



George Martin

In the nine years the Beatles were together, their music changed as they did, as the times did, as the world did. But through all the jumps in their sound, there were five common grounds: Lennon, McCartney, Harrison, Starr and the real fifth Beatle, George Martin. From “Love Me Do” to “Let It Be,” it was Martin at the baton, arranging the music, producing the recordings, helping make John and Paul’s musical inventions and dreams come true and, when the four young men began to take the reins in the studio, knowing enough – well, to let them be. Perhaps George Martin’s greatest contribution to the Beatles story was making it possible to be told at all. In the early Sixties in London, every record company, every A&R man, every producer, it seems, turned down the Beatles – until

they got to our hero. And even Martin wasn’t sure what he had on his hands that day in February 1962, when he listened as Brian Epstein played their demonstration tape.

Its quality, he recalled, was “appalling.” The band’s repertoire ranged from saccharine standards like “Over the Rainbow” to a Fats Waller classic, “Your Feet’s Too Big.” Not exactly rock & roll.

Within a year, the Beatles had conquered England. Another year later, America and most of the rest of the world had learned a new word: *Beatlemania*. And all because of an erudite record producer who seemed ill-suited to the Beatles. George Martin was older than “the boys,” as he referred to them; he had a classical-music background and was best known for his work with comedy acts like Peter Sellers and Spike Milligan.

But Martin’s love of comedy and classical music, along with his adventurous spirit in EMI’s recording studios, meshed perfectly with the attitudes of the spunky band of musicians raised on R&B, rock & roll, pop and dance-hall music, who themselves had comedic instincts and who, given a chance, would smash the barriers of conventional music.

He was, as the author Mark Hertsgaard put it, the “essential partner.” As Martin noted in one of two books he wrote about the Beatles, he encour-

aged them to “think symphonically.” The Beatles, he admitted, resisted, but the proof of his impact on them is in such landmark recordings as *Sgt. Pepper’s Lonely Hearts Club Band* and *Abbey Road*; in songs like “Because” (which Lennon based on Beethoven’s “Moonlight Sonata”) and “Yesterday.”

Having enjoyed a career of working with the best and the brightest – he has also produced recordings with Jeff Beck, John McLaughlin and America – in 1998 Martin decided to produce his own swan song. *In My Life* is a collection of Beatles songs performed by an eyebrow-raising assortment of Martin’s “friends and heroes.” In addition to established musicians like Beck, Phil Collins and Celine Dion, Martin called on actors Sean Connery, Goldie Hawn, Robin Williams and Jim Carrey. For additional comic *oomph*, he had Billy Connolly camp things up on “Being for the Benefit of Mr. Kite.” Tracks featuring violinist Vanessa-Mae and guitarist John Williams recall the ease with which the Beatles blended rock and classical music.

In short, the recording perfectly reflects the stellar career of George Martin and brings him full circle. Which, of course, is exactly as he arranged it. *

Martin, ca. 1965, in his London home, playing *Help!*

