

Renata Scotto and Alfredo Kraus is from a 1983 Lyric Opera of Chicago broadcast. Scotto and Kraus are in good voice and the sound is quite good.

The packaging is minimal, that is to say laudatory notes about the performers, no synopsis, no libretto or translation for either set under review. *Reviewed by Richard LeSueur.*

***The Beatles: The Complete Discography. Parlophone, EMI***

***Please Please Me.*** Parlophone, EMI, C2-46435. CD, recorded 1963.

***With The Beatles.*** Parlophone, EMI, C2-46436. CD, recorded 1963.

***A Hard Day's Night.*** Parlophone, EMI, CDP7-464372. CD, recorded 1964.

***Beatles For Sale.*** Parlophone, EMI, C2-07777-4643825. CD, recorded 1964.

***Help.*** Parlophone, EMI, C2-46439. CD, recorded 1965.

***Rubber Soul.*** Parlophone, EMI, C2-46440. CD, recorded 1965.

***Revolver.*** Parlophone, EMI, C2-46441. CD, recorded 1966.

***Sergeant Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band.*** Parlophone, EMI, C2-07777-46442-28 (1987). CD, recorded 1967.

***Magical Mystery Tour.*** Parlophone, EMI, C2-07777-48067220 (1987). CD, recorded 1967.

***The Beatles.*** (White Album). Parlophone, EMI, C2-46443. 2 CDs, recorded 1968.

***Yellow Submarine.*** Parlophone, EMI, C2-46445 (1969). CD, recorded 1968.

***Abbey Road.*** Parlophone, EMI, C2-07777-4644624 (1987). CD, recorded 1969.

***Let It Be.*** Parlophone, EMI, C2-46446 (1970). CD, recorded 1969.

This 1987 collection, consisting of CD reissues of U.K. original recordings, is the only one that faithfully reflects the Beatles recorded output. In North America, Capitol Records sometimes distorted the true nature of certain albums. For example, Capitol took songs from different recording sessions, songs that were not artistically meant to be put on the same album, and mixed them together to make a new product. It even dropped two or three songs of each original British album in order to stretch the material into more albums. On the ***Revolver*** album, Capitol cut two of John Lennon's songs, thus artificially decreasing his input, and disturbing the album's equilibrium. Obviously, this is not what the Beatles intended, and it affects the coherence of their work.

These reissues are packaged much in the same way the original U.K. albums were. Each is accompanied by a small booklet containing technical data, photographs, and instrumentation details (e.g., instruments used in the recordings, and who plays them). Efforts could have been made to produce lengthier booklets with musical and historical comments on these landmark recordings. However, EMI invested in the sound quality. All CDs have a superb sound with minimal alteration; there is no distortion when played at high volume. The ADD (analog) tape recorder used during session recording, and digital tape recorder used during subsequent mixing and/or editing and during mastering or transcription recording, works well. These recordings are warmly recommended.

Here is some information that is unfortunately missing from those accompanying booklets. The group was formed in Liverpool in the late 50s by John Lennon (rhythm guitar); Paul McCartney (bass); George Harrison (lead guitar); and Ringo Starr (drums). After laboring several years in the tough club scene of their hometown and in Hamburg, Germany (both major European seaports filled

with much nitty-gritty music often coming from America), they went on to become the leading figures of a musical revolution that profoundly affected Western culture. They took early European and American pop and 50s rock and roll, redefined it with power and excitement, and translated it into rock's heavier, more powerful musical language. Transcending such influences, they created an astonishing repertoire reflecting their mastery of nearly all old and new popular styles: mainstream pop, rock, rhythm and blues, rockabilly, country, folk, psychedelic rock, symphonic, art rock. The rich repertoire which they created constitutes their legacy and it has been available now since 1987 in CD format on the Parlophone/EMI label.

If the Beatles were able to achieve such fame and success, it is mainly because several factors entered into play, often beyond their control. First, the four individuals matched each other well. The core of the group were Lennon and McCartney who, according to author Charles Hamm, were "quite simply, among the most talented songwriters and performers in the entire history of popular song".<sup>1</sup> George Harrison was an excellent lead guitarist for those short solos that good pop songs require, and, arguably, the best "third stringer" any pop group has ever had. And Ringo was a steady drummer whose principal quality was that he could get along with the other large, yet fragile, egos in the band. The group was so packed with talent that it could afford to shelve many good compositions, exclude them from albums, or simply waste them on the b-side of their singles. Good songs were plentiful.

The Beatles were also fortunate to find in their path two key figures: Brian Epstein, the sophisticated impresario who helped polish their act so that the world took notice; and George Martin, whose talent as arranger/producer was crucial in making those landmark recordings. Most of all, their timing was right. Since the departure of Elvis (who joined the Army), his subsequent change of style in the early sixties, and the apparent demise of rock and roll in the sidelining of many of its early pioneers, the teenage record-buying public had become more potent than ever. Teenagers were waiting for the rebirth and development of a rock and roll, that stirring music that "spoke their language". When the four "moptops" first toured North America in 1964, it was as if they had long been expected. The media adopted the band instantly and, by 1965, the Beatles were the most popular band in the world. They were also beginning to show remarkable artistic growth in their music. After 1965, each new album had an impact not only on music and the record industry, but also on the arts, fashion, design, etc. The music both expressed and reflected the spirit of the 60s; it even seemed to be part of daily life, like the mailman bringing letters.

All the musical accomplishments listed here were made by a group whose brief recording career lasted only seven years. The first Parlophone/EMI recording dates from October 1962, and the last recording dates from 1969. Thirteen astonishingly different albums that shook the music world in seven years. The Beatles recording career divides itself into three periods: 1962-1964 (the early period); 1965-1967 (the middle period); 1968-1969 (the late period). Their original U.K. discography is one of the few absolutely essential rock collections; it is rich, encompasses almost all pop styles; it is brief, and almost spotless. Like many, I have never been disappointed by a Beatles record. And for good reason. From one record to the next, fans and critics alike did not know what to expect. The element of surprise was part of their success. They could never be cornered or labelled definitively. To listen to the thirteen original albums is probably the

best individual pop music overview of the sixties which one can have.

On the early albums *Please Please Me*, *With the Beatles*, *A Hard Day's Night* and *Beatles For Sale*, they wrote and recorded the classic hits of Beatlemania: "She Loves You," "I Want To Hold Your Hand," "A Hard Day's Night," "Help". They also tastefully exploited their main source of styles: rock and roll, rhythm and blues, and rockabilly, by covering a number of standards in those idioms. Some "covers," as they are commonly called in the music business, stand to this day as definitive versions of those standards.

The year 1965 was a pivotal year for many reasons. The Beatles ceased touring, after only two years of performing live, and they recorded their most enduring song "Yesterday". The song was a brisk departure from the proven rock formula of their beginnings. The ballad was sung by Paul McCartney, backed by a solo acoustic guitar and a small classical string section. Later that year, just as American folk revival artist Bob Dylan adopted rock as a vehicle for his songs, they recorded much to the surprise of their world following, a folk oriented album; thus pushing folk-rock into the mainstream. *Rubber Soul* was miles apart from the first albums; it was moody and introspective, with a hint of mysticism. For the first time, the Beatles introduced an exotic instrument, the sitar. They were only beginning to experiment, developing their creative potential, and moving into new musical terrain.

Their recordings of 1966 and 1967 (*Revolver*, *Sergeant Pepper*, and *Magical Mystery Tour*) are some of the most important and accomplished musical statements of what has been called psychedelia. Once again the Beatles were in the vanguard of pop, music, both artistically and technologically. Whimsical, poetic, and imaginative, they opened up (with the help of producer George Martin) a whole new range of possibilities in pop music undreamed of in 1964. The album *Revolver* included all the features of the impending psychedelic rock movement: high-pitched guitar solos (using fuzz and wah-wah), the utilization of Indian instruments, and quotes from the *Tibetan Book Of the Dead*.

*Revolver* also showed that the Beatles were increasing their knowledge and use of musical instruments. On songs such as "For no One" and "Got to Get You Into my Life," they used wind instruments: horns, trumpets and saxophones. On Harrison's "Love You To," they used Indian sitars and tablas. On "Eleanor Rigby," they also experimented with a new genre, symphonic pop.

With the albums *Sergeant Pepper* and *Magical Mystery Tour*, increasing use of drugs fuelled their creative process, something indeed prevalent in psychedelia. But, unlike many rock bands, however, they did not leave any corpses in the trail. With its intricate collage of music, sounds, words, background noises, orchestral effects, *Sergeant Pepper* expanded the sheer range of popular music and radically changed the way in which albums were made. Critics labelled the music "art-rock". Only a few years before, no one had ever imagined that a pop song could sound anything like "A Day In The Life". The song is really a fusion of what had been two separate songs, one being a narrative and the other being a dream sequence; both are masterfully layered in a cataclysmic orchestral crescendo. The final version of the song "Strawberry Fields Forever" was made by the crafty fusion of two earlier versions which were a semitone apart, and not in the same key. *Sergeant Pepper*, and the slew of albums that followed in its wake, is as far as rock ever got from mainstream pop. *The Magical Mystery Tour* album, of which many songs were recorded during the *Sergeant Pepper* studio sessions, explored the same musical territory. The

film was a failure but the album yielded other Beatles classics: "Fool On The Hill," "Penny Lane," "I Am The Walrus," and the hippie anthem "All You Need Is Love," the last piece performed live in a world-wide satellite broadcast seen by approximately 200 million people.<sup>2</sup>

The year 1968 is their second pivotal one, because that was the year when they abandoned psychedelia and experiments with studio gadgetry, to return to a more unadorned, direct style of rock. They realized that they had pushed musical experimentation to the limit, and if they wished to avoid the pitfall of intellectualism and over-arranged art music, they needed to return to their roots. That is precisely what the double White Album had to offer. The first product of their newly formed record company, Apple Records, the album included songs in all of the pop styles that the Beatles had mastered over the years. Basic, exciting rock and roll: "Back In The USSR"; heavy rockbelters: "Birthday", "Helter Skelter"; heart-wrenching blues: "Yer Blues"; folkish narratives: "Rocky Raccoon", "Julia"; country: "Don't Pass Me By"; and old Tin Pan Alley Pop: "Honey Pie", "Martha My Dear", "Goodnight". The recording also included the experimental Lennon composition, "Revolution 9," which the others, including George Martin, tried desperately to keep off the album. This was a clear indication that there was increasing friction between the band members. For the first time, not all four were playing on all of the tracks; each member was using the other three as sidemen.

*Let It Be*, the Beatles last album, was recorded in 1969 (before their swansong album *Abbey Road*), but released later after much bickering and confusion in 1970, one month after the breakup of the band. *Let It Be*, both the recording and the film, show the fatigued and troubled foursome "au naturel". In spite of the arguments and the sharp differences, they still were managing to write and perform good music, as witnessed in the impromptu rooftop live performance in the film. It was the last time they ever performed together, and the magic was still much in evidence. At the end of the recording sessions, however, the bickering had intensified and the album was shelved indefinitely. After the official breakup of the band, which occurred in 1970, the Beatles new business manager, Allen Klein, called in American producer, Phil Spector, to plow through the miles of tape from the recording sessions and produce a coherent album. For an album birthed in such ominous circumstances, *Let It Be* holds up quite well. Lennon's best soulful rock number "I Dig a Pony" and the poetic "Across The Universe" are matched by McCartney's bouncy rocker "Get Back," the ballad "The Long And Winding Road" and the moving gospel number "Let It Be". Spector was instructed to respect the simple and straightforward approach that was prevalent during the recording sessions, and keep production, especially the arrangements, to a minimum. He almost managed it, letting loose only on "Across The Universe" and "The Long And Winding Road," with disastrous results.

The album *Abbey Road* was their last collective effort after the *Let It Be* ordeal. The four agreed to put their differences aside and work as a band. The results are brilliant, and this harmonious collaboration allows them to end the Beatles epic in a blaze of glory. Perhaps things went smoothly because they had found a recipe that pleased everyone. Paul had almost all of B-side to indulge in sophisticated production with Martin. The concept of blending different musical ideas into one uninterrupted, longer musical statement, in which everyone could express himself, was ingenious, and served as a prototype for much of 70s studio

rock. On the A-side, John gave the best of himself in the soulful, bluesy rock numbers: "Come Together," "I Want You-She's So Heavy". George bloomed forth with two of his best songs ever: "Something" (which became a pop standard) and "Here Comes The Sun". All four merged on this ultimate effort, even though their differences were greater than ever. John Lennon was already involved in *avant-garde* art and politics; George Harrison had religious concerns; and Paul McCartney was both apolitical and agnostic. John had a liking for basic primal rock and roll with compelling lyrics; Paul loved melodic pop and ballads; and George favored Neo-Christian rock and Indian mysticism. Ringo was glad he came along for the ride, and what a ride it was! *Reviewed by Jean-Pierre Sevigny.*

### Endnotes

1. Charles Hamm. *Yesterdays, Popular Song In America* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1979), p.423.
2. Donald Clarke. *The Penguin Encyclopedia Of Popular Music* (London: Penguin, 1989), p.86.

**Blitzstein Symphony: *The Airborne, Dusty Sun*.** Leonard Bernstein conducting the New York City Symphony Orchestra and the RCA Victor Chorale (director, Robert Shaw). Walter Schiff, baritone, with Leonard Bernstein, piano. RCA Victor 09026-62568-2 (from RCA Victor DM 1117, recorded October 30, 1946 at the Lotos Club).

The only recording ever made of the New York City Symphony under Leonard Bernstein and the only significant Bernstein recording never transferred to LP, this long-forgotten piece is now available on CD. Marc Blitzstein (1905-64) wrote it as an enlisted man in the Eighth Air Force stationed in England from 1942 to 1945. When he returned to America at the end of the European war, he played the work for Bernstein, who was in his first season with the orchestra that Stokowski had founded a year earlier (Stokowski had recorded Beethoven, Bizet and Strauss with the orchestra for RCA Victor, all transferred to LP). The first performances were April 1-2, 1946 with Robert Shaw directing the chorus and Orson Welles as narrator. Blitzstein called the narrator "Monitor" in the basic sense of "one who admonishes," as the tone of some of his lines makes clear (much more, however, is straight narrative).

Bernstein broadcast the work on May 26 with the NBC Symphony Orchestra and the composer as narrator, then scheduled the work again with his orchestra on October 28-29, 1946, this time with Shaw narrating, as he did the next day for this recording. On October 13-17, 1966 Bernstein conducted the work with the New York Philharmonic, the Choral Art Society under William Jonson, and Robert Hooks as narrator. The recording made at that time brought back Orson Welles as narrator, but it was not released until the bicentennial, a decade later. It's now deleted and not yet on CD.

Blitzstein used the term "symphony" in the sense of Berlioz's *Romeo et Juliette* and Liszt's *Faust Symphony*, but it is really a dramatic cantata in three movements divided into twelve sections. Tenor Charles Holland and baritone Walter Scheff had modest parts as soloists (Andrea Velis and David Watson had the corresponding parts in the remake). With six mostly minor cuts, it runs 55:15. It's still two minutes longer than the later recording which opens up three of the cuts (though not the most significant cut, one involving the soloists). David Hall's lengthy notes for the