

I, Me, Mine: Crossing *Abbey Road* One Step At A Time

There's something that can be said for listening to music in the place where it was created. You look around you with a new perspective, trying to see through the eyes of the artist, wondering which particular streets they sang about walking on, which bars they met the people that inspired them, and which buildings they lived in while they worked. For me, I had a very unique, almost overwhelming experience during my time in London when I lived in the same city that was the foundation for so many of my favorite artists and the inspiration for countless more. Those three months were accompanied by a soundtrack of British Invasion classics and new, contemporary favorites that played in my ears when I walked to school or work, sat on the tube, or took a jog through my new neighborhood. However, no other artist had such a tangible connection to my temporary home than The Beatles did.

Of course, the first thing any self-proclaimed music fanatic will do upon arrival in London is make the famed pilgrimage to Abbey Road Studios and the famous crosswalk where the iconic photo for the aptly-named album was taken. The photo was taken on August 8, 1969 just before noon when the road was deceptively clear. In reality, the road is highly trafficked at almost all times of the day and there is a near-constant

backup of frustrated drivers impatiently waiting for the tourists to finish attempting to recreate the photo and get out of the road. In fact, the crosswalk has become so popular that that the studio has set up a website with a live cam feed so anyone can watch the chaos unfold at any time of day, anywhere in the world. The website also features crossing shots automatically taken by the camera and archived on the site for crossers to find. When I went, however, I was forever immortalized on the Internet in a different kind of way. As we were standing on the sidewalk, the Google Street View car drove by and took our photo for all of Google Earth to see, ensuring a photo and story almost as cool as our recreation of the *Abbey Road* album cover. Pictures weren't the only souvenirs from the day; I went to a nearby memorabilia shop and bought a copy of the album for myself.

However, the physical tokens from my moment as the 5th Beatle were just the beginning. As I spent the next three months in London exploring the city, interning in the music industry, and learning a great deal about myself, the album that I bought on a whim during my first week across the pond became more than that to me. It took on a new life for me as I found meaning in each individual song as well as the album as a whole. My summer seemed to parallel the story behind *Abbey Road* and its underlying themes, symbols, and motifs. Overall, the unique experience of

living in the same place that the music I was listening to was created was twofold: it gave a new dimension to my temporary home and it provided a soundtrack as I explored it, forever and inexorably linking my favorite album to my favorite summer.

The album opens with “Come Together,” an instant favorite. Its placement sets the tone for what’s to come: a compromise between the funky, psychedelic lyrics and undertones of recent releases and the catchy tunes that would become timeless. One of the more funky, bluesy, downtempo Beatles songs, I later learned that Lennon had originally meant to be a political campaign song for Timothy Leary, the liberal academic running for governor of California. When the campaign ended with Leary’s imprisonment for drug possession, the song was revamped in the studio into the bass-driven standout we know today. The new version centered around an old Chuck Berry line and as Lennon later said, “The thing was created in the studio. It’s gobbledygook.” For me, “Come Together” represents a few different things; namely, a haphazard constitution leading up to a good start. It was the first song I’d play as I walked down the 6 flights of stairs from my flat and through South Kensington, a neighborhood that was far too posh for a bunch of college students enjoying a summer abroad. Just like bizarre lyrics of the verses juxtaposes the clear, rallying

cry of the chorus and the simple musical structure of the song overall, our group definitely contrasted with our surroundings, but I wouldn't say we clashed. Conversely, in both cases, I'd say the final product was pretty great. The song encompasses a political campaign, Chuck Berry references, a great bass line from McCartney, and a whole lot of cryptic lyrics, and in a way, it resonated with me. I felt like my current situation was also a strange mix of seemingly unrelated elements that had been harnessed and turned into a unique little masterpiece that (hopefully) would be the start of something great.

"Something" slows it down and showcases a different side to The Beatles that had only sparingly been heard before, evoking images of James Brown, Frank Sinatra, Ray Charles, and Smokey Robinson. All of this makes perfect sense when you consider that this was one of the few songs written by Harrison instead of Lennon-McCartney and considered by many to be his best. It's actually the second-most covered Beatles song of all time (after "Yesterday," of course) and has been recorded by many of the same great performers who inspired it. Written from the perspective of a man transfixed and in awe of a woman, it's a gorgeous love song with rather innocent lyrics, profound in their simplicity, set to smooth piano and guitar. For me, "Something" resonates with me not for its content, but

rather for the context and history of it. On the surface, it's just a really fantastic song, regardless of whether you relate to it as a love song or not. But despite this being one of Harrison's best contributions to the band's catalogue as well as one of the best love songs of all time, he often doesn't get the credit he deserves. Frank Sinatra, who influenced Harrison in writing this song so much, has said that it's his favorite love song of all time...but also his favorite Lennon-McCartney song. Unfortunately, not being recognized for our achievements is something I'm sure everyone has experienced in their lives, and it's even worse when someone you look up to overlooks your achievement as well. However, that shouldn't discourage us from continuing to work, create, and grow, and as we see with Harrison's other impactful contributions, as well as his timeless solo work, he certainly didn't let it do that to him.

The album does a complete about-face and continues with two songs that aren't steeped in illustrious history, political ideology, or complex meaning—they're just really fun to listen to. Both were written and sung by McCartney and are about as different as could possibly be—a great example of his diversity as a songwriter. "Maxwell's Silver Hammer" is fun and easy to listen to, with an actual anvil featured in the chorus, but actually elicited a surprising amount of conflict between the already tense

band members. The others hated it, but it did appeal to a certain segment of the audience that they hadn't reached in awhile. "Oh! Darling" is a mixture of Louisiana-style R&B and "swamp pop" and doo-wop harmonies. McCartney used a retro-shredded style of vocals that gave it a raw, powerful quality that is apparent even on the final product. Despite their differences, these songs were both great tunes that pushed aside any requirement for deep, meaningful lyrics and instead extended an invitation for us to just enjoy the music.

Conversely, "I Want You (She's So Heavy)" is a direct contradiction of that idea. The lyrics are as simple and concise as the instrumentation is complicated and multifaceted. This was one of Lennon's contributions to the album and like most things he did, form fit function. The repetitive, stripped down lyrics initially garnered criticism—and on the surface, they seemed to deserve it. However, their simplicity was intended to represent his raw, primal, and borderline obsessive love for Yoko Ono. The four blunt, honest statements that make up almost the entire song find a perfect home with plenty of room for obsession and introspection in the equally repetitive eight-minute composition. As Lennon explained to *Rolling Stone* in 1970, "When it gets down to it...when you're drowning you don't say 'I would be incredibly pleased if someone would have the foresight to notice

me drowning and come help me, ' you just scream.” For me, this song represents two different things. First, many things, including people, have the tendency to be like icebergs: you only see 10% of them, while the other 90% is below the surface. I'll admit that I didn't really “get” the point of the simple, repetitive lyrics at first either. But after spending many mornings listening to this song on the tube while on my morning commute to work, I began to dip below the surface a bit and loved what I found. People are often quick to criticize and take things at face value, but that can be an egregious oversight and an injustice to whatever valuable content is being overlooked. Moreover, once I did understand that the simplicity of the lyrics was meant to be a paradox representing the intensity of Lennon's emotions, I realized how true that framework is in a multitude of other situations. We tend to put huge ranges of thoughts and emotions into confining boxes that manifest themselves in monosyllabic words—good, bad, anger, joy, love, hate—and it can be maddeningly frustrating when we try to break outside of them and expand upon these feelings but just can't. I know personally that when I feel profound, complicated, overwhelming things, it can be nearly impossible for me to actually communicate them. During my time this summer, even while listening to this song on my morning commute, there were so many opportunities for reflection that I

desperately wished I could turn into a tangible, creative product like poetry or lyrics, but I never found the right words to do so. But, is that such a bad thing? Perhaps not. Lennon seemed to have the right idea with “I Want You (She’s So Heavy).” Maybe we’d all benefit from taking a page out of his book here and stop trying to keep up the façade of depth that expressive, emotive language is perceived to cultivate. As evidenced here, sometimes much more can be said with four phrases in eight minutes than can in an entire novel.

The difference between that and the next song on the album is figuratively and literally night and day. While “I Want You (She’s So Heavy)” broods from the depths of the darkest night, “Here Comes the Sun” introduces a second, brighter side of the album and makes you feel like a new season is just around the corner. It was written by Harrison when he escaped to Eric Clapton’s house just outside of London for a brief reprieve from the overwhelming tensions within the band and expressed his immense relief over putting some physical distance between him and his problems. Besides the location where the song was written, this is one the songs that I connect most to London because of Harrison’s explanation in *Anthology*: “It seems as if winter in England goes on forever; by the time spring comes you really deserve it.” This resonated with me in both a literal

and metaphorical sense. Of course, it wasn't exactly winter when we arrived in London—it was the middle of May—but it might as well have been the tundra for a group of Floridians. This only amplified any culture shock and homesickness that we experienced during our first few weeks there as we had to deal with the unfamiliar gloom while watching our friends and family back home enjoy the familiar heat of summer. In a metaphorical sense, our overall adjustment period was like our winter and seemed to directly correlate with the weather. None of us knew how long it would last, and for some it seemed to go on longer than for others, but we were all extremely ready for a change in the seasons. Eventually, it came. I remember the first time my flatmates and I sat in Hyde Park and felt the sun for the first time since we left and just thinking, "it's all right." When the sun finally did come out for all of us, figuratively and literally, I've never felt so warm.

Skipping ahead through the impressive medley of songs that makes up the bulk of the second side of the album, we finally come to "The End." Aptly titled, this song is the very last one that all four members of The Beatles recorded together. Given what the album meant for the band and its future, it's only fitting that it opened with "Come Together" and ended with the product of the last time that all four Beatles actually did come

together, “The End.” Even better, in the spirit of collaboration for old time’s sake, it was credited to Lennon-McCartney. Each member had a solo, which feels like a nice but bittersweet send off, like an actor taking a bow at the end of his final show. For me, this song reminds me that all good things must come to an end. No matter how wonderful something is, no matter how much you put into it, nothing lasts forever. However, that’s not meant to be looked at from a cynical, nihilistic point of view. On the contrary, if nothing is permanent, then that’s all the more reason to put as much heart and soul into the things that matter to you while you have the opportunity to do so. It’s all a game of give and take: give your all and the takeaways will transcend the length of anything else. All of this is effectively summed up by the iconic couplet, “And in the end, the love you take is equal to the love you make.” This is one of my favorite lyrics, not just in a Beatles song, but in all of the music that I listen to. It’s so simple but so profound—perhaps McCartney took a lesson from Lennon in that. “The End” was perfect; it was a beautiful way to end the album and effectively close the book on the story of the most successful band in history.

Listening to *Abbey Road* in its entirety evokes a sense of completeness and finality. Everything comes full circle in The Beatles’ last album, beginning with a rallying cry to “Come Together” and effectively

signing off with “The End.” As a whole, *Abbey Road* represents a bittersweet goodbye—the end of an era. Make no mistake, the path that led to this album was anything but smooth, but that makes it so much meaningful in its completion. I am now over halfway through my college career, steadily hurtling towards the ominous destination of “adulthood.” The concept that someday this will all be behind me—and that someday is alarmingly eminent—is unsettling, but not altogether terrible. With the end of The Beatles, the members had to face leaving a huge part of their identity behind and cultivating a new one; for some, the band was all that they knew. The idea of graduation poses a similar mystery: with 16 out of my 21 years spent in school, it has always been a constant in my life, and anything else is unfamiliar. However, a change in the weather can bring good things, as “Here Comes the Sun” helpfully reminds me. Moreover, despite whatever haphazard circumstances lead up to the final product, it can still be a beautiful collaboration between fate and chance, evidenced by “Come Together.” Finally, as “The End” postulates, “And in the end, the love you take is equal to the love you make.” The memories of my time at UF will last much longer than the actual four years I spent here, so I better put everything I can into it while the opportunity still exists if I want my takeaway to be everything that it could be.

This album has come to mean so much to me. What started as a cool souvenir that I picked up around the corner from the place that it was recorded turned into a multifaceted soundtrack to a summer of exploration and growth. Music has a unique power to attach itself to a particular time, place, event, or era, and evoke those poignant memories with startling clarity, just by pressing play. I have no doubt that *Abbey Road* will continue to serve that purpose for whenever I want to instantly recall my time in London. Moreover, I predict that I'll continue to discover new meanings to its songs and identify with previously hidden themes that can only be unlocked by maturity that I do not yet possess and things that I have not yet experienced. With music being such a big part of my life, I'm sure that I'll have many more soundtracks to many more adventures, and I'm excited to see what the next one will be.

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Abbey Road

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