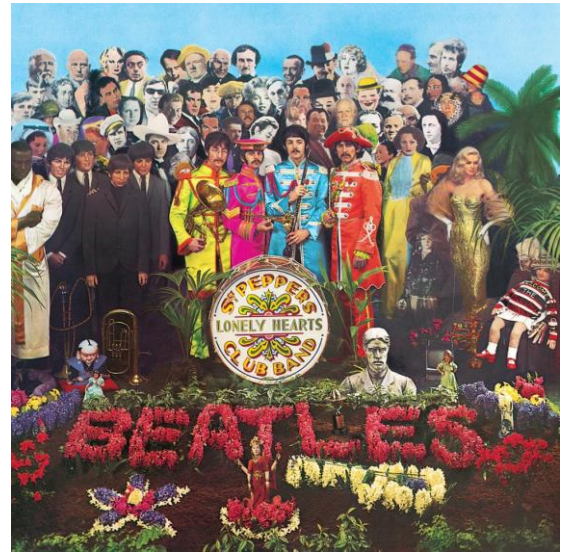
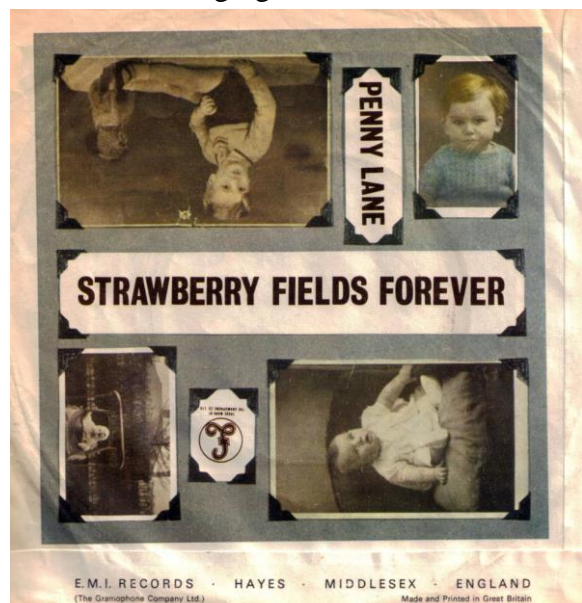


For today's 'On this day' email, we go back to May 26 1967, when the record company EMI ('pronounced 'Eee - em - aye') released THE BEATLES' album *SGT PEPPER'S LONELY HEARTS CLUB BAND*. I expect you've heard this album before (though I would bet most of my students haven't), but you may not know just how important it was, and why it is commonly regarded as the greatest album ever made.



Just about everything about the album was new. It was the first 'concept' album - an album which wasn't just a collection of songs, but where the songs were centred around a particular concept or idea. The concept or idea behind the album was that The Beatles were pretending to be a different band - Sgt Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band - with the first track introducing the band and the last but one track having the band say goodbye. But this concept only really applied to the second song on the album - *WITH A LITTLE HELP FROM MY FRIENDS* - where Ringo Starr pretended to be 'Billy Shears' in singing the song. But after that, the album just goes back to normal songs. But still, it set the trend for having albums that had a particular concept or theme behind them. The album was also the first to print the lyrics of the songs on the back of the album cover, showing The Beatles regarded the words of their songs as being as important as the music. The music was also unlike anything that had been heard before, with The Beatles and their producer GEORGE MARTIN and the EMI engineers coming up with loads of tricks and innovations to make the music sound as fresh and unusual as possible.

The songs themselves are very much about The Beatles and their lives: *WITH A LITTLE HELP FROM MY FRIENDS* was about the togetherness between The Beatles, *GETTING BETTER* had Paul McCartney reflecting on how he was changing as a man, *FIXING A HOLE* and *LOVELY RITA* were about Paul McCartney's relationship with fans, and *GOOD MORNING GOOD MORNING* featured snapshots of John Lennon's life. Two other songs which were about The Beatles when they were growing up - *PENNY LANE* and *STRAWBERRY FIELDS FOREVER* - were taken off the album when they were released as a single to show the fans that The Beatles were still together and producing music. They were replaced by a jokey song called *WHEN I'M SIXTY FOUR* that could have easily been sung in a music hall in the 1920's. *WITHIN YOU WITHOUT YOU* reflected George Harrison's spiritual views and his huge interest in Indian music and is an amazing achievement - a song written by a Western band according to rules and using instruments that belong to a completely different field of music. Both *WHEN I'M SIXTY FOUR* and *WITHIN YOU WITHOUT YOU* looked forward to The Beatles' next

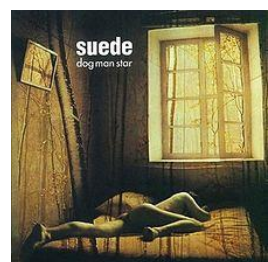
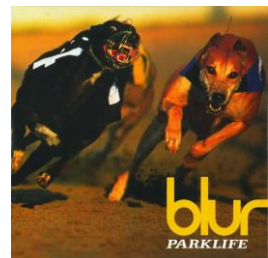


album, *THE WHITE ALBUM*, where they would prove that they could write any kind of song that you could think of – rock, pop, children's, country and western, experimental, soul, heavy metal, jazz, vaudeville, ragtime, lullaby, comedy.

The album finished with The Beatles' masterpiece *A DAY IN THE LIFE*, which was written by John Lennon, but with Paul McCartney contributing a central section. It was their greatest achievement together - comparing *A DAY IN THE LIFE* (see the end of this email for this track) with The Beatles first ever single, *LOVE ME DO* ([https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0pGOFX1D\\_jg](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0pGOFX1D_jg)), which was released less than five years before, is a very strange experience. In less than five years, The Beatles went from turning out pretty ordinary songs like *LOVE ME DO* to writing something as amazing as *A DAY IN THE LIFE*. That speed of artistic development has never happened before in human history, and is likely never to happen again. But *A DAY IN THE LIFE* would also be one of the last songs the greatest songwriting partnership ever known would genuinely work on together. Because while *Sgt Pepper* showed The Beatles working together, focussed on producing something amazing that had never been heard before, they were also splitting apart.

Their last album, *REVOLVER*, had a number of unbelievably brilliant tracks by Paul McCartney, while John Lennon's songs were so-so (with the exception of the stunning *TOMORROW NEVER KNOWS*). John Lennon tried harder to keep up with Paul McCartney on *Sgt Pepper* but was still struggling for inspiration - John Lennon got the idea for the song *LUCY IN THE SKY WITH DIAMONDS* from a painting done by his three year old son Julian (when he asked Julian, 'What is that?' Julian replied, 'Lucy in the sky with diamonds'); the title for *GOOD MORNING GOOD MORNING* was taken from an advert for Cornflakes, a breakfast cereal; the lyrics of *FOR THE BENEFIT OF MR KITE* were read word for word off a poster that John Lennon had bought in a market; and the verses for *A DAY IN THE LIFE* were taken from newspaper stories. Paul McCartney was taking over the band, and John Lennon - who was the first Beatle, when the band wasn't even called The Beatles but The Quarrymen - couldn't take that. Two and a half years after the release of *Sgt Pepper*, he told the rest of the band he was quitting the band. And that was that. But *Sgt Pepper*, together with the two albums that The Beatles would release after it - *THE WHITE ALBUM* and *ABBEY ROAD* - would ensure that The Beatles would forever be known as serious artists, and not just as people who could write a catchy tune.

Those albums would also ensure that every band following The Beatles would have to struggle with the fact that they could never be as good as The Beatles. For a long time, bands tried simply to ignore The Beatles, but in the Britpop era of the 1990s, The Beatles became hugely popular again, and most bands around then wrote songs which were recognisably Beatles-esque. This was obviously true of the biggest Britpop band, OASIS - but actually it was Oasis' two biggest rivals, BLUR and SUEDE (pronounced 'Swayed') that came closest to producing another *Sgt Pepper*. Blur's *PARKLIFE* and Suede's *DOG MAN STAR* both brilliantly capture aspects of life in Britain in the 1990s in the same way as *Sgt Pepper* reflected what it was like to be alive in Britain in the summer of 1967. *DOG MAN STAR* in particular seems to be influenced by *Sgt Pepper* - the titles of the opening track (*INTRODUCING THE BAND*) and the final track (*STILL LIFE*) are very similar to the titles of the opening and final tracks on *Sgt Pepper*.



But whereas *Sgt Pepper* is bursting all over with joy and freshness, *Dog Man Star* is very dark and despairing - almost as though it is asking: What happened to all the hope and excitement that people had in the 1960s? Where did it all go? Will we ever get it back? We shall see... In the meantime, enjoy this music video for A DAY IN THE LIFE, featuring The Beatles and a few invited friends sorting out the orchestral parts for the track:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=usNsCeOV4GM>