

The Cambridge Companion to the Beatles

From *Please Please Me* to *Abbey Road*, this collection of essays tells the fascinating story of the Beatles – the creation of the band, their musical influences, and their cultural significance, with emphasis on their genesis and practices as musicians, songwriters, and recording artists. Through detailed biographical and album analyses, the book uncovers the background of each band member and provides expansive readings of the band's music.

- Traces the group's creative output from their earliest recordings and throughout their career
- Pays particular attention to the social and historical factors which contributed to the creation of the band
- Investigates the Beatles' uniquely enduring musical legacy and cultural power

Clearly organized into three sections, covering Background, Works, and History and Influence, the *Companion* is ideal for course usage, and is also a must-read for all Beatles fans.

The Cambridge Companion to the

BEATLES

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EDITED BY
Kenneth Womack



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For Kenneth E. Zimmerman (1913–2008)

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Foreword

I believe in tomorrow: the posthumous life of the Beatles

There is no end to the making of many books about the Beatles, obviously – and I’m not simply talking about this one. The biographies of the band just get fatter, as do the biographies of its individual members. Critical studies proliferate. And it’s not merely books. Magazine and newspaper articles, blog posts and tributes of various sorts multiply endlessly. The more we know the more we need to know.

Not only do the Beatles still seem to be everywhere, but they still seem to matter so much. Paul McCartney’s presence at the Grammy Awards ceremony amid a host of more contemporary superstars in 2009 elicited constant comments from the stage, as if being in the presence of a Beatle titillated even the most jaded celebrities of the music industry. McCartney, meanwhile, has reincarnated himself as the Fireman and has stormed an ever-welcoming media, performing in hip contexts and even hosting a series of “fireside chats” – how perfectly appropriate – on satellite radio. The tabloid media mark the currents of the sixty-six-year-old cute Beatle’s romantic life with undiminished zeal and glee, and he’s given them much to work with.

John Lennon, of course, remains a figure of enormous regard and significance, both musical and political. References to him dot the pop culture landscape, while Yoko Ono has become an avatar of the downtown dance music scene in New York. Martin Scorsese, meanwhile, works on a documentary about the life of George Harrison. Even Ringo’s unwillingness to sign autographs for fans makes international news. *Love*, the Cirque du Soleil’s homage to the Beatles’ music, continues to be a long-running hit in Las Vegas. As I write, the Beatles are soon to have their own version of the Rock Band video game. The question of when the Beatles’ songs will be available for digital download is one of the biggest unanswered questions in what remains of the music industry. And, on the academic front, enterprising students will soon be able to take a degree in Beatle Studies, a truly inevitable development.

So what does this all amount to? Let’s all agree that the Beatles’ music will last, and deserves to. If that weren’t true, I genuinely believe that no one would care about the band. (Oh, okay, let’s simply say “many fewer people.” In the age of the internet, an audience exists for everything.) But in a turnaround of Gore Vidal’s famed comment (about the Cockettes, if you must know) that sometimes having no talent simply isn’t enough, it’s

also true that having enormous talent isn't enough to sustain the level of attention that the Beatles have. So what are the reasons for our ongoing fascination with them?

In one sense the Beatles are like a young artist who died tragically before his time. As diverse and experimental as the band's albums are, they serve as sketches that succeeding generations of musicians have set out in one way or another to complete. Robert Fripp once told me in an interview that one of the inspirations for King Crimson was the notion that the Beatles had abandoned their *Sgt. Pepper* period without fully exhausting the musical ideas they had set in motion. It's not hard to think of bands like Radiohead or Wilco in similar terms, picking up on and pursuing directions the Beatles had suggested but never fully defined.

If the Beatles as the inspiration for progressive rock disturbs more than excites you, perhaps the dozens of power-pop bands who learned wit, energy and concision from Beatles songs will please you more. The Beatles, of course, took their own lessons from Buddy Holly, Chuck Berry and Little Richard, but everyone who came after took their cues in how to create smart, melodic rock and roll from the Fab Four. And can enough be said about George Harrison's exploration of Indian music? Singer-songwriters, too, who, needless to say, owe their greatest debt to Bob Dylan, often reference the Beatles. The songs on *Rubber Soul* and *Revolver* rank in importance with Dylan's early records in creating a model for the enigmatic self-examinations that would follow in the decades ahead.

It's often pointed out that, short as it was, the Beatles' career was in some senses ideal. The band never were tempted to hang on past their expiration date, cashing in on their audience's longing for days gone by and creating lucrative, mediocre music. Such a grim result was not their only potential destiny, of course. Dylan, for all of his patchy spots over the past forty years, has demonstrated that it is possible for a rock and roll musician to create vital, important work well into their sixties. Neil Young provides an example of that as well.

But it is much easier for solo artists to accomplish that sort of longevity than it is for bands. The creative and personal balance required to sustain a successful band is so delicate that it's far more remarkable that bands ever manage to stay together than that they break up. For all the dramatic posturing, sniping, business machinations and personal bitterness that characterized the Beatles' split, that old cliché "creative differences" provides as honest an explanation as any other for their estrangement from one another. Probably more honest, in fact. Paul wanted to get back. John wanted to move ahead into uncharted territory with Yoko. George wanted to record his own songs. And Ringo just wanted everyone to get along.

I've written elsewhere about how the Beatles story has the arc of a fairytale with a heartbreaking ending, and that's part of the emotional reason why the story of their rise and fall repeats itself so often. Every time it is told, all of the joy, optimism and sheer fun of the band's early days communicate with exquisite delight. And every time, the ending comes too soon, too soon! And too sad. Lennon spoke of the Beatles' breakup as a divorce, and the band's fans, it turns out, are the children of that split, even when they were born decades after it happened. Everyone who learns to love the Beatles enters their narrative, and travels that not-so-long and winding road with them. Every time you hear the familiar story again, you yearn for a different ending, for something truer to the spirit of the band's music, something more heartening. And, in the end . . .

I accepted the kind offer to write this Foreword mostly because I never turn down an opportunity to write about the Beatles – my own version, I suppose, of that desire to return to the primal scene of my own intellectual and musical interests to see if somehow, miraculously, the story could end more happily. I read this book with great pleasure, struck both by how consistently deep and substantive it is as well as how eminently readable.

The Beatles have had an extraordinary posthumous life, and it's fair to ask where the band will go from here. Their albums have long been markers on the road of rock music history and literacy. Will the inevitable dismantling of those albums in the digital age diffuse future listeners' understanding of the band's impact? The Beatles, happily, were a great singles band, so it will always remain possible to enjoy their music. But, along with Dylan, the Beatles also shattered the hegemony of the single.

The Beatles, it seems to me, are best understood *in toto*. The early songs benefit from our knowledge of the complexity of the band's later work. The later work's self-consciousness is mitigated by the effortlessness and verve of the early songs. The relative brevity of the band's career enables even non-specialist fans – among whom I number myself – to gain a three-dimensional understanding of the band's music relatively easily.

But how well can the Beatles be understood in bits and pieces – in downloads (legal or not), mashups, and YouTube videos? In some sense that's how young people have been discovering the band for quite some time now. As millions of parents have learned – and as I'm finding out with my own three-year-old daughter – children love the Beatles. It will be quite a while before little Francesca plumbs the depths of *Abbey Road* or the White Album. That said, she loves songs from each and, if she so desires, she will find her way into the full spectrum of the Beatles' music as I first learned about the blues through cover versions of individual songs by the Rolling Stones and the Animals. She'll pick a starting point and go from there.

As I do when I re-encounter the Beatles, Francesca occasionally confounds the past, present, and future. She will use the words “yesterday” and “tomorrow” interchangeably, as a way of saying “not now.” “Remember what I told you tomorrow?” she asked recently, trying to remind me of something she had said to me the day before. It struck me as similar to the temporal blurring I feel whenever I enter the world of the Beatles, where my own memories, my experiences with members of the band and their wives and colleagues, and my evolving intellectual comprehension of their music collide with and color one another.

In my case, that’s somewhat to do with nostalgia, an occasional sin against the rock critic code that I will admit to, hipsters be damned. As the world of music fragments, fragments and fragments, the Beatles represent a time when the notion of popular music meant something beyond millions of people knowing who you are because you won a singing prize on a TV show. They are the genius-level consensus choice – for kids and hip-hop producers, for boomers and millennial bands, for high-minded critics and casual fans.

When people would ask me in interviews how long I thought the Beatles’ music would last, I would routinely answer, “As long as people care about popular music” – never imagining that there might come a time when people didn’t. I do remember, as my daughter put it, what the Beatles told me tomorrow, back in the past that would indelibly determine my future. They told me, most importantly, that tomorrow never knows. In that spirit, this book offers an illuminating guide to all readers who are moving forward into the precarious world ahead, bringing the Beatles with them for spiritual nourishment, enriched understanding, necessary insight, and absolute pleasure.

Anthony DeCurtis

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Kenneth Womack

Chronology of the Beatles' lives and works

- 1940** **July 7:** Ringo Starr [Richard Starkey] born in Liverpool
October 9: John Winston Lennon born in Liverpool
- 1942** **June 18:** James Paul McCartney born in Liverpool
- 1943** **February 25:** George Harrison born in Liverpool
- 1957** **July 6:** McCartney meets Lennon after a Quarrymen performance at the Woolton Parish Church garden fete
- 1958** **February:** Harrison joins Lennon and McCartney as a member of the Quarrymen
June: the Quarrymen record “That’ll Be the Day” and “In Spite of All the Danger” at P. F. Phillips Professional Tape and Disk Record Service in Liverpool
- 1959** **August 29:** the Quarrymen begin an extensive engagement at Mona Best’s Casbah Club in Liverpool
October: the Quarrymen change their name to Johnny and the Moondogs
- 1960** **January:** Stu Sutcliffe wins £65 for his prizewinning painting in the John Moores Exhibition; Stu purchases a Höfner bass at Lennon’s behest and becomes the Quarrymen’s bass guitarist
May: Alan Williams becomes the manager of Johnny and the Moondogs, who change their name, shortly thereafter, to Long John and the Silver Beetles
May 18: as the Silver Beetles, the band embarks upon a nine-day Scottish tour in support of Johnny Gentle
August 12: drummer Pete Best joins the band, which changes its name to the Beatles in advance of its upcoming Hamburg engagement
August–November: the Beatles perform on the Reeperbahn in Hamburg, first at the Indra Club and later at the Kaiserkeller
- 1961** **February 9:** the Beatles perform at Liverpool’s Cavern Club, eventually becoming the establishment’s regular lunchtime act

[xviii]

April–July: the Beatles perform on the Reeperbahn in Hamburg's Top Ten Club; during this period, McCartney replaces Sutcliffe as the band's regular bassist

June: the Beatles record several songs as the Beat Brothers, the backing band for musician Tony Sheridan

November 9: NEMS record-store owner Brian Epstein watches the Beatles perform at the Cavern Club

December 10: Brian Epstein officially becomes the Beatles' manager

- 1962**
- January 1:** the Beatles audition, unsuccessfully, for Decca Records in London
- January 5:** "My Bonnie"/"The Saints" by Tony Sheridan and the Beatles released by Polydor
- April 10:** Sutcliffe dies of a brain hemorrhage in Hamburg
- April–May:** the Beatles perform at Hamburg's Star-Club
- June 6:** the Beatles audition at EMI Studios for producer George Martin, who is impressed with their potential, with the exception of Best's drumming ability
- August 16:** Best is fired from the Beatles
- August 18:** Starr performs as the Beatles' drummer for the first time
- August 23:** Lennon marries Cynthia Powell
- September 11:** the Beatles record "Love Me Do," "Please Please Me," and "P.S. I Love You" at EMI Studios
- October 5:** "Love Me Do"/"P.S. I Love You" single released by Parlophone; the single reaches no. 17 in the British charts
- October:** the Beatles return for a brief engagement at Hamburg's Star-Club
- October 17:** the Beatles' first television appearance on Granada's *People and Places*
- November 26:** the Beatles complete "Please Please Me" at EMI Studios
- December:** the Beatles' final engagement at Hamburg's Star Club
- 1963**
- January 11:** "Please Please Me"/"Ask Me Why" single released by Parlophone. "Please Please Me" reaches the top position in the British charts
- January 19:** the Beatles appear before a nationally televised audience on *Thank Your Lucky Stars*
- February 11:** the Beatles record the *Please Please Me* album in a single day's session at EMI Studios

March 22: *Please Please Me* album released by Parlophone

April 11: “From Me to You”/“Thank You Girl” single released by Parlophone

August 23: “She Loves You”/“I’ll Get You” single released by Parlophone

October 13: the Beatles perform before a national television audience of some 15 million viewers on the popular British variety show *Val Parnell’s Sunday Night at the London Palladium*. Beatlemania is born.

November 22: *With the Beatles* album released by Parlophone

November 29: “I Want to Hold Your Hand”/“This Boy” single released by Parlophone

1964 **February 9:** the Beatles perform on the *Ed Sullivan Show* in New York City to a nationally televised audience of some 74 million viewers

March–April: principal photography for *A Hard Day’s Night* feature film

March 20: “Can’t Buy Me Love”/“You Can’t Do That” single released by Parlophone

June–November: the Beatles’ first world tour

July 6: *A Hard Day’s Night* premieres at the London Pavilion

July 10: “A Hard Day’s Night”/“Things We Said Today” single released by Parlophone

July 10: *A Hard Day’s Night* album released by Parlophone

November 4: the Beatles’ Royal Variety Command Performance at the Prince of Wales Theatre

November 27: “I Feel Fine”/“She’s a Woman” single released by Parlophone

December 4: *Beatles for Sale* album released by Parlophone

December: the Beatles’ UK winter tour

1965 **February 11:** Starr marries Maureen Cox

February–May: principal photography for the *Help!* feature film

April 9: “Ticket to Ride”/“Yes It Is” single released by Parlophone

June–July: the Beatles’ European tour

July 23: “Help!”/“I’m Down” single released by Parlophone

July 29: *Help!* premieres at the London Pavilion

August 6: *Help!* album released by Parlophone

August: the Beatles’ North American tour

- August 15:** the Beatles perform at Shea Stadium before an audience of some 56,000 fans
August 27: the Beatles meet Elvis Presley
October–November: recording sessions for *Rubber Soul*
October 26: the Beatles receive their MBEs at Buckingham Palace
December 3: “We Can Work it Out”/“Day Tripper” single released by Parlophone
December 3: *Rubber Soul* album released by Parlophone
December: the Beatles’ final British tour
- 1966**
- January 21:** Harrison marries Pattie Boyd
April–June: recording sessions for *Revolver*
June 10: “Paperback Writer”/“Rain” single released by Parlophone
June–July: the Beatles’ Far East tour
July 29: American magazine *Datebook* republishes Lennon’s March 1966 interview in which he proclaims that the Beatles are “more popular than Jesus”
August: the Beatles’ final American tour
August 5: “Eleanor Rigby”/“Yellow Submarine” single released by Parlophone
August 5: *Revolver* album released by Parlophone
August 29: the Beatles play at San Francisco’s Candlestick Park for their final concert before a paying audience
November 9: Lennon meets Yoko Ono at London’s Indica Gallery
November–April: recording sessions for *Sgt. Pepper’s Lonely Hearts Club Band*
- 1967**
- February 17:** “Strawberry Fields Forever”/“Penny Lane” single released by Parlophone
June 1: *Sgt. Pepper’s Lonely Hearts Club Band* album released by Parlophone
June 25: the Beatles perform “All You Need is Love” on the *Our World* international telecast
July 7: “All You Need is Love”/“Baby You’re a Rich Man” single released by Parlophone
August 24: The Beatles meet the Maharishi Mahesh Yogi at the London Hilton

August 27: Brian Epstein is found dead in London from an accidental overdose

September–October: principal photography and recording sessions for the *Magical Mystery Tour* project

November 24: “Hello, Goodbye”/“I Am the Walrus” single released by Parlophone

December 8: *Magical Mystery Tour* EP released by Parlophone

December 26: *Magical Mystery Tour* film televised on the BBC

1968 **February–April:** the Beatles visit the Maharishi’s compound at Rishikesh

March 15: “Lady Madonna”/“The Inner Light” single released by Parlophone

May 14: Lennon and McCartney announce the formation of Apple Corps at a New York City press conference

May–October: recording sessions for *The Beatles*

July 17: *Yellow Submarine* cartoon feature premieres at the London Pavilion

August 30: “Hey Jude”/“Revolution” single released by Apple

November 22: *The Beatles* album released by Apple

1969 **January 2:** principal photography for the *Get Back* project commences at Twickenham Studios

January 17: *Yellow Submarine* album released by Apple

January 30: the Beatles’ Rooftop Concert at Apple Studios on Savile Row

March 12: McCartney marries Linda Eastman

March 20: Lennon marries Yoko Ono

March 21: Allen Klein appointed as business manager for Apple Corps

April–August: recording sessions for *Abbey Road*

April 11: “Get Back”/“Don’t Let Me Down” single released by Apple

May 30: “The Ballad of John and Yoko”/“Old Brown Shoe” single released by Apple

August 22: the Beatles gather at Lennon and Ono’s Tittenhurst Park estate for their final photo session

September 26: *Abbey Road* album released by Apple

October 31: “Something”/“Come Together” single released by Apple

- 1970** **March 6:** “Let It Be”/“You Know My Name (Look Up the Number)” single released by Apple
 April 10: McCartney announces the Beatles’ breakup
 May 8: *Let It Be* album released by Apple
- 1980** **December 8:** Lennon is assassinated in New York City
- 2001** **November 29:** Harrison dies of cancer in Los Angeles

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