

In Search of the *Real* Fifth Beatle

ATHENAEUM SOCIETY OF HOPKINSVILLE

April 3, 2014
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My daughter spent the spring semester of last year in a study abroad program at Regents College in London. Last May, we traveled there to join her for a 12-day family sightseeing trip to England and Scotland. The second day we were in London, we made the pilgrimage to EMI's Abbey Road Studios to cross off one of my bucket list items: to see firsthand where the Beatles recorded most of their hits and to take our pictures walking across the famous pedestrian crossing featured on the cover of *Abbey Road*, the Beatles' last album. I was amazed by the number of tourists who were there at 9:30 on a Sunday morning for the same purpose we were. It was a testament to the Beatles' impact on popular music and culture that persists to this day.

This visit prompted a renewed interest on my part in the world's most famous rock band. Upon returning home, I dragged out my various books on the Beatles, gave most of their albums another listen, and watched the band's six-DVD *Anthology* documentary yet again. My perusal of all things Beatles turned up a particular phrase on several occasions – *Fifth Beatle*. I began to wonder what criteria a person would have to meet in order to deserve the title. It was my opinion that the title of Fifth Beatle could only be awarded to someone who made a real contribution to the Beatles. I decided to examine all of the candidates to see if anyone truly deserved to be called the Fifth Beatle.

When the Beatles first landed at JFK airport on February 7, 1964, approximately four thousand fans were present to greet them, along with a phalanx of newspaper and television reporters and at least one radio disc jockey, Murray Kaufman, otherwise known as "Murray the K". The popular New York City DJ was introduced to the band at their airport press conference and wound up traveling with the band.

In a documentary film chronicling the band's first American visit, there is a scene of the Beatles walking through a train. A security guard tried to stop Murray the K as he followed behind George Harrison, who looked back and told the guard, "He's all right. He's the Fifth Beatle."

Murray became firmly established as a member of the Beatles' entourage while they were in America during February, 1964. He was with the band in New York City, in Washington, and in Miami. After they returned to the U.K. he introduced the group at a Wembley Stadium concert. Murray Kaufman spent an impressive amount of time with the Beatles and used to jokingly refer to himself as the Fifth Beatle. But it was only a joke. He wasn't the one.

In the 1984 book, *The Big Beat*, by Bruce Springsteen's drummer Max Weinberg, session drummer Bernard Purdie claims to have played on at least twenty-one Beatles songs. He won't disclose which ones saying that, "...if I need that information to get me some money, then I'll have what's necessary." He claims that he was paid a five-figure sum to keep quiet about the sessions.

Beatles drummer Ringo Starr, when asked about Purdie's claim, said, "Well then, what was I doing in the studio? I've heard that rubbish before. Everyone was expecting me to come out and fight it. You don't bother fighting that (expletive deleted)." Bernard Purdie is a great drummer, but he's no Fifth Beatle.

One musician who, at least for a short time, might have been considered for a Fifth Beatle nomination was the late keyboardist Billy Preston, who enjoyed success in the 1970s with hits like *Nothin' from Nothin'* and *Will It Go 'Round in Circles*. His electric piano solo is featured on the song *Get Back*, and Preston is prominently featured on the *Let It Be* album. He is the only artist to receive joint credit on a Beatles single, and was even suggested for membership in the band by John Lennon, though the idea was dismissed by the other three Beatles. Billy Preston is the best known session player who worked with the Beatles. However,

his time with the band was relatively short in duration, and consideration for Fifth Beatle status would suggest a longer working relationship with the group than he had. The search continues.

What about the Beatles' manager, Brian Epstein? Without Epstein's vision and persistence, the band would never have been signed to a recording contract. He persuaded them to quit wearing leather jackets and jeans and dress alike in the suits that became their early trademark. Epstein prevailed upon them to stop smoking, eating and cursing onstage and also suggested the famous synchronized bow at the end of their performances. Brian Epstein crafted the image that helped to propel the Beatles to worldwide fame.

Epstein made numerous trips to London in hopes of securing a record contract for the Beatles, and was rejected by all of the labels he courted until finally on May 9, 1962, Epstein secured an audition with EMI's Parlophone label that resulted in the offer of a recording contract. From that point on, Epstein continued to work tirelessly to promote the band. It was Epstein who booked the Beatles onto the Ed Sullivan show, and it was Epstein who arranged the Beatles' subsequent American tours, including a record-setting 1965 concert at Shea Stadium in New York City. Without a doubt, Brian Epstein played a large part in the Beatles' early success. Some say that his death in 1967 was the beginning of the end for the band.

So, was Brian Epstein the Fifth Beatle? While he played the role of image maker for the band in the early stages of its career, his role diminished as the Beatles matured as musicians and performers. Although Brian Epstein helped to shape the band into a form that appealed to the record-buying public of the 1960s, his influence waned as the band grew in stature. So, even though Paul McCartney himself once said, "If there *is* a Fifth Beatle, it's Brian", we must inevitably dismiss him as a candidate for the title.

At this point in my quest, a serious contender for the title of Fifth Beatle emerged. Geoff Emerick joined EMI's Abbey Road Studios as an assistant engineer in 1962 at age fifteen and was promoted to balance engineer in 1966. He began his work with the band during sessions for their album, *Revolver*. Emerick was tested almost immediately by John Lennon, who told the

young engineer, “Make me sound like the Dalai Lama chanting from a mountaintop”. Emerick hit upon an idea – why not try running Lennon’s voice through an amplifier that was designed for something else? He proposed sending John’s vocal through the Leslie rotating speaker that was usually connected to the studio’s Hammond organ. After a few minutes’ wiring, everything was ready. When Lennon began singing, a big grin spread across his face. Emerick knew that he had passed his first test.

Emerick went on to engineer most of the Beatles’ recordings, including the over 700 hours of sessions that produced *Sgt. Pepper’s Lonely Hearts Club Band*. His skill and ingenuity helped the Beatles’ records stand out from a crowded British invasion of pop groups. He was employed by EMI at a time when the company’s engineers wore white coats and ties, had set rules about where to place microphones and which microphones to use for each application, and strict guidelines about use and non-abuse of studio equipment. The members of the world’s biggest rock and roll band were constantly asking him to break those rules. He had the difficult task of pushing the studio to its limits, often at the risk of being reprimanded or even fired. However, the fact is that even though Geoff Emerick was an innovator at Abbey Road, it is likely that another talented engineer would have produced similar results when confronted with the challenge of recording the Beatles.

I finally concluded that the title of Fifth Beatle could only be awarded to someone whose influence and contributions to the work of the band were integral to the very fabric of the Beatles’ music. So who *is* the mysterious Fifth Beatle? I would choose as Fifth Beatle the person who was a contributor to the Beatles work from the beginning of their recording career up to their last session at Abbey Road. He is the man who shaped the Beatles’ music, including writing musical arrangements for strings and winds, arranging vocal harmonies, and presiding over most of the Beatles’ recording sessions. He signed the Beatles to their record contract in 1962 and is the person who produced all but one of the Beatles’ albums. The Fifth Beatle is George Martin.

George Henry Martin was born January 3, 1926 in London, England. When he was six years old, his parents purchased a piano, and its presence in the Martin home fascinated young George, who decided that he wanted piano lessons. He finally got them at age eight. After the first eight weeks Martin's mother had an argument with the teacher, and George didn't have another lesson until he was in his teens. Instead, he was left to pick up his musical knowledge on his own.

After George's term at St. Ignatius College, a Jesuit-run secondary school in north London, was interrupted by the outbreak of World War II, George's parents decided to evacuate the family to the town of Bromley in Kent. There he attended Bromley Grammar School and he continued his study of music using the piano as a tool of discovery. He realized that he had perfect pitch, which proved to be an invaluable aid in working out the relationships between all of the notes in the musical scale. He taught himself to play classics by ear and found another musical outlet by sitting in with various dance bands that played in town. Later, he formed his own band – George Martin and the Four Tune Tellers, playing at local dances. With the money he earned, he was able to resume his piano lessons with a local teacher.

It was during his lessons, while playing the teacher's magnificent grand piano that he would fantasize about becoming a composer – another Rachmaninov – and dreamed of writing music for films. Before long, however, the end of school arrived and George had to decide what to do with his life. His parents urged him to choose a career with security – his mother favored architecture, while his father urged him to try out for a civil service job. After working at a couple of odd jobs, he joined the Fleet Air Arm of the Royal Navy at age seventeen and commenced flight training in Trinidad. Martin nearly wound up in the Department of Naval Entertainments after an officer heard him playing the piano one day, but he chose to stay on as an aviator. His service was cut short by the atomic bombing of Japan and the subsequent end of the war.

After the war, Martin was left without any idea of what to do with himself. Upon the suggestion of a concert pianist who happened to hear him play, Martin submitted one of his

compositions to the Committee for the Promotion of New Music. A committee member and professor at the Guildhall School of Music in London took a liking to Martin and suggested that he enroll at the school, which he did in the fall of 1947.

Martin studied composition for three years, and learned to play oboe as a second instrument. After graduation from Guildhall, he worked as a freelance oboist without much success. While working for the BBC as a clerk in their music library, he was offered a job with Electric and Musical Industries, Ltd. (EMI for short). His interview was at an address on Abbey Road, and the job was assistant to Oscar Preuss, the head of Parlophone Records, a post he accepted in 1950.

George Martin produced his first hit for Parlophone in 1952 with a comedy record – a single entitled *Mock Mozart* by Peter Ustinov. After he took over the label from Preuss in 1955, Martin recorded classical and baroque albums, original cast recordings of plays, and regional music from around the British Isles. Later in the 1950s, Martin worked with Peter Sellers and other comedians. His breakthrough as a producer came from his work with the comedy show *Beyond the Fringe* starring Dudley Moore and Peter Cook. By that time, Martin's work had transformed Parlophone from a sad little company into a very profitable business.

Martin, however, wasn't satisfied with things at Parlophone as they were. He wanted a rock and roll act – a hit-making artist or group to add to Parlophone's stable of recording artists. In April, 1962 Martin received a call from Syd Coleman; the head of EMI's publishing company Ardmore & Beechwood. He had a visitor who had a tape of a group he managed. They called themselves the Beatles. Would he be willing to listen to the tape and perhaps think about giving the band an audition? Martin agreed, and the next day Brian Epstein appeared at Abbey Road Studios to play the tape for him.

The material was old standards and mediocre songs that the Beatles had written themselves, but George Martin heard *something* in the audition tape that Epstein brought him. Martin says, "I did not do handstands against the wall and say 'This is the greatest thing ever!'. I

simply thought it was worth a shot.” Whatever piqued his curiosity, Martin scheduled an audition for June 6th.

When the audition date arrived, Martin says it was love at first sight. Their haircuts shocked him, but their personalities engaged him. After recording a few rough demos of the band’s songs, he called them up to the control room to play back the tape. “If there’s anything you don’t like, just tell us,” said the producer. George Harrison shot back, “Well, I don’t like your tie for a start.”

He confirmed from the band’s audition at Abbey Road that they were good players, other than Pete Best, that is. He thought the Beatles’ original drummer left something to be desired. And he was unimpressed with their original material. Of the songs they presented to him, he said, “I knew I was going to have to find suitable material for them, and was quite certain that their songwriting ability had no saleable future!”

By July, Martin signed the band to a recording contract. He would guarantee to record four songs. In return, the band and their manager would split one penny per double-sided record sold. He also took four one-year options on the band, in case they happened to have some success with their first records.

When the band reported to Abbey Road for their first session on September 11, 1962, George Martin had a session drummer, Andy White, booked to play on their first single, *Love Me Do*. By that time, the band had fired Pete Best and brought Ringo Starr onboard as their new drummer. Martin insisted that Ringo sit by and watch while the session drummer played on the Beatles’ first single. The members of the band, particularly Ringo, were upset by this request and a compromise was reached – Ringo would play drums on one take, and Andy White would drum on the other with Ringo playing tambourine. In the end, Martin believes that the version that was released for sale was the one with Ringo on drums. George Martin’s influence over the Beatles was felt from the very beginning.

Martin became convinced that he had signed a winning act in the Beatles and went to EMI management for help to get their first record on the charts. Since Martin's track record was skewed heavily toward comedy acts, his new musical group wasn't taken seriously. As a result, *Love Me Do* only reached number seventeen on the British pop charts.

For the next session, Martin chose *How Do You Do It?*, a song written by English songwriter Mitch Murray. The band dutifully recorded the song, but told Martin afterward that they weren't crazy about his selection. He asked them if they had anything that was any good, and they replied that they had reworked a song he had heard earlier, *Please Please Me*. After they had played him the revised version, he agreed to record it, and suggested a beginning and an ending. When the session was complete, Martin called out to the band over the studio intercom, "Gentlemen, you've just made your first number one record." And indeed, *Please Please Me* quickly shot to number one in the British charts. "From that moment," Martin says in his autobiography *All You Need Is Ears*, "we simply never stood still."

Martin immediately booked the band back into Abbey Road with an album in mind. In a marathon thirteen-hour session, Martin and the Beatles recorded all thirteen songs that comprise the band's first album. The album went straight to number one on the pop charts just as the single did. Martin had a tiger by the tail, but the early success didn't come without considerable effort on his part. Of the early Beatles compositions, Martin says, "A lot of the songs we made into hits started life as not very good embryos."

In the beginning, Martin would meet the band in the studio to hear a new song, sitting on a stool while John and Paul would stand in front of him with their acoustic guitars and play and sing their latest number. The producer would make suggestions to improve the song and the boys would play it again. Martin calls this process a "head arrangement". The band and their producer didn't change this pattern of working in the studio until the end of what Martin calls the "first era" – the time during which the Beatles' first batch of recordings were made. Martin saw his job at that point as making sure that the band made a concise, commercial statement with

each song. There was no arrangement in the sense of orchestration at this point. Martin simply had to make sure that the song ran for approximately two and a half minutes, that it was in the right key for their voices, and that it was well-proportioned and had good form. In the beginning, he says, his specialty was beginnings and endings. *Can't Buy Me Love*, for instance, originally started off with the song's verse, but Martin insisted upon a proper introduction for the song – something that would catch the listener's ear immediately. He suggested starting with the chorus, thus providing the band with a very catchy introduction.

Before long, the producer became an uncredited session player on the Beatles' songs. One of John Lennon's best-loved songs, *In My Life*, features George Martin's baroque style piano solo in the middle section. In typical Abbey Road fashion, some invention was required. The part Martin wanted to play was difficult at the song's tempo, so Martin asked the engineer to play the song at half-speed while he recorded the solo one octave lower than normal. When played back at normal speed, the piano sounds more like a harpsichord, adding greatly to the overall feel of the song. His playing can also be heard in several other Beatles songs of the era, including the piano part in *A Hard Day's Night*. Martin also suggested the trademark first guitar chord that provides a particularly strong and effective beginning to that song.

With the recording of *Yesterday*, the producer began to contribute to the Beatles' music in a more traditional manner. Martin decided that what the song needed was a string quartet – quite a big change from the normal Top 40 sounds of the day. "We agreed that it needed something more than an acoustic guitar, but that drums would make it too heavy," says Martin. "The only thing I could think of was strings but Paul was unsure. He hated syrup or anything that was even a suggestion of the 'middle of the road'. So I suggested a classical string quartet." George Martin's string arrangement helped to turn a very good song into a classic – one that has been recorded by other artists over 2,200 times. The following year, Martin would write the arrangement for string octet on another Beatles classic, *Eleanor Rigby*.

George Martin recognized that the Beatles were rapidly growing and maturing as songwriters. “I could recognize that an idea coming from them was better than an idea coming from me, though it would still be up to me to decide which was the better approach,” says the producer. His initial approach helped to produce twelve consecutive number one hits – a remarkable achievement.

After the Beatles quit performing live in 1966, Martin’s role as producer changed even more radically. Now that the band was free of the constraints of having to replicate their hits onstage, they became even more adventurous in the studio. Aided by George Martin and the engineering staff at Abbey Road, the Beatles turned the recording studio into an additional “instrument”. This new approach bore fruit on what many consider to be their masterpiece – *Sgt. Pepper’s Lonely Hearts Club Band*.

The album, released on June 1, 1967, stands as a high watermark in popular music. Martin’s contributions to the album’s dense sound are myriad – from his harmonium part and the sounds of a carnival in *Being for the Benefit of Mr. Kite* to his piano solo in *Lovely Rita*, from the clarinet trio in *When I’m Sixty-Four* to the orchestral arrangement and final resounding chord of *A Day in the Life* – Martin is as much a part of the album as any member of the band. *Sgt. Pepper* is as much George Martin’s masterpiece as it is the Beatles’.

In August of 1965, Martin and several of EMI’s youngest and most successful producers had founded Associated Independent Recording. As George Martin had pioneered various techniques in the recording studio, so too did he pioneer the concept of independent record producer. The Beatles remained a client of his until their breakup, through the ups and downs of *Magical Mystery Tour*, *Yellow Submarine* and *The Beatles* (otherwise known as the *White Album*). There was one Beatles album that George Martin did not produce, however, even though he oversaw its recording. The band, at Paul McCartney’s suggestion, planned to make a back-to-basics album emphasizing live performance. The rehearsals for the recording sessions, which were filmed at London’s Twickenham Film Studios for a planned movie, were acrimonious

and the band's playing uneven. The recordings resulting from the subsequent sessions were shelved for several months before eventually being turned over to American producer Phil Spector. Of the *Let It Be* album, Martin wryly says the credits should read, "Produced by George Martin – Over Produced by Phil Spector". Paul McCartney so detested Spector's treatment of *The Long and Winding Road* that he tried to halt the release of the song.

After the unpleasant experience of the *Let It Be* sessions, Martin assumed that his tenure with the band was over. However, early in 1969, Paul McCartney contacted the producer to ask him to work with the band once more. He assured Martin that the band members wanted to get back together in the studio and make an album "the way we used to do it". Martin agreed, *if* the Beatles would let him produce the album as he wished.

The result was the last Beatles studio album – *Abbey Road*. The album is a return to form for the Beatles, and once again George Martin's production completes the package. There are the usual innovative touches such as the prominent use of Moog synthesizer on several tracks and John Lennon's beautiful layered vocal work on his ballad *Because*. The album is significant for another reason: the final session for *Abbey Road* on August 20, 1969 was the last time all four Beatles would appear in a recording studio together. *Abbey Road* was a big hit upon release, spending 12 weeks at number one on the U.S. charts, making George Martin's final production with the Beatles a resounding success.

George Martin enjoyed a long career as a record producer. A partial list of artists he has worked with includes Shirley Bassey, America, Kenny Rogers, Cheap Trick, Cilla Black, and Ultravox. He helped guitarist Jeff Beck forge a new musical direction on his Grammy-winning album *Blow by Blow* and also produced the theme songs to two James Bond movies – *Goldfinger* and *Live and Let Die*.

Martin's AIR London remains one of the world's preeminent recording studios. His AIR Montserrat operation on the Caribbean island of Montserrat was a favored destination for recording artists for ten years before being destroyed by Hurricane Hugo in 1989.

In 1988 George Martin was appointed a Commander of the British Empire for his services to the music industry. He also received an Honorary Doctorate of Music from Berklee College of Music in Boston, and is a Fellow of the Royal Academy of Music. He is now 88 years old and has suffered significant work-related hearing loss over the years. Even so, he continues to write music, perform concerts, give motivational talks, work with charities, advise broadcasters and government on music content and help run his music publishing company. Meanwhile his son, Giles, continues in the family tradition as a record producer – having recently supervised the production of Paul McCartney’s latest solo album *New*.

In his career to date George Martin has been awarded two Ivor Novello awards by the British Academy of Songwriters, Composers and Authors, six Grammys and in 2008 was the recipient of the Grammy Foundation's Leadership Award. And tonight, I am honored to confer upon him, in absentia, the O.F.B. – the Order of the Fifth Beatle. There can only be one – Sir George Henry Martin.

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