

“And in the end/The love you take/Is equal to the love you make,” and so ends the last song on the last album by arguably the greatest band of all time, The Beatles. The perfect ending to a recording career, this LP shows a band still in its prime, capable of songwriting and recording feats others could only envy. Unlike some cultural behemoths that take a while to sink in, the grandeur of the album was immediately recognized.

While completely true, a few of the above statements are a bit misleading. It was the last album that the band would record together, but not their last to be released. ‘Let It Be’ was released seven and a half months later. And while ‘The End’ is the last credited song on the record, there is another one. ‘Her Majesty’ followed ‘The End,’ making it the first instance of a hidden track on an album. Because why wouldn’t the Beatles be the first to include a hidden track on an album. The Beatles and the record’s unity is best illustrated by the tightly knit and unpretentious way it combines a variety of styles. Among them: old-line rock ‘n’ roll (Oh! Darling), low blues (I Want You), high camp (Maxwell’s Silver Hammer), folk (Here Comes the Sun). Okay enough of this tangent, it’s time for a review, a classic review of this Beatles album, *Abbey Road*. The Beatles, The Fab Four, Those Crazy Liverpool Boys, John Lennon, Paul McCartney, George Harrison, Ringo Starr.

Culturally, this record is treated like a very, very, very big deal. And I would argue that the music on it actually lives up to that. Starting with the opening track, “Come Together”, a song that for many is maybe at this point overplayed. And as a result of that, I think some of its magic goes a little underappreciated. Cause it’s one of the weirdest and most cold blooded blues rock songs of all time. And the various sonic parts that make it up, especially in its intro moments, are just iconic. “Come Together” would later get Lennon sued for plagiarizing Chuck Berry’s “You Can’t Catch Me.” Lennon wrote the lyrics (the ones he didn’t steal) during his famous “bed-in” in Montreal. Despite the legal troubles “Come Together” is John Lennon very nearly at the peak of his form; twisted, freely-associative, punful lyrically, pinched and somehow a little smug vocally. Breathtakingly recorded (as is the whole album), with a perfect little high-hat-tom-tom run by Ringo providing a clever semi-colon to those eerie shooo-ta’s. Lennon’s two big songs on the first side are raw, direct, and biting, but they’re also lush studio creations, in keeping with the spirit of the album.

Despite a majority of songs bearing the familiar Lennon/McCartney credit, the album was also George Harrison’s time to shine and to continue flourishing as a songwriter, contributing the next track, ‘Something,’ amongst his best compositions with The Beatles. Frank Sinatra, who covered the song, would famously say that the song was his favourite Lennon/McCartney composition and to be the greatest love song of the past fifty or one hundred years. Which is a tall order but certainly a compliment from a guy who made his career singing and picking songs to sing and this track to me is just Love and infatuation of the highest order.

As Harrison says, there's something in the way she moves that attracts him like no other lover. That's it. But even with that infatuation comes questions and unease. As on the bridge, he's being asked will his love grow? He doesn't know. In fact, he kind of gives this person the option to stick around and it may show. Even after this massive, extravagant, romantic display there's no guarantees. However, I think that's just a reality of life. And kind of a nice, refreshing alternative from the many other love songs of the 60s that seem to operate in this space of love sickness, where you know you're totally blind to any other.

We see flashes of these weird detours and indulgences on the following track on the A side here "Maxwell's Silver Hammer" which is a Paul McCartney track that is theatrical and you know piano tune that is the definition of jaunty. "Maxwell's Silver Hammer," a McCartney composition, is one of the songs that Lennon famously referred to as "Granny Music." He stormed out of the studio, refusing to play on it. The others felt it was too complicated. Harrison said "we had to play it over and over again until Paul liked it. It was a real drag," while Ringo commented "It was granny music but we needed stuff like that on our album so other people would listen to it."

It's tracks like this that make me raise an eyebrow at the fact that John Lennon was the one who was couched as the artsy little weirdo in the band. Meanwhile, here comes Paul who's gonna write a song about a guy going on a murder spree with a gun. Literally, as his victims are a woman he took out on a date, a teacher, and the judge at his trial. Whose deaths are all described against these cutesy little bang bang sound effects in the mix. And super celebratory choruses too. It is a beautiful but also ridiculous tribute to a total asshole who Paul can't even keep himself from laughing at how preposterous his own story is. At one point you can hear him giggling to himself as he's singing.

Moving on from here in the track list though, we are still very much in Paul territory. Cause we get "Oh! Darling" which is a big Paul ballad, we gotta have a big ballad. We gotta do a big soul number where he's yelling his brains out. Which for me can go one of two ways sometimes with Paul doing this you will get a mix of madness and genius like in the case of "Helter Skelter" and sometimes it can get a little too cartoony or feel like a bad impression of a different singer like in the case of a track like a "Why Don't We Do It In The Road?". However, in "Oh Darling" he fronts a great "ouch!"- yelling guitar and wonderful background harmonies, he delivers an induplicably strong, throat-ripping vocal of sufficient power to knock out even those skeptics who would otherwise have complained about yet another Beatle tribute to the golden groovies' era.

It's Ringo time with "Octopus's Garden" and frankly, you got to give the guy some credit on this one. Not just for how cute it is, but after his most well known song being about a yellow submarine you would imagine that he might have some reservations about doing another track that's nautical in any way whatsoever. "Octopus's Garden" was the second and last song that Starr

contributed to a Beatles record. He wrote it on Peter Sellers's boat after quitting the band for 2 weeks during the 'White Album' recording (which was a year prior to the recording of *Abbey Road*). It's just sweet, precious escapism with sunny vocal harmonies, bright pianos, and, of course, bubbles with a finish that has almost like a country twang to it. One has to think that being on a boat a year before the recording of *Abbey Road* would have re-inspired the nautical theme.

"I Want You (She's So Heavy)", the third longest Beatles song, features the great Billy Preston on Hammond organ. It's a good old classic Blues jam, such a far cry from the Beatles of old, but the perfect representation of what they'd become. It's a Lennon song through and through, a love song to Yoko. By this stage they were well and truly 4 solo artists collaborating like a super group. Lennon and Martin didn't know how to finish the song, so they simply cut it. And then it's just over, it's just done, which was certainly a bold choice for its time. And in an instance of amazing sequencing, we go over to the B side on the record, uh, where the first thing we hear is George Harrison's, Here Comes the Sun.

We are going from this cold apocalyptic sound to something that is plucky and acoustic and pretty and bright and a good feeling. "Here Comes the Sun" evokes a mood of perky childlike wonder. It is dazzling and it is sparkling and in so many ways quintessentially Beatles with its vocal harmonies and its hopeful energy. Which somehow manages to increase as the song progresses and again, it feels like another song on this album that doesn't exist in the same reality as me.

I mean, to compare it to a sunrise I think is obvious and kind of corny, what sort of makes it difficult to kind of see this song in the same world as me is that I can't imagine somebody writing it that lives on this planet too, that is so dying, cold, nasty, and disgusting. Even during the cultural era that it came out of, I could only imagine a track this positive and frankly this nice coming from a world that doesn't know the pains of this one. Yet, George Harrison still wrote this track and it's arguably his greatest Beatles song.

From here we get the song "Because" which kind of kicks off the medley on the record. If you're not familiar with the second half of this LP we don't have a whole lot of very full length complete songs with very defined structures beginnings and ends. Rather we are getting these short motifs or you know, vignette type pieces that segue into one another or introduce each other, reference back sometimes, too. And not too long prior to this, the band had flirted with songs that have more experimental or linear structures. But this is the first time that they really extended it out for the length of an entire side of a record, which was certainly an ambitious feat and one that to this day is held in very high regard, which is what makes this LP so special.

To go back to “Because” another quintessentially Beatles moment with these wintry and gorgeous and surreal and stacked vocal harmonies without over explaining this track it is mystifying and ends on a bit of a cliffhanger because it does in a way feel like a tone setter for the following track which begins the medley.

The 16-minute 8-part song is actually the perfect ending to their career. For the last time as The Beatles, and the first in a long time, Lennon, McCartney, Harrison and Starr worked together as a perfect unit. Seamlessly transitioning from song to song, doing things the way they used to, allowing Martin to guide the songs. The suite that runs from “You Never Give Me Your Money” through “Her Majesty” finds the Beatles signing off in grand fashion. Gathering scraps of material that had piled up, McCartney and Martin pieced together a song cycle bursting with light and optimism, and this glorious stretch of music seems to singlehandedly do away with the bad vibes that had accumulated over the previous two years. Then, just for a moment, we’re into Paul’s “You Never Give Me Your Money,” which seems more a daydream than an actual address to the girl he’s thinking about. Allowed to remain pensive only for an instant, we’re next transported, via Paul’s “Lady Madonna” voice and boogie-woogie piano in the bridge, to this happy thought: “Oh, that magic feelin’/Nowhere to go.” Crickets’ chirping and a kid’s nursery rhyme (“1-2-3-4-5-6-7/All good children go to heaven”) lead us from there into a dreamy John number, “Sun King,” in which we find him singing for the Italian market, words like amore and felice giving us some clue as to the feel of this reminiscent-of-“In My Room” ballad.

And then, before we know what’s happened, we’re out in John Lennon’s England meeting these two human oddities, Mean Mr. Mustard and Polythene Pam. Rarely have Bassist Paul and Drummer Ringo achieved more cohesive yet flexible rhythm than on Mean Mr. Mustard and Polythene Pam. From there it’s off to watch a surreal afternoon telly programme, Paul’s “She Came In Through the Bathroom Window.” Pensive and a touch melancholy again a moment later, we’re into “Golden Slumbers,” from which we wake to the resounding thousands of voices on “Carry That Weight,” a rollicking little commentary of life’s labours if ever there was one, and hence to a reprise of the “Money” theme (the most addicting melody and unforgettable words on the album).

The music is tempered with uncertainty and longing, suggestive of adventure, reflecting a sort of vague wisdom; it’s wistful, earnest music that also feels deep, even though it really isn’t. But above all it just feels happy and joyous, an explosion of warm feeling rendered in sound. And then, the perfect caper, finishing with a song called “The End”, which features alternating guitar solos from John, George, and Paul and a drum solo from Ringo. It was an ideal curtain call from a band that just a few years earlier had been a bunch of punk kids from a nowhere-ville called Liverpool with more confidence than skill. This is how you finish a career. From the atmospheric rip of Fleetwood Mac’s “Albatross” that is “Sun King” to the sharp pair of Lennon fragments, “Mean Mr. Mustard” and “Polythene Pam”, and on through the explosive, one-climax-after-another run of “She Came in Through the Bathroom Window”, “Golden

Slumbers”, and “Carry That Weight”, the nine fragments in 16 minutes add up to so much more than the sum of their parts.

*Abbey Road* was about going back to basics. No one knew it would be the final record, but Harrison later said “it felt as if we were reaching the end of the line.” That feeling of the band coming to a close is reflected in the lyrics: “And in the end/The love you take/Is equal to the love you make,” that’s the message The Beatles had been conveying since day one. It’s all about love. Whatever happened with them, they would have one thing in common until the end of their lives. Only those 4 people knew what it was like to be a Beatle. And only they went through that experience. Despite everything they had been through, they loved each other regardless.

The Beatles' first album, *Please Please Me*, had come out almost exactly six and a half years earlier. So if *Abbey Road* had been released today, *Please Please Me* would date to March 2018. So think about that for a sec, within 7 years: Twelve studio albums and a couple of dozen singles, with a sound that went from earnest interpreters of Everly Brothers and Motown hits to mind-bending sonic explorers and with so many detours along the way-- all of it happened in that brief stretch of time. That's a weight to carry. Finally, a perfect epitaph for our visit to the world of Beatle daydreams: “The love you take is equal to the love you make ...”. *Abbey Road* forever.