

'SOME PEOPLE HAVE A DIARY. I HAVE MY SONGS'



More times than I can count I've been asked to write an autobiography, but the time has never been right. Usually I was raising a family or I was on tour, which has never been an ideal situation for long periods of concentration. But the one thing I've always managed to do, whether at home or on the road, is write new songs. Some people, when they get to a certain age, like to refer to a diary to recall day-to-day events from the past,

but I have no such notebooks. What I do have is my songs – hundreds of them – which serve much the same purpose. And these songs span my entire life, because even at the age of 14, when I acquired my first guitar in our little house in Liverpool, my natural instinct was to start writing songs. Since then I've never stopped.

Over time I came to see each song as a new puzzle. It would illuminate something that was important in my life at that moment, though the meanings are not always obvious on the surface.

Fans or readers, or even critics, who really want to learn more about my life should read my lyrics, which might reveal more than any single book about the Beatles could do.

We wrote with two guitars, John and I. The joy of that was that I was left-handed while he was right-handed, so I was looking in a mirror and he was looking in a mirror.

We would always tune up, have a ciggie, drink a cup of tea, start playing some stuff, look for an idea. Normally, one or the other of us would arrive with a fragment of a song. Please Please Me was a John idea. John liked the double meaning of "please". Yeah, "please" is, you know, pretty please.

"Please have intercourse with me. So, pretty please, have intercourse with me, I beg you to have intercourse with me." He liked that, and I liked that he liked that. This was the kind of thing we'd see in each other, the kind of thing in which we were matched up. We were in sync.

There is an old Bing Crosby song called Please and the opening line is: "Please lend your little ear to my pleas". Even if you'd never heard the song before, you would hear – aha, OK – two meanings at work. We both enjoyed wordplay. I recently bought a lot of drawings and writings by John. I have them on the wall so I get to look at them all the time, and it's just pun city. That was part of John's cleverness. Anything that could be distorted, was.

Please Please Me arrived as a very slow song when John brought it in. I heard it and straightaway said, "Orbisonesque". In fact, Orbison should have sung it. I don't know if he ever did, but it has Roy written all over it. If you slow it down and do an impression of him, it fits exactly.

But then our producer, George Martin, changed it. George liked the song when we brought it in, but he said, "Do you think we could do it faster?" We were like, "No, no, no," but George, being very persuasive, said, "Let's just try it. If you don't like it, we don't have to." He said, "I think this could be your first number one." So, grudgingly, we lifted the tempo, and it was, indeed, our first number one.

That was one of the great things about working in collaboration. I could bring something in that John would spot needed alteration. He would bring something in that I would spot needed alteration.

Then, if neither of us spotted the problem, George Martin would. That collaboration made The Beatles a very lucky little group to be in.

The Ashers' house in Wimpole Street. A very small attic room with one window. A garret. Perfect for an artist. Somehow I had a piano in there – a small, sawn-off piano that stood by my bed.

Somewhere in a dream, I heard this tune. When I woke up, I thought, “I love that tune. What is it? Is it Fred Astaire? Is it Cole Porter? What is it?”

I fell out of bed and the piano was right there, just to the side. I thought I'd try and work out how the song went. I thought it had to be some old standard I'd heard years earlier and had forgotten. I just had this tune, and I now had some chords. And to solidify it in my memory I blocked it out with some dummy words: Scrambled eggs, oh my baby, how I love your legs, scrambled eggs. Using dummy lyrics wasn't something I did a lot. It was a rare thing.

So, I had this tune, and I think the first person I saw that morning outside the house was John. I said, “What's this song?” He said, “I don't know.

I've never heard it.” I got the same response from George Martin and my friend the singer Alma Cogan, who had pretty comprehensive knowledge of popular songs. After a couple of weeks it became clear that no one knew the song and it didn't exist, except in my head. So I claimed it and spent time playing around with it, adding to it and perfecting it.

Not long after the song came to me, we were working on the film Help! During a break in the filming, Jane Asher and I went to Portugal for a little holiday. We were heading down to Albufeira, and I was in the back of the car, doing nothing. It was very hot and very dusty, and I was sort of halfasleep.

One of the things I like to do when I'm like that is try to think. Scrambled eggs, bah, bah, bah... What can that be? I started working through some options. I wanted to keep the melody, so I knew I'd have to fit the syllables of the words around that.

Scrambled eggs – da-da-da. You have possibilities like “yes-ter-day” and “sud-den-ly”. I also remember thinking, People like sad songs. I remember thinking that even I like sad songs. By the time I got to Albufeira, I'd completed the lyrics.

When we got back home, I took the song to the band, and Ringo said, “I don't think I can really drum on that.” George added, “Well, I'm not sure I can put much guitar on it either.” And then John said, “I can't think of anything. I think you should just do it by yourself. It's really a solo song.”

Now, this was kind of a big deal at the time, because we'd never recorded like that before. It had always been the band. After some hesitation I decided to give it a go. The song did phenomenally well. The record label

wanted to release it as a single.

We wouldn't let them do it in the UK, since we were a rock'n'roll band, but we let them get away with it in the US because we didn't live there. It's still strange to me when people tell me things like Yesterday is the number one pop song of all time. Apparently Rolling Stone described it as the best song of the 20th century. It all seems quite grand for something that came into the world so mysteriously.

Some people find it hard to believe that I was 22 when I wrote Yesterday. Every time I come to the line "I'm not half the man I used to be", I remember I'd lost my mother about eight years before that. It's been suggested to me that this is a "losing my mother" song, to which I've always said, "No, I don't believe so." But, you know, the more I think about it – "Why she had to go I don't know, she wouldn't say" – I can see that that might have been part of the background, the unconsciousness behind this song after all. It was so strange that the loss of our mother to cancer was simply not discussed.

We barely knew what cancer was, but I'm now not surprised that the whole experience surfaced in this song where sweetness competes with a pain you can't quite describe.

Often I would think of John, and what a pity it was that we'd argued so publicly and so viciously at times. At the time of writing this song, in early 1971, he'd called the McCartney album "rubbish" in Rolling Stone magazine. It was a really difficult time. I just felt sad about the breakdown in our friendship, and this song kind of came flowing out.

Dear friend, what's the time? / Is this really the borderline? Are we splitting up? Is this "you go your way, I'll go mine"? Towards the end of 1969, John had quite gleefully told us it was over. There were a few of us in the Apple boardroom at the time. I think George was away visiting family, but Ringo and I were at the meeting, and John was saying no to every suggestion.

I thought we should go back to playing smaller gigs again, but the answer came back: "No".

Eventually John said, "Oh, I've been wanting to tell you this, but I'm leaving The Beatles." We were all shocked. Relations had been strained, but we sat there saying, "What? Why? Why? Why?" It was like a divorce, and he had just had a divorce from Cynthia the year before. I can remember him saying, "Oh, this is quite exciting." That was very John, and I had admired this kind of contrarian behaviour about him since we were kids, when I first met him.

He really was a bit loony, in the nicest possible way.

But while all of us could see what he meant, it was not quite so exciting for those left on the other side.

I'd been keeping largely quiet about John and The Beatles split-up in the

press. I didn't really have many accusations to fling, but being John, he was flinging quite a few in interviews. He had accused me of announcing the Beatles breakup to promote the McCartney album, but I was just answering Apple's press questions honestly. I didn't want to do interviews to promote it, and Peter Brown at Apple had asked questions like, "Are you planning a new album or single with The Beatles?" My answer was "No." I saw no point in lying. John would say things like, "It was rubbish. The Beatles were crap." Also, "I don't believe in The Beatles, I don't believe in Jesus, I don't believe in God."

Those were quite hurtful barbs to be flinging around, and I was the person they were being flung at, and it hurt. So, I'm having to read all this stuff, and on the one hand I'm thinking, "Oh f..k off, you f..king idiot," but on the other hand I'm thinking, "Why would you say that? Are you annoyed at me or are you jealous or what?" And thinking back 50 years later, I still wonder how he must have felt. He'd gone through a lot. His dad disappeared, and then he lost his Uncle George, who was a father figure; his mother; Stuart Sutcliffe; Brian Epstein, another father figure; and now his band. But John had all of those emotions wrapped up in a ball of Lennon. That's who he was. That was the fascination. I tried. I was sort of answering him here, asking, "Does it need to be this hurtful?" I think this is a good line: "Are you afraid, or is it true?" – meaning, "Why is this argument going on? Is it because you're afraid of something? Are you afraid of the split-up? Are you afraid of my doing something without you? Are you afraid of the consequences of your actions?" And the little rhyme, "Or is it true?" Are all these hurtful allegations true? This song came out in that kind of mood. It could have been called What the F..k, Man? but I'm not sure we could have gotten away with that then.

Did the three of us – George, Ringo, and I – think of carrying on without John? No, I don't think so. No. We were such a unit, such a foursome.

We joked about forming a group called "The Threetles", but we didn't seriously consider it.

It was never anything more than a joke.

We did do a few little bits and pieces together before we all went our separate ways. John and I and Yoko did The Ballad of John and Yoko. He enlisted me for that because he knew it was a great way to make a record. "We'll go round to Abbey Road Studios. Who lives near there? Paul.

Who's going to drum on this record? Paul. Who can play bass? Paul. And who'll do it if I ask him nicely? Paul." He wasn't at all sheepish about asking. He probably said something like, "Oh, I've got this song I want to record. Would you come round?" And I probably said, "Yeah, why not?"

There were still a lot of loose ends to tie up.

We still had all the business things to surmount.

You have to remember, I sued him in court. I sued my friends from Liverpool, my lifelong friends, in court. But in the end, I think playing on that session with him and Yoko contributed to our having quite a few friendly meetings and conversations later.

I think this song, Dear Friend, also helped. I would imagine he heard it. I think he listened to my records when they came out, but he never responded directly to me. That was not his way.

We were guys; it wasn't like a boy and girl. In those days you didn't release much emotion with each other. I was very glad of how we got along in those last few years, that I had some really good times with him before he was murdered. Without question, it would have been the worst thing in the world for me, had he been killed when we still had a bad relationship. I would've thought, "Oh, I should've, I should've, I should've..." It would have been a big guilt trip for me. But luckily, our last meeting was very friendly. We talked about how to bake bread.

There were accusations in the mid-1970s – including one from John – that I was just writing "silly love songs". I suppose the idea was that I should be a bit tougher, a bit more worldly. But then I suddenly realised, that's exactly what love is – it's worldly. I'd been given that reputation, and I had to stand up for it. Instead of abandoning songs about love, just get on with it, get into it and don't be embarrassed, because even though you might say this is a soppy subject, it's actually the opposite: this thing people can feel for each other that makes life better. I think that's the crux of it, and if you want to be cynical, it's easy, you can. Love doesn't come in a minute / Sometimes it doesn't come at all. I think a lot of people who are cynical about love haven't been lucky enough to feel it.

It's easier to get critical approval if you rail against things and swear a lot, because it makes you seem stronger. If you say, "Oh, it's a lovely day; everything's nice; I like the rain," then you're a soppy bastard.

But if you say, "Oh, this f..king weather! It's f..king unbelievable!" the critic might say, "That's marvellous!"

Anyone who knows my performances must realise that I don't use a lot of "bad language" onstage, and not much in life either. But I've still had periods when I've sworn – "f..king this and f..king that" – and I remember thinking, "What am I doing?" It's bravado, trying to be cool, man.

John always had a lot of that bluster, though. It was his shield against life. We'd have an argument about something, and he'd say something particularly caustic; then I'd be a bit wounded, and he'd peer at me and say, "It's only me, Paul." That was John. "It's only me." Oh, all right, you've just gone and blustered and that was somebody else, was it? It was his shield talking. The point is, most people don't tend to show their emotions unless they are in private, but deep down, people are emotional. All I'm really saying in this song is, "Love isn't silly at all".

- Edited extract from *The Lyrics by Paul McCartney* (Allen Lane, \$155), out November 2