

BEATLES HISTORY - PART THREE: 1970-2008

The Solo Careers

In September 1969, John Lennon told his musical partners at a business meeting that he was leaving The Beatles. It was decided that the split was to be kept secret until the group had secured a profitable new contract with EMI Records. In early 1970, The Beatles' staff prepared the release of *Let It Be*, which had been recorded in January 1969. As George Martin had lost interest in the production, American producer Phil Spector was asked to turn The Beatles' rough recordings into a valuable album. Spector's involvement, however, caused further friction between the band members, because Paul McCartney felt that Spector was ruining his song "The Long and Winding Road" with a lavish arrangement featuring an orchestra and a choir. In addition, the release of *Let It Be* collided with the release date of Paul McCartney's first solo album, *McCartney*, which was scheduled for 10 April, 1970. The conflicts within the band finally reached their climax when the other Beatles ignored McCartney's wish of removing Spector's orchestral arrangement from the recording of his song. Consequently, Paul McCartney decided to inform the public that The Beatles had disbanded. The promotional copies of McCartney's first album contained an interview, in which he stated that he did not want to work with The Beatles anymore, because of personal and musical disagreements. The release date of *McCartney* is therefore regarded as the date The Beatles broke up, although they legally existed as a band until 1976, when their contracts finally expired. The other Beatles, i.e. John Lennon, were enraged by McCartney's publicity stunt. In December 1970, Lennon commented on The Beatles' break-up, "Well, I said to Paul, 'I'm leaving.' [...] And then six months later Paul comes out with whatever [his announcement of leaving the band for a solo career]. A lot of people knew I'd left, but I was a fool not to do what Paul did, which is use it to sell a record" (Wenner 2000: 31-32).

In order to dissolve their songwriting partnership as well as their various contracts with Allen Klein, a New York business man who had taken on the role of The Beatles' manager against Paul McCartney's wish, McCartney was forced to sue his bandmates, which, according to McCartney, was one of the most difficult decisions in his life (vgl. *Wing-*

span 2001). The lawsuit Paul McCartney vs. John Lennon, George Harrison, and Ringo Starr became a favorite topic in the tabloids and finally led to a relentless war of words between McCartney and Lennon, which they fought out in the media as well as on their records. For example, McCartney's song "Too Many People" from his album *Ram* (1971) was a quite obvious criticism of Lennon's recent activities ("Too many people going underground [...] / That was your first mistake / You took your lucky break and broke it in two"), while Lennon's "How Do You Sleep" from *Imagine* (1971) was a rather fierce attack on McCartney's work as a solo artist ("The only thing you done was yesterday / And since you're gone you're just another day").

The lawsuits against each other took on quite absurd proportions, while The Beatles themselves reconciled in early 1972. In January 1972, John Lennon and Paul McCartney agreed to stop "slagging each other off in the press" (Badman 2001: 62) at a dinner in New York. In 1973, John Lennon, George Harrison, and Ringo Starr fired their manager Allen Klein, and all of the former Beatles contributed to Starr's hit album *Ringo*.

In the 1970s John Lennon, Paul McCartney, George Harrison, and Ringo Starr pursued successful solo careers as musicians. John Lennon continued to release albums until 1975, when he decided to temporarily retire from the music business to raise his son Sean Ono Lennon. His political commitment and his support of radical groups and human rights issues caused him quite some problems to obtain a Green Card in the United States, which he applied for in 1972, as he wanted to stay in New York City.¹ Lennon's most successful solo works include the albums *John Lennon/Plastic Ono Band* (1970), *Imagine* (1971), *Mind Games* (1973), *Walls and Bridges* (1974), *Double Fantasy* (1980), as well as the singles "Give Peace a Chance" (1969), "Cold Turkey" (1969), "Instant Karma" (1970), and "Power to the People" (1971). After a four-year long break from the record business, Lennon celebrated a successful comeback in 1980 with his single "Starting Over". He was planning a world tour, a musical, as well as a collaboration with Paul McCartney, when a deranged fan shot him in front of the Dakota Building in New York City on 8 December 1980.

Between 1968 and 1973, John Lennon also produced and directed numerous art movies with his wife Yoko Ono. Most of their avant-garde movies were originally screened only for a limited time at selected cinemas or at film festivals, and they attracted some heavy criticism at the

1 For a detailed discussion of John Lennon's political activities and his struggle against Richard Nixon and the F.B.I. see Jon Wiener. *Come Together. John Lennon In His Time*. London: Faber, 1995.

time they were released. Only recently Lennon and Ono's films have been re-evaluated by film critics and scholars alike, which resulted in a successful retrospective at the Viennale, the Austrian international film festival.

In addition to these non-commercial projects, Lennon and Ono were quite active producing promotional films for their record releases. Their 70-minute film *Imagine*, which was basically a visualization of Lennon's most successful solo album, premiered on television on 23 December, 1972. Their promotional videos for songs, such as "Give Peace a Chance" and "Woman" have seen various re-edits and re-packaging since Lennon's tragic death in 1980. Besides supervising a number of video- and DVD-releases, such as *Gimme Some Truth* and *Lennon: Legend*, Yoko Ono has also been involved in a couple of projects celebrating the life and career of her late husband, such as *Imagine: John Lennon* and *John & Yoko's Year of Peace*.

Ringo Starr released several successful albums in the early 1970s and pursued a rather successful career as an actor. He appeared in cult movies such as *The Magic Christian*, *Candy*, *Blindman*, *That'll Be the Day*, and *Caveman*. In addition to his appearances in various feature films and television productions, Starr also directed the documentary *Born to Boogie*, a film about the pop group T. Rex, and *Back Off Boogaloo*, a surreal story about the return of Frankenstein in the 1970s.

Starr's musical career waned in the late Seventies, when he lost himself in alcoholism. While he became known to a generation of children as Mr. Conductor on the children's television series *Shining Time Station* in the 1980s, he celebrated his comeback to the music business in 1989, when he went on his first tour with his 'All Starr Band'. He has continued touring and has released several successful albums throughout the years. Starr's most memorable releases include the albums *Sentimental Journey* (1970), *Beaucoups of Blues* (1970), *Ringo* (1973), *Goodnight Vienna* (1974), *Vertical Man* (1998), *Ringo Rama* (2003), *Choose Love* (2005), *Liverpool 8* (2008) and the hit singles "It Don't Come Easy" (1971), "Back Off Boogaloo" (1972), and "Photograph" (1973).

Paul McCartney is the most successful former Beatle. He has released more than twenty studio albums and more than fifty hit singles in the course of 38 years. In the 1970s he formed his new band Wings, with whom he managed to establish himself as one of the major rock stars of the 1970s. In the 1980s, he collaborated with the likes of Michael Jackson, Stevie Wonder, Carl Perkins, and Elvis Costello, and continued his run of hit records. In the 1990s, he toured the world twice, propagated vegetarianism, and expanded his musical activities in the field of classical music. After the death of his wife Linda McCartney in 1998, he re-

turned to public attention with a variety of musical projects, including classical music, experimental music, and rock'n'roll. He has continued to stay in the limelight and has been setting new standards in the world of musical entertainment. In the *Guinness World of Records* McCartney holds the record of being the person holding the most world records.

After eye-witnessing the attacks on the World Trade Center in September 2001, he organized the Concert for New York, which united some of the world's biggest names in rock music, such as Mick Jagger, David Bowie, The Who, Elton John, and Billy Joel. He went on sold-out world tours in 2002/2003, 2004, and 2005 and recently confirmed his position as the world's most famous music celebrity when he opened and closed Live 8, the biggest concert event in history. His most successful releases contain *McCartney* (1970), *Ram* (1971), *Band on the Run* (1973), *Venus and Mars* (1975), *Wings at the Speed of Sound* (1976), *McCartney II* (1980), *Tug of War* (1982), *Flowers in the Dirt* (1989), *Flaming Pie* (1997), *Chaos and Creation in the Backyard* (2005), *Memory Almost Full* (2007) and the singles "Another Day" (1971), "Uncle Albert/Admiral Halsey" (1971), "My Love" (1973), "Live and Let Die" (1973), "Jet" (1974), "Band on the Run" (1974), "Silly Love Songs" (1976), "Mull of Kintyre" (1977), "With a Little Luck" (1978), "Coming Up" (1980), "Ebony and Ivory" (1982), "Say Say Say" (1983), "No More Lonely Nights" (1984), "My Brave Face" (1989), and "Hope of Deliverance" (1993).

In addition to his career in the music business, Paul McCartney has been linked to the film industry in various ways since the group officially split in 1970. He produced several short films in the 1970s, some of which have never been released. Since the early 1980s he has established himself as a producer of independent short films, such as *The Cooler* (1982) and *Daumier's Law* (1992). In addition to these smaller productions, McCartney also wrote the screenplay for *Give My Regards to Broad Street*, a light-hearted comedy starring Paul McCartney, his wife Linda, Ringo Starr, and Barbara Bach. Although the movie became McCartney's only financial flop in his entire career, he established a reputation of producing innovative videos at the time, winning several awards with the promotional videos for his songs "No More Lonely Nights" and "Pipes of Peace". He also produced and scored the highly successful animated short film *Rupert and the Frog Song*, which was the bestselling video in Britain in 1984. More recently, he has revived his interest in animated films and has produced several animated shorts, such as *Tropic Island Hum* and the award-winning *Tuesday*, which premiered in Cannes in 2001.

George Harrison was initially the most successful solo artist of the four Ex-Beatles. His triple album release *All Things Must Pass* (1970) and the single “My Sweet Lord” topped the charts worldwide, and his *Concert for Bangla Desh* (1972) was the first large-scale charity concert in the history of rock’n’roll. When his musical career stalled in the mid-Seventies, he became an important independent film producers in Great Britain with his company HandMade Films. In 1987, he celebrated a successful comeback to the music business, when his single “Got My Mind Set on You” topped the U.S. charts. He went on to form the ‘supergroup’ The Traveling Wilburys with Bob Dylan, Tom Petty, Roy Orbison, and Jeff Lynne, and toured Japan with Eric Clapton in 1991. In the 1990s Harrison endured an ongoing battle with cancer, which he seemed to have won in 1999, when an insane fan broke into his London home and stabbed him multiple times. After the attack, the cancer returned, and George Harrison died on 29 November 2001 in Los Angeles. His musical legacy contains the albums *All Things Must Pass* (1970), *Living in the Material World* (1973), *Thirty Three & 1/3* (1976), *George Harrison* (1979), *Cloud 9* (1987), *Traveling Wilburys Vol. 1* (1988), *Traveling Wilburys Vol. 3* (1990), *Brainwashed* (2002), as well as the hit singles “My Sweet Lord” (1970), “Give Me Love (Give Me Peace on Earth)” (1973), “All Those Years Ago” (1981), “Got My Mind Set on You” (1987), and “When We Was Fab” (1988).

While Starr, McCartney and Lennon all celebrated quite some success with their individual film projects, it was George Harrison who not only became the most active Beatle in the film business but also one of the most influential independent film producers in the British film industry since World War II. Initially created to help his friends from Monty Python to finance their movie *The Life of Brian*, Harrison’s production company HandMade Films was responsible for some of the most successful and most respected British films in the last thirty years. Besides *The Life of Brian*, Harrison produced, among many others, the blockbuster *Time Bandits* as well as the critically acclaimed *Mona Lisa and Withnail and I*. After some personal disappointments and the financial disaster of *Shanghai Surprise*, a movie featuring Madonna and Sean Penn, Harrison lost interest in producing movies and sold HandMade Films in the early 1990s.

Beatles Projects after 1970

As early as 1969, Neil Aspinall, the director of The Beatles’ company Apple, began to collect film material featuring The Beatles from TV sta-

tions and news archives all around the world. He compiled a two-hour film of the material, which spanned the whole career of the group, from their first televised performance at the Cavern club in Liverpool to the rather unpleasant recording sessions for their *Let It Be* project. A documentary about The Beatles was planned to be released in 1973. For legal reasons, however, the project was abandoned, and the film, which was called *The Long and Winding Road* at the time, remained in The Beatles' archives. Interestingly, the albums featuring the film soundtrack were released by Apple in 1973. The two double albums *The Beatles 1962-1966* aka *The Red Album* and *The Beatles 1967-1970* aka *The Blue Album* contained many of The Beatles' greatest hits and sold several million copies in the 1970s, introducing a new generation of music fans to the works of The Beatles.

In the second half of the 1970s, The Beatles did not have any control concerning EMI/Capitol's Beatles releases. In order to provide the public with Beatles products, the record company released several packages of re-releases without The Beatles' consent, e.g. *Rock'n'Roll Music* (1976), *Love Songs* (1977), *Reel Music* (1982), *20 Greatest Hits* (1982). In 1977, George Martin re-mixed live recordings he had made of The Beatles in 1964 and 1965 at the Hollywood Bowl, Los Angeles, and compiled the first Beatles live album, *The Beatles Live at the Hollywood Bowl*, which topped the American album charts in May 1977.

Various legal complications discouraged The Beatles from releasing any group projects in the 1970s. In fact, it took The Beatles until 1989 to resolve all the legal matters concerning their musical partnership, their contracts with EMI/Capitol Records, and their own business venture Apple. In 1989, a large crowd of reporters applauded Paul McCartney when he announced at a press conference: "I think we're settled. [...] Everything is there, ready to be signed, and we finally – after about twenty years – sorted it all out" (McCartney *Press Conferences* CD).

As soon as their legal difficulties had been overcome, the three surviving Beatles resumed the work on several group projects. In 1992, Apple started to film interviews with each individual Beatle for the documentary film *The Long and Winding Road*. When George Harrison vetoed the documentary's title, The Beatles decided to call their project simply *Anthology*.

In 1993, Apple re-released *The Red Album* and *The Blue Album* on CD, which generated quite some interest around the world. A year later, The Beatles surprised their fans with a double CD called *Live at the BBC*, which featured historical recordings of The Beatles' performances on various BBC radio shows. Finally, in 1995 and 1996, George Harrison, Paul McCartney, and Ringo Starr re-united for the release of their

Anthology project, which initially consisted of a television documentary, three soundtrack double CDs, as well as two new recordings featuring the voice of John Lennon, who had been murdered in 1980.

Further recent Beatles projects include the DVD release of *Yellow Submarine* (1999), *A Hard Day's Night* (2002), *The First U.S. Visit* (2004), and *Help!* (2007), as well as the album releases *Yellow Submarine* (1999), *1* (2000), *Let It Be...Naked* (2003), *The Capitol Albums Vol.1* (2004), *The Capitol Albums Vol. 2* (2005), and *Love* (2006).

