



# here comes the MILESTONE

*The Beatles captured a generation. Millions mourned the untimely deaths of John Lennon and George Harrison, and continue to celebrate the ongoing success of Ringo Starr (who's produced 19 solo studio albums to date) and the legendary Paul McCartney (still filling stadiums on his global tours and rumoured to be headlining Glastonbury next year). This summer sees the 50th anniversary of the band's iconic final album, which will be marked with a series of special events. **Jeremy Blackmore** tells the story behind this historic musical landmark...*

FIFTY YEARS AGO, the sixties were drawing to an end and so, ultimately, were The Beatles. The band that had defined the decade wrote their own epitaph, creating one last masterpiece that concludes with a reflection on their legacy and a message of love for the world. *Abbey Road* was a fitting finale to a remarkable career, their best-selling and most enduring album: a testament to their talent, innovation and charisma.

They produced this crowning musical achievement while bitter business disputes were tearing them apart. Nonetheless, they were able to put those differences one aside last time, and produce music that transcended personal divisions.

Indeed, much of *Abbey Road* evokes the feeling of a hot summer's day, captured most clearly in *Here Comes The Sun* but also through the playfulness of *Octopus' Garden*, the children's playground chants in the fade of *You Never Give Me Your Money* and through lush harmonies and chiming guitars.

This was a Beatles album that sounded brighter and shinier than perhaps any other. The production team used an eight-track reel-to-reel tape machine, offering greater separation and a clearer sound, with a Moog synthesiser adding a new dimension.

Yet, even as The Beatles stepped out of the studios onto the zebra crossing on Abbey Road itself to create the iconic cover image, the sunshine could not disguise the solemn look on their

faces. It was a long way from *Sgt Pepper* and the acid-induced haze of the summer of love just two years earlier. There are darker overtones and an occasional weariness, a subconscious regret at losing a past that could not be recaptured.

Now, 50 years on, fans have a unique opportunity to delve deeper, via two special series of golden anniversary events.

Over two weekends in August, Abbey Road Studios are opening their doors for a series of exclusive lectures in Studio Two on the past, present and future of the world's most iconic recording studios. The first lecture takes place on the evening of 8 August, exactly 50 years to the day since The Beatles lined up for that famous photograph.

Then, this autumn, the world's leading Beatles historian, Mark Lewisohn – whose highly-acclaimed *Tune In* is the first part of the band's definitive biography – embarks on a 21-date UK tour, celebrating the *Abbey Road* album and sharing the story behind its creation.

Its origins date back to early 1969, shortly after the band's famous rooftop gig, with sessions continuing intermittently throughout the spring. The band convened in early July with producer George Martin to complete it and record several additional songs.

Mark notes that The Beatles had always been capable of great



work no matter what else was happening in their lives. "All their albums had been made in some kind of a pressure cooker," he explains, "but here was the first time that they were creating one while breaking up".

Not that its creators had any notion that this would be their final album, he adds. It wasn't necessarily going to finish at that point. More on that later.

Mark, who has had the rare privilege of hearing all the Beatles' original studio tapes, considers that the sessions in 1969 were far less acrimonious than legend has had us believe. "That's not to say they didn't have the occasional cross word. They were, compared to almost any other band, particularly harmonious

because they understood what was required to make music together. Since *Abbey Road* is such an extraordinarily melodic record with a lot of love songs and a lot of beautiful melody and a lot of particularly strong vocal harmony work, you can hear how well they could leave their issues outside and once inside, focus on the creation of beautiful music."

Indeed, looking at Linda McCartney's photographs of McCartney and Harrison recording the vocals for *Here Comes The Sun*, it is hard to detect any ill feeling. The pictures capture two old school friends from Liverpool grinning together at the mic, evidently enjoying each other's company. They were no longer singing from the same hymn sheet outside the studio,

but, once inside, they clearly were.

"The photos of George and Paul look particularly happy," Mark points out. "You can actually see how easy they were in each other's company despite no longer agreeing on things outside the studio."

*Abbey Road* is particularly notable for its musical sequencing, with a standard collection of individual songs on side one and a long medley on side two. "It's especially effective and so brilliantly done," says Mark. "The Beatles always got their sequencing right."

Studio documents indicate, though, that what we know as Side Two was originally going to be Side One: the plan was to end with the abrupt cut note in *I Want You (She's So Heavy)*. It would have been dramatic, sudden, almost harsh. Instead, after a couple of bespoke songs at the start of Side Two, the band opted to finish the album with the long medley and, appropriately, with a track called *The End*.

Lennon's output during sessions for the *Let It Be* album (recorded January 1969, released May 1970) had been lacklustre. He had been eclipsed by McCartney and the burgeoning songwriting talent of Harrison. But on *Abbey Road*, he made a decisive contribution. Scraps of old Lennon compositions form part of the medley, but, Mark believes, John's other contributions – *Sun King*, *Because*, *Come*

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*Together* and *I Want You (She's So Heavy)* – stand among his greatest songs.

*Come Together*, which opens the record, is a *tour de force*, beginning with McCartney's rumbling bassline and underpinned by Starr's pounding bass drum. While much of the lyrics are freeform nonsense, the title evokes the hippie dream at a time when it was fracturing.

By 1969 Lennon and Yoko Ono were inseparable. Lennon's almost desperate yearning for his new wife is laid bare on the bluesy *I Want You (She's So Heavy)*. Conversely *Because* showed the gentler side of its composer. Its banked harmonies create an otherworldly, psychedelic update of earlier, more innocent harmony-driven songs like *This Boy* and *Yes It Is*.

Lennon very much played his part in the creation of this album, says Mark, although McCartney was musically dominant. "In terms of its compositional strength, Paul is the chief writer. He was the one who was keenest for the medley idea... this suite of tracks was not really John's idea of what he wanted but it was certainly what Paul wanted and beautifully executed. Paul's musicality throughout the album is extraordinary."

Paul's songs on side one include *Oh! Darling* which shows off his howling rock and roll voice for the first time since Beatlemania days. To get his voice into shape, he came into the studio early to warm up before going for a take. *Maxwell's Silver Hammer*, meanwhile, as Mark notes, is "perfectly fun", but our view of it has become jaded by the other Beatles' view of it. "It's Marmite McCartney. But it's still good pop music."

Then, on side two, there is *You Never Give Me Your Money*. Reflecting on the band's business woes, it opens with Paul's vocal, tinged with regret, set against a sparse piano backing. He goes through several gear changes, singing about getting away from it all, possibly with Linda, possibly on tour with the band in simpler times.

"It's a beautiful, extraordinary piece of work," says Mark. "Just the opening of it, the piano, then the vocal that comes in on top of that. It's hard to imagine pop music being any better than that really or the medley which is one of pop music's finest moments. Paul is the architect of that and chief contributor."

Beyond the songs is what McCartney offers to the group as a whole across the album, whether on his own compositions or those by the other three.

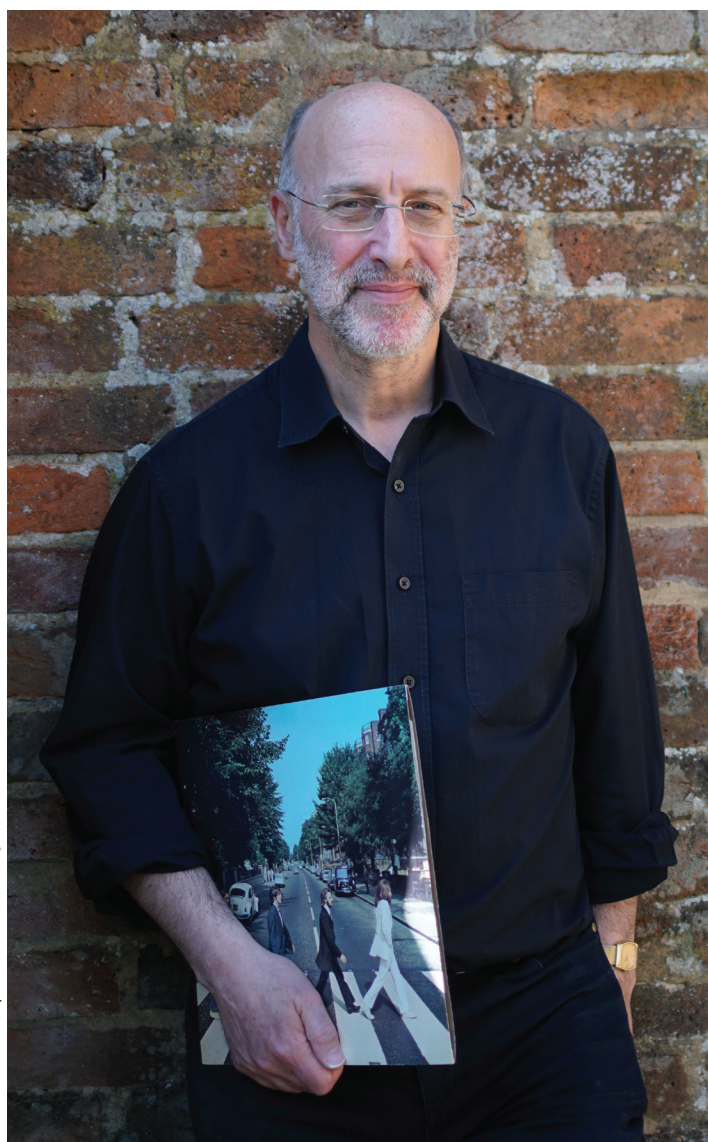
"His bass playing was just sublime," says Mark. "His sense of melody, the harmony vocals that he provides for everybody





else. He makes a major contribution to *Something*. He always gave tremendously to whatever any of the other Beatles were doing. It's a high watermark for Paul McCartney without doubt."

Harrison was blossoming by 1969 and the stockpile of songs he had built up enabled him to release a triple solo album the following year. *Abbey Road* is graced by *Something*, one of the finest love songs the band ever recorded. Written for his wife, Pattie Boyd, it is rightly regarded as his masterpiece, while *Here Comes The Sun* stands as his second bona fide standard. Opening Side Two, Harrison's vocals float in sweetly over an acoustic guitar, announcing that summer is finally here. Written in Eric Clapton's garden during a break from Apple's tortuous business problems, the sense of release is palpable.



Mark Lewisohn pic © James Coy

The so-called 'quiet Beatle' had been on a formative trip to America in late 1968 when he visited Woodstock and forged a strong friendship with Bob Dylan and The Band.

"During the course of that visit he had an epiphany," says Mark. "Whereas he had written songs occasionally before, suddenly his tap is flowing quite freely and that's where the stockpile really begins. There's no indication that he was trying to get any of those other songs onto *Abbey Road* nor that they were rejected. He offered two and both went on, but it was clear that he had enough for a whole album more, if not two."

The medley blends scraps of songs together into an almost symphonic suite before reaching its climax with the segue from *Golden Slumbers* into *Carry That Weight* and *The End*, which McCartney still performs in concert to this day.

*Golden Slumbers* opens in reflective mood. Once there was a way to get back home, Paul sings, yearningly, before all four Beatles join together on the prophetic *Carry That Weight*. They will have to bear the weight of their enormous legacy for the rest of their lives. The suite reaches a crescendo with Starr playing the only drum solo in the Beatles' canon and McCartney, Harrison and Lennon sparring by playing alternate lead guitar parts, again for the first and only time.

"They'd done almost everything and it's tempting to imagine them thinking, what haven't we done yet? Let's do it now and make sure in *The End*, on their last album, they get to do these things that they hadn't done before."

Leaving fans with the eternal message: 'And in the end the love you take is equal to the love you make', the band left the studios as a four-piece for the final time.

Not that the split was inevitable, even then. Mark, who has heard the tape of a business meeting where Lennon, McCartney and Harrison were discussing a post-*Abbey Road* release, says, "They were still a functioning group who had ideas for what they would do next. When they had what turned out to be their last photo session at John's house in Ascot, they were still together. By the time of the album's release one month later, John had left.

Next April marks 50 years since their breakup – a powerful anniversary. "But April is merely the date of an announcement. The break was the previous September. So, it's 50 years ago this September they released their album and broke up the same month. We just didn't know it at the time."

The soundtrack to the *Let It Be* movie eventually came out in May 1970, but The Beatles were done. As Lennon sang on his first solo album, *The Dream is Over*. ●

You can find out more about the lectures at Abbey Road by visiting: [www.abbeyroad.com/news/abbey-road-lectures-the-studios-that-became-a-legend-2546](http://www.abbeyroad.com/news/abbey-road-lectures-the-studios-that-became-a-legend-2546). Find out more about Mark Lewisohn's tour, a celebration of Abbey Road, by visiting: [www.marklewisohn.net/hornsey-road](http://www.marklewisohn.net/hornsey-road)