earth while Paul's lead vocal changes to bitter and sardonic ("*now today I found you have changed your mind...*"), and then to gently pleading ("*treat me like you did the night before*"). I'm a little disappointed by the exceedingly simplistic double-tracked guitar solo (which, honestly, feels more like a temporary placeholder where they forgot to fill in the *real* thing), and the "*last night is a night I will remember you by*" bridge carries relatively little emotional weight, but the main body of the song still remains a thing that only the Beatles were capable of back in 1965, filler or no filler.

The third of the «pure McCartney» tracks was 'Tell Me What You See', though in this case, the «purity» was a bit disturbed by Paul using as inspiration a religious motto that used to hang on the wall of John's Aunt Mimi's house ("*however black the clouds may be, in time they'll pass away; have faith and trust and you will see, God's light make bright your day*"). In contrast with the other two, this one might seem to be completely devoid of any psychologism — just an optimistic little

piece, relatively relaxed and nonchalant, good to play on a lazy warm summer day or something. Alan Pollack, in his description of the song, keeps referring to it as «Latin-flavored», but the only justification for this is the use of semi-exotic percussion instruments (like the güiro, which is apparently manned by Harrison here — since the song has no use for the lead guitar, he had to leave his mark in some special way). I don't really hear a lot of «Latin» influences here; instead, to me the song feels more like something in an early folk-pop, Sonny & Cher-like style, thus incidentally presaging the stylistic twists on **Rubber Soul**.

The most interesting part of the song, though, in this case is its bridge section — the Beatles' unpredictability strikes again as the languid flow of the song is suddenly interrupted by the louder-than-expected chanting of the title, followed by Paul's bluesy mini-solo on the electric piano. Are these interruptions supposed to be the «big black clouds» in person, breaking up the overall serenity, only to be promptly whisked away by the friendly arpeggios from John's rhythm guitar? And what's up with Ringo's drumming here, as he briefly lays it all on the big bass drum, while the rest of the song only relies on very light percussion in comparison? However you interpret it, the bridge section does remain unusual and enigmatic. Remove it, and you are left with a smooth, well-behaved, pleasant and ultimately quite forgettable composition. Put it back, and you learn an important lesson about creativity — there's always room for it even in the most generic of environments, as long as you do not forget that *surprise* is one of the most essential components of good art.

Meanwhile, John, too, brought three new songs to the same session, and, from a certain angle at least, we see him largely being on the same page with Paul: insecure and dissatisfied, though, naturally, with a bit more of a snarl about it. 'You're Going To Lose That Girl', perhaps not incidentally placed right after 'Another Girl', gives us another triangle — except this time it's not one guy and two girls, but rather two guys and one girl, with John «punishing» his rival for his inefficient (insufficiently alpha?) behavior. (Might this be a hint that in real life, Paul always had two girls where John had just one?) Whether this is just a conniving strategy or a true knight-in-shining-armor moment, though, remains largely irrelevant because nobody (apart from picky critics) ever listens to 'You're Going To Lose That Girl' for the lyrics — we all love the song for its unique vocal harmony arrangements, clearly influenced by the Beach Boys but adapted to the Beatles' own abilities. The call-and-response mechanics between John's lead and Paul and George's backing are arguably their most complex on a song chorus up to that date, and the falsetto note sustained for two whole seconds is John's proudest achievement in that range so far, as well. (There's some great instrumental stuff happening here, too, like the unpredictable shift from E Major to G Major in the bridge, but I'll just refer you to [Alan Pollack](#) for such matters).

There's still a bit of atmospheric mystery about that song for me: it's clearly meant to be «triumphant» in tone, and on their previous records, the Beatles had no problems coming across as beaming victors on the field of battle, but there seems to be a shadow of regret and self-doubt on 'You're Going To Lose That Girl': the protagonist almost feels *forced* to make his move on the lady out of pure compassion ("*if you don't take her out tonight... I'm gonna treat her kind*"), and the melody, albeit lively and upbeat, also feels compassionate rather than aggressive — even the brief guitar solo seems to sting you with notes of pity rather than violence. (In fact, thinking about this situation gets me to realize that the song would be *perfect* for the soundtrack to a docudrama about the relationship between Brian Jones, Keith Richards, and Anita Pallenberg — the three of whom pretty much re-enacted this whole story in 1967). Regardless of any concrete judgements, it can hardly be denied that 'You're Going To Lose That Girl', behind the still rather simplistic wordcraft, shows a ton of psychological maturity next to John's output circa 1964 — here, he is beginning to use the simple form of the commercial pop song to express fairly complex human feelings, rather than a cartoonish approximation thereof.

And this, mind you, is one out of three Lennon songs from February '65 that is usually the *least* commented upon, with most of the critical attention diverted toward 'You've Got To Hide Your Love Away' and 'Ticket To Ride', both of which feel unusual and attractive from the outset. The former, as is well acknowledged by John himself and everybody else who ever mentions the song, continues his fascination with Dylan, and, indeed, if you only play the first two seconds, you might suspect that you are going to be treated to a Beatle cover of 'A Hard Rain's Gonna Fall'. But the funny thing is that the vocal melody — "*here I stand, head in hand...*" — has nothing whatsoever to do with Dylan. Hum it in your head and you shall rather feel the atmosphere of an old-fashioned lullaby — "*hush-a-bye, don't you cry*", something to that effect. Bob himself would never have sung anything like this (and *not* because the song is too vulnerable for the size of his ego — Bob could be *very* vulnerable on record, but only on his own terms of what defines vulnerability); instead, amusingly, the song would catch the eyes and ears of the Beach Boys that same year, and be included on their **Party!** record with Dennis Wilson singing lead vocal — the first time, ironically, that the «wild» Beach Boy would reveal his bleeding heart, albeit in a comic, vaudevillian setting.

Anyway, while I have always found this early excursion into folk-pop territory a bit tentative and repetitive, and its chorus hook seriously undercooked (couldn't he have at least thought of a second rhyming line, rather than chant the title twice in a row?), there's no denying that, once again, here we have a big step forward in terms of emotional content. Most of John's love songs on previous albums were either of the knight-in-shining-armor kind ("*anytime at all, all you gotta do is call*" blah blah blah), or of the jealous and/or angry kind ("*I've got every reason on earth to be mad*" and so on) — typical

teenage stuff when the thing that matters most is asserting your masculinity rather than honing your empathy. With lines like "*if she's gone I can't go on, feeling two-foot small*", he takes a giant leap forward — farther along than Dylan himself, in fact. The funny thing is that the inspiration behind this imagery could hardly have been Cynthia; there are speculations that the song is a reflection of John's married status which he had to downplay or conceal for reasons of public image (hence the "*everywhere people stare*" line), but they hardly hold water. Instead, I do believe that 'You've Got To Hide Your Love Away' is the very first one (and the next one would follow in just a few months — see below) of John's many songs about... Yoko Ono, yes, a year and a half *before* the two even met for the first time. It's an imaginary, premonitory vision of that particular type of love that this «big, strong man» was craving for — blind, submissive, perhaps even with a slight whiff of some sort of emotional masochism. (For what it's worth, Dennis Wilson spent a lot of his life also looking for that kind of love, though his self-destructive nature made it much more difficult for him).

Thus it is probably not an accident that 'You've Got To Hide Your Love Away' uses a flute part, played by guest musician John Scott, in the outro — formally, this just serves to reinforce the folksy, «pastoral» vibe of the song, and they probably settled on flute instead of the more usual harmonica just so as to avoid accusations of copying Dylan's style way too blindly; but the flute is a more tender and «vulnerable» instrument than harmonica (unless you're playing it Ian Anderson-style), and the switch from harmonica (one of John's most common self-expressing instruments in the past) to flute is perfectly symbolic of the switch from a «dominant» to a «submissive» attitude. (It's amusing that in the movie the song is played by the band in their home while entertaining their newest guest, the beautiful Eleanor Bron — except that John isn't even looking in her direction, instead it's George who keeps making eyes at her, as in «hey there, see what a beautiful song my friend John wrote about no-one in particular? how 'bout we make it about you and me, gorgeous?» Meanwhile, John is just blankly staring into space — maybe there's a ghost of Yoko already floating somewhere out there).

But now let us rewind just a little bit to February 15 for the very first song recorded during those sessions, most of the credit for which also goes to Lennon. On a purely personal level, 'Ticket To Ride' has never been a favorite of mine. It's slow, it's *very* repetitive, there's no solo section, and the revved-up "*my baby don't care*" bit cuts out *way* too fast. But this gut impression is only there if you think of 'Ticket To Ride' as what it *is* — a verse-chorus-bridge pop song — and not as what it could aspire to be, namely, an early psychedelic drone that might, perhaps, best be enjoyed under the influence. Because there is no denying that, in sheer technical terms of melody, arrangement, and production, 'Ticket To Ride' marks the band's greatest leap forward on the album ('Yesterday' comes close, but from a completely different perspective). Unlike the average Beatles song that gets better and better for me the more I *listen* to it, 'Ticket To Ride' has the distinction of getting

better and better for me the more I *think* about it — not coincidental, perhaps, for a song that is sometimes described as being the Beatles' first properly experimental creation, taking full advantage of the studio as its own instrument.

Sometime around 1970, John boastfully called 'Ticket To Ride' «the earliest heavy-metal record ever made» or something to that effect — probably being jealous of the rise of the new generation of heavy music around him, though even hyperbolic remarks like that one have their use in that they get you to notice things you might have otherwise missed. The main riff of the song — the jangly, shrill *ostinato* figure that traverses the entire tune — is far more The Byrds than The Kinks or The Who (in fact, it bears an uncanny resemblance to the opening riff of The Byrds' cover of 'Mr. Tambourine Man', though this is almost certainly a coincidence, as both bands were working on these songs around the same time); but its arrogant insistence on the A chord does also give it a bit of a raga feel, which means it's «folk-pop going psychedelic» — an early precursor of what the Byrds and all those other West Coast bands would start doing in about a year's time. What does make the song *heavy*, though, is McCartney's bass which, for most of the verses, he does not so much «play» as «manipulate», using just a few notes to generate a constant deep, monotonous hum (if you look at his playing in the [accompanying video](#), he seems to be barely moving his fingers — just a leisurely twitch of the thumb here and there). In between that sort of loose-wiring bass and Ringo's unusually complex and loud-as-heck drumming pattern, 'Ticket To Ride' does sound... well, I still wouldn't describe it as *heavy*, but *monumental* would probably be a good term.

Monumental *and* high: having ingested quite a bit of weed since being officially introduced to it by Dylan in August 1964, the band had definitely opened their minds to new vibes and sensations such as this one — up until now, I haven't ever used the word «trippy» to describe any Beatle song, but 'Ticket To Ride' is a pretty good start, I believe. Before 'Ticket To Ride', most of the band's loud numbers were party anthems, sonic firecrackers to get the girls thrashing and screaming and wetting their seats; 'Ticket To Ride', even if, through the inevitable pull of momentum, it did get the girls to do the same things when played live, is still their first «loud» song that would rather put you in a trance instead, slow and repetitive as it is, while Doctor McCartney's hypnotizing bass pendulum subjugates your brainwaves. In this respect, I'd rather put 'Ticket To Ride' into the same category as the (still upcoming at the time) Kinks' 'See My Friends' than any of the hard-'n'-heavy songs on the mid-1965 circuit.

One semi-observation, semi-complaint here could be that the musical vibe of the song feels rather detached from the lyrics, which, in themselves, also mark an important development. Both in 'You're Going To Lose That Girl' and 'You've Got To Hide Your Love Away', the male protagonist steadily remains in focus, whether he's being competitive, chivalrous, or

masochistic. In 'Ticket To Ride', however, it is the girl who's shown to go all these-boots-are-made-for-walkin' over our hero: "*She said that living with me was bringing her down / She would never be free when I was around*" — now that's *definitely* not about Cynthia, is it? People are still debating, after all these years, what *ticket to ride* really means, but to me it's never been about anything other than an abstract declaration of personal freedom, so, kind of, welcome to the first proper feminist anthem out of the ever-unpredictable mind of John Lennon, professional wife-beater. The only question is: what the hell does that particular message got to do with the proto-psych folk drone and the deep proto-metal bass rumble of the musical arrangement? I'm still having a bit of trouble connecting the dots here — the same sort of thing would work much better next year with 'She Said She Said', but in this case, it's two different dimensions of the conscience sitting next to each other like two accidental passengers in adjoining airplane seats.

Regardless, 'Ticket To Ride' was very important in that, as the only officially released piece of new Beatle output over the entire first half of 1965 (backed with 'Yes It Is' on the B-side), it gave the world a proper reassurance that the Fab Four *were* involved in the great big race to finally make rock'n'roll into serious art — clearly, of all the songs recorded at that February session this was the most stereotypically «mind-blowing» candidate, topping UK and US charts as usual. But as important as the song is, I think that the truly outstanding moment of the February sessions was the emergence of George Harrison as an accomplished songwriter in his own right. After the acceptable, but forgettable 'Don't Bother Me' on **With The Beatles**, and a frustratingly bungled effort to turn 'You Know What To Do' into something accomplished during the **Hard Day's Night** sessions, George finally hits the jackpot, proving that mediocre talent *can* mutate into something grander, given a conveniently beneficial environment, so to speak.

Of the two songs he contributed for the sessions, only 'I Need You' made it into the movie, but 'You Like Me Too Much' was still deemed good enough to make it onto Side B of the LP — although as a proper «Harrising», it feels rather conventional, and the greatest attraction here comes from some ingenious keyboard work, where John, Paul, and even George Martin are all involved in combining acoustic and electric piano parts. Lyrics-wise, George has not yet progressed beyond standard boy-girl thematics (then again, neither have his superiors), but the words to 'You Like Me Too Much' aren't too bad; as both John and Paul are upping their game in this department a little, progressing beyond simplistic stock clichés to thinking up slightly more realistic and emotionally complex situations, so does George, giving us a more nuanced tale than the trivial "I'm so happy" or "I'm so gloomy" message. ("*Though you've gone away this morning, you'll be back again tonight*" kind of gives us both at the same time already, doesn't it?).

Ironically, though, it is the lyrically and emotionally simpler ‘I Need You’ that ends up being the best of the two — arguably, George’s very first serious emotional punch captured on record. It’s possible to treat it as a direct sequel to ‘Don’t Bother Me’, except this time the atmosphere of doomed melancholy, permeating the imaginary conversation between the dumped protagonist and his friends, shifts to one of subtly hopeful melancholy, reflected in what might be an imaginary letter from the dumped protagonist to the love of his life (the song is said to have been inspired by George’s feelings for Pattie Boyd, but if so, it comes about a decade too early). One thing both have in common is George’s love for long-winded verse lines: 12 syllables in ‘Don’t Bother Me’, 10 in ‘I Need You’ — this skill would later come in handy for all of George’s religious-philosophical needs — but where ‘Don’t Bother Me’ does not expand much beyond the angry grumble, ‘I Need You’ makes a terrific shift between depressed exposition (“*you don’t realize how much I need you...*”) and desperate pleading (“*please come on back to me...*”), where John and Paul also seriously enhance the effects with extra harmonies that reinforce the feeling of hope-beyond-despair.

For all of its superficial simplicity, George has no other song like ‘I Need You’ in his entire Beatle-era catalog, and maybe even beyond that, too, though it is hard for me to quickly rewind all of it in the back of my mind; already on **Rubber Soul**, his seriousness and preachiness would start to get the better of him, and his desperate pleading in the future would rather be addressed to the Lord above than any of his blonde-haired creations below, which is a whole different story already. But if you’re looking for a proper starting point to that famous «George heart tug» which affects some of us so deeply, look no further than the chord change from "*love you all the time and never leave you*" to "*please come on back to me*". Forty years later, the first man to properly play tribute to that moment would be Tom Petty, whose performance of ‘[I Need You](#)’ during the memorial *Concert For George* is one of the show’s major highlights — and, of course, that chord change, along with the words, took on a whole different meaning back then. Whoever implied that George Harrison only began to compete with the level of Lennon-McCartney around 1968–69, with songs like ‘While My Guitar Gently Weeps’ or ‘Something’ (I think Paul, rather condescendingly, said something to that effect), is willingly ignoring the fact that it is George Harrison who is responsible for one of the strongest, most painful flashes of genuine feeling on this whole album, and it would take a pretty thick-skinned non-believer not to notice that.

With the work on those eight songs mostly completed, the Beatles headed off to the Bahamas and to Austria in order to film *Help!*, and, ironically enough, ‘Help!’ — the actual song — was not written or recorded until early April, after most of the shooting was over; in fact, Lennon actually wrote it to match the agreed upon title of the movie, not the other way around. The really interesting thing here is that, later on, John would always talk about the song as representing a *true* «call for

help», reflecting his feelings of being trapped, exploited, and miserable at the time ("*I WAS crying out for help!*"); yet if you look more closely, the lyrics here actually continue the motif already initiated in 'You've Got To Hide Your Love Away', with a perfectly logical transition from "*if she's gone I can't go on*" to "*I know that I just need you like I've never done before*". In other words, this is not just a vague, abstract call for help — it's more like an explicit advertisement for a soulmate. On the other hand, there is no serious contradiction here: John did feel trapped, and it did take his falling in love with Yoko to free him from the trap eventually — regardless of any of our *own* perspectives on the breakup of the Beatles.

Years later, John would also regret the decision to record the song as a speedy pop-rocker instead of a slow ballad, in the context of which the words might gain more emotional resonance (as it is, I'm sure most people barely pay them any attention indeed, other than just the chanted title). No evidence exists, as far as I can tell, of the Beatles themselves trying it out slow and mellow — but, of course, you can always go to later cover versions by [Deep Purple](#) or [the Carpenters](#) to see how it would work out, and I'm pretty sure you'll agree with me that it wouldn't work out nearly as well as the original (although I have my share of respect for both attempts). The «breakneck» tempo is not there merely for commercial purposes; it is there to underline the urgency and seriousness of the situation. The hero is not just sitting, all gloomy and depressed, finding masochistic pleasure in his own wounds in some hotel room; he's panicking, running through the streets in his underwear after having just set the hotel room on fire, or something like that. At a slower tempo, John's voice would never have sounded as urgently desperate as it does on "*but-now-these-days-are-gone-I'm-not-so-self-assured*" (note how on the slower Carpenters version, the tempo allows Karen to throw on a little flowery melismatic hop on *self-assured* — it's totally adorable, but it also kiddifies the song, downplaying the pain and upping the playfulness).

The most inventive trick associated with 'Help!' are its vocal harmony arrangements, particularly the idea of George and Paul's lines «previewing» the lead vocal, creating the effect of an echo that comes before the main part — "*[and now] and now these days are gone...*". I always like to imagine that the boys came up with this solution to help John better memorize his own lyrics: what with the long-winded nature of the verse lines and the high speed of delivery, it would have been hard for him not to flub the words — in fact, several live recordings of the song do exist where he still messes up — and thus it's quite helpful to have yourself an official prompter in such dire straits. According to Mark Hertsgaard, the author of *The Music And Artistry Of The Beatles*, this strategy is "*underlining the importance of the words even as it softens their sorrow with wistful nostalgia*", but I don't know where the *nostalgia* bit is coming from, other than an association with the song's single line of "*when I was younger, so much younger than today...*". To me, it's more about a realistic symbiosis of the internal voices disrupting the protagonist's peace of mind — his inner demons, if you like — and his own inevitable

reaction. Paul and George are playing out the role of John's nerve impulses, driving him to act in crazy ways, and he is their obedient slave like most of us are obedient slaves to our own impulses. Make sense?

Anyway, regardless of the actual interpretation, the vocal harmonies on 'Help!' are just another awesome example of how the Beatles, whose singing and harmonizing techniques could never hope to match those of the Beach Boys (well, maybe if John and Paul and George had all been blood brothers and living under the same roof with their dictatorial and abusive father... ah well, never mind), could compensate for that by relying on their sheer creativity and coming up with inventive and meaningful arrangements that might not require all that much training and practice but could still earn them a place at the same table with all the great masters of vocal harmony, past and present. And not that this should in any way downplay the importance of the instrumental parts — the doom-laden three-chord mini-stairway-to-hell guitar line between each of the chorus lines, the sympathetic arpeggiated jangle backing up John's "*won't you please please help me?*" falsetto, or that panicky Ringo fill connecting the verse to the chorus.

If there's anything seriously critical to be said about any of those songs, it is probably that they feel totally disconnected from the movie for which, allegedly, they should have been written. Granted, so was most of the material used for *A Hard Day's Night*, but there at least the band had the excuse of the pseudo-documentary approach, being free to perform just about anything as long as it was in a relatively realistic setting. By contrast, within *Help!* all the songs play out like early examples of music videos where the visual content has practically nothing to do with the musical, which seriously detracts from the songs' power — it's hard to take John singing 'Help!' seriously when he is having darts thrown at his onscreen image by infuriated cult members, or to notice the actual pain within 'I Need You' when it's all about tanks and artillery setting up positions to safeguard the Beatles against the cult during their recording process. And what exactly does 'Ticket To Ride' have to do with skiing up in the Alps? Is the cable car supposed to be a metaphor for "*riding so high*"?

Clearly, this problem is no longer relevant in the 21st century, but back in 1965, it *was* relevant: the music written for the movie was so far ahead of the movie that the very existence of the movie was a bit insulting next to it. These days, it's just harmless nostalgic fun and adorable old-school silliness, but back then it could reinforce some pretty harmful stereotypes about the band, and indeed it is quite telling that the conservative *Daily Express* praised the movie while the liberal *Daily Mirror* condemned it, or that the movie is often listed as a chief source of inspiration for the Monkees' TV show — not that there was anything wrong with the Monkees' TV show, mind you, but it *was* good-natured fluffy light entertainment, and most of the songs written for *Help!* go way beyond good-natured fluffy light entertainment.

The «proper» soundtrack version of the album was, just as it was with **A Hard Day's Night**, only released in the US, where the seven songs used in the movie were padded out with additional instrumentals from the score, composed and conducted by Ken Thorne; it's mostly rubbish, but due to the film's «Indian» motifs, a few of the compositions featured Eastern instruments such as sitar — thus officially marking the first presence of a sitar on a Beatles album, several months prior to 'Norwegian Wood'. (Joking aside, George's introduction to the sitar *did* occur during the shooting of the movie, so there was at least one long-lasting positive effect from those almost-wasted months). For the UK release, however, it was artistically necessary to come up with a whole other side of new songs, given that fans had been impatiently waiting for a proper new Beatles LP for more than half a year already.

Two of the songs for that Side B came from the same February '65 sessions — 'You Like Me Too Much' and 'Tell Me What You See', which did not make it into the movie — but five more had to be rounded up to complete the picture, and this was a bit of a patch-job: spread over two or three different sessions in May and June '65, including two covers of outside artists (the last ever time the Beatles would include somebody else's songwriting) and at least one song that John would later come to despise with a vengeance ('It's Only Love'). However, even if on an objective level Side B of **Help!** clearly loses the game to Side A, even the weakest of its songs still have their moments and aspects of redemption.

Perhaps opening things up with Ringo singing Buck Owens might feel like a corny move when taken outside of context; but *inside* of context, 'Act Naturally' is the perfect opener, especially if you listen to it in its proper place. The monumentality of 'Ticket To Ride' has just faded away, the curtain has fallen, you have turned the record over — and now, as if breaking the fourth wall, the principal star of the movie (by then, it was a general consensus that Ringo had the best acting abilities of all four Beatles) walks out on stage and delivers a boastful-but-humble closing reflection on how "*they're gonna put me in the movies, they're gonna make a big star out of me*", which, I dare say, hits even harder home with Ringo than it did with Owens (although I would think that "*they'll make a scene about a man that's sad and lonely*" better describes his part in *A Hard Day's Night* than *Help!*). If you think of it that way, it's the first theatrical-conceptual move on the part of the band to ever appear on an LP, and you can even draw a straight line from here to **Sgt. Pepper** if you so desire.

Additionally, if you compare the performance to the [original Buck Owens recording](#), you'll see just how much the band brings to the table — the original is pretty barebones, while the Beatles version features some excellent lead guitar licks from George throughout, starting from the opening descending «guffawing» riff and shadowing Ringo's vocal for most of the song. A very similar style would soon be adopted for **Rubber Soul**'s original 'What Goes On', also with Ringo on vocals

and with even more intricate country-style guitar arrangements, so 'Act Naturally' also happens to be a small step forward in the Beatles embracing the «folk-rock revolution» of 1965. See how much food for thought is provided even by the tiniest of trifles at the time!

Meanwhile, John took things easy and went on a brief Larry Williams kick: the Beatles definitely knew of Larry from their earliest days, as 'Bony Moronie' had allegedly featured already in the Quarrymen's live setlist as early as 1957, and with a couple new tracks required a.s.a.p. for their upcoming American LP **Beatles VI**, they went into the studio on May 10, 1965 (Larry's birthday!) and knocked off 'Bad Boy' and 'Dizzy Miss Lizzy', with John taking lead vocal on both. Unfortunately, 'Bad Boy' ended up half-lost (apart from **Beatles VI**, it would only surface on various compilations, from **Golden Oldies** to **Rarities** to **Past Masters** etc.), even if it's the better song of the two — less repetitive, featuring a tremendous George solo, and one of the «nastiest» ever Lennon vocals from his Beatle days.

But there is something to be said about the minimalism of 'Dizzy Miss Lizzy', too, even if the band quite intentionally limits George to replaying the same lead line over and over for eternity. Like with 'Rock And Roll Music' and other early rock'n'roll songs, the aim here is to toughen up a song whose original vibe was relatively toothless and friendly. Larry recorded 'Dizzy Miss Lizzy' — like every other hit of his — as a bit of a joke number; the Beatles, particularly George with his alarm siren-like guitar tone and John with his «hungry» vocal delivery, take it far more seriously, turning the song into a modernized headbanger that would also be perfect for their live show (and even long after they ceased doing live shows, 'Dizzy Miss Lizzy' would be one of the few songs John would perform at Live Peace Toronto in 1969 with the Plastic Ono Band, though, admittedly, they might have settled on it back then mostly because they had no time to rehearse anything more complex). In any case, it's one of his finest «all-out shouting» performances since the days of 'Twist And Shout'... and I do admire George's tenacity in holding down that riff non-stop for three minutes (while also chuckling at the occasional mistake here and there, like at 1:46 when he drops an extra note out of the blue and they decide to keep it in — just so, you know, sixty years later unsuspecting people would not assume the whole track had been AI-generated or something).

John's last and only fully original contribution to Side B was 'It's Only Love', a song he would later single out as one of his favorite targets for self-criticism, and perhaps the self-criticism is justified when it comes to the lyrics: after the impressive verbal progress seen on 'Help!', 'Ticket To Ride', and 'You've Got To Hide Your Love Away', something like "*when you sigh, my inside just flies, butterflies*" and "*just the sight of you makes night time bright*" feels like a conscious nod to the young and innocent days of 1963 — back then, John could have been given plenty of slack for the likes of 'Ask Me Why', but this

here is the equivalent of a full-grown man walking around in his school uniform (and *not* in an Angus Young manner of doing it). In his defense, though, the song does begin with "*I get high when I see you go by*", which may have been a conscious or subconscious reference to the famous conversation with Dylan who, allegedly, was surprised by the Beatles having never smoked pot before despite singing "*it's such a feeling I get high*" on 'I Want To Hold Your Hand'. Now we have tricky John actually slipping that bit into the beginning of a sugary love ballad and nobody paying attention — and to think of all the fuss around Jim Morrison and his "*girl we couldn't get much higher*" bit two years later...

What is really surprising is that by this time, John had all but stopped writing simple, sentimental love songs, and when he later returned to that practice, he would always make sure the simple feeling would be transferred directly from the heart; 'It's Only Love' does feel somewhat hollow and fake as a «Lennon song», though, in its defense, it fares pretty well as a «Beatles song». We can criticize the words all we like, but there's no denying the beauty of the tremolo-laden lead guitar figure, or the prettiness of the interplay between John's 12-string rhythm and George's little syncopated «pecks» in the other channel, or, most importantly, the power of the final melismatic falsetto vocal coda — that last note genuinely gives me the proverbial *butterflies* in the same manner that only a few other people are capable of, like, say, Ray Davies on 'Waterloo Sunset'. In the end, 'It's Only Love' may be «regressive» in attitude, but in terms of writing and arrangement it is still miles ahead of the level of **Please Please Me** and, ultimately, nothing to be ashamed of.

Finally, we are left with two more McCartney songs, and these really couldn't have come sooner, given Paul's relatively «auxiliary» involvement with the proper soundtrack of *Help!* (as good as 'The Night Before' and 'Another Girl' turned out to be, they do feel humble and insignificant next to Lennon's tracks on Side A). Although nothing shall ever take away the champion crown from 'Scrambled Eggs', it could be argued that 'I've Just Seen A Face' does not really drag too far behind its ten-times-more-famous neighbor — even if it could be formally classified as a «bluegrass ballad», it's the kind of song that could only be written by a compositional genius working outside of any strict genre conventions or formalities. The contrast alone between the slow, almost meditative introduction, gallantly picked by three different Beatles on three different acoustic guitars, and the breakneck speed of the main melody is something we'd never previously heard on a Beatles song, or, for that matter, on *any* song on the pop market — and the twisted shape of the verse, which feels as if it's propelling you forward through a narrow corridor with no clear indication of when and how it's going to stop, is another innovative feature that may, perhaps, have been inspired by the «rappy» likes of Dylan's 'Subterranean Homesick Blues' but is realized in full-on Paul McCartney style: no aggression or cynicism, just pure charm.

My personal moment of mystery with the song has always been with the chorus: "*Falling, yes I am falling / And she keeps calling / Me back again*". It turns out a bit clumsy, with the words clipped and overpressed to fit into the musical structure, but this is also what gives the whole thing a bit of an extra dimension. *Falling* naturally supposes *falling in love*, but it is rare that the complement *in love* is omitted in such situations, and a simple *I am falling* could just as equally mean *going to Hell* or the like — and in this context, "*she keeps calling me back again*" would have an almost Gothic flair. I mean, if you see a vision of someone at night who "*keeps calling you back again*", it's gotta be some Edgar Allan Poe shit, right? To me, it was as if, quite inadvertently, Paul was penning a love song to a ghost here, and if you add this perspective to the song, it actually becomes... something completely different, as if all the melodic tricks alone didn't *already* make it so completely different. If it were up to me, I'd add a bit of haunting graveyard laughter to the outro to complete the picture.

As for 'Scrambled Eggs' (I find that calling the song by its original working title helps it feel a little less clichéd in the back of your mind), anything I say on the subject shall most likely repeat something already written a dozen times before even if I spend an eternity trying to come up with something original. I can't help noticing, though, that the theme of 'Yesterday' is *precisely* the same as that of 'The Night Before' — it's like the same subject relived in the mind of the protagonist after he'd mellowed out a little — and also that the song marks McCartney's initiation into the ranks of the greatest «nostalgic» songwriters of all time, along with Ray Davies and maybe, to a lesser extent, Brian Wilson. For some reason, while one of Paul's biggest weaknesses in songwriting is the all-too-common lack of psychological depth, he has few equals when it comes to writing about (a) loneliness and (b) looking back into the past (sometimes even *imagining* looking back into the past from the future, e.g. 'Things We Said Today'), and 'Yesterday' is the first massive and unassailable argument for that. As is well known, even John regularly expressed respect and admiration for the song ("*thank you Ringo, that was wonderful!*" is a classic moment in Beatle history), and that's, like, the highest praise Paul McCartney of Liverpool could ever aspire to. But it's also much to Paul's honor that the success of 'Yesterday' as, essentially, his solo creation never went to his head enough to opt out for a solo career — the time had certainly not yet come to loosen the Beatle bonds.

Yet speaking of Beatle bonds, we can already see here that they are beginning to loosen up. As the Beatles mature as artists, their individualities begin to overshadow their collective influences, and the sharp contrast between a song like 'Help!' (pure John) and 'Yesterday' (pure Paul) is felt much more intensely than any John-Paul contrast on the previous four albums; not coincidentally, it is on **Help!** that George comes into his own right as a third, and equally distinctive, creative force. At the very same time, the Jagger/Richards songwriting team was coming into its own with great original compositions like 'The Last Time' and 'Satisfaction', yet there was hardly any sign of a «this is a Jagger song» and «this is a Richards song»

dichotomy, which is basically your obvious answer to the question of why the Beatles broke up and the Rolling Stones survived. Naturally, at this time the band was still working as a whole, with John and Paul adding beneficial touches to each other's material; but even though they continued to spend a lot of time together, including touring and stuff, the days of their working out ideas between them in hotel rooms were already more or less a thing of the past.

Which is telling, if you ask me — great art is rarely, if ever, produced collectively on a 50-50 basis, and it is quite telling that the closer the Beatles got to their peak, the more fleshed out their individual styles would become. From that point of view, **Help!** might indeed represent a bit of a stutter in the band's relentless journey to the top of the pantheon, but it is the record that almost officially gave us «John Lennon, of Liverpool», «Paul McCartney, of Liverpool», and «George Harrison, of Liverpool», for all three of whom «opportunity knocked», and without the satisfaction of that particular condition prior to everything else, the quality and impact of **Rubber Soul** and **Revolver** would have been far less than they are seen today. Thus, **Help!** might still have one of its feet dragging behind in the soil of 1963-64, while the other one is faintly beginning to grope for the big musical innovations of 1965-66; but it is important to remember that all those innovations, no matter how many gushing pages of text have been produced about them by fans, critics, and musicologists alike, would have signified very little if they were purely a matter of form, not substance — and that the substance could only be provided by the individual natures, feelings, and reflections of each of the band members, rather than by getting together under some sort of «okay, let's write something like Roy Orbison does!» pretext. The best songs on **Help!** all satisfy that requirement, and the worst seem to at least acknowledge it. That's a pretty good ticket to ride if there ever was one.

