

I came, I saw, I got on

The Convertible Bus

The quiet one



All things must pass.

I'm writing this on the day I found out that George Harrison had died, and listening to his music. The Beatles was the first band I really got into (in 1976 – late as ever), and they always have and always will mean a very great deal to me – they are the sound of every summer I've ever had. I still remember vividly exactly where I was when I heard that John Lennon had died. George's death¹ is not such a shock, as there were reports that he was ill; but I still think I shall remember where I was when I first heard the news.

For me, George's greatest Beatles period, and probably his greatest period ever, is early 1969. As a songwriter, his career had its ups and downs. If the stories of the origins of the title of his first solo composition, 'Don't Bother Me' are to be believed, he was reluctant to start writing music, and his second, 'You Know What To Do', was so obviously duff that it was buried until released on *Anthology 1*. He became far more accomplished with his songs from 1965 and 1966, but then failed to live up to his potential. With a couple of exceptions ('Within You, Without You', 'While My Guitar Gently Weeps') most of his 1967 and 1968 output is undistinguished, or sometimes just plain dreadful (by which I mean 'Piggies'). But in 1969 he was at the height of his creative powers, not just fulfilling his potential, but shooting past it, coming round and doing it again.

First of all, there's 'Badge', which he wrote with Eric Clapton for Cream, and allowed him to indulge his interest in the developing genre of rock in a way he rarely could in The Beatles (one occasion when he did was on 'Not Guilty',

¹ Normally, I'd put my critical hat on and refer to a public figure who I didn't know personally by their surname. But to do this with The Beatles just seems *wrong*. They were our friends, whatever our actual connection to them may have been.

recorded for but left off the 'White' album – hearing it now, it sounds like something from the mid-70s rather than 1968). Then there's a quartet of songs he wrote for The Beatles, though only three got recorded by them. 'Old Brown Shoe': a fine rocker, that ended up as a B-side (but then Beatle B-sides weren't like other people's). 'All Things Must Pass': There's not much to justify the existence of the *Anthology* albums, but his beautiful demo of this track is one of the gems amongst the iffy live performances, songs wisely dropped and arrangements sensibly changed. It's almost inconceivable that instead of this, The Beatles chose to stick with 'For You Blue' and 'I Me Mine' for *Let It Be*, but bootlegs from the *Get Back* sessions (which turned into *Let It Be*) show John and Paul ruining the song with their cack-handed contributions – they obviously hated it. 'Here Comes The Sun': Ian Macdonald in his masterly *Revolution In The Head* rather dismisses this as "a little too *faux-naïf*", but I stand with the many who consider it a great song of hope. I've never seen anyone else suggest it, but I'm convinced he's singing about the impending break-up of The Beatles, and the liberation that this would bring him (Paul at the same time was looking with sad nostalgia at the band's demise).

And then there's 'Something'. What can I say about this song? Frank Sinatra was right – it is one of the greatest love songs of all time. It's the perfect song for when you realize you've found the person you want to spend the rest of your life with, and how intense your feelings for that person are. The face of a girl I was once seriously planning to have children with comes to mind whenever I hear it (she's married now, of course).

George was never a flashy player, like Clapton or Jimmy Page. This has led to many underrating his ability. George may have been the best musician in The Beatles, they say, but The Beatles weren't that good musicians anyway – their genius lay in writing, not performing. Albert Goldman, in his vicious biography of John, has some nasty things to say about George, suggesting that he was a journeyman hack (or something like that – I forget the exact words). This is, of course, bollocks. Just as anyone who's actually picked up drumsticks themselves appreciates how bloody *good* Ringo

really was,² so generations of guitarists (Roger McGuinn, Dave Gilmour, Noel Gallagher, to name but three) recognize George’s appreciation that less is more, and that his shunning of the spotlight allowed him to concentrate on playing what was right for the song, rather than what made him look best.

The other thing about George is how funny he was. Often accused of being dour and humourless in his songwriting, this is a misrepresentation of the man.³ Everyone remembers John’s acerbic wit, but George could be just as funny, if quieter and less cruel. The BBC showed an extract from an edition of *Rutland Weekend Television*, where Eric Idle introduces ‘George Harrison sings’. George comes down the steps, strumming the intro to ‘My Sweet Lord’, and then launches into “Oh I’d like to be a pirate ...”, and it’s really hilarious. He’s in *The Rutles*, disguised as a journalist. And, of course, he famously produced *Monty Python’s Life of Brian*, because otherwise he wouldn’t get to see the film.

Paul’s initial statement in response to George’s death is interesting. He said: “I am devastated and very very sad. We knew he’d been ill for a long time. He was a lovely guy and a very brave man and had a wonderful sense of humour. He is really just my baby brother.” It’s that last sentence that’s illuminating. Even now, Paul can’t help being patronizing, yet he clearly doesn’t realize he’s doing it. You can see why relations between the two could be so fractious, with George being constantly irritated by Paul’s attitude, and Paul never being able to understand what the problem was.⁴

‘Something’ is playing now. And ‘While My Guitar Gently Weeps’. And ‘All Things Must Pass’. And I’m crying.



The dodgy movie

In the Acnestis meeting, Mark hands me a tape. “Don’t believe the label”, he says, “It really is Geoff Ryman on *Bookmark*, not *The Story of O*.” Mark thus becomes the only man I know to have taped over a dirty movie with literature.

² Listen, I mean really *listen*, to the drumming on ‘I Feel Fine’, ‘Rain’ or ‘Get Back’, and *then* tell me Ringo wasn’t any good.

³ As listening to the first version of ‘Only A Northern Song’ on *Anthology 2* will show, or indeed ‘When We Was Fab’.

⁴ Ironic Footnote#1: *Channel 4 News* pulled out Ian Broudie of The Lightning Seeds to give his opinion, in a sort of “Hey, you’re from Liverpool, you can talk about a Beatle” way. Ironic Footnote#2: BBC 1’s tribute to George was followed by the pile of shite that is contemporary *Top of the Pops*.



The new paradigm

But it’s only a paradigm of “The-Adjective-Noun school of fanzine titles”, as opposed to all those one-word titles of fanzines like *Head!* and *Gloss* that do so much better in the Novas than I ever will. I’m reminded of a thought I had in the height of the Britpop years, when the charts was full of bands called Suede and Blur. I wanted to form a band called Wank. (This is an amusing anecdote, and in no way is intended to make any insinuations about any one-word-titled fanzine.)



The alternate perspective

Flicking across the channels on November 12th, when the airliner crashed in Queen’s, New York. Channel 4: “Secretary of State Powell says that a terrorist attack is unlikely”; Channel 5: “Was this the work of Bin Laden?” Curious that ITN provides the news service for both.



The old farts

Have to share this with you: Status Quo have cancelled a series of gigs because Rick Parfitt is suffering from RSI.

He’s quoted as saying: “I couldn’t move either my elbow or lower arm and it would have been impossible for me to play one chord, let alone three.”



The bra man

Fortunately, there’s not room to tell this story properly. Nor can I fit in *Murder on the Fandom Express*. Or the Alison Freebairn lookalikes. Oh well, never mind ...



The Convertible Bus No. 8, from **Tony Keen**, 15 Heathbridge, Heathbridge Approach, Brooklands Road, Weybridge, Surrey, KT13 0UN. Carlton PALMER?????!!!!!!?!?!?? E-mail: keentony@hotmail.com. The Convertible Bus No. 8 is not a Croydon fanzine, so three points seems about right. December 2001. Contains Five Alison Freebairn Laugh Out Loud Moments.⁵



⁵ May not apply to current issue.