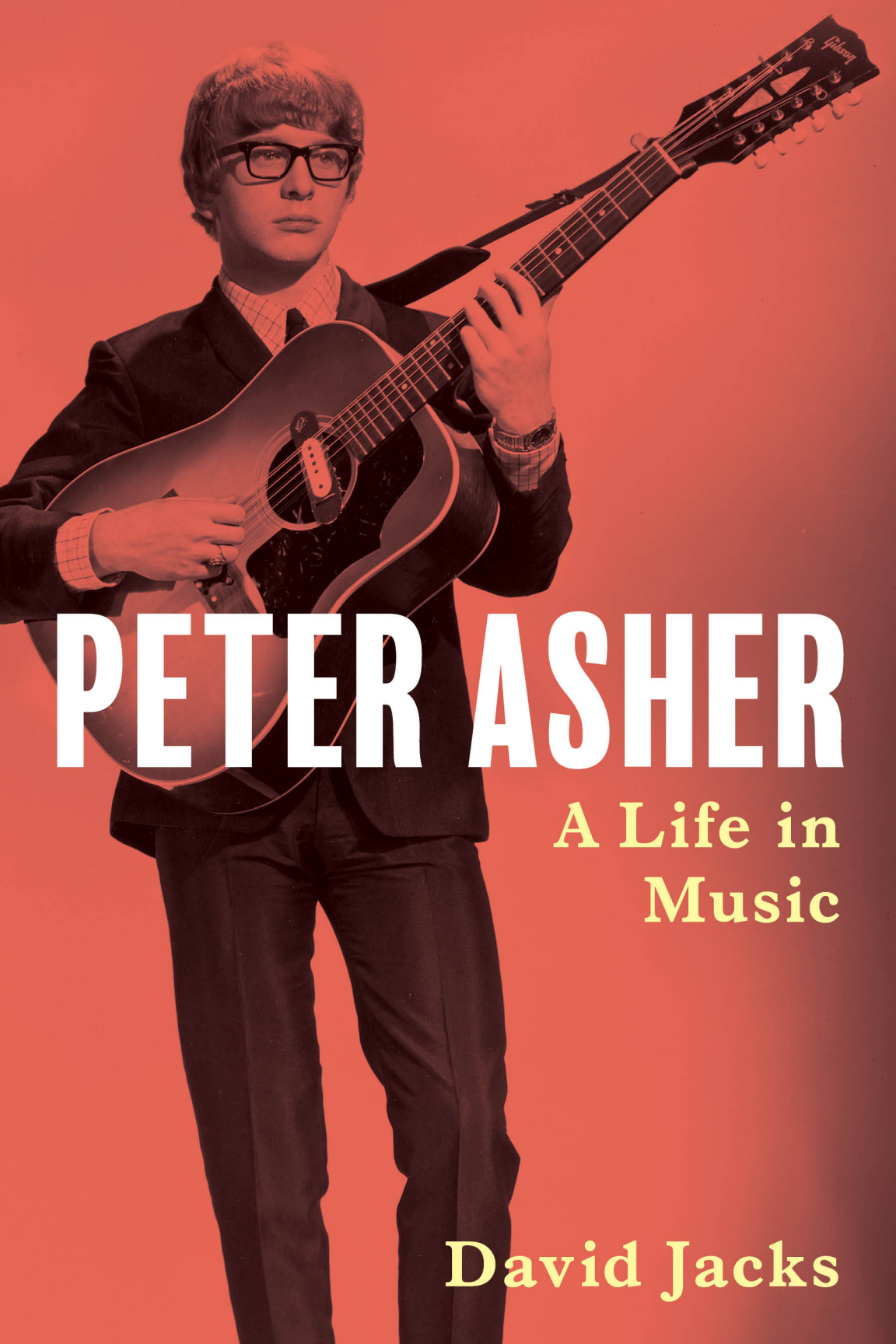

PETER ASHER

A Life in Music

David Jacks

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To Kathleen

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INTRODUCTION

"Are you alone?" the voice on the other end of the line asked. "Can you speak freely?"

Peter Asher was surprised at the sudden cloak-and-dagger twist in what had begun as a casual conversation. When the phone call from the Los Angeles British consulate general's office came near the end of 2014, he assumed they once again needed his help for an upcoming cultural event—something in which the British-born Asher would always enthusiastically participate.

Cautiously, he answered: "Uhhh, yes?"

"Well," the voice announced, "I'm happy to inform you that Her Majesty the Queen has decided to offer you the rank of Commander of the Most Excellent Order of the British Empire."

"I was amazed," Peter admitted to me when we spoke a few months later. The CBE ranking is only one notch below a knighthood.

But if anyone deserves such an honor for their contributions to music and culture, it would be Peter Asher. In a career spanning over sixty years, "he's done it all," singer Raul Malo enthused. "He's been an artist; he's been a manager; he's been a producer. . . . To me, he embodies what a person in the music business should be about."

Beginning with Peter and Gordon's first record, "A World Without Love," a worldwide smash in 1964 that Peter (though uncredited) had a big hand in producing, on through the seventies with a string of hits for both James Taylor and Linda Ronstadt (earning Peter two Grammy Awards for Producer of the Year), and into his seventies working with young artists like Ed Sheeran and Esperanza Spalding—while somehow finding time to add his touch to Broadway musicals and blockbuster movie soundtracks—he has succeeded in almost every aspect of the music business. His influence is everywhere (the look of Austin Powers, anyone?), even influencing The Beatles during their most creative phase. He has discovered, managed, and mentored legends, *plus* was one of the first producers to use samples on a pop single. And

though the blinding red hair of his youth has faded to a grayish gold (and somewhat receded), his overriding love of music has remained firmly intact.

"He has such a deep passion for music," insisted Malo, whose atmospheric 2006 release *You're Only Lonely* Asher lovingly produced. "That was one thing that was inspiring being around him—how much he loves music. He's not in it for the money or this and that—I mean, the money's nice, you know? And he's made a lot of money in his life . . . but I think, deep down, he would do it for free, if he had to."

Steely Dan's Donald Fagen, who was once managed by Peter, hit on another reason his friend stands apart in the industry: "He doesn't lie—which is very unusual in the music business." Singer David Crosby, another old friend, agreed: "Don't ask him if you don't wanna hear what he really thinks, 'cause he probably will tell you! That makes a lot of people *very* uncomfortable. 'Cause they'll go into a meeting expecting a shine job, and he'll say"—now Crosby affected a low-key British accent—"'You know, this is really crap, actually.'"

There's another personal quality, also rare, that Peter regularly displays: "As you get older," said composer Randy Newman, whose musical masterpiece *Faust* was produced by Peter, "you realize people mean well, but relatively few of them—including myself—do what they say they'll do. He's a *guarantee*. If he says he'll do something, he'll do it. I can count 'em on . . . one hand, *maybe*, the people I know that are like that. And he is."

And don't forget intelligence: When his friend Robin Williams accepted the Best Comedy Album Grammy Award for his Asher-produced release *Live 2002*, he gave special thanks to Peter, calling him "DJ Mensa" (Mensa being the society for those with the highest of IQs, of which Peter is a longtime member). Amid laughs, Williams explained: "He's English; he knows more than we do." And Newman concurred: "He's *very* intelligent. For regular people, he's in the 95th percentile, but for this business he's, you know, ninety-nine and a half.

"He's almost *too smart* to be in show business."

But show business is where Peter has made—and continues to make—his mark. How, though, did this bookish, reserved Englishman rise to the top of his profession? Determination? Talent? Was luck involved?

It always is: "Obviously, a great deal of everything is luck—except there's no such thing," confided Peter, who prefers to call it "happenstance—what happens to happen." The skill in his case or anyone's, Peter explained, is in "taking advantage of what does come your way."

In 2003, I had a chance encounter with Peter Asher. That bit of happenstance has produced this book: a look at a singular life and unbelievable career spanning over sixty years of modern music and culture. Having acquired Peter's first hit record at the tender age of eight (thanks, Mom), I continued to admire his production work through the years and always wondered how these works of art came to be. In this book I try to tell the stories behind the songs and the albums that have captivated, not just me, but millions of fans the world over.

Alongside Peter's own recollections, over two hundred of Peter's friends, collaborators, and colleagues comment on their experiences creating music with him. Most thought it about time his story was told.

However, when I first broached the idea of a biography to Peter, his surprised response was: "Who's going to want to read it? It's only me . . ."

His late friend Andrew Gold told me never to bet against Peter because he was "hardly ever wrong." As you're holding this book in your hands, I suppose even a genius can be mistaken . . .

1

THE CARROTS OF WIMPOLE STREET

On April 3, 1912, just a week before the *Titanic* set sail on her only voyage, the fourth of Louise and the Reverend Felix Asher's five children was born in Nottingham. Richard Alan John Asher certainly inherited his mother's love of music, and though he did not follow his father into the clergy, Richard always loved the hymns of the church; his mind easily grasped the workings of harmony and thrilled to voices raised in song—a love he passed on to his future children. "My father used to make us all sing in a little harmony group at home," Peter Asher remembered. "He would sing bass. We sang a lot as kids, my sisters and I."

After attending Lancing College, Richard enrolled at the London Hospital, where he got his qualifications in 1935. In 1942, Dr. Asher was appointed physician at Central Middlesex Hospital—not a particularly prestigious hospital at the time. Though a new World War was raging, Richard was deemed unfit for the armed forces. "He had some problem with his toes, some disease where they were all kind of bunched up," Peter recalled. "But I think doctors got pretty much of a pass anyway because they needed them. He was a pacifist by the end of the war," Peter confided, smiling, "so *that* would have been an issue!" Dr. Asher excelled as a general physician, where his eccentricity began to show itself—mastering how to sign his name upside down (to save time, he said) and bicycling through the hospital corridors as he went from ward to ward, seeing scores of patients on his rounds.

On July 27, 1943, Richard married red-haired twenty-nine-year-old Margaret Augusta Eliot—like his mother, a talented musician and teacher. Margaret could trace her ancestry back past William the Conqueror and other members of the British peerage, eventually arriving at distant relative Arnulf of Metz, a seventh-century Frankish bishop and saint. The newlyweds soon moved into a flat at 2 Seaford Court on Great Portland Street, where Margaret gave private music lessons, supplementing her income as a teacher at the prestigious Royal Academy of Music. She also began

to play concerts around England, which helped boost morale during wartime: "One day playing in a canteen, where the noise of the till drowned the music," she later recalled, "and another day playing trios at the bottom of a coal mine."[1] A woman in an orchestra was then quite rare, but with many of the men off fighting Hitler, they were welcomed—somewhat: "I remember my mother telling me," said Peter, "they were instructed that when they walked onto the stage to walk behind the men to make themselves invisible."

Not long after he arrived at Central Middlesex, Dr. Asher was given the task of overseeing the Mental Observation Ward. He was not formally trained in psychiatry but had amazing powers of observation, noting how mental disease often had a physical cause. He also began to write, with many articles appearing in *The Lancet*—one of the oldest and most-respected medical journals in the world. "He was known for his succinct way of writing, rather than the medical tradition of verbosity and confusion," Peter noted.

One early piece, published in 1947 in the *British Medical Journal*, was "The Dangers of Going to Bed." With skill and wit, and quite ahead of his time, he made the case for getting patients up and moving much quicker than was then customary. But of all his writings, many gathered in two volumes after his death (*Talking Sense* and *A Sense of Asher*), he is best known for "Munchausen syndrome."

Now an accepted mental condition known even by the general public, Munchausen syndrome involves a person who fabricates or elaborates an illness to get attention. After observing several patients who were admitted numerous times with different "illnesses" and wildly varying stories to explain their need for treatment, Dr. Asher wrote his paper (published in *The Lancet*, February 1951), naming the condition after the wild and fictitious exploits of Baron von Munchausen. "Whereas most Doctors would name a disease after themselves," Peter observed, "it was my father's nature that he would name it after Baron Munchausen, of whose adventures he was an avid reader." Today, a related condition named "Munchausen syndrome by proxy" is well-documented, in which a parent, for example, concocts a story regarding their child's supposed illness and revels in the attention.

On June 22, 1944, the Ashers welcomed their first child—the thirty-ninth great-grandson of mighty Saint Arnulf. No long fancy name—simply Peter Asher. "My father believed in simplicity," Peter recalled, "especially when many forms and ration books required the use of full names. He decided, correctly, that it would be a convenience in life (both to him and later to us) to give minimalist names." Margaret, encouraged by Dr. Asher, was determined to feed Peter herself, "so it was a choice between staying at home or taking the baby with me to work," she later recalled. Accordingly, baby Peter began to accompany Margaret to her concerts. "I often think," she stated, "that he did more for morale of the troops than the classical concerts they heard. When I came off the platform, I invariably found some soldier had picked

1. Margaret Asher quote from "The War, Music and Baby": SWWEC LEEWW.2001.1401 Asher, M (courtesy of The Second World War Experience Centre).

him up." One experience, though, proved quite alarming: "I played in a Town Hall and was advised to leave my baby and the carrycot in the Mayor's parlour. When I went to collect him, no baby and no carrycot. An earnest social worker had taken him as she thought he was abandoned," Margaret remembered. "But of course, all was well in the end."[2]

Sister Jane joined the family two years later, with another sister, Clare, arriving two years after that—all sporting their mother's flaming red hair. While juggling the raising of her growing brood, Margaret continued tutoring music students, including a young man who, while serving in the Fleet Air Arm during the war, had befriended a professor of piano at the Guildhall School of Music.

"When I came out of the services, he asked me to come and see him," Sir George Martin recalled. "He said, 'You know, you *really* should take up music.' And I said, 'I can't! I've never had a music lesson in my life!' And he said, 'Yes you can! If you apply yourself, you *can* do it. And, if you agree, I'll arrange for you to have an audition with the principal of the Guildhall School of Music and Drama. Play him all the things you played me, and he will decide then whether you should be taken on as a student. *If* you're taken on as a student, I'd like to remind you that you're an ex-serviceman and you will get a government grant to live on.' Which hadn't occurred to me. The principal liked what I'd done and said, 'Okay, we'll take you on as a student of composition and orchestration and conducting. But you'll have to take up a second instrument.' So I went into the Guildhall, studied for three years, and I took up the oboe as my second instrument. Never played it before."

Why the oboe? "Very practical reasons." Martin laughed. "There weren't many of them around, compared with a violin or a piano. And they're much smaller to carry than a harp."

He soon gravitated to Margaret Asher. "She took me on as a pupil, and she was terrific . . . a jolly good teacher," Martin enthused. "Her musicianship did rub off on me—there's no doubt about that.

"Efficient is the best way I can describe her, in teaching, and very, very musical. By that I mean she wasn't just a 'nuts and bolts' person telling you how to handle a bit of wood; she had tremendous understanding of music. And if she hadn't been an oboe player, whatever it was she played, she would have been a great musician. I mean, music was her life. And I enjoyed being taught by her." The future Beatles producer would work with Margaret toward perfecting his tone, then with his oboe packed away, bump into various carrot-topped children as he exited the house.

With their combined income, the Ashers moved from Great Portland Street to a bigger and posher Georgian townhouse in London's West End. 57 Wimpole Street was mere steps from where the famed Barretts of Wimpole Street had once lived. With their bright orange hair, neighbors took to calling the Asher children "The *Carrots* of Wimpole Street."

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2. Margaret Asher quotes from "The War, Music and Baby": SWWEC LEEWW.2001.1401 Asher, M (courtesy of The Second World War Experience Centre).

One basement room became Margaret's music study. Bookshelves were crammed with sheet music, and along with a chair and sofa, there was just enough room for an upright piano. An amateur musician himself, Dr. Asher loved games, puzzles, and other intellectual pursuits. These passions were passed on to Peter and his siblings, as was an appreciation for all the fine arts. The Ashers were very much like the Darlings in Barrie's *Peter Pan*—two gifted parents and their three adoring children growing up in the middle of London, all playful, inquisitive, and full of life. But life was not that easy.

Though England was still, in many ways, Blake's "green and pleasant land," the fifties seemed black and white to many Britons as they tried to recover from the war's destruction. "The place was full of bombsites," Peter remembered. "We still had rationing—when I was a kid you couldn't get sweets without, you know, stamps in your ration book. And even though we won the war—with a little bit of help, it must be admitted—we still had this nagging feeling that maybe the 'Age of the British Empire' and 'Britain Triumphant' might be kind of over."

A friend of Margaret Asher's, upon seeing how adorable and precocious the three Asher children were, suggested she try to get them in front of the cameras. Valery Glynne Progressive Management was, at that time, the premier children's theatrical agency in Britain, and Peter, Jane, and Clare were signed up immediately. "The three of us got signed because all of us looked cute and graded in size," Peter said, bringing his hands down to indicate their height, "but actually, we never did do anything, all three of us together."

Peter found work almost immediately, acting as the young son of parents Claudette Colbert and Jack Hawkins in the black-and-white 1952 film *The Planter's Wife*

Peter and Claudette Colbert in *The Planter's Wife* (1952).

(released in the United States as *Outpost in Malaya*). The film focused on plucky white farmers attempting to keep communist native insurgents from driving them off their rubber-tree farmland, while Colbert's character yearns to return home to both protect her child and save her marriage. Peter, only age seven during production, holds his own opposite the Academy Award–winning actress. Peter has fond memories of Colbert, once commenting: "I remember her smelling delicious!"

Peter's second film that year was a period piece set in the Victorian era of the early 1900s entitled *Isn't Life Wonderful!*, a gentle tale of a proper English family and their problems—specifically a ne'er-do-well relative and a son's possible marriage—all told through the eyes of young Charlie, Peter's character. He was certainly proving to be a good actor for his young age.

In between acting jobs, Peter continued to study music—honing his harmony skills as a boy soprano, performing at various competitions around Britain. "You would be on a little stage," Peter recalled, "singing some soprano thing with just a pianist behind you, judges or somebody sitting at a table in front of you. I remember doing a few of those and being quite terrified. In terms of stage fright, compared to that, walking out with a band is *nothing!*"

He was taking oboe lessons from Margaret and absorbing a lot of classical music, but certain pop records began to catch Peter's ear. Leroy Anderson was an early favorite—his "Blue Tango" (1952) and "The Typewriter" (1953) were both spun numerous times by Peter on the Ashers' hand-cranked gramophone.

Then came Peter's third film role, *Escapade* (1955)—an interesting combination of family drama and antiwar film. Sir John Mills's character becomes so consumed with advocating for world peace he neglects his wife and ignores the trouble his sons are encountering at school. Eventually his boys, one of whom Peter portrays, take off on a dangerous mission for world peace on their own.

A film that could never have been made, let alone released, in the States during that Cold War period, *Escapade*'s producer was US filmmaker and activist Hannah Weinstein. Fleeing the McCarthy anticommunist hysteria of early fifties America and moving to England, Weinstein set up a production company called Sapphire Films, and within a few years had a hit on her hands with the television series *The Adventures of Robin Hood*. The swashbuckling show starring Richard Greene was popular not only in Britain but also in the States—one of the first independently made syndicated programs of its kind and incredibly popular with American children. Weinstein remembered Peter from *Escapade* and began using him in *Robin Hood* episodes. "They were very much aiming at America. We had to say 'castle' instead of '*cästle*,'" Peter recalled, repeating the word with a more British pronunciation, "because they said Americans wouldn't understand."

Americans certainly wouldn't have understood, in those Red-baiting days, the hiring of blacklisted writers to bang out the show's scripts. Using pseudonyms, pros like Ring Lardner Jr. and Waldo Salt helped to keep the quality of the stories high for a low-budget show and also inserted subtexts that were lost on the kids but gave their parents food for thought.

Peter enjoyed himself, learning archery, riding horses, and engaging in feats of derring-do for the cameras. He had a recurring role for a time as young Prince Arthur, but one memorable 1956 episode featured both Peter and Jane as brother and sister. The show's producers normally didn't cast siblings, thinking they'd waste time quarreling, but they needn't have worried with the professional Ashers. The episode, entitled "Children of the Greenwood," had the pair trapped in a castle by an evil lord, their father falsely accused of murder. You can already tell, at this early stage, why Jane continued on to a successful acting career—she's simply very good.

Peter continued with appearances in other British television series, including *Sword of Freedom* (another Weinstein-produced swashbuckler) and *Col. March of Scotland Yard*—a detective series starring Boris Karloff. Peter was even named one of the "Most Promising Youngsters" in a yearly survey by Britain's *Picturegoer Magazine*. But he had also become a student at one of the oldest and most illustrious of London's public schools, Westminster. "That's the English gift for irony," Peter observed, "because 'public' schools in England are not public at all—they're actually quite private and exclusive and hard to get into."

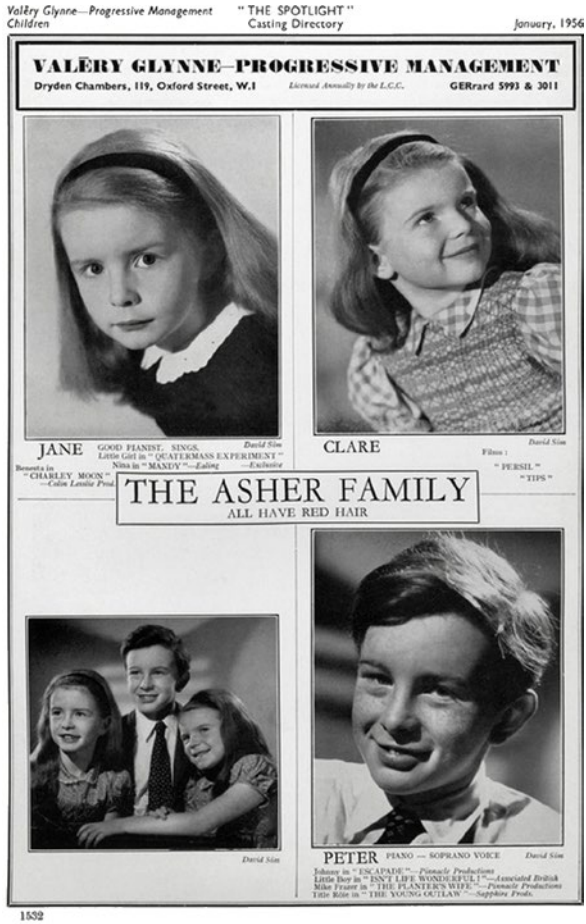
Queen Elizabeth I established Westminster School in 1560. All-boys until 1967, its ivy-covered classrooms and dormitories sit in the shadow of Westminster Abbey. "It was a hard school," according to Peter, "and they don't let you off for stuff." It became increasingly difficult for Peter to abandon his studies for auditions, "and once you start saying 'no,'" he said, "they rapidly lose interest."

Before all interest was lost, though, Peter was cast in his final film role—the youngest member of a family of thieves in the film comedy *The Big Money*. The distinguished actor Ian Carmichael starred as Peter's older brother, and a very comely Jill Ireland filled the big sister role quite nicely. Ireland "was extremely hot," Peter remembered, "and the fantasies circulating in my young brain were in no way fraternal in nature." Noting the famous movie tough guy she would later marry, Peter remarked: "Good thing Charles Bronson never found out!"

BBC Radio programs were easier to say "yes" to—there was no need for makeup or costume fittings, no need to memorize stage direction—or even lines, for that matter. "There was so much," Peter remembered, "and each thing was only a day." One of his last regular acting engagements was as a recurring character on the Children's Hour radio serial *Jennings at School* (also a series of popular novels by Anthony Buckeridge). Aimed at adolescents, the light drama—concerning the adventures of Jennings and his boarding school classmates—was a good, steady gig for a young actor. David Schutte, a Jennings expert, noted that the series' listening audience was huge, with close to thirty thousand children requesting it each month. It ran, with various casts, for sixteen years.

Peter actually had the lead role for the first three episodes of 1957, but deciding that voices were sounding too similar, the producers moved Peter to the role of classmate Darbishire, which was fine by him: "Darbishire had all the best lines," Peter was quick to note. "'*Fossilized fishhooks!*' and all these bizarre exclamations."

Andy Irvine, a pioneer of British folk-rock from his days in both Sweeney's Men in the sixties and Planxty in the seventies, was, like Peter, also a child actor



Valery Glynne Progressive Management casting photos of the Asher family, 1956.

in fifties London. "I do remember we did a lot of radio together," Irvine recalled, including *Jennings*, where Andy played schoolmate Temple, and friend and fellow actor Nigel Anthony was Venables. Peter, Andy, and Nigel became a tight unit almost immediately.

"We discovered that we all had an interest in music," Irvine continued. "We'd all got a plastic ukulele, which was *the* Christmas present of the year, but I had also been learning classical guitar for a couple of years. So, we went to Peter's flat"—most likely Margaret's basement music room—"and we started to play skiffle."

Skiffle was an early British do-it-yourself music craze that was popular in the mid-fifties, before rock'n'roll began to overtake it. It was based around American folk songs like "Rock Island Line," and its most popular performer was the exuberant Lonnie Do-

negan. Kids across Britain turned their mums' washtubs upside down, attached broom handles with a long string, and played it like an upright bass. As drums were hard to come by, rubbing thimbled fingers quickly across a washboard provided the rhythm. Thousands of British lads formed skiffle bands, including a young John Lennon with his group, The Quarrymen. With Nigel scraping the washboard and Andy and Peter singing and playing guitars, The A 1 Skiffle Group was quickly formed.

Around this time, Peter began to show an early interest in tape recorders. He would spend hours playing with his Fi-Cord, one of the first portable reel-to-reel recorders available commercially in Britain. Whether experimenting with tape loops, slowing things down, speeding things up, or screaming gibberish into the mic and playing it backward, the properties of sound and how it could be manipulated began to fascinate Peter.

The three friends soon discovered Woody Guthrie, Leadbelly, and Cisco Houston, and The A 1 Skiffle Group became The Red River Folk Group. Rehearsals continued in the Asher basement. "I have a recording of the two of us, from about 1958," Andy told me, confessing: "It's not very good!"

"We used to go to the hoot nights Saturday nights in Soho Square to sing," Peter recalled, but they were denied their chance due to the policy of hoot ringmaster and British folk heavyweight Ewan McColl. "He didn't approve of people singing music other than their own culture. We couldn't, as two English lads, get up and sing American folk songs." Interesting, given the fact that Celtic music had a massive influence on the American folk tradition. Nonetheless, these evenings in Soho proved educational as Peter became enthralled with the twelve-string guitar playing of blues singer Long John Baldry. "Part of the beginning of my love for twelve-string guitars," Peter fondly recalled. "He had gigantic hands and could play things nobody else could."

Though stunned upon hearing Elvis's "Heartbreak Hotel," the first rock'n'roll record Peter bought was 1956's "Rock With the Caveman," by England's homegrown rocker, Tommy Steele. "Rock Around The Clock," by Bill Haley and His Comets, also made quite an impression on young Peter, as did witnessing Haley onstage in London—his first rock concert.

In 1957, a young doctor named Stephen Lock applied for a job at Central Middlesex Hospital, wanting more general medical experience. There were four jobs available, and he landed one: Dr. Asher's houseman, or intern. "I must say, the attitude of the establishment was that I'd possibly got the worst job in the hospital. It's very interesting; he didn't really sort of 'fit in' with the medical establishment at all."

Certainly, due to "Munchausen syndrome" and all his other writings, the hospital had gained a higher profile. But still, according to Lock: "They were frightened of him." Asher's honesty could be startling: "He would say of the hematologist in the hospital, 'Of course, Dr. Discomb is talking utter nonsense.' And he'd say that out, you know, to a collection of students and interns and everyone else. That wasn't done in those days . . . and Dr. Discomb didn't like it very much!" And though Dr. Asher wore the black jacket and striped trousers befitting a London specialist, he had a flamboyant nature: "It was just at the beginning of our Jamaican immigrants coming

to Britain," Lock remembered. "And we had one patient who was dressed absolutely wonderfully—sort of purples and reds, scarlets, and everything else." Dazzled, Dr. Asher confessed to Lock: "Oh, I *wish* I could wear clothes like that!"

As the fifties came to a close, Jane's career continued to blossom, with better roles in film, radio, and television. Concurrently, Clare landed a part on the British radio soap opera *Mrs. Dale's Diary*, the first significant BBC Radio drama. Its oft-used line, "I'm awfully worried about Jim," eventually became a national catchphrase.

But unfortunately, despite his early promise, their brother's acting career was basically over.

One factor often overlooked when discussing the British beat boom of the sixties is the end of conscription in October 1960. Until that time, young Englishmen could be routinely called up for two years of military duty. Peter had already made his choice: "I would have joined the RAF 'cause we'd all read Biggles"—referring to the adventure novels of W.E. Johns that feature Captain Bigglesworth, Spitfire pilot. "Of course, having gone to public school, I would have been an officer"—he laughed—"'cause if you were upper-class, you were officer material automatically!" (All Biggles-type fantasies would have evaporated had an actual war, like Vietnam, been Britain's fate: "We didn't have to run away to Canada or wherever, but we would have"—he laughed—"in no time!") During conscription, it would have been extremely difficult for any artist to build a career, or a group to form and tighten, when the momentum could be interrupted with national service. With that no longer a threat, thousands of young British boys could follow their muse, taking up guitars and drumsticks instead of rifles—and many did just that.

For the majority of British youth (and, for that matter, American youth), singing and playing music was one way out of the dull future that seemed to lie in store for those in the lower and working classes. "When you come from where I come from," explained the UK singer known as Lulu, "you either have to be a boxer, a thief, a footballer, or you can do music." She said that last word with a sense of magical hopefulness. "Not that I wanted to get out, but that was the drive, I suppose."

The tale of how a small girl in a working-class port in the northern British Isles fell in love with American blues and soul is strikingly similar to hundreds of other UK acts, including The Beatles: "In Glasgow," Lulu said, speaking of her hometown, "when you live in a city like that, people have hard times—day to day. It's fighting to survive. So, what they do after work is they drink, and they play music." Not only did American sailors bring in music to this bustling port, but American airmen stationed outside the city also shared the latest rock'n'roll and rhythm-and-blues records with their Scottish friends.

"And my father used to sing," Lulu continued. "Everybody—for recreation, they'd drink and have parties at home and sing! They didn't stand around with glasses of wine saying"—here she changed to a very posh voice—"'*Dahhling, HOW is the economy?*' It was gritty!" And when little Marie Lawrie (her given name) began to sing at parties, she was encouraged. "You get a lot of attention, and it's very flattering,"

she said. "All I ever wanted to do was sing—that's all I ever cared about. I didn't care about anything else. Not even boys—well, maybe boys a *little* bit!"

Peter Asher, by contrast, was a well-educated, upper-class lad with practically every career possibility open to him. Music for Peter was not a way out of a dreary existence—it was in his DNA. He was enthralled with music in all its permutations and played whenever time allowed. He wasn't yearning for fame or fortune—it was simply fun.

Now falling under the thrall of artists like Charlie Parker and Miles Davis, Peter turned his attention to jazz. England was going through a period when traditional Dixieland-style jazz music became hugely popular, and artists such as Chris Barber, Acker Bilk, Kenny Ball, and Bob Wallis were selling records and packing clubs throughout Britain. Peter began playing standup bass, and pal Nigel Anthony graduated from washboard to actual drums. Andy Irvine, though, knew his heart was in folk music and soon went his own way.

Peter honed his musical chops by taking part in jam sessions with various acquaintances joining in, including one of Nigel's friends: Richard Hewson, a guitarist, trumpeter, and student at the Guildhall School. The three soon formed a jazz trio, never getting proper paying gigs but playing a lot of parties. Hewson, though, remembered that Peter was already thinking about pop music: "One day he came 'round and said, 'Do you want to write a song?' And I didn't know *anything* about pop songs!" The resulting tune was, Hewson said laughing, "complete crap!"

And how good a jazz bassist was Peter? "Oh, he was *good*," Adrian Lyne said of Peter's musical chops. "I wouldn't say he was the 'best in the world,' but nor was I!"

Lyne, who went on to direct such memorable hit films as *Flashdance* and *Fatal Attraction*, was focused on a music career during the trad jazz period. "I sort of played 'semi-pro' with different bands, playing the trumpet. And I wasn't very good, really—it was more passion than technique.

"I had my own band, with the dubious name of The Neolithic Jazz Men!" He laughed heartily. "We were quite popular, even with that daft name! We played riverboats and pubs and a lot of workingmen's clubs in North London." Peter would play with Lyne's band when their regular bassist was unavailable. "I can see him doing it," Lyne said, thinking back to those nights when jazz ruled the London club scene. And Peter, Lyne remembered, "was such a sweet man. I just liked him enormously."

Though a highly successful filmmaker, Lyne misses his days making music: "I just loved it. If I'd been any *good*—if I could have played like Clark Terry or Chet Baker—I'd still be doing it *now*. In my late twenties I started directing, and then eight years later I started directing films. But I've never felt quite the same way. If I played a good solo, trumpet solo . . ." Lyne paused, recalling his satisfying nights on the bandstand: "It's the best thing on earth! I've never felt that good since, you know?"

Peter, encouraged by his friends and music-loving parents, denied having any thoughts that jazz was his forte: "I was nowhere nearly good enough to play the be-bop that I loved . . . and I didn't practice nearly hard enough either, it must be admitted." But he was beginning to wonder if music might eventually be more than just a hobby. He got his answer when a fellow student at Westminster entered his life.

2

GORDON AND PETER

Gordon Trueman Riviere Waller's father, like Peter's, was also a doctor—an ear, nose, and throat surgeon—with the family residence upstairs from his medical office in the village of Pinner. And, like the Ashers, the Wallers enjoyed music together, though the atmosphere was slightly different: "My father was a brilliant tenor," Gordon said. "And one of my sisters is a great pianist. So, when the family got together and Dad got drunk and my sister got drunk and I got drunk, my sister would play the piano and he would sing. And I would try to!

"I was always in trouble. I was always in fights. I think I was probably a big worry to my parents. And I didn't give a shit about school, except sport." But there came a fateful day in 1957 that changed his life forever.

"I remember the afternoon, absolutely clear as a bell," Gordon recalled. "The people next door, who had a huge garden with a field at the end of it, used to have, like, a garden party every year." As Gordon passed by his neighbor's party, one particular record stopped him in his tracks. "About the third time it came on, I said, 'Who's that?' 'Well, that's Elvis!' I said, 'Elvis? Who's Elvis?' They said, '*That's* Elvis!' And so, I stayed there all night with them, 'cos I just loved it! Playing these old 78s over and over and over and over again."

Gordon's parents, realizing their son was becoming almost obsessed with this new music, bought Gordon a guitar for Christmas. He immediately began to teach himself chords, learning over a half-dozen songs that first day. Soon he was taking the guitar with him to parties, where he learned a fact all young men with guitars quickly realize: "If you're playing guitar, you've got twenty times more chance of pulling the girls than the guys who aren't playing!"

Then came Gordon's first paying gig, earning ten pounds to play at a party given by a rich schoolmate: "*Fuckin' 'ell, ten quid?* That would keep me drunk and in cigarettes for three weeks!" Gordon talked his mother into buying him an electric

guitar, borrowed an amp from a friend, and showed up ready to rock. In the midst of his first hip-shakin' number, he managed to catch the attention of an "unbelievable, angelic, sexy, nymphomaniac Swedish chick," according to Gordon, and that did it. "I thought, '*This* has got to be the way to go!'"

At the dawn of the 1960s, performing at one of his father's Christmas parties, he was approached by a guest who worked at EMI asking if he was interested in auditioning for one of the biggest record labels in the world. Gordon couldn't believe his good fortune, but his father had a decidedly different response: "My dad was furious with this guy! He wanted me to carry on at school. But"—Gordon laughed—"I was waaaay past academics by then! I'd had a taste of blood, and I wasn't goin' back." He auditioned and was offered a contract, but he would have to leave school. His parents steadfastly refused to allow *that* to happen. EMI, though, left the door open: "Well," Gordon remembered them saying, "when you finish school, get back to us."

Around this time, Gordon met fourteen-year-old Jennifer Dunbar. "It was 'first love' for both of us," she confessed. She adoringly witnessed some of Gordon's early gigs, where all his hours of Elvis practice became evident, unleashing a perfected snarling lip to the delight of the assembled youngsters. "The way that Elvis had burst onto the world music scene was absolutely full of '*Fuck You*,'" Roderick Peters recalled, adding: "Gordon had that in spades."

Dr. Roderick Peters, now a respected psychotherapist and author, was a young lad at Westminster School when he met Gordon: "He came over to the house where I was boarding one evening," Peters remembered, "and came into my study. And his way of getting to know me is actually very characteristic of Gordon, which was very confrontational—kind of, 'Right. I'm here. What are you going to do about it?' You always had a feeling as if he was semi-spoiling for a fight—if not physical, then at least a conflict of wills. Or testosterone.

"The whole way that he walked around school and dressed was full of that challenging confrontational individuality," Peters recalled. Take the gray suit, which, he noted, all the boys were required to wear: "He had his altered, so they were sort of 'drainpipe' trousers. He *had* to wear a tie, otherwise he would've been required to leave the school, but he had it knotted halfway down his chest with the top button opened. And his hair was like Elvis . . . brushed back in a great wave."

Gordon's confrontational nature had its origins at home: "I got to know his father quite well," Peters said, remembering Dr. Waller. "He could be kind and pleasant, and then he could be really cutting and unpleasant and quite cruel to Gordon, especially." Many times, while staying at the Wallers', "it would get quite uncomfortable 'round the table," recalled Peters. "It was difficult for me going there because, in the way that parents sometimes do, he chose to set me as the sort of example of what his son *should* have been . . . I hated it. As did Gordon."

Despite what Dr. Waller thought his son "should" be, the moment that solidified what he *would* be happened sometime early in 1961. Gordon overheard guitar playing, including some rather advanced finger-work, coming from one of Westminster's

Westminster School, Liddell House, 1961. (Gordon: top row, 2nd from right; Peter: third row, 2nd from right.) *Reproduced by kind assistance of the Governing Body of Westminster School.*

rooms, and he crept in to listen. When the playing finally stopped, Gordon said, "That's good."

"Thank you," Peter Asher replied.

Until that moment, their paths had not crossed. Gordon, winning medals with his athletic activities, was not part of Peter's circle—young intellectuals busy with academics and working on the school magazine. Gordon's strong antiauthoritarian attitudes would have precluded him from joining groups such as the school's debate

team, for example, or theatrical productions—two activities at which Peter excelled. Dr. Peters, watching the two of them interact, remembered the stark contrast: "Peter was deathly white, and his hair was like a flame at that time. He was so still and calm . . . almost like frozen water. Gordon," Peters recalled, "was at odds with the whole world." Or, as Gordon frankly told me: "Peter was a human being; I was just an animal."

But they certainly learned from each other: "There was a lot of rock'n'roll that he introduced me to," Peter explained. "And, if anything, I think what we started off trying to do was combining both our interests. When we started singing, first we would do a number of folk songs that I would often introduce into the mixture, and a number of rock'n'roll songs and Buddy Holly songs that *he* would introduce into the mixture, and our 'style,' such as it was, grew out of that. Of course, a lot of our style grew out of trying to sound as much like The Everly Brothers as possible, which is what everybody did."

"I have never met anybody who can sing harmony like him," said Gordon. "He'll probably hate me for saying this, but Peter's a fuckin' lousy singer on his own. He really is. I mean he is not a 'singer' as such. But—he's the most *fantastic* harmonizer! If my voice is 'whipped cream,' Peter's voice is 'skimmed milk.' It is just pure."

Their first public performance together, though, had no singing involved. Peter and Gordon teamed up with friend Christopher Garmany to debut at the Westminster School's chamber music competition, performing for those assembled a competent guitar trio arrangement of the instrumental "Apache" by the popular British band The Shadows. "Having read the rules of the chamber music competition, we realized we were eligible. It said, 'six or less instruments playing an existing piece' or whatever," Peter recalled. "It *didn't* say, 'they cannot be electric guitars.'" Music instructor Mr. Harvey felt it was unfair to judge their performance alongside a Beethoven Trio, which took top honors that day, so Asher, Waller, and Garmany were given "honorable mention." "That was in the spirit of Westminster," Peter explained. "Other schools might have tried to stop us—the same way I got to read 'Howl' at the school poetry competition and nobody stopped me. That's Westminster at its best."

Peter, a year ahead of Gordon, left Westminster for King's College, majoring in philosophy, not music. Peter explained why: "I think because it was about the vaguest thing I could think of. I had no idea what I wanted to do for a career. I didn't know much about philosophy, but it sounded kind of interestingly intellectual and rather vague, which it turned out to be." Peter puts himself squarely in the logical positivist camp along with fellow Englishman Bertrand Russell, though suspects he might be a Wittgensteinian. "But," Peter confessed, "that's if I could really understand it."

Though now at different schools, the two friends continued to practice together. Folk songs such as "500 Miles" and rockers such as "Lucille" started sounding very good indeed when Gordon's rich baritone ran alongside Peter's strong tenor. The singing duo of Gordon and Peter (as they were then billed) began by playing various pubs at lunchtime for free food and beer.

Gordon's girlfriend, Jennifer Dunbar, had moved recently with her family from Pinner to the Marylebone section of London, just a few blocks from the Asher residence. Peter became friendly with Jennifer's brother, John Dunbar, a fine arts major at Cambridge. The two well-read lads hit it off immediately with shared interests in film, art, science, and, of course, books. "We both read a lot," John Dunbar said. "He was sort of amongst the few people that one could talk with about other subjects in that kind of milieu—that music lot." Eventually, Dunbar would play an important role, both in Peter's life and in the history of sixties pop culture.

Peter took time from his philosophy studies in 1962, undertaking a final appearance on the London stage as part of the Royal Shakespeare Company's production of Giles Cooper's *Everything in the Garden*, starring Geraldine McEwan. "It was about urban housewives who start a brothel to make money on the side," Peter recalled. He began the show as understudy but ended the run playing the part of McEwan's son, Roger, the most morally grounded member of the family.

In 1963, Jane Asher, after her big break onscreen in *The Greengage Summer*, became a semi-regular on the very popular Saturday night BBC TV show *Juke Box Jury*, where a panel of four judges made up of show business cognoscenti listen to new records and decide if they'll "hit" or "miss." Tuning in one evening and seeing the quite photogenic Miss Asher, Len Black thought to himself: "If that girl sings as good as she looks, we could make some hit records!"

Len Black had been working for a time as a song-plugger for music publishers, providing tunes by under-contract songwriters to artists and record labels. He called Jane's agent and arranged for her to meet him and an accompanist for an audition. After a song or two, it was clear: "She didn't have it," Black recalled, thinking she had a "squeaky voice." But as she was leaving, Jane mentioned: "I have a brother who plays and sings." Politely, Black agreed to see Peter and his friend but was not too impressed when he heard them. "I said go away and come back in six months—you're not quite ready." As Gordon and Peter continued to polish their act, Jane made another acquaintance who would ultimately prove more important to Peter's career.

In April 1963, Jane was asked by the magazine *Radio Times* to review a concert by a promising beat group that had managed to get their second single, "Please Please Me," to the number-one spot. The Beatles were to appear on April 18th at the Royal Albert Hall with the BBC broadcasting the second half of the show for a radio special. This was quite a prestigious venue, and Beatles producer George Martin was also in attendance.

Backstage, as introductions were being made, Martin suddenly recognized the red-haired young woman in front of him as the little "carrot top" he knew when taking oboe lessons from her mother. "And I made the most smart-assed remark I've ever made in my life," Martin said, "which I *immediately* regretted—it was the most stupid thing to say. I was introduced: 'This is Jane Asher, this is George Martin.' I said, 'Last time I saw you, you were in the bath.' And she looked at me, astonished."

Though everyone laughed, Martin said he felt the daggers coming from Jane's eyes. Still embarrassed decades later, he shook his head: "What a gauche thing to say."

Jane met the band and then spent hours chatting with Paul McCartney. He was cute, clever, and charming, quoting Chaucer to her. She was attractive, educated, artistic, and understood the ins and outs of show business. They hit it off immediately.

A young man named Andrew Loog Oldham had been hired by Brian Epstein's company NEMS to help publicize both "Please Please Me" and The Beatles' brand-new single, "From Me to You." Oldham was fully submerged in the London pop culture of fashion and music. His right-hand man at this time was Peter Meaden, a "face" in the burgeoning mod scene. The mods were stylish, unlike their leather-clad detractors called "rockers," who still revered Gene Vincent and Eddie Cochran. Mods embraced pop art and Carnaby Street fashions, while musically preferring American R&B and Jamaican ska. Both Oldham and Meaden were ambitious, but Meaden's head was a little too much in the clouds for Oldham, who had just become manager for The Rolling Stones. Oldham "had fingers in every pie," Philip Townsend recalled.

Townsend was a photographer who had met Oldham while snapping celebrities in the south of France for the magazine *Tatler*. Townsend was now booking music acts on the side for the debutant parties and private dances around London he was hired to shoot. Oldham phoned one day, telling him that Meaden was coming over. "He wanted to get rid of him," Townsend said. "Andrew is very persuasive! He just said, 'He's coming along to help *you* out.'" The Townsend-Meaden Agency was formed and set up shop on Brompton Road in Kensington. And, along with pushing Meaden on Townsend, Oldham also suggested that they look into booking Gordon and Peter for their parties. Oldham had booked them once himself and sensed the duo would be perfect for the debutant crowd.

"Because they were just starting out, they didn't have a band to back them," Brian Parker remembered. Parker was a guitarist in an R&B trio called The Renegades, another act in the Townsend-Meaden stable, and on the more up-tempo numbers The Renegades would add sonic support for the acoustic duo, becoming the pair's first backing band. Gordon still yearned to be a rocker, so he and Townsend invented "Aubyn St. Claire," and his services would be provided along with Gordon and Peter—"Two acts for the price of one," Townsend said, laughing. For the "Aubyn" set, Gordon combed his hair up, took his suit jacket off, and would sing a half-dozen rock and R&B numbers backed by The Renegades, who were mining the same sonic vein as The Rolling Stones. He would then go backstage, change his clothes, comb his hair down, grab his acoustic guitar, and come back out with Peter. The debutants witnessing this, at the Chelsea Town Hall or at private parties in millionaires' mansions along Totteridge Lane, were none the wiser.

Len Black, in the meantime, had been hired by composer John Barry to manage his company based in Denmark Street. Gordon and Peter found his new office and came to see him, as six months had passed. All their gigs for Townsend-Meaden had helped: "They were better; they were tighter," Black recalled. "I said, 'Okay, let me try and do something with you.'"

Pickwick Room newspaper ad.

Black and boss John Barry would leave their Denmark Street offices at lunchtime and head to a new two-story restaurant/bar called The Pickwick Club. "We'd go in every day," Black recalled, "so I got to know the manager quite well. One day he said to me, 'I'm looking for a piano player for the restaurant.' I said, 'I have an idea—I have a couple of boys who play guitar. Why don't you have them in? They can move from upstairs to downstairs, as opposed to a piano player that's stuck in one place.' And he said, 'Okay.'"

The Pickwick, located on a street filled with show-business offices, had quickly become something of a private dining club. Rising stars like Michael Caine and Terrence Stamp and British showbiz royalty like *Goon Show* comedian Harry Secombe would drink, dine, and close deals. Gordon's sweetheart, Jennifer Dunbar; twin sister, Margaret; and Roderick Peters all attended Gordon and Peter's debut performance at the club. The pair performed on two stools with no amplifiers or microphones, performing their repertoire and taking requests. Jennifer Dunbar recalled that, as the weeks went by, the lines to get in to catch this new acoustic duo dramatically increased.

Meanwhile, Paul McCartney had become quite close to the Asher family. He was still living in Liverpool when he first met Jane, but as the year progressed and The Beatles continued to become more and more successful, it made sense for them all to move to London. In August 1963, the band members began sharing a flat in Mayfair, but Paul was yearning for something more—something that provided the comfortable feelings of family and home that he was missing now in London. He was spending more and more of his downtime at the Wimpole Street townhouse, and one evening Margaret simply suggested that he move into their spare room, which was next to Peter's on the top floor. It was an opportunity too good to pass up. McCartney's biographer and longtime friend, Barry Miles, explained it was "not

just for the convenience of living with his girlfriend—which, of course, was obviously very nice—but also the Asher household provided him with a home away from home. Margaret Asher was very, very kind to him, and very much a mother substitute. Paul's own mother had died when he was fourteen, so he loved that—the fact that he could come in and, you know, she was always making him food, and his clothes and everything were taken care of."

An interesting situation—sleeping just steps away from your sweetheart. But before you jump to conclusions, dear reader: "There's no hanky-panky in the house," Peter emphasized. "It was conducted in the proper way an English house would be conducted; Paul definitely lived in his room." Peter described his parents as "generally, I suppose, liberal and progressive in their attitudes, but still basically good English white Tories, you know?"

Paul began using Margaret's basement music room as a space for songwriting sessions with John Lennon. Peter remembered one October day in particular when England's hottest hitmakers got down to business: After only a couple of hours, "Paul called up to my bedroom and asked me if I wanted to hear a new song that he and John had just written, which they clearly thought was quite good. I came down to the basement where they sat side by side at the piano and sang 'I Want to Hold Your Hand' for the first time to an audience." His verdict? "I was overwhelmed."

Also, in October 1963, Paul and John had been cajoled by Andrew Oldham to give The Rolling Stones the first crack at recording "I Wanna Be Your Man"—becoming the Stones' second single when released the following month. But before either the Stones' or The Beatles' own recordings of the song were released, clubgoers at The Pickwick heard it first. "I learned the song from Paul," Peter recalled. "I said, 'Would you mind if we sang this? It's a great song!' And he said, 'Yes.'" Working up a nice two-part harmony version with Gordon, the duo sang it for a couple of weeks at their Pickwick gigs, mentioning the Lennon and McCartney authorship and upcoming Stones release, thereby creating some anticipation for the record among their burgeoning fans. The situation would be different today, with cameras in every audience member's pocket and an instantaneous online upload threatening a release's exclusivity, but in 1963, permission was casually given and "I Wanna Be Your Man" became Peter and Gordon's first brand-new Lennon and McCartney cover.

Peter meeting Gordon, Paul meeting Jane, Len Black suggesting an unknown guitar act for The Pickwick Club—each a significant bit of luck in Peter's life, or, as he might say, "happenstance." One November evening at The Pickwick, the next great bit of happenstance came in the form of EMI executive Norman Newell.

3

A WORLD WITHOUT LOVE

Norman Newell began his career selling sheet music and writing songs for one of London's many publishing houses. He eventually caught the eye of EMI and was hired in 1949 to head their Columbia label. Initially relying on the licensing of American hits, he began to build a roster of British acts, including signing a teenage Petula Clark. He also continued to have success as a songwriter, providing the lyrics to the ballads "More" and "A Portrait of My Love"—big hits on both sides of the Atlantic. In the postwar years, he was as powerful as you could get in Britain's music industry. "The epitome of EMI," said guitarist "Big" Jim Sullivan. "Very tall and well-educated."

"Norman was one of the great British lyricists . . . a very interesting man," artist manager Alex Armitage explained. "He was pretty well the first accepted—what we would call 'out'—homosexual in the music industry. The fact that he was openly gay was absolutely astonishing." Remember: In the early sixties, many in society thought of homosexuals as mentally ill, criminals, or both. Most gay men in the business, including Beatles manager Brian Epstein, kept it a closely guarded secret.

The advent of rock'n'roll was quickly changing the industry, and though EMI had success with Cliff Richard, Johnny Kidd, and now The Beatles, this sort of "music" was still not taken very seriously. The powers-that-be at EMI thought their commercial acts were inconsequential but necessary to make the company money, thereby financing their *much* more important business: classical recordings. Newell's expertise was more in the world of musical theater than the rock'n'roll realm, but he was always on the lookout for commercial talent.

One evening near the end of 1963, Newell caught Gordon and Peter's act at The Pickwick Club. What transpired sounds like the biggest of showbiz clichés: The well-dressed Newell (whom Gordon, recalling the meeting, called "Mr. Glitter" because of all the rings he wore) summoned the boys over. Peter remembered he "sat us down

at his table, bought us a drink," and asked, "Have you boys ever made a record? Would you come and audition?" They didn't say no. Gordon especially didn't want to pass up a *second* chance at an EMI contract.

In this era of music streaming, file sharing, and software such as ProTools and GarageBand, we seem light-years away from the realities of struggling musicians only a generation ago. "Back then, unless you had access to a real recording studio, there was no way to make any sort of a record," Peter recalled. The duo nervously arrived at EMI's studios at Abbey Road and auditioned with, among other songs, Hedy West's "500 Miles," which fit with Newell's plans. "Norman was imagining us as an English version of Peter, Paul and Mary or The Kingston Trio," Peter explained. "We were going to be England's answer to the 'folk boom' that was happening in America."

Newell offered them a contract. "A terrible record deal. The big record companies screwed everyone back then," Peter laughed.

"I think it was a penny per single," he recalled. "And, of course, the killer was it was half royalties overseas! Like a lot of contracts were, and are, to this day." Obviously, when they signed, no one could foresee the British Invasion only months away, which meant that any million-selling single Peter and Gordon later achieved in the States meant a "massive" payday of . . . approximately $5,000. This was simply EMI's standard starting contract—even The Beatles had to toil under these rates for years. But, unlike modern contracts, nothing was "recouped" to cover the label's costs, according to Peter: "You *did* get paid."

Newell, like any good producer, began to wonder: What would be the single? "500 Miles" was a strong contender—it had not been a hit before in the UK, and their performance was very good—but still not quite what he had in mind. A commercial song that was not a cover was needed. Could the pair come up with one? Peter thought he knew whom to ask.

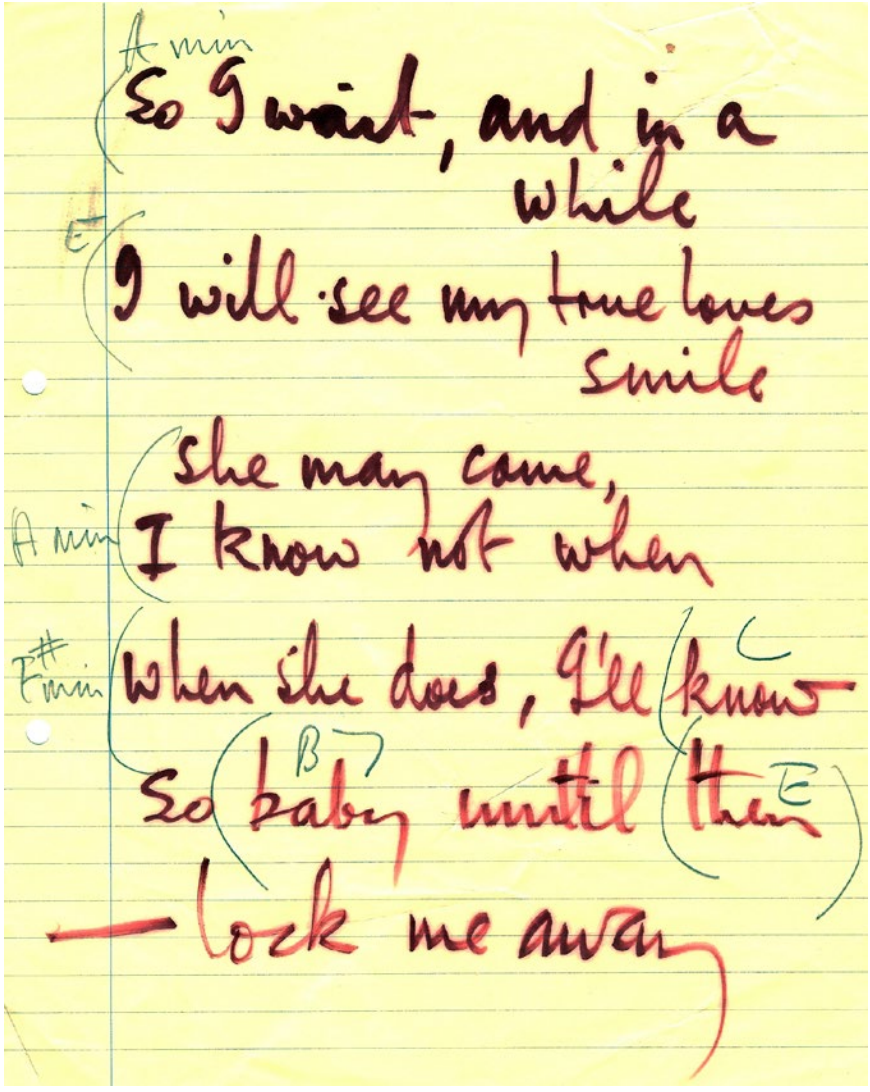
McCartney had recently played Peter an unfinished song that he originally thought might make a good Beatles track. The idea had come to Paul years earlier, and periodically he would bring the song to John Lennon's attention during their writing sessions. But he was never able to get past the first line with the phrase "*lock me away*." Lennon's savage wit would then be unleashed, letting Paul know he *needed* locking away for using that daft line. Eventually Paul gave up, accepting the fact that The Beatles would never record it.

Now, needing a song for himself, Peter asked his new housemate if he and Gordon could have a crack at the orphaned song. Paul happily agreed. "He wrote out the words and the chords for us to learn," Peter remembered, with Paul even providing a recording featuring simple guitar strums and a one-minute rendition of the tune. But only days before the session was scheduled, it was still unfinished—two promising verses, but no bridge (sometimes called a "middle-eight," referring to the eight bars that help a song's structure by bridging a chorus, say, to a verse).

Gordon recalled, "He didn't have a middle-eight for it, and we kept asking him to do it, and he didn't. We said, 'Come on, Paul, we're desperate!' So he went into his bedroom and came back about two minutes later." Paul, guitar in hand, said, "Right.

What do you think of this?" He then sang them the lilting, melancholy missing piece, beginning with the words "*So I wait*" and finishing with "*Baby, until then*," dovetailing nicely back into the verse.

Remembered Gordon: "We said, 'GREAT!'" They immediately picked up the phone, called Norman Newell, and excitedly proclaimed, "We got a song!" Today, Peter still retains both the demo tape and the pages with Paul's scribbled verses and last-minute bridge, proclaiming, "When things get really bad, I'm off to Sotheby's in a minute!"



McCartney's last-minute bridge. See credit on copyright page.

Tuesday, January 21, 1964, was a bright, clear day in London. Blanketed in snow the week before, the sun had returned to the city, and on this crisp winter morning, Peter and Gordon began their recording career at EMI's Abbey Road Studio Two. The session began with Peter, playing acoustic guitar, running through "A World Without Love" for bassist Eric Ford and drummer Dougie Wright. "There was no music written," Wright remembered, and as they came up with the structure, music director Geoff Love took notes to make sure the arrangement remained tight. Love had arranged many sessions for Newell over the years, including tracks for Shirley Bassey, one of EMI's most successful artists.

Peter wanted a particular drum sound, which Wright was able to come up with on his brand-new American Gretsch kit, doubling up the floor tom with the kickdrum: BOM—BOM BOM . . . BOM—BOM BOM. "I kept it very cool; there was no point in being clever," Wright said. "We were just there to put the carpet down for everybody to rest on." Later in the day, a second session commenced for the overdubs and vocals. The guitarist hired was Vic Flick, one of London's leading studio musicians. Flick's ominous guitar lead on the "James Bond Theme" was one of *the* iconic sounds of the sixties.

The guitarist remembered the session well: "That was one of the few times I used the electric twelve-string," Flick said, referring to the bulky Vox guitar used as the record's lead instrument, specifically requested by Peter. Keyboardist Harold Smart played a massive Hammond B-3 organ, which had to be carried into the studio by four construction workers hired off the street. Flick and the other musicians each received, according to "Big" Jim Sullivan, "£7 for the session and ten shillings for carriage—to carry your amp and guitar in." The exchange rate in 1964 translated to about twenty dollars, "which was a quite lot of money back then," Flick recalled, "but, of course, we were terribly exploited." (Unfortunately the exploitation went on, as Flick's old guitar leads were sampled and mixed into modern recordings without any compensation.)

Clem Cattini, a legendary session drummer from that era, referred to London's small cadre of studio musicians as "The Musical Navvies" (*navvy* being a nineteenth-century Irish term meaning "laborer"). Dougie Wright defined the term thusly: "Someone who gets pulled from pillar to post, gets kicked around rotten, but still comes up with the answers."

With definite ideas about how the song should sound, Newell let Peter get on with it with hardly any interference. And Peter was thrilled with the process: "I loved the studio, I loved the technology," he remarked, "and I loved the idea of having great musicians that you could make suggestions to or, indeed, tell them what to do.

"That was a thrilling idea to me—the idea of taking a song and sculpting it into something other than what it was." A definite seed was planted in Peter's mind on this very first day at Abbey Road.

Peter's first production attempt, albeit uncredited, the record was released on EMI's Columbia label on February 28th. The first time I visited Peter's office, almost thirty-nine years to the day of that first single's release, there were no platinum albums on his wall, and neither of his two Grammy Awards for "Producer of the Year"

were in sight. But there, on a small table next to his desk, sat his 1964 Gold Disc award for "A World Without Love."

"Obviously, the fact that we had a fantastic, brand-new song to record was incredible," Peter recalled, "and allowed us to have a hit straightaway, which is unique."

Norman Newell not only advised them to change their billing to "Peter and Gordon" (as he thought it sounded better), but he steered them toward signing with his own manager, Richard Armitage. Len Black, the man who had gotten them their break at The Pickwick Club, had unfortunately been too slow in securing a management deal with the duo. "I thought, 'I'd better sign these boys up.' But I was too late—Norman Newell came in one night, snatched them up, and I was fucked."

Manager Richard Armitage was born into show business, as his father, Reginald, was a songwriter of many popular English tunes in the 1920s and '30s, with four of his musical revues running in the West End simultaneously (a feat not achieved again until the days of Andrew Lloyd Webber). Reginald wrote under the name Noel Gay, and his son Richard formed Noel Gay Artists in the fifties to manage performers and supply songs under their copyright to various acts.

"Norman was a client with this company for over fifty years," said Alex Armitage, one of Richard's sons and now CEO of the still-thriving Noel Gay Artists. "Norman was one for an easy life and wanted people that he produced to be properly represented. Noel Gay was a really, really good agency and management company in those days—it was very successful and *very* honorable." I had brought up with Alex a claim Gordon made to me—that Norman Newell got five percent of what Noel Gay Artists earned from managing Peter and Gordon as a kickback for steering them his father's way. Newell, Alex Armitage assured me, "would have introduced people to Richard Armitage 'cause he wanted those people to be properly, professionally, *honestly* represented.

"My father, God love 'im, was as straight as a die," Armitage continued. "Nothing would have embarrassed him more than *any* suggestion of that ilk." John Burgess, Newell's friend and fellow EMI producer, flatly stated: "If that's what Gordon thinks, then he didn't know Norman Newell or Richard Armitage very well."

As "A World Without Love" began its rise up the charts, Peter and Gordon commenced the seemingly endless series of TV, radio, and concert appearances needed to establish themselves in the public's eyes and ears. Their new manager realized a solid group was needed to go on the road with them to help fill out their folksy sound.

As a youngster, Eddie King began his education on the piano with lessons from his mother, a music teacher. "My whole life was practice, practice, practice, practice, practice. I hated it." But all the lessons left King with the ability to sight-read any music and grasp arrangements fairly quickly. Then in the late fifties, King recalled, "The whole world exploded. It was Presley and it was Gene Vincent and it was Buddy Holly." He traded the piano for a guitar and, of course, formed a band.

With none of the members blessed with a good rock voice, the group's drummer (with the wonderful *nom de plume* "Basher" Bailey) recruited Bill Green, a friend

from work. To sound more authentic, taking his cue from American heartthrobs and motorcars, Green became "Ricky Ford." Though Green fronted the combo, Eddie King was the band's maestro because "he had perfect pitch," according to Green. "He was a great musician."

The band, dubbed Ricky Ford & The Cyclones, was a hard-driving professional unit, working almost every night. Many of the London singing stars playing the Bristol area—Terry Dean, Vince Eager, Billy Fury—got solid backing from The Cyclones. With their good reputation, a call came for the band to back Peter and Gordon. When the group arrived in the afternoon for their rehearsal and soundcheck, King got his first look at the pair. "They were like very well-spoken upperclass folkies," he recalled, somewhat appalled at their stage presence, or lack thereof: "They did the whole show sittin' on *stools!*"

The rehearsal went so well an offer was made: "Their management said, 'Would you go out on the road with them and back them?' So we said, 'Yeah, but *get off the stools*, for God sakes!'" The sedentary singers did from that day onward.

The sessions for Peter and Gordon's first album took place that March at EMI's studios at Abbey Road, with Norman Newell again using arranger Geoff Love to flesh out the sound. Guitarist "Big" Jim Sullivan, who played on many of these early sessions, remembers Love providing charts for everyone with solos written out note for note, though "there was always suggestions flying about" from the musicians, who do their job—driving when needed ("Lucille," "Leave My Woman Alone"), subdued when necessary ("500 Miles," "Pretty Mary"). The duo's vocals, recorded together on one mic, were double-tracked (meaning recorded twice), and reverb was added for fullness—standard practice for the time. The album was a good snapshot of their live repertoire, combining the boys' love of fifties rock with the folk songs they'd learned off records by, among others, Joan Baez (whom Gordon idolized). Their own early attempts at songwriting, though not close to Lennon and McCartney standards, showed promise.

With the album sessions completed, on March 27th Peter had dinner with good mate John Dunbar and his new girlfriend, Marianne Faithfull. Dunbar and Faithfull had met at Cambridge, fallen in love, and would eventually marry, with Peter standing as best man. That evening (and thanks to Bill Wyman for confirming the date), Andrew Oldham was throwing a party to celebrate the sixteenth birthday of singer and actress Adrienne Posta. Peter, who was going to attend, talked John and Marianne into coming along, which, Peter now says, "may have been a mistake." It was at this party that Marianne Faithfull was introduced to Mick Jagger, who would soon not only write the song that would kick-start her music career ("As Tears Go By") but would also infamously become her lover. Peter later remarked he was a "full-service best man from hell! I get you both married *and* divorced . . ."

That very week in March, "A World Without Love" had climbed to #21 in the *New Musical Express* singles chart. Just behind it at #22, a new record appeared, "My Boy Lollipop," sung by a pretty, effervescent Jamaican singer named Millie Small. The song was an infectious slice of "blue beat" (a term that was used at the time to

refer to Jamaican music in general), and Millie was billed as "The Blue Beat Girl." Produced by Island Records founder, Chris Blackwell, who brought her to England, its offbeat ska rhythm, catchy harmonica break by Peter Hogman, and, above all, Millie's dynamite delivery, thrilled the record-buying public.

Back at Adrienne Posta's party, Peter was introduced to Millie. Intrigued, he began to see her regularly over at Chris Blackwell's apartment. "He had a flat on the Cromwell Road and Millie had the flat opposite. She would hang around at his flat with a lot of other Jamaican émigrés," Peter recalled, adding: "There was a lot of dominoes playing and a lot of dope smoking—both of which they do faster and better than anyone else in the world." Millie was unlike any other girl he had ever met, and a romance began to blossom. With both Millie and Peter out promoting their first records, they saw a lot of each other—taping *Top of the Pops* episodes together in London and appearing on the same bill in concert halls across the UK.

In 1964, Britain was certainly not a utopia when it came to race relations—the first legislation to outlaw discriminatory practices wouldn't come for another year. So the relationship did run into some obstacles from time to time, but not from Peter's family. "He liked Millie," Peter said, speaking of his father. "Obviously, going out with a black girl then was odder than it would be now . . . he certainly had nothing against it, that's for sure." How could anyone not like her? "She was full of energy," Peter's friend Barry Miles remembered. "Very bouncy and ebullient . . . a really beautiful little girl." Dr. Asher was certainly intrigued with the genetic possibilities in store. Surrounded for years with a household full of red-haired relatives, Dr. Asher once watched Peter and Millie together and remarked, according to Miles, that getting some West Indian blood in the gene pool would not only strengthen it but "get rid of those wretched red hair genes."

After the break to record their album, touring continued through April, performing at workingmen's clubs and small halls that had been booked many weeks in advance. Now that their first single was a hit, the gigs were pandemonium. Ricky Ford would front The Cyclones for a thirty-minute opening set, and then Peter and Gordon would take the stage to screams that were becoming louder with each appearance. Despite now being an act with a huge buzz and a Top Ten record in the charts, they honored every engagement, no matter how small, which, to Bill Green, was a lesson in professionalism. He recalled: "You would have thought they were at the Albert Hall, you know, at every gig. And I was always impressed with that."

In early April, Jane Asher was once again on TV's *Juke Box Jury*, listening to new records and judging their hit potential, when suddenly the opening chords to "A World Without Love" began to echo through the studio. The show's host and her fellow panelists began to smile and laugh as all eyes fell on Jane, listening to a disc written by her boyfriend and sung by her brother. After it finished playing, the seventeen-year-old actress confidently said, "It's going to be number-one, I know it is!"

By April 25th, their debut single *had* reached number-one on the UK charts, knocking The Beatles' "Can't Buy Me Love" out of the top position. "If you have to be knocked off the number-one spot," McCartney told a reporter, "it's nice to know

it's your own song." Bill Green remembered the thrilling moment while on tour, driving into Buxton: "We pulled up in the van—it must've been very early in the morning—and I ran and got the *Melody Maker* and the *New Musical Express*. And their faces, their mugshots, were all over the front, you know?

"It was an exciting experience," Green marveled, "witnessing firsthand the hysteria that was going on there. It was absolutely *crazy*." Green recalled many occasions when he and the band had to fight their way through the adoring throngs to enter their hotels.

The headliners, though, did not let it all go to their heads. "Gordon," Green recalled, "was a very, very friendly guy . . . such a nice fellow. And Peter I always found an absolute gentleman." He remembered an incident that showed the young singer's kindness and generosity: "Peter had this black overcoat, which had this lovely sort of high Tudor collar . . . I just loved this coat. And I think it was the night before I left, he actually gave it to me. So I treasured that for quite a time—wore it out in the end." The next day, Eddie King and the rest of The Cyclones were asked to stay for the upcoming tour, but not Green. Understanding what a great opportunity this was for the band, he left with no hard feelings. Though never making it big, Green wouldn't stop rockin'—still billed as Ricky Ford, he continues to perform today.

For almost all of 1963, "Beatlemania" had Britain by the throat. Puzzlingly, EMI's American subsidiary, Capitol Records, kept passing on releasing Beatles records in the States, forcing manager Brian Epstein to license the recordings to smaller independent labels, like Chicago-based Vee-Jay. Without major promotion, the discs, not surprisingly, went nowhere. Perhaps one should pause for a moment and recall what America was listening to in 1963 while England was awash in Merseybeat:

- "Sugar Shack" (Jimmy Gilmer and The Fireballs)
- "The End of the World" (Skeeter Davis)
- "Rhythm of the Rain" (The Cascades)
- "Blue Velvet" (Bobby Vinton)
- "Hey Paula" (Paul and Paula)
- "Can't Get Used to Losing You" (Andy Williams)
- "Sukiyaki" (Kyu Sakamoto)
- "I'm Leaving It Up to You" (Dale and Grace)
- "I Will Follow Him" (Little Peggy March)
- "Blame It on the Bossa Nova" (Eydie Gormé)

American rock'n'roll was certainly in the doldrums by 1963. The original white-hot flame that had fired the imagination of British youth had, for the most part, been stamped out in the country that sparked the explosion. Of the "dangerous" originators, Buddy Holly was dead, Jerry Lee Lewis was disgraced, Chuck Berry was in jail, Little Richard was in church, and Elvis Presley was in Hollywood. Yes, Motown was beginning its rise, Phil Spector was producing magical pop symphonies in the studio,

and surf music promised teens an endless summer, but mostly it was safe, controlled Frankies and Bobbys on the radio. With Kennedy's assassination that November, America could not have been more ready for a breath of fresh air.

The day after Christmas, Capitol Records finally woke up to the undeniable future and released "I Want to Hold Your Hand," The Beatles' fifth single, onto the American airwaves. The group landed in New York on February 7, 1964, and two days later, after performing on *The Ed Sullivan Show*, The Beatles conquered America. It was a complete and total sea change, musically and culturally. Anything associated with Lennon and McCartney was assured to get airplay, and Peter and Gordon were certainly poised to take advantage of this situation.

Though not remembered by most, at the exact same time that Capitol Records released Peter and Gordon's debut single, "A World Without Love" was also released in the United States by Philadelphia crooner Bobby Rydell on the Parkway label. He had toured England in December 1963, sharing the stage with The Beatles on a few dates. According to Rydell, his manager had befriended Brian Epstein, who offered the song with the pledge that it was unrecorded—which, at that time, was correct. Peter, though, is doubtful: "My understanding was he'd heard our version and immediately covered it. You see, if Brian had a version, it couldn't have had a bridge. That bridge really was written shortly before the session." Adding to Peter's suspicion is the fact that Parkway's owner, Allen Klein, had copies of England's Top Ten hits sent to his office weekly. Rydell performed the song May 10, 1964, on *The Ed Sullivan Show*, but Peter and Gordon's version was quickly overtaking Rydell's as, almost overnight, the scrubbed, Brylcreemed crowd had been deemed passé. Ironically, Rydell's last hit—the prophetically entitled "Forget Him"—inspired Lennon and McCartney to write "She Loves You."

By May 16th, "A World Without Love" had reached number-one in the United States, making the duo the first British group after The Beatles to top the charts on both sides of the Atlantic. Peter and Gordon had now become worldwide pop stars. Gordon couldn't wait to claim this mantle, Westminster be damned. Peter, well into his studies at King's College, went to have a talk with his tutor, the esteemed Professor Vesey: "I explained to him what we'd been doing and what had happened, and I said, 'Now it's number-one in America, and they really want us to go over there and do *The Ed Sullivan Show* and tour and everything, and I'd really like to do it; it sounds like fun. And would you consider giving me a year's leave of absence?' To pursue this, you know, foolishness. And he did. I'm not sure what I would have done if he'd said 'No.'" He pondered this for a moment: "Hmmm . . . 'Cause I'd done two years of philosophy—I didn't want to waste it!" Students at English universities stayed in school until their coursework was finished; leaving for a spell was simply not done. But kindly Professor Vesey agreed to bend the rules for Peter: "He said, 'Okay, come back within a year and you can take up where you left off.' But tragically, he's still awaiting my return."

Dr. Waller gave Gordon even less time: "My father said, 'You've got six months, then. Otherwise, you're gonna go back and you're gonna get your A levels and you're

gonna go to university.' 'Okay, Dad, fine.' Well, six months later I was, like, buying him a Rolls Royce."

Noel Gay Artists got to work promoting their new clients. One of Armitage's early deals was to put Peter and Gordon into a quickie musical film to capitalize on their chart-topping success. *Just For You* was basically a series of music clips introduced by British actor and radio DJ Sam Costa. His comments, all delivered from bed, are painfully unfunny, and the musical acts—save for Peter and Gordon, Millie Small, and Freddie and The Dreamers—are completely forgettable (though future Yes vocalist Jon Anderson can be spotted as a member of The Warriors). With their Lennon and McCartney–penned hit being too costly to license, Peter and Gordon instead performed two of their own compositions ("Soft as the Dawn" and "Leave Me Alone"), which, unfortunately, are also fairly forgettable. To help get the most out of this low-budget production, producer Jacques De Lane Lea recycled the Peter and Gordon footage almost two years later in an American release entitled *Disk-O-Tek Holiday*—equally bad, though it at least tried to have a plot.

The last week of May saw the pair, backed again by The Cyclones, second-billed on a Rolling Stones tour. Gordon saw a kindred spirit in Brian Jones (then the Stones' driving force), whose taste for hellraising and womanizing was on par with his own. The two became close, with Brian giving Gordon some blues harmonica tips and eventually inviting both him and Peter to Rolling Stones' recording sessions.

Only a week after their debut disc hit number-one, Peter and Gordon rushed back into Abbey Road to cut their second single, "Nobody I Know." McCartney, pleased with getting "A World Without Love" to the top of the charts, wanted first crack at the follow-up and presented the song to the duo "without any delays or nagging," Peter recalled. With harmony heroes The Everly Brothers firmly in mind, McCartney crafted a melody easy to stick in the head of every youngster who heard it, including the descending guitar riff that punctuated the track. As with "A World Without Love," McCartney smoothly switches from a major key in the verse to a minor key for the bridge—all told, a perfect little pop confection. (And, as with "A World Without Love," due to a longstanding agreement, "Nobody I Know" was credited once again to Lennon and McCartney, though Lennon really had no hand in either song's creation.) As Richard Armitage finalized plans for Peter and Gordon's initial trip to the United States, Columbia released the single on May 29th. Their American label, Capitol, quickly put promotional copies of the new record into the hands of DJs around the country in preparation for the tour and rushed it into stores on June 15th, along with the pair's first American album.

For Peter and Gordon, The Beatles, and every other British act, America was, as the title of one of Chuck Berry's songs proclaimed, "The Promised Land." "America was the country we all idolized," Peter recalled, remembering the Yanks that Britons were introduced to in the postwar years. "They had these perfect teeth and huge cars and gigantic refrigerators and great clothes. And, of course, they had rock'n'roll, which is the music we all loved." Lennon idolized Elvis and Chuck Berry, McCart-

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ney worshiped Little Richard and Buddy Holly, The Rolling Stones were besotted by Howlin' Wolf and Muddy Waters, and Peter and Gordon adored The Everly Brothers. "The English music scene was *entirely* based on our admiration for American music and how great it was," Peter admitted. "But it seemed terribly far away. America was another world . . ."