

6 Revolution

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After five years of uninterrupted success, in which their achievements as composers, recording artists, and performers had attracted unprecedented levels of attention and acclaim, the Beatles entered 1968 in somewhat uncertain mood. Delighted with the critical impact of *Sgt. Pepper*, confused by the consequences of Brian Epstein's death, startled at the overwhelmingly negative reactions to *Magical Mystery Tour*, and separated through their growing involvements in a number of (often film-related) projects,¹ the group – for the first time in their career – seemed to have temporarily mislaid the sense of direction and purpose that had previously distinguished it. This lack of unity gradually became so apparent that it became the defining characteristic of the Beatles' music throughout 1968.

While it was always true that historical and cultural conditions helped to implicitly shape the Beatles' output, the dramatic and divisive events of 1968 created a political context of fragmentation, argument, disunity, confrontation, and disillusionment, which inevitably – and explicitly – found its way into their music. These events included US escalation of the war in Vietnam, following the Tet Offensive launched by the Viet Cong at the start of the year; Czechoslovakia's election of Alexander Dubček as its leader, and its subsequent invasion by the Soviet Union; the assassinations of Martin Luther King and Robert Kennedy; the increasing numbers of student-led demonstrations, rallies, and occupations across Europe; the violent police response to protests at the Democrat convention in Chicago; Irish Catholic marches leading to street battles in Londonderry and military intervention in Northern Ireland; Conservative MP Enoch Powell's "river of blood" speech and the focus on anti-immigration policies to which it led; the punitive response to the iconic black power salute given by 200-meter medalists Tommie Smith and John Carlos at the Mexico Olympics; and the election of Richard Nixon as US President. Far from being seen as unconnected incidents, these and other events were widely regarded as constituents of a cultural shift through which challenges to the established order were no longer tolerated, as they had been earlier in the decade, but were met by a determined resistance to maintain (or reclaim) lost ground:

[112] By the eventful year of 1968, this phase of exhaustion and loss of momentum, this "fading into reality" of the collective dreams of the fifties

and sixties, this rightward swing and the beginnings of transition to a different age, could be seen all over the world . . . The speed with which, in just a few years, the American Dream, the most powerful image of the twentieth century, had collapsed into nightmare, had left the world quite stunned . . . By 1968 there were many other examples of disillusionment overtaking the dreams which had been so conspicuous over the previous decade.²

It was equally true, of course, that the Beatles' own experiences, circumstances, and emotions frequently and inevitably colored their songs. In 1968, there were four specific and significant developments which impacted on the personal context of their music. The first (partly to fill the vacuum caused by Epstein's death) was the formal creation, in January, of Apple, the group's own recording, management, and production company. Second, in February the group decamped to India, for several weeks' intensive tuition in transcendental meditation at the Maharishi Mahesh Yogi's ashram in Rishikesh. Third, John Lennon left his wife, Cynthia, for the Japanese conceptual artist Yoko Ono. Fourth, Paul McCartney's five-year romance with actress Jane Asher ended, shortly after he met New York photographer and future wife, Linda Eastman.

The unforeseen combination of their disrupted personal lives and a turbulent political climate effectively shaped much of the music created by the Beatles throughout the year. Moreover, it raised the prospect of a future in which the four Beatles themselves might not continue as a group. At the start of the year, this was nothing more than a remote possibility; by the end of the year, it had become, for many observers, a probability.

Preparation: *Yellow Submarine*

In 1963, United Artists had contracted with Brian Epstein to produce three Beatles films. *A Hard Day's Night* and *Help!* (both directed by Richard Lester) had been hugely successful, but by 1967 the Beatles, reluctant to submit themselves to the demands of movie-making and largely unimpressed by the potential scripts they had been offered, were unwilling to agree to United Artists' demands for the promised third film. The solution, negotiated between Brian Epstein and Al Brodax (producer of the US television cartoon series *The Beatles*) was that the group could fulfill their obligation by cooperating in the production of a full-length cartoon inspired by the lyrics of "Yellow Submarine." Dismayed by the prospect, the group distanced themselves from the project, refused to supply any new music, and offered only previously rejected songs for the soundtrack. These were George Harrison's "It's All Too Much" and "Only A Northern Song,"

Paul McCartney's "All Together Now" (all recorded during the *Sgt. Pepper* sessions in April–May 1967), and John Lennon's "Hey Bulldog" (recorded in February 1968).

All four songs were dismissed, by critics and by the Beatles themselves, as trivial and unimportant examples of their music. The two compositions by Harrison have been described, respectively, as "little more than formless shrieking"³ and "a self-indulgent dirge . . . quickly set aside and forgotten."⁴ In its obvious haste to reproduce "the repetitive chant of a children's game,"⁵ the nursery-rhyme-based "All Together Now" showed little attention to either words or music; and John Lennon remarked, "I knocked off 'Hey Bulldog' . . . it's a good sounding record that means nothing."⁶

Given such adverse comments and the group's transparent lack of interest in the film and its music, it was ironic that, after viewing some early footage, they were impressed enough to agree to appear in its final scene; and following the positive response to its release in July 1968,⁷ they engaged in a reappraisal of its merits, thereby allowing themselves to be rather more associated with its unexpected, and enduring, status:

The film is a masterpiece and it has opened up new and undreamed of horizons for animation. It bears seeing several times for its content to be fully appreciated, and it has given such an impetus to the full-length animation cinema that it is already a classic.⁸

As a result, the music was also reassessed, so much so that the songs came to be identified as early and influential examples of contemporary musical genres: psychedelia ("All Together Now"), blues-based rock ("Hey Bulldog"), heavy metal ("It's All Too Much"), and electronic ("Only a Northern Song"). However, when the soundtrack album was released (on the group's Apple label) in January of the following year (by which time critical scrutiny had switched to the group's double album, *The Beatles*, released in November 1968), it was noticeable that some of the initial apprehension about the project still persisted: uniquely, *Yellow Submarine's* sleeve notes, written by the Beatles' press agent, Derek Taylor, said nothing about the music it contained, but reproduced, in full, a review of *The Beatles* that had appeared in the *Observer*. His explanation that he "wanted the people who bought the *Yellow Submarine* album to buy and enjoy the really wonderful *The Beatles* album"⁹ was seen by many as a tacit admission by the group that it remained less than satisfied by its musical contributions. As a result, *Yellow Submarine* occupied, and continues to occupy, a curious and somewhat uneasy position in the group's musical history.

Evolution: “Lady Madonna” to “Hey Jude”

Much of the Beatles’ impact in 1963 and 1964 was achieved through their remarkable sequence of successful hit singles (eight, from “Love Me Do” in October 1962 to “I Feel Fine” in November 1964). By 1968, the configurations of popular music had been transformed (largely as a result of the Beatles themselves) and two related trajectories had emerged – pop (built around singles) and rock (built around albums). However, there still existed a huge demand for Beatles singles, particularly in the USA, which the group was loath to ignore; and a week-long session in February at the Abbey Road studios produced four new songs, from which its next single would be selected.

“Lady Madonna,” written and sung by Paul McCartney, was a stated attempt by the group to mimic the boogie style of New Orleans rock and roll, popularized by Fats Domino in the 1950s. Utilizing the same piano riff that had introduced jazz trumpeter Humphrey Lyttleton’s “Bad Penny Blues” (also, coincidentally, produced by George Martin) in 1956, the song fused traditional musical forms with an unexpected, contemporary lyric that paid tribute to the plight of the working woman. As McCartney acknowledged, it was a deliberate exercise:

“Lady Madonna” was me sitting down at the piano trying to write a bluesy boogie-woogie thing. I got my left hand doing an arpeggio thing with the chord, an ascending boogie-woogie left hand, then a descending right hand. I always liked that, the juxtaposition of a line going down meeting a line going up.¹⁰

Although “Lady Madonna” was chosen as the A side of the next single, the inclusion of George Harrison’s “The Inner Light” on the B side was perhaps the more significant decision, breaking as it did the group’s exclusive reliance on Lennon-McCartney compositions on both sides of its singles. Harrison had created the song’s instrumental track a few weeks earlier with various Indian musicians at EMI’s studios in Bombay, during his recording of the film score for *Wonderwall*. The lyrics were adapted from Juan Mascaró’s translation of a poem in Lao-Tse’s *Tao Te Ching*. As with “Lady Madonna,” it was the extraordinary synthesis of separate musical and lyrical traditions (in this case, Indian instrumentation, Chinese philosophy, and Western popular music) that distinguished the song. Harrison was well aware that its innovative structure might deter traditional pop audiences – “I think the song went unnoticed by most people because I was getting a bit ‘out of it’ as far as Western popular music was concerned”¹¹ – and its appearance on the single was a bold and unequivocal indication of the ways in which the Beatles were confronting conventional assumptions about their responsibilities as musicians.

The other two songs were compositions by John Lennon. “Hey Bulldog,” as discussed above, was immediately discarded until it was used to complete the allocation of new tracks for *Yellow Submarine*; it also has the distinction of being the song most quickly recorded by the Beatles after their decision, in August 1966, to stop touring in order to concentrate on studio work. That it took less than ten hours from start to finish says much about the group’s estimation of its relative importance. Lennon described the other song, “Across the Universe,” as one over which he had little control, and whose origins were more magical than musical:

I was lying next to my first wife in bed . . . she’d gone to sleep and I’d kept hearing these words over and over, flowing like an endless stream . . . I don’t know where it came from . . . such an extraordinary meter and I can never repeat it! It’s not a matter of craftsmanship; it wrote itself. It drove me out of bed . . . I went downstairs and I couldn’t get to sleep until I put it on paper.¹²

It is, without doubt, one of Lennon’s and the Beatles’ loveliest melodies and most thoughtful lyrics; Mellers noted how “the flux of the visible universe – evoked in the beautiful poem – is timelessly stilled in a sublimation of folk and country-western music.”¹³ It was, therefore, puzzling that the song was not released until December 1969, when it was included on a compilation charity album, *No One’s Gonna Change Our World*, for the World Wildlife Fund; and it did not appear on a Beatles’ album until *Let It Be* in May 1970.

Although Apple had been established at the start of the year, the “Lady Madonna”/“The Inner Light” single was released, in March, on the Parlophone label. To publicly launch the new label (its other artists included James Taylor, Jackie Lomax, and Mary Hopkin) in August, the Beatles determined that their next single should be especially memorable. While visiting Cynthia Lennon and her son Julian, following the collapse of the Lennons’ marriage in May, Paul McCartney had begun to incorporate his reaction to their situation into a broader songwriting strategy:

I started with the idea “Hey Jules,” which was Julian, don’t make it bad, take a sad song and make it better. Hey, try and deal with this terrible thing . . . And I got this idea for a song, “Hey Jude,” and made up a few little things so I had the idea by the time I got there. I changed it to “Jude” because I thought that sounded a bit better.¹⁴

But while its inspiration was unusual, it was the song’s construction that attracted more interest. At a time when the typical single was rarely longer than two or three minutes in length, the seven minutes and eleven seconds of “Hey Jude” (including a four-minute closing chorus) were quite exceptional, and, like so much of the Beatles’ music, provided models which others were quick to follow.¹⁵ “Hey Jude” also became the Beatles’ biggest-selling single.

On the B side of the record was the first of three tracks bearing the title “Revolution” that the group would record that year. Written by John Lennon, it signaled his frustration and resentment at the Beatles’ commercial obligation to avoid overt political comment. Envious of Bob Dylan’s ability to engage in meaningful contemporary debates in song, Lennon’s politicization had accelerated since his relationship with Yoko Ono, and the death of Brian Epstein had removed the last serious restraint on his desire to participate in “serious” forms of discourse. These factors, set alongside the student protests sweeping Europe and the emergence of a counterculture fighting for the withdrawal of US troops from Vietnam, encouraged Lennon to write, and the Beatles to record, the group’s first explicitly political song, as he later explained:

I wanted it out as a single: as a statement of the Beatles’ position on Vietnam and the Beatles’ position on revolution. For years, on the Beatles’ tours, Brian Epstein had stopped us from saying anything about Vietnam or the war. And he wouldn’t allow questions about it. But on one of the last tours, I said, “I am going to answer about the war. We can’t ignore it.” I *absolutely* wanted the Beatles to say something about the war.¹⁶

What the Beatles did say about the war was rather confusing, as the lyrics ranged across endorsements and denials of violence as a legitimate tactic, veered between the merits of political and personal change, and failed to identify any specific ideological solution. The sense of confusion was added to by the instrumental combination of two distorted lead guitars and an unusually heavy drum track, which emphasized the atmosphere of discord and friction both musically and contextually.

What the song also demonstrated was the astonishing evolution in the personal and professional career of the group over the previous twelve months. The contrast between the married family man calmly reassuring audiences that “love is all you need” through the Summer of Love, and the adulterous political activist screaming of the necessity to “change the world” in the Year of the Barricades, could not have been better exemplified than it was here.

Revolution: *The Beatles*

Within weeks of its release in November 1968, the double album *The Beatles* had been unofficially, but effectively, re-christened as The White Album, the name derived from its plain, all-white cover, designed by Richard Hamilton. Regarded by some as the group’s finest,¹⁷ it was certainly the longest, containing more than ninety minutes of music, mostly written during

the weeks in Rishikesh earlier in the year. It was recorded over a four-month period from June to early October, but its significance was not limited to, or even concentrated on, its musical properties. The tensions and interactions between three distinct, yet related, components – narrative, aesthetic, and musical – gave *The Beatles* an immediate momentum and lasting reputation.

Narrative

Lennon, McCartney, and Harrison had each returned from Rishikesh with several new songs that they were keen to record. However, the fact that they were largely individual compositions rather than collaborative efforts led to intense competition for their inclusion on the new album. Since their withdrawal from live performance, they were no longer able to rely on their participation in a demanding touring schedule to bind them together as colleagues; instead, they became competitors. In addition, the increasing number of invitations and opportunities to engage in solo projects through 1968 (including McCartney's work as record producer for Mary Hopkin, the Bonzo Dog Band and the Black Dyke Mills Band; Harrison's musical collaborations with Cream and Jackie Lomax; and Lennon's adaptation of *In His Own Write* for the National Theatre and his *You Are Here* exhibition at London's Robert Fraser Gallery) and the lack of agreement when they did engage in shared projects (such as the visit to India, when one by one the Beatles became suspicious of the Maharishi Mahesh Yogi's motives, leaving George Harrison as the only remaining follower) further undermined any sense of common purpose. Given the personal upheavals and professional reorientations in which the four were involved, it was hardly surprising that there was an absence of agreement about, and throughout, the making of *The Beatles*. In this respect, *The Beatles* was not an album by the Beatles, but a collection of thirty separate songs by four performers who happened (for the time being, at least) to be members of the same group, but who showed little willingness to cooperate with one another. George Harrison recognized the change in emphasis at that time:

There was also a lot more individual stuff and, for the first time, people were accepting that it *was* individual. I remember having three studios operating at the same time: Paul was doing some overdubs in one, John was in another, and I was recording some horns or something in a third . . . What else do you do when you've got so many songs and you want to get rid of them so that you can write more? There was a lot of ego in the band, and there were a lot of songs that maybe should have been elbowed.¹⁸

But whatever hostility might have been created by musical disagreements and rivalries, the unease was significantly compounded by the constant

presence of Yoko Ono during the recording sessions. From the beginning of their career, the Beatles had vigorously enforced a policy that excluded any and all outsiders from the recording studio: the presence of girlfriends and wives, family and friends, even manager Brian Epstein, was strictly prohibited in order to allow the group, and producer George Martin, to concentrate uninterruptedly on its music.¹⁹ Lennon's unilateral decision to encourage Ono's attendance at every session, even providing a bed for her in the studio, was unsurprisingly seen by McCartney, Harrison, and Starr, not only as a personal affront, but also as an explicit abandonment of their consensual work ethos. And while they may have been prepared to tolerate this as a temporary, if bizarre, inconvenience, the fact that she was invited to contribute musically to "The Continuing Story of Bungalow Bill" and "Revolution 9" was a serious and lasting blow to the unity the four had long shared. Indeed, this was re-emphasized later in the year by the release of John Lennon and Yoko Ono's *Two Virgins* album, and by their participation in BBC's *The Rolling Stones Rock 'n' Roll Circus*, in which they performed songs (including "Yer Blues") as members of an impromptu group with Eric Clapton, Mitch Mitchell, and Keith Richards.

As the recording of *The Beatles* progressed, it became increasingly evident that the group's arguments were far more than local disagreements, but reflected fundamental and evident divisions of approach and ambition: "To a man, the staff working with the group inside Abbey Road confirm this. The sessions were becoming tangibly tense and fraught, and tempers were being lost more easily and more frequently than ever before."²⁰ In mid-July, studio engineer Geoff Emerick, who had worked with the Beatles since 1963, departed in response to the group's incessant quarrels. And when, in August, McCartney's criticism of Ringo Starr's contribution to "Back in the USSR" led the drummer to walk out, it was perceived by many to be an unavoidable outcome of the sessions' personal and professional turmoil, as Starr admitted:

I felt I was playing like shit. And those three were really getting on. I had this feeling that nobody loved me. I felt horrible. So I said to myself, "What am I doing here? Those three are getting along so well and I'm not even playing well." That was madness, so I went away on holiday to sort things out. I don't know, maybe I was just paranoid. To play in a band you have to trust each other.²¹

He allowed himself to be persuaded to return two weeks later, but the fact that one of the four had (albeit temporarily) left the group signaled a decisive moment in the history of the Beatles, as was confirmed by John Lennon:

After Brian [Epstein] died we collapsed. We broke up then. We made the double album, the set . . . it's like if you took each track off and gave it all mine and all George's . . . it was just me and a backing group, Paul and a backing group . . . and I enjoyed it, but we broke up then.²²

The photographs and drawings of Yoko Ono that were included on the album's lyric sheet, and the formal, printed acknowledgment to Linda Eastman (who had taken many of the photographs), were the final confirmation that with the album, the Beatles had engaged in a radical restructuring of obligations and relationships, whose repercussions would govern much, if not all, of their future careers.

Aesthetic

The Beatles divided critics more than any other of the group's albums; but this division was less to do with disagreements about quality than with confusions about the aesthetics, or cultures, of the album itself. On the one hand, it was described as "unsurpassed . . . seamless gear changes and bomb bursts of jaw-dropping brilliance";²³ "unquestionably glorious . . . a rich tapestry of musical textures";²⁴ and "a musical outpouring of overwhelming quantity, richness and diversity."²⁵

On the other hand, it was seen as "something of a failure . . . it consisted of rough sketches of songs";²⁶ "without the necessary spark to lift many of the songs out of the ordinary . . . a collection of bits and pieces";²⁷ and "songs or song fragments [that] reeked of the argument and self-indulgence that had gone into their making."²⁸ Whether positive or negative, all assessments of *The Beatles* drew attention to its fragmentary aesthetic. However, while some complained about the lack of a coherent style, others recognized this as the album's *raison d'être*.

In fact, *The Beatles* has been designated as popular music's first post-modern album.²⁹ Within postmodern theory and practice, it has become axiomatic that the only certainty is that there are no longer any certainties, and, in this respect, the album was an early example of the rejection of constant principles, determination to transgress and combine creative codes, and repudiation of familiar systems of classification that characterized artistic production in the last decades of the twentieth century. The strategies utilized by the Beatles included bricolage (multiple quotation from earlier styles and periods), fragmentation (paradox, contradiction, incongruity), pastiche (imitation of another work, artist, or genre), parody (imitation for comic or satirical effect), reflexivity (self-conscious reference or attribution to itself), plurality (the absence of a single preferred reading), irony (the deliberate juxtaposition of meaning), exaggeration (abnormal enlargement or intensification), anti-representation (the deflection of attempts to define

“reality”), and meta-art (the admission that all art is constructed). In its design, production, and execution, *The Beatles* employed all these elements (many of which had been present in much of the group’s previous work) to fashion a contemporary text whose music(s) described the present, recalled the past, and anticipated the future.

The full significance of these tendencies was often overlooked, even by those who drew attention to them. Kozinn’s comment that the album was “a fascinating compendium of compositional and performance styles that shows how wide-ranging the Beatles’ musical imaginations were,”³⁰ and O’Grady’s observation that “aside from a frequent preoccupation with satire and irony of various kinds, the album fails to demonstrate any particular theme or conceptual reference point,”³¹ were incomplete in that the features they identified were seen as interesting and incidental rather than definitive. The culture of postmodernism may have constituted a new and unfamiliar trajectory in 1968, but it was one which the Beatles were well positioned to embrace and exploit:

By employing the disruptive aesthetics of postmodern art, the White Album calls attention away from itself as a source of meaning and instead clears a space where readers can engage the issues of what popular music is and what role it plays. It does not hold up a unified, understandable, interpretable theme, but blurs any possible theme, making it impossible to grasp its essential motivation . . . The album deconstructs itself, pop music, the Beatles themselves, and their own musical history.³²

Music

While its extraordinary compilation of musical styles and inflections made the album impossible to classify as a coherent whole, there were, nevertheless, sufficient principal musical constituents within each song to permit the tentative and broad categorizations set out in Table 6.1. These classifications can only be indicative, since many of the songs contained elements drawn from different genres, presented startling combinations of tempo and delivery, and blurred boundaries between past and present musical approaches. Paul McCartney revealed that this was quite intentional, when he explained: “We felt it was time to step back because that is what we wanted to do. You can still make good music without going forward.”³³

Nowhere was this better demonstrated than in the four rock and roll-based songs; just as “Lady Madonna” had been inspired by the compositions and vocal style of Fats Domino, so McCartney’s “Birthday,” “Helter Skelter,” “Why Don’t We Do It in the Road,” and Lennon’s “Everybody’s Got Something to Hide Except Me and My Monkey” reproduced the insistent rhythms, vocal shrieks, and alliterative and onomatopoeic lyrics of two more of the group’s early mentors, Little Richard and Larry Williams. While

Table 6.1 *Major musical sources of The Beatles*

Folk	Blackbird; I Will; Mother Nature's Son
Rock	Savoy Truffle; While My Guitar Gently Weeps; I'm So Tired
Rock and Roll	Why Don't We Do It in the Road; Birthday; Everybody's Got Something to Hide Except Me and My Monkey; Helter Skelter
Ska	Ob-La-Di Ob-La-Da
Psychedelia	Glass Onion; Sexy Sadie
Vaudeville	Martha My Dear; Honey Pie
Country	Don't Pass Me By; Rocky Raccoon
Doo-Wop	Happiness Is a Warm Gun; Revolution 1
Ballad	Long Long Long; Julia
Rhythm and Blues	Back in the USSR
Avant Garde	Revolution 9
Blues	Yer Blues
Nursery Rhyme	Dear Prudence; The Continuing Story of Bungalow Bill; Piggies; Cry Baby Cry; Good Night
Miscellaneous	Wild Honey Pie

those songs derived from the group's adolescence in the 1950s, there was a set of five – “Cry Baby Cry,” “Piggies,” “The Continuing Story of Bungalow Bill,” “Dear Prudence,” and “Good Night” – whose origins lay in the memories of their childhoods in the 1940s. McCartney's perennial liking for the legacy of vaudeville and music hall, and for its reinterpretation by Fred Astaire in his stage and screen musicals of the 1930s, was evidenced in “Martha My Dear” and “Honey Pie”; and “Rocky Raccoon” and “Don't Pass Me By” (the first composition of Ringo Starr) revisited the traditions of the country ballad.

But while these songs generally recalled past musical styles, their specific creation often lay in current and spontaneous events. “Helter Skelter” was a deliberate attempt to surpass the renowned volume and excitement of the Who; “Dear Prudence” was written for one of their Rishikesh companions, Prudence Farrow; “Martha My Dear” was about McCartney's Old English sheepdog, Martha; “Good Night” was composed as a lullaby for Lennon's son Julian; and “Sexy Sadie” chronicled the group's disillusionment with the Maharishi Mahesh Yogi. Musically and lyrically, the album was thus able to incorporate past and present concerns not only between songs but also within them.

No less important was the contribution of specific friends and peers to several of the songs. The West Coast harmony vocals on “Back in the USSR” were added to the track following the group's association with Beach Boy Mike Love at Rishikesh; “Rocky Raccoon” was also written in Rishikesh, with the assistance of the British folk singer-songwriter Donovan; “Revolution 9” was a joint attempt by Lennon and Ono to translate her *avant-garde* art into *avant-garde* music; and the lead guitar on “While My Guitar Gently Weeps”

was played by Eric Clapton, who was invited by George Harrison in order to provide a distinctive guitar solo and as a mark of their growing friendship.

Following the largely positive reaction to “Revolution”, the group were able to use several of the album’s songs to refer – directly or indirectly – to the broader political context. “Back in the USSR” was an oblique comment on the continuing Cold War and Russian occupation of Czechoslovakia; “Blackbird” was a response to the ongoing racial tensions in the USA; “Happiness is a Warm Gun” was inspired by the spiraling gun culture in the same country; and “Piggies” was a savage attack on the corporate greed of contemporary capitalism. And finally, two songs were intensely personal statements that revealed much about their authors: “Long Long Long” was “a yearning, beautiful song . . . an oasis of calm and faith”³⁴ recording the happiness that came with George Harrison’s discovery of God; and “Julia” (with lyrics adapted from Kahlil Gibran’s *Sand and Foam*) was John Lennon’s song to his dead mother, which managed to “evoke through music a language that is deeper than words.”³⁵

Although double albums were still comparatively rare, *The Beatles* was not popular music’s first,³⁶ and there were doubts about its sales potential. In addition, George Martin was reluctant to release so much of the group’s music at one time, especially given his lack of enthusiasm about some of the songs. However, his objections were overruled by the Beatles’ absolute and unanimous insistence that their music should be presented in its entirety, and *The Beatles* became the group’s biggest-selling album.

Redirection

Although 1968 brought with it an exceptional twelve months of political revolution, professional reconstruction, and personal reorientation, the Beatles had by no means resolved these issues by the end of the year. The repercussions of Lennon’s controversial relationship with Yoko Ono, McCartney’s decisive involvement with Linda Eastman, Harrison’s deepening interest in Eastern religion, Starr’s feelings of despondency, and their *de facto* managerless state were only magnified by the failure of Apple to meet its original objectives: “By the fall of 1968 Apple was slowly rotting away, losing a reported £20,000 a week from gross mismanagement and employee pilfering.”³⁷

As the year closed with no satisfactory resolution to these problems and differences in sight (and with the emergence of new difficulties, following Lennon’s arrest and conviction in October for possession of cannabis), it was apparent that the direction along which the Beatles had traveled for the previous several years was no longer viable. The temporary uncertainty

present at the start of the year seemed to have relentlessly spiraled into a permanent discomfort. While the diversity of the music they produced in 1968 indicated a number of plausible alternative trajectories, both individual and collective, the absence of any common agreement about preferred destinations had created a sense of distance and unease within the group, whose outcome could not be predicted.