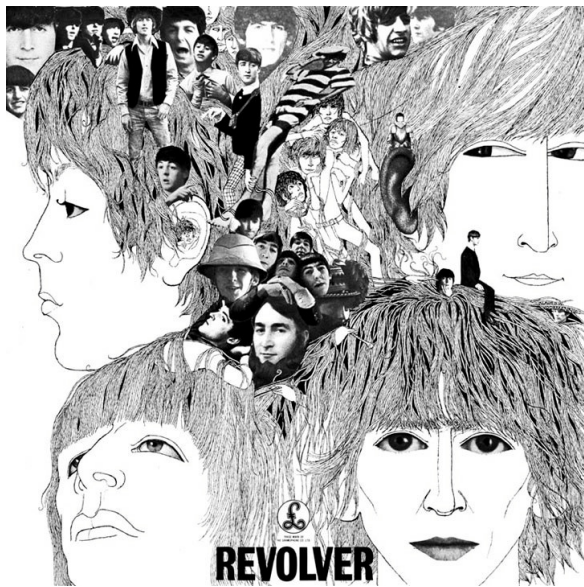


Michael Waddacor's
Strange Brew™

Re-exploring seminal rock music | Edition 05 | Friday January 26 2007

***Revolver*: Thirty-five glorious minutes of Fabulous adventure and innovation**

An appreciation of a seminal psychedelic masterpiece



Front cover of The Beatles' *Revolver* album, based on a collage by Klaus Voormann (1966)

Nineteen sixty-six was a watershed year for rock music – a period of heightened creativity marked by the release of several seminal albums, among them key works by Bob Dylan, The Kinks, The Beach Boys, The Rolling Stones, Love and Frank Zappa and the Mothers of Invention. Perhaps the most glittering of all these rock gems was The Beatles' *Revolver*, released in August 1966.

Michael Waddacor revisits the album many critics and fans regard as the greatest rock album of the last five decades.

Three years into British Beatlemania, it seemed as if The Beatles in 1965 could do nothing wrong. The Fab Four recorded and released two excellent albums, *Help* and *Rubber Soul*. Both albums proved one certain fact: Lennon, McCartney, Harrison and Starr were improving as writers, musicians, arrangers and ideators with each successive album and showing greater degrees of wit, originality and musical distinction. Similarly, George Martin was evolving in leaps and bounds as one of the most imaginative and daring music producers of the 1960s.

By this time, however, there were fans and critics who wondered if anyone, let alone The Beatles, could top the performance of *Rubber Soul*. With the release in August 1966 of *Revolver*, The Beatles fast quelled any arguments about their culture of continuously improving creativity. Today, many Beatles enthusiasts rate this as the band's best album. I shall settle on *Revolver* being a Top Five Beatles album along with *Abbey Road*, *The Beatles*, *Sgt Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band* and *Rubber Soul*.

Turning on

On *Rubber Soul*, we sensed the Fabs were turning on – and the daringly unusual perspective of the band's portrait by photographer Robert Freeman on the front cover gave us some hint of what was to follow aurally and lyrically. By the time of *Revolver*,

however, The Beatles had reached the next level of coolness, drawing on fresh musical inspirations that extended way beyond their British skiffle, rock 'n roll and vaudeville musical roots, as well as their deliciously crisp Liverpudlian humour.

They were becoming increasingly eclectic, eccentric, experimental and more inspired by Indian raga music, Eastern mysticism (including *The Tibetan Book of the Dead*), beat poetry, The Byrds, The Beach Boys, The Rolling Stones, Bob Dylan, the underground press, experimental film-making, hallucogenics, a zany form of British '60s surrealism, electronica, studio mischief ... and so much more.

Psychedelic melange

Revolver is an adventurous psychedelic melange of explorative lyrics, manipulated vocal-guitar-and-drum weaves, bizarre tape loops and droning sitar-and-tabla swirls spiced with occasional horns and strings, as well as some of the most charming Lennon-McCartney-Harrison vocal harmonies, touchingly poetic lyrics and cleverest song structures and arrangements.

As The Beatles opened their hearts and minds to new ideas, feelings, sounds and possibilities, they became richer, more diverse and more explorative musically, which is why – more than any other single criterion – *Revolver* is such a great album.

On the blistering opening track, *Taxman*, Harrison had his first real stab at pointed sociopolitical commentary, while McCartney made it clear on *Got to Get You into My Life* that he loved American rhythm 'n blues and soul – not to forget, by his own admission, some pot. Harrison, too, was free to explore his burgeoning love of Indian music and mysticism, and indulged himself in the raga-inspired *Love You To*.

McCartney turned to chamber music and the pre-rock 'n roll era to draw his inspiration for another memorable song, *For No One*. Moreover, the darker, deeper side of Lennon was beginning to unfurl its wings, as on the album's closing track, the acid-tinged nightmare of *Tomorrow Never Knows*, as well as his endearingly otherworldly *I'm Only Sleeping* and *Doctor Robert*.

Yellow Submarine remains one of the most delightful sing-along pop songs of all time, despite the quirky, kindergarten nonsense of its lyrics, while the string-drenched *Eleanor Rigby* stands out as one of the most touchingly melancholic and memorable ballads of the rock era.

Greater artistic freedom

The Beatles set themselves free to explore many moods and ideas, as they shifted from songs of light, beauty and sweetness to ones of darker-hued angst and revulsion. On *Revolver*, across 14 songs of uncompromising brilliance and originality, they were funny, strange, angry, nostalgic, tender, mocking,

silly, fantastical, hallucinatory, down-to-earth, loving and so much more, and, reassuringly, comfortably distanced from their happy, shiny, head-shaking *Yeah, Yeah* obsessions of 1964.

Subject-wise, too, the group launched themselves on a kaleidoscopic adventure, covering topics as diverse as taxation, sunshine, post-acid-trip bummers, a pitiful spinster, an eccentric "pill" doctor, romantic love, sleep and, of course, that childish maritime adventure revolving around a magical yellow submarine in a sea of green.

In one word, The Beatles were truly "cool" – and they would sustain their musical coolness in the EMI Studios over the next three years, arguably remaining the epitome of rock 'n pop coolness until their saddening demise in 1970. As much as the Fab Four were cool, they were also confident, bold, daring and adventurous, willing to take spontaneity, creativity and experimentalism to new heights.

Dispensing with their twee suits and letting their hair grow longer, The Beatles paved the way for a new direction in rock music. At home, the likes of Pink Floyd, Soft Machine, Procol Harum, The Move, The Moody Blues, The Kinks, The Who and Eric Burdon and the Animals would follow suit. Across the Atlantic, the *Revolver* Effect would shape the future sounds of The Beach Boys, The Byrds, Buffalo Springfield, Love and, a little later, also The Jimi Hendrix Experience.

Even listening to Bob Dylan's post-*Revolver*-era works, it is hard to imagine that the great Minnesota troubadour, too, did not nod his head towards the acid-tinged splendour of the Fabs' seventh album.

Intricate structures

Lennon, McCartney, Harrison and Starr, with adroit help from Martin and Emerick, rapidly evolved their songwriting and arranging skills towards intricate, cleverer and far more novel structures.

They experimented with miking techniques for recording drums, cymbals and horns and they used backward tapes and multiple loops, feedback and other sonic effects to craft new sounds and, in many respects, change the way many rock records would be recorded, engineered and mixed.

Revolver provided the experimental foundation needed to construct its more elaborate and experimental successor, the other watershed album, *Sgt Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band* (1967). The Beatles also declared that the future of rock could no longer be confined to prosaic variations of guitar, piano and drum sounds as they incorporated the French horn, sitar, tambura, violin, viola, cello and tabla, among other breakthrough sonic ideas.

A then 20-year-old engineer, Geoff Emerick, later disclosed that Lennon, McCartney, Harrison and Starr wanted an entirely fresh approach to sound manipulation and engineering. A piano could not

sound like a piano, and a guitar could not sound like a guitar.

This album would also confirm the band's preference for studio indulgence over stage performances and, within days of releasing *Revolver*, The Beatles announced their "retirement" from live performances after playing their final concert at San Francisco's Candlestick Park on August 29 1966.



Rubber Soul was the start of the Fabs' purple patch

Revolver Effect

The Beatles, with little doubt, led the Anglo-American rock movement and were the key players in globalizing rock music. From Rio to Tokyo, from Sydney to Prague, and from Johannesburg to Toronto, millions of people were touched by the Revolver Effect – and its aftermath lingers today. Listen to bands like Mercury Rev and you will appreciate the *Revolver* legacy.

When the British rock magazine, *Mojo*, decided to revisit and celebrate the great Beatles album for its July 2006 edition, 14 artists were happy to reinterpret *Revolver*, track by track, in a special *Mojo* tribute album, *Revolver Reloaded*. The featured artists included Belarus, Neal Casal, Thea Gilmore and Lampshade.

Taxman

The taut, 12-bar, barrelhouse-boogie-styled opening song characterized by its consistent pentatonic tune and bluesy sevenths, *Taxman*, was written by George Harrison, who was featured on double-tracked lead vocals with Lennon and McCartney providing harmony voices.

The song required 10 takes to record the rhythm track before any vocals were added and required 11 hours to complete. It remains one of Harrison's best mid-1960s compositions with its distinctive blend of Harrison exasperation, melancholy and satire – and a strong performance on guitar.

Against a distinctly mid-1960s black American music feel and its fuzzy, offbeat guitar chords, *Taxman* was the group's first blatant attempt on record to criticize the British Government of the day – the Labour-led one under Harold Wilson. The Labour government had imposed a 95 per cent super-tax on wealthy Britons – and this impacted on The Beatles' net earnings, hence Harrison's sneering reference to "19 for you and one for me".

Until this point, The Beatles manager, Brian Epstein, had always tried to persuade the group to avoid political commentary and dabbling with topical issues like the Vietnam War and the atomic bomb. In another ironic development, it was bassist-pianist Paul McCartney – and not the usual lead guitarist, Harrison – who played the song's standout seven-bar lead-guitar solo, for which he used his Epiphone Casino guitar.

Eleanor Rigby

Eleanor Rigby – the melody of which was written mainly by McCartney on piano – is one of the finest ballads written and recorded in the five-decade rock era. McCartney wrote the original lyrics, with the remaining Beatles, particularly Lennon, contributing at least half of the final lyrics.

Focusing on morbid topics, such as death, loneliness and suppressed middle-class feelings, it was a disconcerting digression from the prevailing British pop-songwriting subject matter of the time.

Eleanor Rigby, however, would pave the way for richer and more parochial range of English rock-songwriting topics, starting with the charmingly idiosyncratic Ray Davies vignettes that would characterize the great Kinks albums of 1967-1969.

This poignant song also contains one of the best pieces of Beatles lyric writing. It showed a remarkable grasp of the haunting subject, with emphasis on a deeply human realism, rather than what was to become (1968-1969) characteristic Beatles nonsense, escapism and even sardonic mockery of the Establishment – not to forget McCartney's frequent lapses into deep sentimentalism and silliness.

In subtle Beatlesque ways, *Eleanor Rigby* draws some of its inspiration from rural folk music and the English music of the urban music-hall tradition. This narrative ballad, about the death of a lonely spinster who is buried "along with her name" by a lonely church minister, is built around a dorian E minor.

Recorded by the group on April 20, it later had an octet string arrangement added with four violins, two violas and two cellos. Martin scored and conducted the strings, with Lennon and McCartney overseeing the octet's recording sessions. Martin later said he was influenced by the composer, Bernard Hermann, particularly his score for the François Truffaut film, *Fahrenheit 451*.

Besides the backward-recorded vocal harmonies by Lennon, McCartney and Harrison, McCartney was the only Beatle to perform on this song as an instrumentalist. The right title for this composition eluded McCartney for weeks.

It was first written with a working title of *Miss Daisy Hawkins*, but later changed to *Eleanor Rigby*, with the first name coming from a young English actress who had worked with The Beatles during the filming of *A Hard Day's Night*, and the surname coming from a shop McCartney had passed on a visit to Bristol in south-west England.

I'm Only Sleeping

The otherworldly, lysergic-tinged *I'm Only Sleeping* – written primarily by John Lennon with strong contributions from McCartney – is a languid, dreamy, if not meditative, song about relaxation and letting go of worldly matters and the lower ego when entering a hallucogenic state of consciousness. Performed in an acolian E minor, *I'm Only Sleeping* incorporates the use of backward and accelerated tape recordings and has been released in slightly different mixes over the years.

It often has been mentioned in Beatles accounts that Lennon loved sleeping and indulging in morning lie-ins. *Evening Standard* journalist, Maureen Cleave, once referred to Lennon as “probably the laziest person in England”. During the *Revolver* sessions, McCartney frequently travelled to Lennon's Mock Tudor home at Weybridge in Surrey to find his songwriting partner in bed, usually asleep, despite an agreement to meet a specific time to commence serious writing and discussion sessions.

By his own admission, Lennon was lazy and rarely took physical exercise, saying that sex was the only physical thing that interested him.

I'm Only Sleeping – among other highlights – features Harrison's specially charted lead guitar parts recorded backwards, while Lennon's surreal vocal effects were created by both speeding up and slowing down the tapes. To achieve the backwards guitar sound, Harrison had two choices: he could play and record the guitar parts conventionally and then the final version could be played backwards and rerecorded; or, Martin could score the guitar parts backwards and get Harrison to play it afresh.

Martin and Harrison opted for the more difficult second choice because the final guitar part would have a more melodic flow of notes. It took six hours to record Harrison's solo for *I'm Only Sleeping*.

As with many of The Beatles' sonic novelties, the idea of the backwards guitar was serendipitous. During the *Revolver* sessions, the group worked on a single, *Rain* backed with *Lady Madonna*. One evening, Lennon took home a rough mix of *Rain* and, by mistake, placed the tape the wrong way around on his home tape recorder, and loved the effect of the guitar sounds played “backwards”.

Love You To

Harrison's *Love You To* was originally called *Granny Smith* after the famous green apple and, in a notable break from songwriting convention, including Beatles habit, bears a title whose words are not contained in the lyrics. It was the first Beatles song he specifically wrote with the sitar, tabla and other classical Indian musical instruments in mind. It is based on a classical Indian drone.

Harrison first used a sitar on *Norwegian Wood*, but this stringed instrument was added as an afterthought towards the end of the final mixing sessions for *Rubber Soul* (1965). Harrison's caustic-sounding vocals were double-tracked.

Anil Bhagwat played the tabla and was asked by Harrison to improvise, using the 16-beat Indian meter system favoured by Ravi Shankar. Unnamed members of the North London Asian Musicians Circle played the sitar and tambura parts.

Lennon did not perform on this song – and it has been said that the *Love You To* sessions initiated a strange tradition of Lennon not wanting to contribute to Harrison compositions in the studio.

Love You To has no harmony in the Western sense and the distinctive Oriental flavour seems to heighten Harrison's serious questioning of the inherent hollowness of the Occidental world view, particularly the obsession with materialism.

The eccentric American rock journalist, the late Lester Bangs, referred to this song as “the first injection of ersatz Eastern wisdom into rock”.

Here, There and Everywhere

Paul McCartney wrote *Here, There and Everywhere* at the poolside of Lennon's Weybridge home with some help from Lennon. McCartney, who sings double-tracked lead vocals, was inspired by Brian Wilson's classic, *God Only Knows* from The Beach Boys' definitive 1966 album, *Pet Sounds*, and wrote this piece in the form of a lullaby-styled love song.

McCartney rates this as one of his finest songs along with *Yesterday* and *Eleanor Rigby*. Art Garfunkel of Simon and Garfunkel fame once hailed this McCartney composition as “the greatest song of all time”.

Contrary to much of the tone and spirit of *Revolver*, *Here, There and Everywhere* is a song of pure and uncomplicated romanticism and encapsulates the essence of McCartney as a strong, compelling pop tunesmith. Some critics regard this as McCartney's finest love song and as a eulogy to his girlfriend of the time, Jane Asher.

Written in G major, this is a notably deceptive tune at face value: it comes across as a simple song on casual listening, but has a complex structure and some clever chord and tempo changes.

Yellow Submarine

Written by McCartney, with help from Lennon, for Starr to sing, *Yellow Submarine* was intended to be a simple, sing-along-style children's song, hence the simplicity of the words. McCartney, however, did express concerns that this song would have "connotations" for some listeners.

The song was recorded over 12 hours of sessions. *Yellow Submarine's* childlike escapism and mischief are made more compelling by Starr's plain and limited singing characterised by hints of his adorable Liverpudlian accent and the nasal quality of his voice.

The song's seed idea came to McCartney one night when falling asleep as a guest at the Asher home. He visualized a make-believe world of different coloured submarines and the story of a young boy spellbound by the bold tales of an old sailor who had enjoyed countless adventures in the "land of submarines". These tales inspired the boy to go sailing.

McCartney's friend and fellow London resident, singer-songwriter, Donovan (Leitch), is said to have contributed the line, "Sky of blue and sea of green".

McCartney, Lennon and Harrison accompanied Starr on the chorus, as did Harrison's then wife, Patti Boyd, producer George Martin, engineer Geoff Emerick, personal assistant Neil Aspinall and road manager Mal Evans. Other performers included Marianne Faithfull, The Rolling Stones' Brian Jones and the group's chauffeur, Alf Bicknell.

The sound effects on *Yellow Submarine* included real submarine noises, as well as Harrison swirling water in a bucket, Lennon blowing bubbles through a drinking straw and an English brass band, courtesy of George Martin, who spliced together cut-up recordings from an old, uncredited 78-rpm record. Lennon and McCartney provided the mid-section nautical chatter for the submarine crewmen.



Revolver, along with *Sgt Pepper's* (above), captures The Beatles at the creative best

She Said, She Said

In contrast to the more meticulous, softer and sentimental or romantic work of McCartney is Lennon's hypnotizing and angst-based song, *She Said, She Said*, about his second LSD trip in Los Angeles with The Byrds and the American actor, Peter Fonda.

This is a masterful piece of Lennon songwriting, with the dominant mood being on his underlying paranoia and doubts of the time. This eccentric composition originally was entitled *He Said, He Said*. Interestingly, McCartney is not featured on this song. Harrison plays lead guitar and bass, while Lennon plays rhythm guitar and Hammond organ.

This acid-inspired song features almost-Byrdsian chiming guitars, delightful vocal harmonies, superlative drumming from Starr (made all the more startling because of the heavily compressed drum sound) and several tape loops. *She Said, She Said* defies many of the principles of conventional songwriting and has abrupt changes of meter from double to triple time, which seem to reinforce Lennon's metaphysical concerns about death, consciousness and the purpose of life.

Good Day Sunshine

The free-spirited and jolly *Good Day Sunshine* – written by McCartney one sunny day at Lennon's Surrey home – was inspired partly by The Lovin' Spoonful's *Daydream*. This song, the opening track of side two, reaffirms McCartney's status as The Beatles' optimist and romanticist.

It was an ideal celebration song for 1966, but also cleverly structured to make it hard to cover. Just listen to the harmonic shifts in the final chorus, along with the overall shape-shifting of the melody. *Good Day Sunshine* has a bubbly rumba-styled rhythm in its chorus and infectious barrelhouse-styled middle section.

McCartney played bass and piano on the song and sang lead vocals, with Lennon and Harrison providing harmony voices. It sounds like one of the most effortless recordings of The Beatles and, because of its cleverly structured melody and arrangement, is said to have been the favourite Fab Four song of Leonard Bernstein, the American composer and conductor.

And Your Bird Can Sing

Lennon's caustic *And Your Bird Can Sing* reveals the artist at his deadpan best, waxing philosophically and cynically about nothing of real importance, although there is a general view that he was mocking McCartney about the latter's experimentation with marijuana and his dabblings with serious artistic matters in London. To McCartney's credit at the time, he had the edge over Lennon by being more explorative culturally, especially in his search for new songwriting topics, structures and sounds.

In hindsight, some fans and critics cite this song as tolerable Lennon trivia. Years later, Lennon, too, admitted he disliked this song. In 1971, he referred to *And Your Bird Can Sing* as a "horror" and, in 1980, he said it was a "throwaway" song. Its recording process was finicky and prolonged – perhaps too much so, considering that most of *And Your Bird Can Sing* was recorded and then reworked over two intensive 12-hour sessions.

Played in the key of E, this tongue-in-cheek song is developed around a pounding beat and the incessant chatter of barrelhouse-piano-style thirds. McCartney's fine bass playing is notably melodic on *And Your Bird Can Sing*.

For No One

For No One – written by McCartney, who played piano, clavichord and bass guitar and sang lead – did not feature Lennon and Harrison on guitars and vocals. At the time, it was one of McCartney's most mature and haunting ballads, melodically and lyrically. Lennon once said this was one of his favourite McCartney compositions. It has a beautiful melody and a remarkably good, fresh arrangement.

As with other McCartney songs of the time, *For No One* showed his rapidly maturing craft as a songwriter – and one who tended to be clear and fastidious about structuring his melodies, verses, choruses and arrangements. The song is played in the key of B, one rarely used by The Beatles. The song features on horn one of Britain's most respected horn players of the 1960s, Alan Civil, the then principal horn player in London's Philharmonia orchestra.

McCartney wrote this matter-of-fact ballad – a bleak account of the demise of a romantic relationship – on a manila envelope in a bathroom of a rented chalet near the Swiss ski resort of Klosters, where he and Jane Asher holidayed briefly in March 1966.

Doctor Robert

Written mainly by Lennon with help from McCartney in completing the middle section, *Doctor Robert* was about a pill-man who could supply whatever recreational substance a pop star needed. Contention surrounds this song's origins.

Some Beatles insiders believe this song was specifically about a New York City doctor, Charles Roberts. Others have said it was about Dr Robert Freymann, a German-born medical practitioner who had a practice on East 78th Street. Freymann was renowned for prescribing amphetamines for showbiz celebrities.

Another source says it was a light-hearted reference to British photographer and one-time Beatles friend, Robert Freeman.

Doctor Robert uses an ostinato rhythm and has subtle elements of jazz and music-hall idioms to add

to its comical atmosphere. Lennon sings the double-tracked lead vocals with McCartney contributing a few harmony parts. Displaying the more caustic, sardonic side of Lennon, it is often thought that *Doctor Robert* is also Lennon's snide attack on Dr Timothy Leary, the late LSD guru.

Lennon added an unusual flourish to this quirky song by playing harmonium, as well as rhythm guitar.

I Want to Tell You

I Want to Tell You – written by Harrison, who also sings the double-tracked lead vocals – was another of his characteristically obtuse and uncertain love songs and revealed his concerns about the uncertainty, if not futility, of romantic love and one's inability to say what one most wants to express.

It is a somewhat dichotomous song – and this quality is reflected in its unusual, if not confused and fragmented, chord structures.

I Want to Tell You opens with dislocated boogie rhythms and bluesy guitar phrases built around four bars before shifting in structure. McCartney's piano parts feature a series of flat ninths.

Got to Get You into My Life

Got to Get You into My Life – written and sung by McCartney – is one of The Beatles' most horn-intensive songs, as well as a tongue-in-cheek, but conventional, stab at writing an American-styled soul classic in the vein of the great Motown and Stax writers. McCartney once admitted this song is about marijuana.

It features five session musicians on horns: Les Condon, Ian Hamer and Eddie Thornton on trumpet and Alan Branscombe and Peter Coe on tenor saxophone.

During The Beatles' prolonged hiatus in earlier 1966, McCartney and his partner, Asher, frequented London nightclubs, one of which featured Georgie Fame and the Blue Flames. McCartney liked the Blue Flames' sound and hired two of their horn players, saxophonist Coe and trumpeter Thornton.

On a more trivial note, listen to the original mono mix and then the later stereophonic one – and you will hear McCartney doing different ad-lib vocals on the final fadeout.

Tomorrow Never Knows

The final and, in many respects, most significant and (then) futuristic track, *Tomorrow Never Knows* was written by Lennon and recorded in three takes, barring the extensive overdubbing sessions to accommodate a complex web of tape loops.

At this key turning point in The Beatles' rapid musical evolution, *Tomorrow Never Knows* was the band's most experimental and daring song with its strangely

kaleidoscopic fusion of sounds, keys, tempi and moods bordering on a dark, manic anarchy.

It is an arpeggiated, quasi-chant song developed around a single, Indian-styled C-note drone to create its dominant effect, along with the unusual drum sound. The tambura's intense drone was generated by removing the erase-head on the tape recorder and then saturating the quarter-inch recording tape. [Arpeggiated means playing a chord in the form of either ascending or descending notes].

Originally titled *The Void, Tomorrow Never Knows* was the first song recorded for the *Revolver* sessions. The final title wording came from Starr, who had uttered one of his infamous malapropisms, better known as Ringoisms in Beatles speak. He had meant to say, "tomorrow never comes", but Lennon enjoyed his clumsy expression.

This otherworldly song was inspired by Lennon's reading of *The Psychedelic Experience* by Dr Timothy Leary and Dr Richard Alpert, the high priests of LSD and renegade American university professors. *The Psychedelic Experience* was an LSD-based reworking of the ancient Tibetan sacred text, *The Tibetan Book of the Dead*.

The unusual arrangement included two Indian instruments, the sitar and tambura, as well as slack-tuned tom-toms and a series of five *musique concrète* tape loops. One of the tape loops, with its Native American effect, is based on McCartney laughing, while another is based on his guitar solo for *Taxman*, which was slowed down a tone, cut up and played backwards.

Tibetan trip

This astonishing song is the perfect early Beatles attempt at creating a darker, more adventurous psychedelic sound, with Lennon insisting during the recording sessions that he wanted his multi-tracked voice to sound as if it was being projected by thousands of singing monks from a Tibetan hilltop.

To create part of this "Tibetan effect", Martin and Emerick used eight different tape loops, each of which was placed on a different tape recorder and faded in and out as required. The distinctive, otherworldly sound of Lennon's voice was created by feeding it through a revolving Leslie speaker inside a Hammond organ. This effect occurs 87 seconds into *Tomorrow Never Knows*. Before that, his voice was double-tracked using novel artificial double tracking (ADT) technology developed by a member of EMI's technical staff, Ken Townsend.

The numerous other sonic effects of the song's complex arrangement include one continuous organ note, a honky-tonk piano and two guitars – one fuzzed and played backwards, and the other played through a revolving Leslie organ speaker.

Starr's unique and hypnotic drum sound was created, in part, by placing the studio microphones far closer

to the bass drum than usual. The recording staff also placed an oversized jumper inside Starr's bass drum. The overall drum sound was fed through Fairchild 660 valve limiters and compressors. This approach provided the basis for the drum sound recorded for *Revolver* and *Sgt Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band*.

The legacy of this song's inventive soundscape lives on as a new generation of American and British psych-rock bands continue to craft transcendental and drone-type music that harps back to the mid-60s sounds of The Beatles and some of the peers they influenced. Just listen to The Black Angels and a new generation of psych-rock bands emerging in North American and Britain today...

Background on *Revolver*

McCartney takes the experimental lead

Recorded in London over eight weeks between April and June 1966 and released in August 1966 as The Beatles' seventh album, *Revolver* was to be called *Abracadabra*, but the latter title was dropped when the band realized another album had this title. Released in the United Kingdom (UK) on August 5 1966, it became the sixth album by The Beatles to enter the UK charts at number one, which it did within five days of being released. The advanced orders for the album in the UK were 300,000 – a considerable volume for the mid-1960s.

The Beatles commenced recording sessions for *Revolver* at EMI Studios on Abbey Road, St John's Wood on April 6 1966, mostly in studio two. The sessions commenced with the album's strangest and most challenging song, Lennon's acid-inspired *Tomorrow Never Knows*.

Embracing the London scene

By now, following the immense success of their two 1965 albums, *Help* and *Rubber Soul*, The Beatles were living mostly in and around London – and, to different degrees, savouring the London scene that was metamorphosing from the Swinging London scene of the British Invasion to the Turned On London scene that would be epitomized by the psychedelic explosion of mid-1966 to mid-1969.

A key facet of The Beatles music at the time was the emergence of Paul McCartney as the most open-minded, explorative and experimental band member – and the one we glean from various accounts who was less dependent on LSD, hashish and other hallucinogens for his deep, sensitive and

often idiosyncratic inspiration. While John Lennon spent much of his non-studio time at home (*Kenwood*) at Weybridge in Surrey not far from London, McCartney was throwing himself into the hip London scene, listening to a vast array of music, including classical music, jazz, soul, R&B and experimental music.

His closer musician friends of the time included the Scottish psych-folk troubadour, Donovan (Leitch), as well as Peter and Gordon and The Rolling Stones. At the time, he was listening to music as diverse as the Atlantic, Stax and Tamla-Motown soulsters, The Beach Boys, The Rolling Stones, Lovin' Spoonful, Bob Dylan, Donovan, John Cage, Karlheinz Stockhausen, the Ornette Coleman Double Quartet and the Albert Ayler Trio.

He also was enjoying opera and theatre with his then girlfriend, Jane Asher and reading poetry, including Dylan Thomas' *Under Milk Wood* anthology and beat poetry by the likes of Allen Ginsberg, and other literature. McCartney, too, was meeting some of the inspirational minds of the time, including Barry Miles, co-owner of London's hip Indica bookshop and art gallery, as well as the American novelist, William Burroughs.

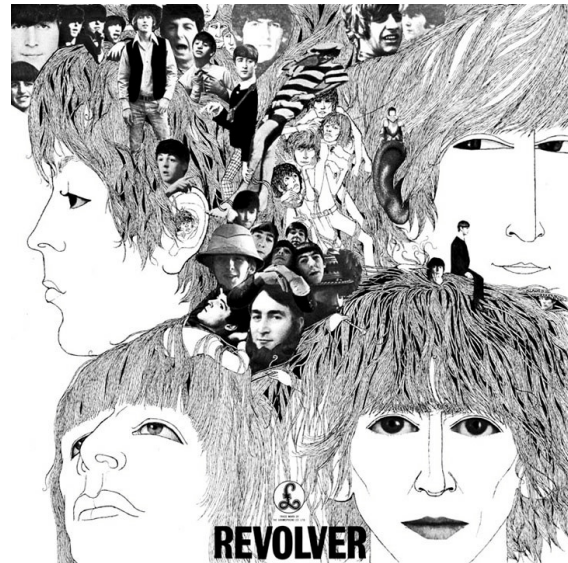
Experimental studio

Going several steps beyond Lennon, who had seemed to be too wary of, and cynical about, the London scene and the threat of intellectuals, McCartney established away from home and Abbey Road an experimental studio at 57 Wimpole Street, where he toyed with a wide variety of sonic ideas and musical sketches. He used a pair of Brenell tape recorders to record sound effects and song sketches, as well as to indulge in recording from radio and other sources some of his favourite music of the time.

A major artistic breakthrough occurred when McCartney began to make short tape loops of varying lengths, some of which he would use for the *Revolver* sessions with help from Lennon, producer Martin and engineer Emerick. Through these loops, inspired in part by the work of Stockhausen, McCartney got guitars to sound like seagulls, among other effects, which led to collaged sounds McCartney would later describe as "little symphonies".

At the time of writing and recording *Revolver*, Lennon and McCartney expressed an interest in experimental electronic music and *musique concrète*. Lennon also wanted *Revolver* to be edited and mixed as one continuous track without spaces between songs. His colleagues and EMI, however, persuaded him to uphold record-making convention.

The Beatles, notably McCartney, made tape loops at home by recording their voices, musical instruments and ambient sounds. To do this, each musician would remove the erase head from his tape recorder and then place on to the recorder a short loop of tape and saturate it with weird or interesting sounds.



Forty years later, *Revolver* remains a masterpiece

Other views on *Revolver*

"A shamelessly perfect album, its position (*one out of 1,000*) fully justified," Colin Larkin in the third edition of his *All-Time Top 1,000 Albums* (Virgin Publishing, London, 2000).

"*Revolver* is such an extraordinary sonic adventure that it almost distracts attention from the magnificent songwriting from which these soundtracks grow," Charles Shaar Murray in *The Beatles: 10 Years that Shook the World* (Mojo and Dorling Kindersley, London, 2004).

Label: EMI Parlophone (CDP 7-46441-2)

Release date: August 5 1966 (United Kingdom, UK)

Musicians: **George Harrison** (guitar, sitar, tambura, bass, tape loops and vocals), **John Lennon** (guitar, organ, harmonium, tape loops and vocals), **Paul McCartney** (bass, guitar, piano, clavichord, tape loops and vocals) and **Ringo Starr** (drums, percussion, tape loops and vocals).

Plus Anil Bhagwat on tabla (*Love You To*), Alan Civil on horn (*For No One*), Tony Gilbert, Jurgen Hess, Sidney Sax and John Sharpe on violin, Stephen Shingles and John Underwood on viola with Norman Jones and Derek Simpson on cello (*Eleanor Rigby*), and Les Crondon, Ian Hamer and Eddie Thornton on trumpets with Alan Branscombe and Peter Coe on tenor saxophone (*Got to Get You into My Life*) plus George Martin on piano, organ and clavichord.

Producer: George Martin

Engineer: Geoff Emerick



Studio: EMI Studios (mostly studio two), Abbey Road, St John's Wood, north-west London, England

Mixing: Martin and Emerick, responsible for mixing the album, completed the mono and stereo mixing at EMI Studios on June 22 1966

Sonic innovation: *Revolver* heralded a new approach to making music and the start of The Beatles' most creative period (1966-1969). Their breakthrough recording techniques included:

- close-up miking of instruments to create a heavily compressed sound;
- recording voices and guitars backwards and through revolving organ speakers;
- introducing homemade tape loops;
- adding tonal equalisation and elements of *musique concrète*;
- using droning sitars and tamburas based on classical Indian musical forms;
- incorporating other unusual instruments that were novel for a 1966 rock album (eg, tablas, harmonium, clavichord, cellos, violins and French horn);
- double-tracking of vocals and guitars; and
- using varispeed recordings.

The 14 songs: *Taxman* (Harrison), *Eleanor Rigby*, *I'm Only Sleeping*, *Love You To* (Harrison), *Here*, *There and Everywhere*, *Yellow Submarine*, *She Said, She Said*, *Good Day Sunshine*, *And Your Bird Can Sing*, *For No One*, *Doctor Robert*, *I Want to Tell You* (Harrison), *Got to Get You into My Life* and *Tomorrow Never Knows*. All songs written by John Lennon and Paul McCartney except for the three Harrison songs.

Cover art: The original pen-and-ink drawing-cum-photographic collage was done by Klaus Voormann, a musician-artist friend of The Beatles from their early Hamburg days. Voormann's front-cover artwork, which included a small black-and-white photographic image of himself on the extreme right, won the best album cover award at the Ninth Grammy Awards of 1967. In 1996, Voormann had arrived in London from his native Germany to become the new bassist for Manfred Mann.

The complete Beatles album discography

The Best of Abbey Road

Please, Please Me (1963) ★★
With The Beatles (1963) ★★
A Hard Day's Night (1964) ★★
Beatles for Sale (1964) ★★
Help! (1965) ★★
Rubber Soul (1965) ★★
Revolver (1966) ★★
Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band (1967) ★★
Magical Mystery Tour (1967) ★★
The Beatles ("White Album") (1968) ★★
Yellow Submarine (1969)
Abbey Road (1969) ★★
Let It Be (1970) ★½
The Beatles 1962-1966 [compilation, C] (1973) ★★
The Beatles 1967-1970 [C] (1973) ★★
Rock 'n' Roll Music [C] (1976) ★★
Live! at the Star Club in Hamburg, Germany 1962 [live, L] (1977)
The Beatles at the Hollywood Bowl [L] (1977)
Love Songs [C] (1977) ★★
Rarities [C] (1979) ★
Rock 'n' Roll Music, Vol II [C] (1981) ★★
The Beatles EP Collection [box set, B] (1981) ★★
Reel Music [C] (1982) ★
The Early Tapes of The Beatles [C] (1986) ★
Past Masters, Volume One [C] (1988) ★★
Past Masters, Volume Two [C] (1988) ★★
The Ultimate Box Set [C] (1989) ★★
The Singles [B] (1991) ★★
Live at the BBC [L] (1994) ★★
The Beatles Anthology 1 [C] (1995) ★
The Beatles Anthology 2 [C] (1996) ★
The Beatles Anthology 3 [C] (1996) ★
The Yellow Submarine Songtrack (1999) ★
1 [C] (2000) ★★
Let It Be ... Naked (2003) ★
LOVE [C] (2006) ★★

The American albums (US)

Meet The Beatles (1964)
The Beatles' Second Album (1964)
The Beatles' Story (1964)
Something New (1964)
Beatles '65 (1965)
Early Beatles [C] (1965)
Beatles VI (1965)
Yesterday ... and Today [C] (1966)
Hey Jude [C] (1970)

Love to turn you on ...

Despite mixed reviews and opinions by critics and fans, the latest Beatles album, *LOVE*, is a must-hear reworking of more than 20 of their great songs by producer George Martin and his son, Giles.

Flashback: Other notable 1966 LPs

- The Animals: *Animalization*
- The Beach Boys: *Pet Sounds*
- Tim Buckley: *Tim Buckley* [debut, D]
- Buffalo Springfield: *Buffalo Springfield* [D]
- The Byrds: *Fifth Dimension*
- Judy Collins: *In My Life*
- Cream: *Fresh Cream* [D]
- Spencer Davis Group: *Autumn '66*
- Donovan: *Sunshine Superman*
- Bob Dylan: *Blonde on Blonde*
- Tim Hardin: *Tim Hardin 1* [D]
- Jefferson Airplane: *Takes Off* [D]
- The Kinks: *Face to Face*
- The Leaves: *Hey Joe* [D]
- Love: *Love* [D]
- Lovin' Spoonful:
Hums of the Lovin' Spoonful
- The Mamas and the Papas:
If You Can Believe Your Eyes and Ears
- John Mayall's Bluesbreakers: *John Mayall's Bluesbreakers with Eric Clapton*
- The Moody Blues: *Magnificent Moodies*
- Otis Redding: *The Soul Album*
- The Rolling Stones: *Aftermath*
- The Seeds: *The Seeds* [D]
- Simon and Garfunkel:
Parsley, Sage, Rosemary and Thyme
- The Small Faces: *The Small Faces* [D]
- Dusty Springfield: *Golden Hits* [C]
- The Temptations: *Gettin' Ready*
- Thirteenth Floor Elevators:
The Psychedelic Sounds of the... [D]
- The Who: *A Quick One*
- The Yardbirds: *The Yardbirds*
- The (Young) Rascals: *The Young Rascals* [D]
- Frank Zappa and the Mothers of Invention:
Freak Out [D]

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Dedicated to George, John, Paul and Ringo

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