

# THE BEATLES

## Fifth Session

### Essential Beatles Listening, early-1968-early 1969:

1. *The Beatles (aka The White Album)* (EMI, the Beatles' tenth album, 1968). Continuing to increase the technological sophistication of the production, yet for the most part moving away from psychedelic rock to earthier hard rock and folk-rock, this late-1968 double LP was easily the Beatles' most diverse album. While a "back to basics" approach informs much of the material, in fact some of this doesn't fall into that category, or indeed any easy label. Hard rock, 1950s-styled rock, blues-rock, folk-rock, folk, avant-garde, country, Tin Pan Alley, vaudeville, saloon music, lushly orchestrated pop – all can be heard on *The White Album*, with some styles mixing in the same song. In hindsight, it also shows the group becoming less united, with some tracks featuring just three, two, or even only one of the Beatles. Nonetheless, the standard of the songwriting in particular remained high, as did the imagination of arrangements and level of instrumental work. The record also marked a growth in the quality and quantity of George Harrison compositions. Key tracks: "Back in the U.S.S.R.," one of Paul McCartney's greatest straightahead rockers; "Revolution 1," a John Lennon political statement (in a much slower and different version than the one used on a hit single); "While My Guitar Gently Weeps," one of George Harrison's most famous songs; "Blackbird," one of Paul's folkiest tunes and best lyrics; "Julia," one of *John's* folkiest songs and most personal lyrics; "I'm So Tired," one of Lennon's best rock vocals; and "Helter Skelter," McCartney's hardest rocker bar none.

2. *Let It Be...Naked* (EMI, 2003). In a strange turn of events bound to cause eternal confusion, although *Let It Be* was issued as the Beatles' final album in spring 1970, most (though not all) of it was actually recorded in early 1969, *before* the material for the 1969 album *Abbey Road*. To muddle the picture more, production work in early 1970 on the *Let It Be* album changed the sound of the record from what had originally been intended. *Let It Be...Naked*, issued in 2003, has production of *Let It Be* material that is much

more in line with the album as originally envisioned, though no posthumous production job could completely replicate how it might have sounded had it appeared in early 1969 as originally planned. Though these sessions (mostly cut in January 1969) found the Beatles less inspired and more erratic than usual, they did include some outstanding songs, usually in a yet more back-to-basics mode than they'd employed on *The White Album*. Key tracks: "Get Back," the outstanding Paul McCartney rocker that was a spring 1969 hit single; its B-side "Don't Let Me Down," one of John Lennon's most powerful ballads; "Let It Be," one of *Paul's* finest ballads and lyrics; "Two of Us," one of the final songs on which John and Paul seemed in both musical and personal harmony; "Across the Universe," a gently philosophical Lennon song actually first recorded in early 1968; and "The Long and Winding Road," the McCartney ballad heard here without the overdubbed strings to which he'd later strenuously object.

3. *Yellow Submarine* (EMI, 1969). Although it came out in early 1969 after the release of 1968's *The White Album*, and although technically it was a Beatles LP, it actually only featured four "new" Beatles songs, all of which had been recorded prior to *The White Album* in 1967 and early 1968. This is thus the slightest of all Beatles LPs, but the songs aren't bad, particularly the tough rocker "Hey Bulldog" (not even heard in the original US version of the movie) and George Harrison's uncommonly fierce psychedelic rocker "It's All Too Much." The 1999 CD dubbed *Yellow Submarine Songtrack* is superior to the original 1969 version of the album, as it combines the four songs exclusive to the record with other Beatles recordings heard on the soundtrack, whereas the original LP devoted the entirety of side two to instrumental orchestrated soundtrack music on which the Beatles didn't play.

4. From *Past Masters Vol. 2* (EMI): The "Lady Madonna" single from early 1968, on which the Beatles got back to straight rock'n'roll with a vengeance, without sacrificing the enigmatic lyrics into which they'd progressed when leaving simpler rock'n'roll behind. Also includes its relatively obscure B-side, "The Inner Light," the final George Harrison song to make prominent use of Indian music. Also the "Hey Jude"/"Revolution" single, which rivals "Strawberry Fields Forever"/"Penny Lane" as the Beatles' strongest

double-sided 45, and likewise features one of the most magnificent compositions by Paul and John respectively on each of its sides.

### **Recommended additional recordings by the Beatles, early 1968-early 1969:**

1. *The White Album* super deluxe edition (EMI). Besides a remix by Giles Martin, this six-CD set has four discs of previously unreleased bonus material. The three CDs of studio outtakes are usually clearly works in progress. Sometimes they're just backing tracks; sometimes the songs are unfinished run-throughs; sometimes the arrangements aren't a whole lot different from the familiar versions; sometimes they're distinctly inferior to the finished product (like the plod through an early twelve-minute version of "Helter Skelter"). But sometimes they're pretty different, like the harder-rocking "Cry Baby Cry," the quite frisky "Everybody's Got Something to Hide Except Me and My Monkey," and a superb "take 17" of "Helter Skelter" (using the rearrangement heard on the LP version) with a wildly exuberant McCartney vocal.

The most significant disc, by far, has 27 demos the Beatles recorded at George Harrison's home shortly before studio sessions for *The White Album*. Although seven of these appear on *Anthology Vol. 3*, there were about twenty others that have circulated that have not been officially issued. Generally these demos have a folky, "unplugged" feel akin to hearing friends play for their own fun in their living room or around a campfire. They also show many of the songs in a slightly unfinished state with notable differences, as well as including some songs the Beatles never issued, though they'd appear on various solo albums by the group's members. Key tracks: a happy singalong version of "Revolution"; "Child of Nature," not recorded by the Beatles, which John would rework into "Jealous Guy" for his 1971 *Imagine* album; a groovy, gritty "Back in the U.S.S.R."; "Sour Milk Sea," a Harrison song given to Apple Records artist Jackie Lomax; "Circles," never recorded by the Beatles, which would surface on a Harrison solo album many years later.

2. From *Anthology Vol. 3* (EMI): All of disc one, tracks 1-12 on disc two. Like the rest of the three *Anthology* volumes, this contains rare recordings, virtually all of them unreleased before 1995. These

are all studio outtakes from *The White Album* and *Let It Be* era, except for the live Apple rooftop performance of "Get Back." Key tracks: seven *White Album* demos recorded at George's house in May 1968; the *White Album* outtake "Not Guilty," a George Harrison song that didn't make the final cut; an early, substantially different version of "Ob-La-Di, Ob-La-Da"; a great quiet, mournful version of "While My Guitar Gently Weeps"; the Beatles' version of "All Things Must Pass," later to become the title track of George's first solo album; "Teddy Boy," later used on Paul's first solo album.

### **Notable unreleased Beatles material, early 1968-early 1969:**

1. ***Get Back* sessions, January 1969.** An astonishing 100 hours or so of unreleased material circulates from the Beatles' January 1969 recording sessions. Much of this quantity is due to their being constantly filmed, rehearsing or recording for the project (initially titled *Get Back*) that would become the *Let It Be* movie. This requires enormous patience to hear in full, as many of these are different rehearsal versions with only small differences, or ragged (often incomplete) covers of countless songs by other artists. Still, as a document of the Beatles' influences (including many attempts at rock'n'roll oldies), their working methods in the studio, and the tensions that were starting to surface and would eventually split them up, it's historically fascinating. Key tracks: "I'm So Tired" with Paul on lead vocals; "Get Back" with John on lead vocals; endless takes of "All Things Must Pass," never to make it onto a Beatles album while they were active; early version of "Something" where George asks the others for help on the lyrics; weird tongue-in-cheek version of "Besame Mucho" with operatic McCartney vocal.

### **Recommended additional reading:**

1. ***Revolution: The Making of the Beatles' White Album***, by David Quantick (Unanimous, 2002). A thorough book, though the author's strong opinions are sometimes expressed in ways that might annoy fans of specific tracks he doesn't highly rate.

2. ***Inside the Yellow Submarine***, by Dr. Robert R. Hieronimus (Krause Publications, 2002). Rather obscure but well-done book on

the 1968 animated feature based around the characters and songs of the Beatles, with plenty of first-hand research and interviews with figures involved in the film's creation.

3. *Get Back: The Unauthorized Chronicle of the Beatles' Let It Be Disaster*, by Doug Sulpy and Ray Schweighardt (St. Martin's, 1997). Nearly moment-by-moment, but intelligent and highly readable, scrutinization of the mammoth body of work (mostly unreleased) the Beatles recorded in January 1969, by guys who spent years studying the tapes.

4. *Those Were the Days: An Unofficial History of the Beatles Apple Organization 1967-2002*, by Stefan Granados (Cherry Red, 2002). Other books concentrate on the business side of Apple Records and how its chaotic management helped break up the Beatles. This focuses on the musical side, and mostly on the other artists who were affiliated with Apple, not on the Beatles themselves.

#### **Recommended DVDs/videos:**

1. *The Beatles Anthology 7 & 8* (Apple, 2003). The second half of episode 7, and the first half of episode 8, covers the Beatles' career from early 1968 to early 1969. Like all of the *Anthology* volumes, it includes extensive interviews with McCartney, Harrison, and Starr; archive audio clip interviews of Lennon; and a wealth of vintage performance and interview footage. This is the part of *Anthology* where the filmmakers and interviewees seem to start to be more reluctant to investigate sensitive and sore subjects in depth, such as the effect of Yoko Ono on the band and the tensions that almost broke them up during the January 1969 *Get Back/Let It Be* sessions.

2. *Yellow Submarine* (Subafilms/MGM, 1999). Although the Beatles were not much involved in the creation of the full-length animated feature *Yellow Submarine*, and only appear in it live on screen briefly at the end, it remains a definite part of their legacy. It also remains, to this day, a frequent port of introduction to the Beatles for children. Unfortunately it hasn't always been available on DVD, though this official 1999 release is recommended if you

can find it, as it includes a full-length audio commentary from some of the people involved in the production, as well as other extras.

3. *Let It Be* (Apple). Still unavailable on DVD, though as it was issued on VHS in the 1980s, it's been frequently bootlegged. Though frequently described as a depressing document of a group on the verge of breaking up, in fact it has some very enjoyable musical scenes, especially the concluding rooftop concert. As a documentary of their January 1969 sessions, it does inadvertently capture some tension among the group, especially in a notorious scene where Paul and George argue over a guitar part.

4. *The Rolling Stones Rock and Roll Circus* (ABKCO, 1995). Though filmed in December 1968, this concert movie, hosted by and featuring the Rolling Stones as well as other artists (including the Who, Jethro Tull, and Marianne Faithfull), wasn't released until 1995. Notable in Beatles history as the first instance in which John Lennon performed outside of the group, singing "Yer Blues" with a band including Eric Clapton, Keith Richards (on bass), and drummer Mitch Mitchell from the Jimi Hendrix Experience.

5. *Strange Fruit: The Beatles' Apple Records* (Chrome Dreams, 2012). Lengthy (about two hours and 40 minutes) documentary on Apple Records, not authorized by the Beatles or Apple. On the one hand, this suffers from the lack of many interviews with figures directly involved with Apple; the Beatles themselves, are absent to start with. On the other hand, it's an intelligent and thorough survey of Apple's history, with snippets of archive footage of the artists. And the ten or so people interviewed are interested, including Apple artists Jackie Lomax, David Peel, and members of of Badfinger and Elephant's Memory, as well as some music critics.

#### **Notable people:**

**Francie Schwartz:** Briefly Paul's girlfriend in mid-1968, between his split from Jane Asher and initiation of a serious relationship with Linda Eastman. Later wrote about their affair in her memoir *Body Count*.

**Linda Eastman:** New York photographer who first met Paul briefly in spring 1967 in London, and renewed their acquaintance when he visited New York to promote Apple a year later. Their relationship grew more serious a few months later, and at that point she moved into his London home, where her daughter from a previous marriage, Heather, also relocated. Married Paul on March 12, 1969.

**Al Brodax:** Producer of the *Yellow Submarine* film.

**Peter Asher:** A friend of the Beatles and especially Paul's since 1963, since he was sister of his longtime girlfriend Jane Asher; half of the British Invasion duo Peter & Gordon, who had hits with several Lennon-McCartney songs; and Paul lived in the Asher family home near central London for a couple of years before moving into his own home in St. John's Wood. Became head of A&R (Artists and Repertoire) at Apple Records, though his stay at the label was short.

**Mary Hopkin:** The most successful of the artists signed to Apple Records in 1968, getting a worldwide chart-topping release with her first single on the label, "Those Were the Days." Paul McCartney was responsible for getting her on Apple, and was the primary writer of the Lennon-McCartney composition she covered for a hit in 1969, "Goodbye."

**Jackie Lomax:** Friend of the Beatles since the early 1960s in Liverpool and Hamburg, where he played with Liverpool band the Undertakers. Signed to Apple and covered a George Harrison song the Beatles did not release, "Sour Milk Sea," on which most of the Beatles played.

**James Taylor:** American singer-songwriter who moved to London in 1968 and was signed to Apple by Peter Asher. A song from his sole Apple album, "Something in the Way She Moves," influenced the writing of George Harrison's "Something." Became a star after leaving Apple and returning to the US, where he was produced and managed by Apple.

**Eric Clapton:** Became one of the few rock musicians to guest on a Beatles recording when he played guitar on "While My Guitar Gently Weeps." Became close friend of George Harrison's, falling in love

with George's wife Pattie, for whom he wrote "Layla." George Harrison played on and co-wrote a track by Clapton's group Cream, "Badge."

**Nicky Hopkins:** One of the only other rock musicians to guest on a Beatles recording, playing the electric piano on the single version of "Revolution."

**Chris Thomas:** Assistant to George Martin during the sessions for *The White Album*. Produced a few sessions when Martin went on vacation, and played piano, harpsichord, and Mellotron on a few *White Album* tracks. Went on to produce numerous major acts, including Procol Harum, Roxy Music, Badfinger, the Pretenders, and the Sex Pistols.

**Richard Hamilton:** Designed cover and poster collage for *The White Album*.

**Michael Lindsay-Hogg:** Director of the *Let It Be* movie. Had worked with the Beatles on a couple of other previous occasions, directing the promotional films for their "Paperback Writer"/"Rain" and "Hey Jude"/"Revolution" singles. Also directed *The Rolling Stones Rock and Roll Circus*.

**Glyn Johns:** Top British recording engineer, working in the 1960s with the Rolling Stones, the Who, and numerous other notable UK bands. Also worked with the Beatles during their January 1969 recording sessions, eventually getting credited as a co-producer of the *Let It Be* album.

**Billy Preston:** Keyboardist who first met the Beatles in Hamburg in the early 1960s, and was enlisted by George Harrison to play on some of the Beatles' January 1969 sessions when Preston happened to visit Apple while playing in London with Ray Charles. Preston's keyboards were vital to the studio versions of several tracks, including "Get Back," "Let It Be," and "One After 909." Preston also played on *Abbey Road's* "Something" and "I Want You (She's So Heavy)," recorded for Apple Records as a solo artist, and played on early solo records by Lennon and Harrison.

## Notable landmarks:

**Kinfauns:** The name of George Harrison's home in the London suburb of Esher, where a little more than two dozen (as far as is known) demos were recorded for *The White Album* in May 1968.

**3 Savile Row:** Central London building that housed the offices of the Beatles' Apple Corps, in whose basement the Beatles did some recording in 1969. The Beatles performed on the building's roof on January 30, 1969 to film the concert sequence used as the finale to the *Let It Be* movie.

**34 Montagu Square:** Central London home to which John and Yoko briefly moved when he separated from his first wife. Formerly briefly the home of (at different times) Ringo Starr and Jimi Hendrix, and briefly a home recording studio in the mid-1960s for Paul McCartney. John and Yoko were busted here for marijuana possession in October 1968, and John's decision to plead guilty to the charge would cause enormous problems for him in the early-to-mid-1970s when he (eventually successfully) tried to establish residency in New York.

**Trident Studios:** One of several London studios the Beatles occasionally used when Abbey Road wasn't available, notable as the site of the recording of "Hey Jude" in summer 1968.

**Twickenham Film Studios:** Where the promotional film for the "Hey Jude"/"Revolution" single was shot in September 1968, and where Beatles musical rehearsals were shot in January 1969 for the *Let It Be* movie.

## Essential Albums by Other Artists That Were Influential On, Admired By, or Influenced By the Beatles from early 1968-early 1969:

1. **Bob Dylan, *John Wesley Harding*** (Columbia, 1967). Actually released just a few days before the beginning of 1968, this marked Dylan's re-entry into the music business after about a year and a half of silence following his summer 1966 motorcycle accident. Its extremely simple, stripped-down production and country feel is

often credited as spurring a "back to basics" movement among rock's elite and a retreat from the psychedelic experimentation of 1967.

**2. Bob Dylan, *The Basement Tapes* (Columbia, 1975).**

Throughout mid-to-late 1967, Dylan and backup musicians with whom he'd toured in the mid-1960s, soon to form their own group called the Band, made a lot of informal home recordings in Woodstock. This double LP, which featured some of them, did not find official release until the mid-1970s (several dozen other recordings from the same sources have long been bootlegged). But publishing demos of some of these started to circulate back in October 1967, and artists began to cover some of the Dylan songs from that source on official releases, the most successful being Manfred Mann's "Mighty Quinn." It's unknown how soon or how often the Beatles heard any *Basement Tapes* material. But they were certainly aware of some of it, as they did (unimpressive) versions of a couple *Basement Tapes* songs, "Mighty Quinn" and "Please Mrs. Henry," during their January 1969 *Get Back* sessions. George Harrison might well have heard some *Basement Tapes* songs, through either the recordings or from Dylan and the Band themselves, when he visited them in Woodstock in late 1968. Harrison did a bit of recording with Dylan at this time that remains unreleased, as well as playing on an unreleased Dylan session in spring 1970 shortly after the Beatles broke up.

**3. The Band, *Music from Big Pink* (Capitol, 1968).** The Band's debut album was only a modest commercial success, but enormously influential on other musicians. The Beatles certainly would have been aware of them, as they casually tried out a few songs from *Big Pink* ("To Kingdom Come," "The Weight," and the Dylan composition "I Shall Be Released") during their January 1969 *Get Back* sessions. Again, the main connection might have been Harrison having met the Band in late 1968 in Woodstock. Harrison later cited the respect he was given as a musician by the Band and Dylan on that visit as a depressing contrast to the condescension he often suffered from McCartney and Lennon when working within the Beatles, and thus an indirect spark for his desire to do his own thing outside of the group.

4. **The Rolling Stones, *Beggars Banquet*** (ABKCO, 1968). The Stones' own entry in the "back to basics" movement was this LP, which often found them going back to their blues-rock foundations. Although most noted for the classics "Street Fighting Man" and "Sympathy for the Devil," most of the rest of the LP had a more acoustic, laidback country blues feel.

5. **Cream, *Gold*** (Universal). The Beatles did not get into as hard and heavy rock as Hendrix and Cream. But Harrison's friendship with Eric Clapton might have been a factor in George's decision to concentrate on rock guitar again after a couple of years of studying Indian music and the sitar. This best-of includes the Cream song Harrison co-wrote and played guitar on, "Badge."

6. **The Jimi Hendrix Experience, *Electric Ladyland*** (MCA, 1968). Though *Electric Ladyland* and *The White Album* don't have any obvious similarities, *Electric Ladyland* coincidentally appeared as a double album at around the same time the Beatles issued their double-LP *White Album*. That reinforced the sense of two of rock's titans simultaneously upping the stakes with their most sprawling, voluminous albums to date.

7. **Johnny Cash, *At Folsom Prison*** (Columbia, 1968). If Ringo was bringing any influences to the Beatles in this period, it might have been the kind of country music being played by Johnny Cash (and the Beatles *did* run through a few Cash songs at the January 1969 *Get Back* sessions). This 1968 album marked a career resurgence for Cash, and was a big hit on both sides of the Atlantic.

8. **Elvis Presley, '68 *Comeback Special*** (RCA). Undergoing a far more dramatic career resurgence in 1968 was Cash's one-time Sun Records labelmate Elvis Presley, who vaulted back into media headlines and artistic credibility with a TV special. As huge Elvis fans to a man, the Beatles certainly would have been aware of that; these are performances heard on the soundtrack.

9. **Various Artists, *Come and Get It: The Best of Apple Records*** (EMI). A good 21-song compilation of some of the most notable recordings (other than those by the Beatles) on Apple Records in the late 1960s and early 1970s. Includes tracks by Mary

Hopkin, Badfinger, James Taylor, and Billy Preston, as well as numerous far less celebrated acts on the label such as Ronnie Spector, Doris Troy, and Jackie Lomax.

10. **Mary Hopkin, *Post Card*** (Apple, 1969). Paul McCartney produced the debut album by this high-voiced Welsh singer, who has since expressed regret that she wasn't able to concentrate more on folk songs than pop songs on her early Apple recordings. Make sure to get the expanded CD version with her hit singles "Those Were the Days" and "Goodbye," the latter of which is a Lennon-McCartney song not recorded by the Beatles.

11. **James Taylor, *James Taylor*** (Apple, 1968). Though both Taylor and Peter Asher later expressed dissatisfaction with the production, and though it wasn't a hit, this was the first proper album by the singer-songwriter. Notable for "Something in the Way She Moves," an influence on the opening line of George Harrison's "Something."

12. **The Pretty Things, *S.F. Sorrow*** (EMI, 1968). It bore much more of the influence of the 1967 Beatles than the 1968 Beatles. But this psychedelic album was recorded at Abbey Road not long after the Beatles' psychedelic heyday, using (as did early Pink Floyd) producer Norman Smith, who'd engineered most of the Beatles' work through *Rubber Soul*. Little known at the time of its release (though it's since garnered a large cult following), this early concept album was a likely influence on *Tommy*, and itself shows quite a few debts to the Beatles and the Abbey Road production staff in its vocal harmonies and carefully multi-layered arrangements.

13. **John Lennon & Yoko Ono, *Two Virgins*** (Apple, 1968). Even most committed Beatles fans find this hardcore avant-garde recording unlistenable. Yet it made the world aware that Lennon and Ono were committed to uncompromisingly experimental expression, both on the vinyl and on the cover, a photograph of them in the nude. Probably recorded in May 1968 at Lennon's Kenwood home, on the first night the couple spent together.

14. **The Easybeats, *The Very Best of the Easybeats*** (Varese Sarabande). Though Australian, the Easybeats were based in the UK

for most of the late 1960s, and quite apparently Beatles-influenced. Their only big international hit was "Friday on My Mind," but they merit a listing here as their 1968 single "Good Times" caused McCartney to pull over after he heard it on his car radio, call the BBC, and ask them to play it again - not something a Beatle is often reported to have done.

15. **Donovan, *Donovan's Greatest Hits*** (Epic). Donovan's hits epitomized the best aspects of psychedelic folk-rock flower power. They would have been known to the Beatles not just because they were big smashes, but also because Donovan was a personal friend of theirs, hanging out with them at Rishikesh among other places. His 1968 hit "Hurdy Gurdy Man" is of special note as it originally contained a verse written by George Harrison in Rishikesh, although it wasn't included on the hit single recording.

16. **The Bonzo Dog Band, *The Doughnut in Granny's Greenhouse*** (EMI, 1968). The Bonzos got more psychedelic and rock-oriented, though not enormously so, on their second album, which was their peak as the UK's top comedy-pop outfit. Particularly relevant to Beatles history, however, was a late-1968 single not included here, "I'm the Urban Spaceman," produced by Paul McCartney under the pseudonym Apollo C. Vermouth.