



OPINION



After 50 Years and 26 Seconds Her Majesty is Still a Pretty Nice Girl

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Media & Culture

Tony Broadbent Wed, 09 Oct 2019 17:45 GMT



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And so it ends once again. No. Not the Monarchy. Thankfully, Her Majesty, Queen Elizabeth II, by the Grace of God, of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland and of Her other Realms and Territories Queen, Head of the Commonwealth, Defender of the Faith, still sits upon the throne, just as she did 50 years ago. Still as glorious a figure as she was when Paul McCartney first sang 'Her Majesty' on The Beatles' seminal 1969 album 'Abbey Road'; the very thought of it sending a little frisson up and down the spines of all red-blooded Englishmen. "Did he just... Could he have... My word, did he really just sing a sexy little ditty about our good and gracious Queen? God save us from "Toppermost of the Poppermost" stars...even world-famous ones from, er, Liverpool, was it?"

Well, Paul McCartney had, indeed, composed and sung an affectionate tribute to the Queen. On what was the very last track on the very last album The Beatles would ever record together as a band. 'Abbey Road' still a signal event in the world of popular music now justly celebrated all over again in a really rather fab new digitally re-mastered, multi-format 'golden anniversary' release.

"Her Majesty is a pretty nice girl, but she doesn't have a lot to say."

The 26-seconds long delightful little ditty; recorded by McCartney, alone, in just three takes, and the shortest Beatles' song ever recorded; ending with the words: *"Someday I'm going to make her mine."*

Noteworthy, for the simple fact Paul confessed many years later that he'd had a schoolboy crush on the young Elizabeth. And why not, for both at home and abroad, the Queen has ever been "the cynosure of all eyes" and deservedly so.

Impossible, of course, to imagine that any such frivolous notion could ever have come to pass, even for one of the most famous commoners on the planet. Even so, it showed considerably more affection for the monarch than was evidenced by the recent machinations of Britain's current blonde 'mop topped' premier politician, Boris Johnson, and his cringingly caddish call upon Her Majesty to assist him in proroguing parliament, not once, but twice. Unnecessary political theatre doubly rendered as Whitehall farce.

And, yes, as it happens, I'm a huge fan of Princes William and Harry for eschewing 'Ancestry.com' and marrying 'commoners' outside the European Royal families' 'blue-blood guaranteed' family tree and choosing very admirable and very capable, smart, young women to be their life partners. Good for them. And would that 'their-snouts-forever-stuck-in-the-gutter' British 'tabloid press', please, leave the Royal couples just the hell alone.

Given William and Kate's and Harry and Meghan's now allotted roles in life, I can't see the young Royals as doing anything but good; their numerous charity works all very purposefully focussed and engaged. It does, though, lend a decidedly sombre note to George Harrison's otherwise wondrous 'Here Comes the Sun' ('Abbey Road': Track 7) given Prince Harry's recent legal action against the owners of the 'Sun' and the 'Daily Mirror' over "alleged" highly intensive, scarily invasive phone hacking of the young Royals over the past 20 years and more.

Prince Harry forced into further action in his battle with British tabloids over their unceasing and irredeemably shabby treatment of his wife, Meghan, Duchess of Sussex. And so all strength to him in his fight against such odious cold-hearted 'Fleet Street' dragons; they deserve to be slain.

In light of which, it's so refreshing to have something so uplifting and enlightening; and, yes, so uniquely 'best of British'; to comment upon: the 50th Anniversary release of The Beatles' album: 'Abbey Road'.

'Come Together' (Track 1) a tad more poignant now when you consider the 'Brexit' divide that's all but split the country down the middle. Come Together? If only. We most all of us did way back then, in our collective admiration for the musical genius that was The Beatles. If only there was something that could bring us all together, again, today, something as moving as George Harrison's sublime love song, 'Something' (Track 2).

OK. No more allusions to the 17 stellar tracks on the newly re-engineered Beatles' 11th studio album that, needless to say, like the rest of the group's truly extraordinary musical output; 227 songs recorded in a little over 7 years; have been the treasured soundtrack to so many people's lives.

One thing about The Beatles that continues to astonish, that even after 50 years their music still attracts generations of new fans. Spotify, the music streaming platform recently reporting that the music of The Beatles has

already been streamed 1.7 billion times this year. Much of it by music fans in their late teens and early twenties; pop music's sweet spot. Little wonder then that 'Abbey Road' has already reached No.1 on the UK album charts. And it wouldn't surprise me if by the time you read this it's also topped the US Billboard chart.

What also amazes is how a group that disbanded 50 years ago still continues to make headlines the world over, and most of those headlines positively uplifting, too. And there're few things you can say that about.

A few fun facts about 'Abbey Road': The album was originally going to be called 'Everest' to reflect the peak of the band's career. Get it? But the cost, in time and money, and insurance, of a fully manned professional photo shoot out in Nepal was too much. So it was Paul McCartney who suggested they remain at 'home base' and go no further than the road outside the studio. Paul even going so far as to draw a quick layout of the album cover he had in mind for the photographer to follow. Hence: 'Abbey Road'.

'Abbey Road' the first and only time the front cover of a Beatles' album displayed neither the group's name, nor an album title. The album cover of the four Beatles striding over the zebra-striped pedestrian crossing; John in white suit, Paul sans shoes, George in denim, Ringo all in black; a group icon that's since become recognized and imitated the world over. The Abbey Road "zebra" crossing, itself, long one of London's premier tourist attractions awarded full 'heritage status' in December 2010.

As, too, thankfully, was Abbey Road Studios. Considered to be of such cultural significance that it was granted English Heritage Grade II listing; thereby preserving it from ever being "redeveloped" into a block of luxury flats. Ironic, when you consider that the first time The Beatles visited EMI's Recording Studio, at No. 3 Abbey Road, London, NW8, in June 1963, they weren't even allowed in through the front door, but had to enter by the tradesmen's entrance located around the side of the building.

'Abbey Road' also represents The Beatles' first foray into eight-track tape decks and transistorized mixing consoles. New technologies that helped give the album a much fuller and cleaner sound than anything they'd been able to achieve before. They were also amongst the first rock musicians to use such new audio tools as Dolby noise reduction and a Moog synthesizer. All of which, not only helped to change how records were made but, just as significantly, how they sounded.

A prime example being Ringo Starr's utterly distinctive, eight-measure drum-solo; the only one he ever recorded with The Beatles, and heard for the first time in full, glorious stereo; on 'The End' (Track 16). Paul ending his song with now famous Bard-like couplet: "And in the end, the love you take is equal to the love you make." John Lennon commenting many years later that the idea in Paul's "unfinished song" was inspired: "It's a very cosmic, philosophical line. Which again proves that if he wants to, he can think."

Which, very conveniently, brings us, again, to what in the end turned out to be the album's last song: 'Her Majesty' (Track 17). Very much a McCartney throwaway composition, it was originally slated to come between 'Mean Mr Mustard' (Track 11) and 'Polythene Pam' (Track 12) in what's now referred to as the 'Abbey Road' medley. Yet on hearing a rough first mix of the song, on playback, Paul didn't like it and asked that it be edited out. The session's canny EMI recording engineer, having been soundly instructed by EMI 'powers that be': "to never ever throw anything Beatles away," later slipped it onto the end of the song always slated to be the album's final offering: 'The End' (Track 16).

The last-minute addition, as unexpected, today, as it was back then, when it wasn't even listed on the album's back cover. A serendipitous musical afterthought that delivers as much of a tingle, today, as ever it did. And millions of Beatles' fans, and me, pleased beyond measure that when Paul and the other three Beatles, John, George, and Ringo, listened to the song sequence on a 'playback' lacquer disc, just before making a group decision about releasing the master tape to the record-pressing plant, they let it be.

Which, if nothing else enables me to tell you all over again that Her Majesty is still a pretty nice girl. And still as very much loved, I'm sure, as The Beatles' 'Abbey Road', if not more so.

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