

Michael Waddacor's  
**Strange Brew**<sup>TM</sup>

Re-exploring seminal rock music | Edition 06 | Sunday May 27 2007

## Remembering tangerine trees, marmalade skies and plasticine porters

Forty years ago, Sergeant Pepper taught the band to play



Front cover of The Beatles' *Sgt Pepper* album, based on an idea by Paul McCartney (1967)

Forty years ago, on June 1 1967, The Beatles released one of the greatest albums of the rock era, *Sgt Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band*. While Beatles fans enjoy impassioned debates about which album is the Liverpudlian band's best work, there is little doubt that millions of rock enthusiasts consider *Sgt Pepper* the most famous and influential rock album of the last 50 years. **Michael Waddacor** revisits the album that dominated The Summer of Love and became a powerful catalyst for liberalising the spirit and expanding the scope of writing and recording popular music.

Despite the considerable advance of recording technology and the proliferation of several influential generations of rock songwriters and groups since 1970, The Beatles' eighth studio album, *Sgt Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band* (*Sgt Pepper*), remains a watershed work whose influence continues to flavour, however subtly, the sounds of several contemporary indie-rock and psych-rock bands.

The album's overall sound and atmosphere may not have aged as gracefully as some of The Beatles' other landmark albums, particularly the more evergreen *Revolver* and *Abbey Road*. Yet, *Sgt Pepper* remains an important milestone in defining not only the sound and the spirit of rock music, but the wider development of late-twentieth-century music.

It is a masterpiece of sonic adventure and innovation with its novel recording techniques and kaleidoscopic shifts of unusual themes, diverse moods, adventurous lyric writing, rich melodies, unorthodox structural and key shifts, and highly imaginative arrangements.

Within weeks of its release in Britain, *Sgt Pepper* became the primary soundtrack for The Summer of Love, reverberating around the rock 'n' roll globe.

The album inspired the likes of Jimi Hendrix, The Beach Boys, The Byrds and The Kinks to develop new songwriting subjects and styles, and pioneer novel recording techniques and arrangements that extended beyond the rudimentary rock sounds of guitars, keyboards and drums.

---

*Sgt Pepper is a masterpiece of sonic adventure and innovation with its novel recording techniques and kaleidoscopic shifts of unusual themes, diverse moods, adventurous lyric writing, rich melodies, unorthodox structural and key shifts, and highly imaginative arrangements.*

---

To the amusement of the American counterculture leaders, including Beat poet Allen Ginsberg, *Sgt Pepper* unwittingly bridged the generation gap by wowing a broad spectrum of counterculturists, while also infiltrating the minds and hearts of the so-called Establishment, from younger schoolchildren to senior citizens.

### **Topping the polls**

The Beatles' recording company, EMI Music, sold 250 000 copies of the album in Britain and another 100 000 copies in Germany in its first week of release – a remarkable achievement in the 1960s. By 1981, the album had notched up global sales of 10-million. Today, the album's sales are approaching 12-million, which ranks it as the sixth biggest-selling pop-music album since Thomas Edison invented the gramophone.

In 2005, the American magazine that was founded in the year of *Sgt Pepper's* release, *Rolling Stone*, published its eagerly awaited *The 500 Greatest Albums of All Time*. The *Rolling Stone* panel of more than 200 musicians, music producers, industry executives and critics voted *Sgt Pepper* as the number-one album of the rock, pop and jazz era.

British rock enthusiast, Colin Larkin, runs periodic international polls for updated editions of his indispensable music guide, *All-Time Top 1 000 Albums*. In his third edition of 2000, Larkin's 200 000-plus survey respondents voted *Sgt Pepper* as the number-three album, beaten only by its predecessor, *Revolver* (1966), and Radiohead's masterful second album, *The Bends* (1995). Larkin's poll respondents voted the album number one in the first edition of 1994 and number two in the second edition of 1998, when *Revolver* again beat it.

The *Rolling Stone* book (edited by Joe Levy) eloquently encapsulates the album's significance: "*Sgt Pepper* ... is the most important rock 'n' roll album ever made, an unsurpassed adventure in concept, sound, songwriting, cover art and studio technology by the greatest rock 'n' roll group of all time.

"From the title song's regal blasts of brass and fuzz guitar to the orchestral seizure and long, dying chord at the end of *A Day in a Life*, the 13 tracks on *Sgt Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band* are the pinnacle of The Beatles' eight years as recording artists. John Lennon, Paul McCartney, George Harrison and Ringo Starr were never more fearless and unified in their pursuit of magic and transcendence."

If The Beatles groundbreaking seventh album, *Revolver* (1966), confirmed that the four young men from Liverpool were really *turned-on*, in the counterculture parlance of the day, with their proto-psychedelic sounds, then *Sgt Pepper* confirmed there would be no gloating on past artistic and technical accomplishments. With demanding concerts and public appearances behind them, The Beatles dedicated themselves to becoming full-time studio musicians with ample time and freedom to indulge in their innermost creative urges, no matter how outrageous.

Lennon, McCartney, Harrison and Starr set their hearts and imaginations on taking rock music into a previously unexplored dimension of creative possibilities and sonic tapestries. Over an estimated 700 hours of recording, they concocted a work of immense originality and freshness. With the help of their faithful and equally adventurous producer, George Martin, they achieved their goals and created a bold precedent for making a subsequent suite of markedly original albums for their remaining two years together as a writing-and-recording entity.

By 1966, The Beatles had abandoned their prudish suits, cute mop-top hairstyles and their more prosaic, but nevertheless delightful, three-chord, sing-along songs about romance. The Fab Four took a courageous leap of faith towards the avant-garde and the free-spirited in making their post-*Rubber Soul* music without abandoning the delightful hallmarks that defined their popularity. These hallmarks included their optimism and playfulness, their eager smiles, their deadpan Scouser humour and, most important, their uncanny knack for writing one masterful melody after another with the nonchalant ease of a genius.

Building on these endearing qualities, The Beatles – notably Lennon and McCartney – delved into Lewis Carroll, The Goons, avant-garde music, The Beach Boys, Bob Dylan, proto-psychedelic garage bands, Edwardian brass bands, newspaper stories, antique circus posters and fond childhood memories of their beloved Liverpool to expand their themes and soundscapes.

### **Creating an alter ego**

The excitement of the *Sgt Pepper* experience began with its bright, alluringly styled cover. It had that intriguing look that kept fans entranced for long periods, pondering the deeper meaning of the front-cover images and their connection to the sonic explorations and lyrical paintings contained on the original 12-inch vinyl pressing. Back in 1967, the cover looked so hip and "now", yet it also formed an endearing bridge to some quaint, near-forgotten English past: a world of sprightly Edwardian brass bands, idle tea gardens and bonhomie.

The Beatles had an incessant drive to reinvent and redirect themselves, album by album. On *Sgt Pepper*, this meant creating some form of alter ego, Sergeant

Pepper and his Lonely Hearts Club Band, which would allow them to pursue new forms of artistic freedom and creative indulgence. McCartney, by now the band's principal creative director and more prolific songwriter (contrary to popular belief at the time), was aware of the need for anonymity and disguise. An alter ego created an opportunity to break free from public scrutiny, not to forget the seemingly incessant harassment that characterised Beatlemania between 1964 and 1966.

.....  
*The Fab Four took a courageous leap of faith towards the avant-garde and the free-spirited in making their post-Rubber Soul music without abandoning the delightful hallmarks that defined their popularity.*  
.....

The idea for an alter-ego band identity came to the musician in November 1966 while flying back to London from Nairobi at the end of a brief East African sojourn. Before spending time in East Africa, McCartney had been in France, where he had used a facial disguise to travel incognito.

This inspired the extended conceit of Sgt Pepper and his Lonely Hearts Club Band and, among other artistic elements, enabled the band to bring an unprecedented number of session musicians to the studio, including a 41-piece orchestra and a six-piece horn section.

While it would be unfair to regard *Sgt Pepper* as a "concept album", a misnomer frequently attached to the record, it foreshadowed this type of work, which began in earnest with the release in 1968 of The Pretty Things' *S F Sorrow* and The Who's *Tommy*. Instead, in the wake of *Revolver*, The Beatles sensed a natural artistic inclination towards cohesion and continuity – and these are just some of the qualities that make *Sgt Pepper* a rock milestone, even 40 years after its release.

The conceit – and its attendant images and undertones – fused well with the Summer of Love, yet retained an authoritative air of distinct Englishness from another era, perhaps an idyllic and languid Edwardian summer.

Musically, what was hinted on *Revolver* became more apparent on *Sgt Pepper*: Lennon was the lazier and seemingly less enthusiastic half of the great Lennon/McCartney songwriting partnership, while McCartney's influence and talent were waxing. Of the 12 of 13 songs attributed to them as Lennon/McCartney, Lennon wrote most of four and McCartney wrote most of the balance of eight, including the title song's reprise.

As with the *Revolver* period, Lennon continued to languish at his respectable middle-class home, *Kenwood*, at Weybridge, Surrey with his then wife, Cynthia, and their son, Julian. In a sense, Lennon had dropped out both from the emerging counterculture and the pop-music mainstream to

indulge in comfortable domesticity by reading newspapers, watching television, loafing in bed and doodling on his piano and guitar, sketching ideas for songs far less prolifically than McCartney did.

As for McCartney's stimuli, he continued to live in the heart of London and draw on many of those influences that shaped *Revolver*: Karlheinz Stockhausen and other experimental electronic musicians, Beat writers, the London fine-art scene, new-era jazz and even strains of English music-hall-era genres – not to forget the emerging sounds of Bob Dylan, The Beach Boys and other American trendsetters. He later admitted in 1980 that The Beach Boys' watershed album of 1966, *Pet Sounds*, was particularly influential on the writing and recording of *Sgt Pepper*.

### Extending studio wizardry

The Beatles – keenly supported by the adroitness of Martin's production flourishes – overwhelmed us by exceeding our expectations and swept us away more than any other pre-*Pepper* album. Moreover, all of this was achieved in a largely antiquated London recording studio – the famous EMI Studios on Abbey Road in St John's Wood – using a rudimentary four-track recording system and first-generation stereophonic sound processing.

Martin and the group's recording engineer, Geoff Emerick, had pioneered several novel recording techniques the previous year when The Beatles recorded *Revolver*. Most of these techniques – including compressed drum sounds, tape loops and backward recording – were used again in recording *Sgt Pepper*, while newer ones were devised for the sessions.

One of their favourite recording tricks, with extensive technical help from Martin and Emerick, was to use varispeeding – a technique of recording and playing back, for editing and mixing, sections of music at different speeds, which altered the mood and keys of songs.

EMI's sound-technology wizard, Ken Townshend, had developed artificial double recording (ADR) technology for the group's use on the previous album and, for *Sgt Pepper*, he devised direct-injection technology. This invention enabled McCartney to plug his bass guitar directly into the recording console through a series of transformer boxes to make his highly melodic bass lines more pronounced in the final mix.

Unique to The Beatles as a rock group at the time, was the use of traditional Indian instruments, including tablas, sitar, tambura, dilruba and swordmandel, as well as an orchestra with strings, horns, woodwinds and percussion.

While the themes of *Sgt Pepper* are richly varied, loneliness is one of the album's strongest elements, as are those of alienation, drudgery, escapism and the search for metaphysical meaning and

emancipation, whether in the form of Harrison's Eastern-flavoured reflections on egoism and oneness (*Within You Without You*), or Lennon and McCartney's search for ecstatic relief from the treadmill of Western etiquette, mores and tribal rituals (as on *She's Leaving Home* and *A Day in the Life*). In many respects, the fictitious Sgt Pepper alter ego symbolised The Beatles' quest for a better, if not transcendental, human experience.

.....  
*The Sergeant Pepper conceit – and its attendant images and undertones – fused well with the Summer of Love, yet retained an authoritative air of distinct Englishness from another era, perhaps an idyllic and languid Edwardian summer.*  
.....

Evolving out of *Revolver*, *Sgt Pepper's* explores, lyrically and musically, many polarities and contrasts: sadness and joy; drudgery and ecstasy; confusion and clarity; incarceration and emancipation; loneliness and companionship; alienation and belonging; nostalgia and a sanguine longing for a new world and, perhaps, a better future.

On this album, more than any other previous work by The Beatles, fantasy embraces realism; the ornate weaves with the plain; and the comically frivolous dances with the gravely serious.

Sadly, two of another three songs originally written and recorded for *Sgt Pepper* were omitted because of a bizarre record-industry practice of the day of not featuring hit singles on an album: *Penny Lane* and *Strawberry Fields*, two of the finest Beatles songs.

In his insightful book about the making of the album, *Summer of Love: The Making of Sgt Pepper* (1994), producer Martin confessed that these omissions were "the biggest mistake of my professional life".

In hindsight, The Beatles searched for new musical tones, structures and styles, while also delving back into the music of pre-War Britain. Such polarities are part of the magic of listening to this album 40 years later. Significantly, for all the contrasts and diversity of this album, The Beatles sounded so cohesive in their art and so unified as a band.

The debate may continue to thrive for another 40 years about what is the finest Beatles album, but, for many of us, *Sgt Pepper* is the one we embrace with the most affection. Or, at least, it is the one that best encapsulates our most cherished memories of its time and influence. ■

.....  
**Michael Waddacor's Top Five Beatles albums:** *Rubber Soul* (1965); *Revolver* (1966); *Sgt Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club* (1967); *The Beatles* (aka *White Album*) (1968); and *Abbey Road* (1969). Worst studio Beatles album of its time: *Let It Be* (1970).  
.....

## The basic *Sgt Pepper* fact-file

### A 700-hour studio affair

**Recording studio:** EMI Studios, Abbey Road, St John's Wood, north-west London (barring one night-session at Regent Studios, London)

**Recording period:** About 700 hours over 129 days between December 6 1966 and April 21 1967

**Release date:** June 1 (UK) and June 2 1967 (USA)

**Record label:** EMI Parlophone (12-inch vinyl album: PCS 7027; CD album: CDP 7-46442-2)

**Producer:** George Martin

**Engineer:** Geoff Emerick

**The 13 songs:** *Sgt Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club*; *With a Little Help from My Friends*; *Lucy in the Sky with Diamonds*; *Getting Better*; *Fixing a Hole*; *She's Leaving Home*; *Being for the Benefit of Mr Kite*; *Within You Without You* (George Harrison); *When I'm Sixty-Four*; *Lovely Rita*; *Good Morning, Good Morning*; *Sgt Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club (Reprise)*; and *A Day in the Life*.

**Song credits:** All songs written by John Lennon and Paul McCartney except for *Within You Without You*

**Definitive song:** *A Day in the Life*

**Psychedelic song:** *Lucy in the Sky with Diamonds*

**Triest song:** *When I'm Sixty-Four*

**Weirdest song:** *Within You Without You*

**Omitted songs:** *Penny Lane*, *Strawberry Fields* and *Only a Northern Song*

**Art direction:** Peter Blake and Jann Haworth

**Cover photography:** Michael Cooper

**Highest chart positions:** number one in the UK, USA and many other countries

**Global sales:** 11,7-million ... and still selling

**Grammy awards, 1967:** Album of the year; best contemporary album; best engineered recording (non-classical); and best album cover (graphic arts)

The current **compact-disc version** of *Sgt Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band*, available since 1987, features a cardboard slipcase and a 28-page booklet with additional photographs and liner notes from producer George Martin, designer Peter Blake and The Beatles' recording chronicler, Mark Lewisohn. You also find the names of all the people whose images are featured on the front cover.

To get an idea of how much better *Sgt Pepper* could have sounded with better recording technology, listen to The Beatles' *Love* album from 2006. This remixed, 26-track compilation features four *Pepper* songs: *Being for the Benefit of Mr Kite*; *Within You Without You*; *Lucy in the Sky with Diamonds*; and *Sgt Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band (Reprise)*.





## Endearing icon of 20<sup>th</sup>- century pop culture

The bright *Sgt Pepper* cover – conceived by Paul McCartney and art-directed by Peter Blake and his former wife, Jann Haworth – remains a classic record-cover design and one of the most endearing icons of twentieth-century pop culture.

The elaborate front-cover artwork (pictured above) features a montage of nine wax models (including The Beatles) borrowed from Madame Tussaud's London waxworks and 57 photographic images of famous or influential people admired by the group.

These people include musicians Bob Dylan and Karlheinz Stockhausen, writers William Burroughs, Lewis Carroll, Aldous Huxley and Dylan Thomas, and actors and entertainers Marlon Brando, Lenny Bruce, Marilyn Monroe and Laurel & Hardy, as well Carl Jung, Albert Einstein, Sonny Liston, Karl Marx, David Livingstone and Lawrence of Arabia (T E Lawrence).

At the request of EMI Music's management, the group and art-direction team withdrew images of Jesus, Mahatma Gandhi and Adolf Hitler to lessen controversy.

The London theatrical costumiers, Berman's, designed and produced the bright, satin, Edwardian-styled military suits worn by Lennon, McCartney, Harrison and Starr. The photographic shoot was executed by English photographer, Michael Cooper, in his Chelsea, London studio on March 30 1967.

---

## Other views on *Sgt Pepper*

An unsigned review writer in the *International Times* (1967): "Tripping with this record is a mind-blowing experience. The record is a continuum of fantastic sounds... Musically it is highly sophisticated."

**Kenneth Tynan**, reviewing the album in *The Times* of London (1967): "...a decisive moment in the history of Western civilisation."

**Colin Larkin** (2000): "The Beatles reached for the sky, and they got it. This one album revolutionised, altered and reinvented the boundaries of twentieth-century popular music, style and graphic art.

"More than 30 years on, this four-track recording is still a masterpiece. Equal credit is now justifiably placed with the elegant George Martin. He was the chemist who made their crazy ideas work."

**Mark Ellen** from *The Beatles: Ten Years That Shook the World* (2004): "By an organic shift rather than strategic design, (Karlheinz) Stockhausen, The Beach Boys and Lewis Carroll where being ushered in the front door while Elvis (Presley), Buddy Holly and Carl Perkins were shuffled out the back.

"Apart from a McCartney knees-up in an idealised suburban future, all songs were in the present tense, all emphatically *now*, and none of them subscribed to the boy-meets-girl romantic axis that had been the staple of their compositional landscape since the beginning, including a good 50 per cent of *Revolver*. They were songs with very little emotional depth but vast imaginative possibility."

**Jim Irvin and Colin McLearn** from *The Mojo Collection: The Ultimate Music Companion* (third edition) (2000): "*Sgt Pepper's* reeks of confidence and the desire to set new standards. ...McCartney – whose vision glued the project together – was especially daring, challenging Lennon to come up with sparkle to match."

**Martin C Strong** from *The Essential Rock Discography* (2006): "...the record was a landmark in new studio technique. Utilising the (then) pioneering four-track recording process, the band painstakingly pieced together ornate pieces of sonic intricacy that set new standards."

**Ringo Starr** in *The Beatles Anthology* (2000): "*Sgt Pepper* was our grandest endeavour. It gave everybody – including me – a lot of leeway to come up with ideas and to try different material."

---

## 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 1967 LPs

James Brown: *James Brown Sings Raw Soul*  
Tim Buckley: *Goodbye and Hello*  
Buffalo Springfield: *Buffalo Springfield Again*  
Eric Burdon and the Animals: *Winds of Change*  
The Byrds: *Younger Than Yesterday*  
Captain Beefheart and His Magic Band: *Safe as Milk*  
Country Joe and the Fish: *Electric Music for the Mind and Body*  
Cream: *Disraeli Gears*  
Miles Davis: *Nefertiti*  
Donovan: *Sunshine Superman*  
The Doors: *The Doors*  
The Doors: *Strange Days*  
The Electric Prunes: *I Had Too Much to Dream...*  
The Electric Prunes: *Underground*  
Aretha Franklin: *I Never Loved a Man the Way I...*  
Tim Hardin: *Tim Hardin 2*  
The Jimi Hendrix Experience: *Are You Experienced*  
The Jimi Hendrix Experience: *Axis: Bold as Love*  
The Hollies: *Butterfly*  
Howlin' Wolf: *More Real Folk Blues*  
The Incredible String Band: *The Hangman's Beautiful Daughter*  
Etta James: *Tell Mama*  
Jefferson Airplane: *Surrealistic Pillow*  
Jefferson Airplane: *After Bathing at Baxter's*  
Kaleidoscope (UK): *Tangerine Dream*  
Albert King: *Born Under a Bad Sign*  
B B King: *Blues Is King*  
The Kinks: *Something Else*  
Love: *Da Capo*  
Love: *Forever Changes*  
The Lovin' Spoonful: *Hums of The Lovin' Spoonful*  
Moby Grape: *Moby Grape*  
The Moody Blues: *Days of the Future Passed*  
Pearls Before Swine: *One Nation Underground*  
Pink Floyd: *The Piper at the Gates of Dawn*  
Procol Harum: *Procol Harum*  
The Rolling Stones: *Between the Buttons*  
The Seeds: *Future*  
The Small Faces: *The Small Faces*  
The Thirteenth Floor Elevator: *Easter Everywhere*  
Traffic: *Mr Fantasy*  
The Velvet Underground: *The Velvet Underground...*  
The Who: *The Who Sell Out*  
The Young Rascals: *Groovin'*  
The Youngbloods: *The Youngbloods*  
Frank Zappa and the Mothers of Invention: *We're Only in It for the Money*

.....  
**Written and published** by Michael Waddacor ©  
1 Hocky Avenue, Northcliff, 2195, Johannesburg

Phone: 0027 (0)11 888 1226 (office) or  
0027 (0)84 457 7133 (mobile)  
Email: waddacor@telkomsa.net

© **Copyright:** Unless otherwise clearly indicated, all material in this newsletter, Michael Waddacor's Strange Brew™, is protected by international copyright and may not be sold, copied or reproduced in any manner or form without the prior written consent of the publishing editor.