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June 2, 1967 was a revolutionary day in the history of popular music. The album that would 20 years later be deemed the best rock album ever by *Rolling Stone* magazine ("Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band" 46) was released. The Beatles' *Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band* was a turning point in rock history. In a sense, it helped legitimize rock music in the "art music" world. In an essay on the Beatles, composer Ned Rorem stated that "She's Leaving Home" is "equal to any song that Schubert ever wrote" ("The Beatles triumphant" 60). Many people, including music critics and members of the general public, believe that *Sgt. Pepper* is the Greatest Rock Album Ever. Granted, the techniques used to record this album are primitive by today's standards. Yet they were indeed revolutionary, and a great amount of credit is due to Beatles producer George Martin for helping to master the effects. The sounds of the songs themselves, however, were not as "new" as pop music listeners believed them to be.

Musical styles evolve over time; a new style does not "suddenly appear." The Baroque era, for example, did not extend from exactly January 1, 1600, to Johann Sebastian Bach's death in 1750. Composers did not wake up the next day inspired to write Classic music. Likewise the Beatles, with their preceding albums *Rubber Soul* (1965) and *Revolver* (1966), along with the February 1967 single of "Penny Lane"/ "Strawberry Fields Forever," clearly foreshadowed what was to come.

Albums mentioned in this paper refer to the British versions of the Beatles albums, which are different from the original American releases up to and including *Revolver*. The British albums are recorded as the Beatles originally intended and are drastically different from the "hack jobs" that were released in America—albums of singles, bootleg tapes, and sometimes material combined from two different British albums (Pond 131). In fact, the Beatles themselves

attempted to make a statement about their displeasure with this practice. The cover for their June 1966 American album *Yesterday...and Today* showed the Beatles dressed as butchers, happily posed with bloody baby doll parts around them, a statement that their babies—their albums—were being butchered. Capitol Records, their American distributor, did not like this cover and ordered another one made (Wallgren 164). Three copies of the "butcher cover" slipped by the presses, however, and are now worth over $50,000 each. In Britain, singles are considered separate releases from albums. Singles are not included on an album if they have been released before the album, but a single can be taken from an already-released album. The Beatles' album catalog was standardized (as the British releases) in 1987 with the albums' release on compact disc (Puterbaugh 10). The proper, British versions of the Beatles' albums are now available from EMI/Parlophone. Singles are included on *Past Masters*, volumes I and II, and on the Beatles' greatest hits collections, the "Red," from 1963-66, and "Blue," from 1967-1970, albums.

The Beatles' early sound, "simple, economic, and distinctive" (Gammond 46), was developed in Hamburg in the early 1960's, the only place where they could find regular work. Early 1963 marked the beginning of Beatlemania in England. Their effect was not to be felt overseas until early 1964, after a number one single, "I Want to Hold Your Hand," and a legendary appearance on "The Ed Sullivan Show." Their classic film *A Hard Day's Night* was released in mid-1964 to great critical acclaim. By this time, their musical style was moving away from the early "Merseybeat" sound they made famous and into more subdued, inventive music.

The differences in the compositional styles of John Lennon and Paul McCartney were beginning to become more obvious around 1965. It should be noted that, even though almost all the Beatles'

songs are credited to "Lennon/ McCartney," there were few *true* collaborations. Some of these songs were written wholly by only one of the songwriting duo. Todd Compton gives a full analysis of the Lennon/ McCartney songs and who *actually* wrote them. "Norwegian Wood" and "Nowhere Man," with their simple yet memorable melodies and occasionally cynical lyrics, were written by Lennon. "Eleanor Rigby" was written by McCartney. "Tomorrow Never Knows," the haunting song that closes *Revolver*, was a product of Lennon, as were "Strawberry Fields Forever" and "Lucy in the Sky with Diamonds," rumored to be an LSD song. These songs recall drug trips and psychedelic dreams with their off-the-wall lyrics and dizzying accompaniments. Even an untrained ear can discern the differences between the jaunty, lyrical, dance-hall vaudevillian style of McCartney's songs and the "trippy," zooming melodies and Carrollian lyrics of Lennon.

After *Help!*, their second movie, and the album soundtrack, "the Beatles got 'mature': less adrenaline, more subtlety" (Pond 131). *Rubber Soul* was released in December 1965, and contained music that was a bit more experimental than previous releases, due to the fact that the Beatles were able to invest more time and thought into their recordings than ever before (Lewisohn 15, 1996). With "Nowhere Man," the Beatles became more like Bob Dylan in their lyrics (Roxon 34) and the close harmonies proved to be something fresh for audiences:

> Doesn't have a point of view
> Knows not where he's going to
> Isn't he a bit like you and me?
> Nowhere man, please listen
> You don't know what you're missing
> Nowhere man, the world is at your command ("Nowhere Man").

George Harrison's interests in Indian music helped the song "Norwegian Wood" to introduce the sitar, an Indian instrument, to American pop audiences. *Rubber Soul* offered a new refinement to the Beatles' sound and a reflective maturity that seemed to tie the entire album together. On this album and its follow-up, August 1966's *Revolver*, the Beatles moved away from simplicity, experimenting with electronic effects and added instruments in the studio, moving in different stylistic directions (Gammond 46). *Revolver* sported "Love You To," another Harrison composition with Indian instruments, in a traditional Indian style. "Eleanor Rigby," the first pop song to have a classical string-only accompaniment, further demonstrates the Beatles' ability to grow in both lyrical content and musical creativity. The last song on *Revolver* is aptly placed; "Tomorrow Never Knows," a swirling song with a psychedelic accompaniment and words that could recall a drug trip, was a definite hint of what was to come.

> Turn off your mind, relax and float down-stream
> It is not dying, it is not dying
> Lay down all thought, surrender to the void
> It is shining, it is shining . . .
> But listen to the colour of your dreams
> It is not living, it is not living ("Tomorrow Never Knows").

These songs and ones that followed were a step away from the "boy-girl romantic themes" of their earlier songs. *Revolver* was a highly adventurous pop record, and established the Beatles as "recording-studio *auteurs*" (Loder 52). In fact, they were unable—and unwilling—to perform any of the *Revolver* songs on their subsequent American tour, which was to be their last.

August 29, 1966 was to be the Beatles' last official concert, in Candlestick Park in San Francisco. With the relief of no longer having to tour incessantly came more inventiveness in the studio, and

more time to produce an album. As an example, the Beatles' first British album, *Please Please Me*, took 585 minutes of studio time; *Sgt. Pepper* would take 700 *hours* (Lewisohn 4, 1987). Fueled by the Beach Boys' 1965 album *Pet Sounds*, which introduced the theremin[1] into American pop music with "Good Vibrations," and the threat of *Smile*, a work-in-progress by Brian Wilson that was reportedly the greatest thing that had happened in rock to date (Roxon 34), the Beatles went back into the studio to work on new material. Fortunately for the Beatles, *Smile* never made it out of the studio.

The studio sessions resulting in the Sgt. Pepper album began in November 1966 (Loder 52). The first song in these sessions was "Strawberry Fields Forever," a Lennon song that recalls both a Liverpool orphanage and a dreamy, trippy feel.

> Let me take you down
> 'cos I'm going to strawberry fields
> Nothing is real
> And nothing to get hungabout . . .
> Always, no sometimes, think it's me
> But, you know, I know when it's a dream
> I think I know, I mean, er, yes
> But it's all wrong
> That is, I think I disagree ("Strawberry Fields Forever").

This was also the Beatles' first use of a Mellotron, a forerunner to the synthesizers of today. The first attempts at recording this song resulted in a heavy rock background. A later attempt yielded an

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[1]The theremin is a musical instrument invented by Lev Theremin in the early 20th century. It resembles a television set, and is played by moving the hands around it, playing the sound waves. It produces an eerie sound.

accompaniment of cellos and trumpets. Lennon decided that he liked both versions, and asked producer George Martin to put the beginning of the first with the end of the second. There was one problem: the two versions were in two different keys and at two different tempos. Fortunately, the slower version was a semitone flat compared to the faster one. Martin made adjustments on a variable-control tape machine, and slowed one down and sped the other up to make the two versions meet in the middle, at the same tempo and in the same key (Martin 199-201). This third version was released as a combination of Takes seven and twenty-six (Lewisohn 30, 1996), and by listening closely, one can tell that the second half of the song sounds just a bit slowed down.

Next, the group tackled "When I'm Sixty-Four," a McCartney song that evoked the sounds and attitudes of vaudeville. "Penny Lane," another McCartney tune, was accented by the sounds of a B-flat piccolo trumpet, like the one McCartney had heard at a recent performance of J.S. Bach's Brandenburg Concerti (Martin 201). By the time these three songs were recorded, EMI, the band's label, was pressuring them for a single. "Strawberry Fields Forever" and "Penny Lane" were released as a double A-sided record, and were therefore left off the *Sgt. Pepper* album. This single displayed the Beatles on a new plane (Loder 52). Beatles engineer Geoff Emerick stated that the single "seemed to be one vast, giant step toward something that was better than we'd ever heard . . . into a new generation and a new time" (Loder 52).

Work resumed in February 1967 on the next album. Five more songs were recorded: "Lovely Rita," "A Day in the Life," "Good Morning, Good Morning," "She's Leaving Home," and "Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band." The "Sergeant Pepper" theme of the album did not come until after the song was recorded. Lennon even said in an interview that any of the songs, with the

exception of "Sgt. Pepper" and "With a Little Help From My Friends" could have been on any album (*The Beatles Anthology*). McCartney suddenly got the idea of the album being *by* Sergeant Pepper and his Lonely Hearts Club Band. This idea eventually evolved into the Beatles' development of the first-ever concept album. The album was to be a concert by Sergeant Pepper's band, and the cover art by Peter Blake reflects this: on the cover, the "concert" is over, and the band is posing with concertgoers, people that the Beatles, Peter Blake, and photographer Michael Cooper chose for the shoot. The cover was to evoke a sense of community, with Sgt. Pepper's Band surrounded by their friends. The album begins:

> We're Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band
> We hope you will enjoy the show
> Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band
> Sit back and let the evening go ("Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band").

One of the most remarkable things about the *Sgt. Pepper* album was the innovations in technology and recording that it produced. The methods used in 1967 to produce this album now seem quite primitive. No synthesizers (except for the Mellotron) or sampling machines were used. The equipment they had was a four-track machine, similar to what is now called a "portable studio" and cost around $500 in 1987 (Loder 54). George Martin produced a masterful work, considering the simple equipment. He sometimes linked up two four-track recorders to make an eight-track machine. In the recording of "Being for the Benefit of Mr. Kite!", a Lennon song written about an 1843 circus poster (Lewisohn 35, 1996), Lennon wanted a swirling cloud of circus-type music in waltz time. Martin, Lennon, and another man achieved the hurdy-gurdy sound with a Hammond organ, a Wurlitzer organ, and a huge bass har-

monica. Due to Martin's lack of speed on the runs, everything was played an octave lower, and slower on the other two instruments' parts, and sped up later. Martin also used recordings of old Victorian steam organs to add to the sound, and dubbed them onto a tape of his own. To ensure that none of the recordings were identifiable, the Victorian tape was cut into foot-long slices, tossed into the air, and put back together in random order. This resulted in a potpourri of carousel noises, and when put together with the previous tape, it gave the overall impression of the sounds of a circus.

Sgt. Pepper has been hailed as the Beatles' funniest album ("Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band" 46). The end of the album is probably the best example of their humor. After the famous chord in "A Day in the Life" fades into silence, a dog whistle is blown. This 20,000 hertz note was put at the end of the album just to annoy listeners' dogs. After this annoying note fades out, nonsense chatter stretches into the run-out groove. On record players without auto-change or a manual return device, the record would keep playing the run-out groove until it was stopped. The Beatles decided to record something in this space, a little loop of conversation. McCartney once said, "We were into Cage and Stockhausen, those kind of people. . . . Well, Cage is appreciating silence, isn't he? We were appreciating the run-out groove!" ("Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band" 46). Unfortunately, this does not have the same effect on the cassette tape or compact disc releases of *Sgt. Pepper*—the nonsense chatter lasts only about ten seconds.

Perhaps the most frequently talked about song from *Sgt. Pepper* is "A Day in the Life." It appears on the album after the "Sgt. Pepper (reprise)," which is fittingly the end of Sgt. Pepper's concert. This song can be thought of as their encore—the best song, saved for last, to keep the audience wondering what would happen

at their next "concert." This was the song that shocked listeners. It was totally unexpected—even from the Beatles. *Time* called it "the most disturbingly beautiful song the group has ever produced" ("The Beatles Triumphant" 61). This song is actually two separate songs: the slow beginning and end verses are a product of Lennon, and the up-tempo middle section is McCartney's (Martin 208). Lennon's part was a dreamy, simple melody, with odd lyrics about news stories that he had read:

> I read the news today, oh boy
> About a lucky man who made the grade
> And though the news was rather sad
> Well, I just had to laugh
> I saw the photograph
> He blew his mind out in a car
> He didn't notice that the lights had changed
> A crowd of people stood and stared . . .("A Day in the Life")

McCartney's contribution fit in, according to Martin (208), as a dream sequence to this song. The tempo and mood are contrasting: Lennon's is slow, McCartney's is upbeat and typical of the vaudeville dance-hall style he had adopted as of late.

> Woke up, got out of bed
> Dragged a comb across my head
> Found my way upstairs and drank a cup
> And looking up, I noticed I was late.
> Found my coat, and grabbed my hat
> Made the bus in seconds flat
> Found my way upstairs and had a smoke
> And somebody spoke and I went into a dream . . .("A Day in the Life").

Startling sonic delights fill this song. Lennon's first part is separated from McCartney's by "the crescendo," a massive swirl of sound

from a full orchestra. Actually, it was only a 41-piece orchestra, with the tape dubbed slightly slower to give the impression of a full orchestra (Martin 211-212). The instructions given to the orchestra were different from anything they had ever heard. A good ensemble musician is taught to listen to everyone in the ensemble. Martin wanted them to do just the opposite. At the beginning of this part of the score, the lowest note possible on each instrument was notated. Twenty-four bars later, the highest possible note was written. A squiggly line was all that appeared in between. The musicians were instructed to go at their own pace from the pianissimo lowest note to the fortissimo highest note. This effect from the musicians, dubbed to "double" the size of the orchestra, created what is probably the most famous crescendo in rock music (Martin 209-212).

Even more memorable is the chord heard after the second crescendo, at the end of the song. This chord is a loud piano chord that rings on for forty-five seconds. This required more studio trickery from Martin, Emerick, and all four Beatles. Three pianos—one upright and two grands—were used by five men. The chords were given to the players, Martin and the Beatles, and all hit the chords as hard as possible. In the control room, Emerick had the faders, which control the volume from the studio, down as low as possible. As the chords faded away, Emerick gradually turned the faders up to full blast. The people in the studio had to be very quiet, as the microphones were very live. This method was used three times, building up a massive sound from the pianos. This miraculous chord was a fitting end to "A Day in the Life."

Clearly, the technical innovations are one of the things for which *Sgt. Pepper* will be remembered. That such a sonically challenging album could be recorded on what was basically a four-track machine is astonishing. The album still holds up today as one of

the best albums of all time. However, it should not be passed off as a "sudden innovation." The music and lyrics evolved over a period of two years and three albums. The advances realized in *Sgt. Pepper* aided the Beatles in their further explorations of sound in the studio.

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