



THE MUSIC OF GEORGE HARRISON

THOMAS MACFARLANE

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The Music of George Harrison

George Harrison was one of the most prolific popular music composers of the late 20th century. During his tenure with the Beatles, he caught the wave of 1960s pop culture and began channeling its pervasive influence through his music. Often described as “The Invisible Singer,” his solo recordings reveal him to be an elusive, yet essential, element in the Beatles’ sound. The discussion of George Harrison’s Beatle tracks featured in the text employs a Songscape approach that blends accessible music analysis with an exploration of the virtual space created on the sound recording. This approach is then used to explore Harrison’s extensive catalog of solo works, which, due to their varied cultural sources, seem increasingly like early examples of Global Pop. In that sense, the music of George Harrison may ultimately be viewed as an important locus for pan-cultural influence in the 20th century, making this book essential reading for those interested in the history of songwriting and recording as well as the cultural study of popular music.

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Timeline

- 25 February 1943 George Harrison is born to Harry and Louise Harrison in Liverpool, England.
- 6 July 1957 John Lennon and Paul McCartney meet at the Woolton Town Fair in Liverpool.
- Early 1958 Paul McCartney suggests that George Harrison audition for The Quarrymen. Initially, he is considered too young to join, but he persists and is gradually accepted into the group.
- 16 August 1960 The Beatles depart for their first engagement in Hamburg, Germany.
- 27 December 1960 The Beatles play Town Hall Ballroom, Hatton Hill Road, Litherland, Liverpool. Beatlemania is born.
- 5 January 1962 *My Bonnie* by Tony Sheridan and the Beat Brothers (The Beatles) is released on Polydor Records.
- 6 June 1962 George Martin auditions the Beatles at EMI Studios.
- 5 October 1962 The Beatles' first single, "Love Me Do," is released in the UK. The B-side is "PS I Love You."
- 17 January 1963 The Beatles' second single, "Please Please Me" is released in the UK with the B-side "Ask Me Why."
- 22 March 1963 *Please Please Me* the Beatles' first album, is released in the UK.
- 11 April 1963 The Beatles' third single, "From Me to You," is released in the UK. The B-side is "Thank You Girl."
- 23 August 1963 Parlophone releases "She Loves You" in the UK, backed with "I'll Get You."
- September 1963 George Harrison visits his sister Louise in Benton, Illinois. Before returning to the UK, he visits New York City with his brother, Peter.
- 4 November 1963 The Beatles appear at the Royal Command Performance at the Prince of Wales Theatre in London, England.
- 22 November 1963 President John F. Kennedy is assassinated in Dallas. The Beatles' second album, *With the Beatles*, is

- released in the UK. It features Harrison's first solo composition for the group, "Don't Bother Me."
- 29 November 1963 Parlophone releases "I Want to Hold Your Hand" in the UK, backed with "This Boy."
- 9 February 1964 The Beatles perform for the first time on *The Ed Sullivan Show*.
- 2 March 1964 The Beatles begin filming *A Hard Day's Night*, their first motion picture. During production, Harrison meets Pattie Boyd.
- 20 March 1964 Parlophone releases "Can't Buy Me Love" in the UK, backed by "You Can't Do That."
- 13 April 1964 Director Richard Lester directs George Harrison's solo scene for *A Hard Day's Night*.
- 24 April 1964 Filming is completed for *A Hard Day's Night*.
- 6 July 1964 *A Hard Day's Night* premieres at the London Pavilion cinema.
- 10 July 1964 Parlophone releases the album *A Hard Day's Night*.
- 4 December 1964 Parlophone releases the album *Beatles for Sale*.
- 6 August 1965 Parlophone releases the album *Help!*
- 15 August 1965 The Beatles perform at Shea Stadium in Queens, New York, for a crowd of 55,600 fans.
- 3 December 1965 Parlophone releases the album *Rubber Soul*.
- 21 January 1966 George Harrison marries Pattie Boyd.
- 5 August 1966 Parlophone releases the album *Revolver*.
- 23 August 1966 The Beatles perform once again at Shea Stadium in Queens, New York. This time there are 11,000 empty seats.
- 29 August 1966 The Beatles' last performance for a paying audience at Candlestick Park, San Francisco, CA.
- 26 May 1967 Parlophone releases the album *Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band*.
- 25 June 1967 The Beatles perform "All You Need is Love" on *Our World*, the first global satellite broadcast.
- 7 July 1967 Parlophone releases the single "All You Need is Love" backed with "Baby You're a Rich Man."
- 25 August 1967 The Beatles travel to Bangor, Wales to attend a weekend workshop by the Maharishi Mahesh Yogi.
- 27 August 1967 The Beatles' manager Brian Epstein dies of an accidental overdose of barbiturates.
- 27 November 1967 Capitol Records releases the album *Magical Mystery Tour*.
- 8 December 1967 Parlophone releases the EP Set *Magical Mystery Tour*.
- 26 December 1967 The Beatles' original film, *Magical Mystery Tour*, is broadcast in monochrome on BBC1.

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- 5 January 1968 The Beatles' original film, *Magical Mystery Tour*, is broadcast in color on BBC2.
- February 1968 The Beatles depart for Rishikesh, India, to study transcendental meditation with the Maharishi Mahesh Yogi.
- 15 March 1968 The single "Lady Madonna" is released in the US and UK. The B-side is George Harrison's "The Inner Light."
- 20 June 1968 George Harrison assists John Lennon and Yoko Ono in the recording of "Revolution 9."
- 24 June 1968 George Harrison begins producing "Sour Milk Sea" for Apple artist Jackie Lomax. A Harrison original, the song will later be featured on Lomax's album, *Is This What You Want?*
- 17 July 1968 United Artists releases the animated film *Yellow Submarine*.
- 1 November 1968 The George Harrison album *Wonderwall Music* is released.
- 22 November 1968 The double LP *The Beatles* is released in the US and the UK.
- 13 January 1969 Apple Records releases the album *Yellow Submarine*.
- 26 January 1969 John Lennon meets with Allen Klein and thereafter hires him as his financial advisor.
- April 1969 Allen Klein becomes the Beatles' manager on an interim basis. Lee and John Eastman become the Beatles' attorneys.
- 8 May 1969 Allen Klein is granted a three-year contract as the Beatles' business manager.
- 9 May 1969 George Harrison's album *Electronic Sound* is released on Zapple Records, a subsidiary of Apple.
- 26 September 1969 Parlophone releases *Abbey Road*, the Beatles' final recorded album.
- 2 December 1969 George Harrison appears onstage with Delaney & Bonnie at Colston Hall, Bristol. He continues to appear with them at several subsequent live dates.
- 3 January 1970 The Threeples (McCartney, Harrison, Starr) assemble at EMI Studio Two to record Harrison's song, "I Me Mine," for inclusion on the album *Let It Be*.
- 22 February 1970 Paul McCartney records the songs "Every Night" and "Maybe I'm Amazed" in EMI Studio Two.
- 12 March 1970 George and Pattie Harrison move into the estate at Friar Park.
- 10 April 1970 Paul McCartney announces that the Beatles are no more.
- 8 May 1970 Apple Records releases the Beatles' album *Let It Be*.

- 13 May 1970 United Artists releases the film *Let It Be* in the US.
- 20 May 1970 United Artists releases the film *Let It Be* in the UK.
- 7 July 1970 George Harrison's mother, Louise Harrison, dies of cancer.
- 27 November 1970 *All Things Must Pass* is released in the UK.
- 31 December 1970 Paul McCartney files suit against John Lennon, George Harrison, Ringo Starr, and Apple Corps to dissolve the Beatles' partnership.
- 10 February 1971 Bright Tunes Music Corporation, the publisher of "He's So Fine," files a plagiarism suit regarding the George Harrison track "My Sweet Lord."
- 28 July 1971 George Harrison releases the single "Bangla Desh" backed with "Deep Blue."
- 1 August 1971 George Harrison produces and headlines the all-star charity event, *The Concert for Bangladesh*, at New York's Madison Square Garden.
- 20 December 1971 The triple LP live set, *The Concert for Bangladesh*, is released in the US.
- 1972 George Harrison installs a 16-track recording studio at his home in Friar Park.
- 10 January 1972 The triple LP live set, *The Concert for Bangladesh*, is released in the UK.
- 23 March 1972 The film *The Concert for Bangladesh* is released in the US. It is released in the UK on 27 July 1972.
- October 1972 Recording sessions begin for *Living in the Material World*.
- March 1973 John Lennon, George Harrison, and Ringo Starr allow Allen Klein's contract with Apple to expire.
- March 1973 Recording sessions for *Living in the Material World* are completed.
- 30 May 1973 George Harrison's *Living in the Material World* is released on Apple Records.
- 2 November 1973 The *Ringo* LP is released, featuring all four ex-Beatles on various tracks.
- September 1974 Dark Horse Records releases its first album, *The Place I Love* by Splinter.
- 2 November 1974 George Harrison and Ravi Shankar begin a tour of North America in Vancouver, Canada.
- 9 December 1974 Apple Records releases the album *Dark Horse*.
- January 1975 The Beatles' legal partnership is officially dissolved.
- 22 September 1975 Apple Records releases the album *Extra Texture (Read All About It)*.
- 24 November 1975 The promotional clip for "I Must Be in Love" is filmed in Denham Memorial Hall in

- Buckinghamshire, UK, for broadcast on *Rutland Weekend Television*.
- January 1976 Harrison offers \$148,000 to Bright Tunes to settle the litigation on “My Sweet Lord.” On the advice of the Beatles’ former manager Allen Klein, the offer is refused.
- 26 January 1976 The contract between EMI and the Beatles expires. Harrison announces that his future recordings will be issued on Dark Horse Records, under the aegis of A&M.
- 23 February 1976 The “My Sweet Lord” trial begins in the court of Judge Richard Owen in New York City.
- May 1976 Harrison begins recording *Thirty Three & 1/3* at Friar Park.
- 13 September 1976 The sessions for *Thirty Three & 1/3* are completed.
- 28 September 1976 A&M Records sues George Harrison for breach of contract regarding his failure to deliver the master tapes of *Thirty Three & 1/3* in July 1976 as agreed.
- 2 October 1976 Eric Idle hosts *Saturday Night Live*. The program features the promo clip for “I Must Be in Love” by the Rutles.
- 8 November 1976 The collection *The Best of George Harrison* is released, featuring selected Harrison tracks from the Beatles as well as from his solo career.
- 12 November 1976 *Rutland Weekend Television* features the promo clip for “I Must Be in Love” by the Rutles.
- 19 November 1976 Dark Horse Records releases the album *Thirty Three & 1/3* on Dark Horse Records, now distributed by Warner Bros.
- 9 June 1977 George Harrison’s divorce from Pattie Boyd becomes final.
- 22 March 1978 *All You Need is Cash* premieres on NBC-TV. Created by Eric Idle and Neil Innes, with support from George Harrison, the film tells the story of a fictional band called the Rutles.
- 13 April 1978 Allen Klein’s company ABKCO purchases the rights to “He’s So Fine.”
- May 1978 George Harrison’s father, Harold (Harry) Harrison, dies of cancer.
- 1 August 1978 Dhani Harrison is born to George Harrison and Olivia Arias.
- 2 September 1978 George Harrison marries Olivia Arias.
- 20 February 1979 Dark Horse Records releases the album *George Harrison* under the aegis of Warner Bros.

- 17 August 1979 *Monty Python's Life of Brian* is released in the US under the aegis of George Harrison's new company, HandMade Films.
- 8 November 1979 *Monty Python's Life of Brian* is released in the UK under the aegis of George Harrison's new company, HandMade Films.
- 8 December 1980 John Lennon is assassinated in New York City.
- 19 February 1981 Harrison pays \$587,000 to ABKCO to settle the "My Sweet Lord" litigation. However, he is also awarded ownership of "He's So Fine."
- 1 June 1981 Warner Bros./Dark Horse Records releases the George Harrison album *Somewhere in England*.
- 5 November 1982 Warner Bros./Dark Horse Records releases the album *Gone Troppo*.
- 21 October 1985 George Harrison performs with Carl Perkins at Limehouse Studios in London for the taping of *Blue Suede Shoes: A Rockabilly Session*.
- 1 January 1986 *Blue Suede Shoes: A Rockabilly Session* premieres in the UK on Channel 4.
- January 1987 George Harrison and Jeff Lynne begin recording *Cloud Nine* at Friar Park. These are completed the following August.
- June 5–6, 1987 George Harrison appears at The Prince's Trust concerts at Wembley Arena.
- 2 November 1987 Warner Bros./Dark Horse Records releases the album *Cloud Nine*.
- 20 January 1988 The Beatles are inducted into the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame.
- 18 October 1988 Wilbury/Warner Bros. releases the album *Traveling Wilburys, Vol. 1*.
- 17 October 1989 Warner Bros./Dark Horse Records releases the George Harrison collection *Best of Dark Horse (1976–1989)*.
- 29 October 1990 Wilbury/Warner Bros releases the album *Traveling Wilburys, Vol. 3*.
- 13 July 1992 Warner Bros./Dark Horse Records releases the George Harrison album *Live in Japan*.
- February 1994 George Harrison, Paul McCartney, Ringo Starr, and producer Jeff Lynne meet at Mill Studios in Sussex, UK, to begin recording new tracks for *The Beatles Anthology*.
- November 1995 *The Beatles Anthology* premieres on ABC-TV.
- 20 November 1995 Apple Records/Capitol releases the album *The Beatles Anthology 1*.

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- 18 March 1996 Apple Records/Capitol releases the album *The Beatles Anthology 2*.
- 28 October 1996 Apple Records/Capitol releases the album *The Beatles Anthology 3*.
- August 1997 George Harrison is diagnosed with throat cancer.
- March 1998 The conclusion of the litigation regarding “My Sweet Lord” and “He’s So Fine.”
- 30 December 1999 George Harrison and his wife Olivia are attacked in their home by Michael Abram, a mentally disturbed man who has become obsessed with the Beatles’ cultural influence.
- January 2001 A remastered version of George Harrison’s *All Things Must Pass* is released to commemorate the album’s thirtieth anniversary.
- 29 November 2001 George Harrison dies of cancer at the age of 58.
- 18 November 2002 *Brainwashed*, George Harrison’s final album, is released.
- 29 November 2002 *Concert for George*, a tribute concert to George Harrison, is held at London’s Royal Albert Hall.
- 17 November 2003 Warner Bros. releases the live recording *Concert for George*, a tribute concert to George Harrison held at London’s Royal Albert Hall.
- 20 November 2006 The Beatles release the album *Love*, a collection of remixed and mashed-up versions of songs from their catalog. The collection features Harrison’s original solo version of “While My Guitar Gently Weeps,” featuring a newly recorded string accompaniment by Sir George Martin. The process required to complete the track has spanned nearly 40 years.
- 11 December 2012 Ravi Shankar dies at the age of 92.
- 8 March 2016 Sir George Martin dies at the age of 90.

Preface

Songscaapes

As you already know, this is a book about George Harrison, the *quiet one*. During his tenure with the Beatles, Harrison caught the wave of 1960s pop culture and began to channel its pervasive influence through his music. Although a founding member of the Beatles, his time with the group was largely spent in the shadows of Lennon and McCartney. There is no doubt that he benefited from their example, but he also struggled to assert himself within the band's rigid hierarchy. Nevertheless, he managed to create a remarkable collection of twenty-four original Beatle songs that display a rare and unique artistic vision.

Sometimes described as "The Invisible Singer," Harrison's solo works reveal him to be an elusive but essential element in the Beatles' sound. Due to this anonymity, his time with the band might be viewed as an apprenticeship during which he began to develop his diverse musical influences into a highly original style. From the angular gestures of "Don't Bother Me" (1963) to the subtle ironies of *Brainwashed* (2002), Harrison's music exhibits a remarkable sophistication that is sometimes sadly overlooked. In this book, we will attempt to remedy that situation.

The following exploration of the works of George Harrison will be informed by pop music scholarship, but nevertheless accessible to the lay reader. It will consider how George Harrison's decidedly modern approach could sometimes inspire similar works by Lennon and McCartney. It will then explore Harrison's extensive catalog of solo works, which due to their varied cultural sources can often sound exotic to Western ears. Today, however, in the wake of the widespread availability of music in all its forms, Harrison's works seem increasingly like early examples of Global Pop. In that sense, the music of George Harrison may ultimately be regarded as an important locus for diverse cultural influence in the 20th century.

As one of the founding members of a group so closely associated with electronic sound, George Harrison was in a unique position to observe and comment on the immediate cultural effects of new media. In the documentary, *The Making of Sgt. Pepper* (1992), he described the ways in which technology helps preserve cultural moments and, in the process, impacts on our perception of the world:

If you listen to music from the twenties or the thirties, it has a sort of sound to it, and I think, you know, that's important. If you want to listen to, you know, something like a Hoagy Carmichael tune, well, it's partly the song that you like, and it's partly the way he did it, and it's also partly the way it was recorded, how the microphones sounded in those days, how the tube amplifiers in the boards—you know, it's all that, that kind of atmosphere, and it becomes a little period piece.¹

Inspired by this observation, the discussion of various Harrison tracks featured in this book will employ *Songscape* analysis. This approach blends conventional, yet accessible, music analysis with an exploration of the structure and perception of the virtual space created on sound recordings. The intention is to allow one to address a song as both a music composition and a work of recorded sound. In the process, one can consider how recordings create virtual spaces that become the *world* of the song.² Following a brief overview of historical elements related to the work and the artist, *Songscape* analysis will comprise the following:

Song: Since the recording process often begins with some kind of musical idea that is the basis for further development in the studio, this level will focus on the structural elements of the song. The goal is to create an accessible framework that may include descriptions of harmonic progression and melodic shape, as well as any relevant aspects of arrangement and performance. The approach will differ from conventional methods of musical analysis in that it will attempt to address the above-mentioned elements from the viewpoint of the composer. Thus, it will seek to describe the ways in which the materials themselves suggest a form, similar to the way a piece of marble suggests the sculpture that can ultimately emerge. Although some aspects of this level may be obscure to non-musicians, the emphasis will be on those elements that occur across various forms of human expression such as tone, balance, texture, and shape.

Track: The next level involves an exploration of the recording techniques employed in the creation of the song/track. As such, it can include a discussion of the background details regarding the recording, the characteristics of the studio in which the track was recorded, the various effects used on vocals and instruments during the session and on the final mix, and a discussion of tracking on the multi-track tape that can include published track diagrams, or diagrams extrapolated from existing archival material. The primary inspiration for the use of track diagrams is Kevin Ryan and Brian Kehew's book, *Recording the Beatles: The Studio Equipment and Techniques Used to Create Their Classic Albums* (2006). The reader will note that the track diagrams used here have been adapted to appear on the horizontal rather than on the vertical. This was done in order to facilitate the use of timelines here and in the next level of the analysis.

Space: The final level of the *Songscape* approach will explore how, as an outgrowth of music composition and the manipulation of sound, recorded works produce virtual soundspaces for human perception. In the sound recording,