

## Review

Olivier Julien, ed. 2008. *Sgt. Pepper and the Beatles: It Was Forty Years Ago Today*. Burlington, VT: Ashgate. ISBN 978-0-7546-6708-7 (pbk). 208pp.

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Winner of the 2009 'Best Research in Recorded Rock and Popular Music' Award for Excellence by the Association for Recorded Sound Collection (ARSC), *Sgt. Pepper and the Beatles: It Was Forty Years Ago Today* was published in 2008 as part of Ashgate's extensive Popular and Folk Music Series. Edited by Oliver Julien, the volume consists of eleven chapters by well-known and emerging American, European and Australian popular music scholars who approach the Beatles' 1967 album *Sgt. Pepper's Hearts Club Band* from a variety of perspectives.

A number of the essays are musicological in nature. Some consider the growing differences in Lennon's and McCartney's individual approaches to song writing, the notion of extended form on *Sgt. Pepper's*, the deployment of sound design in the album's production, the Beatles' use of Indian music, the Beatles' use of classical music and elements of psychedelia, and the Beatles' relationship to what Julien refers to as the *phonographic tradition*. Other essays discuss whether the album has a cultural agenda or is more escapist in nature, analyse the album's extraordinary cover art, interrogate the presence of psychedelic insight on the record, and look at the album's reception *vis à vis* authenticity over time.

Virtually all the volume's authors are to be commended for carefully contextualizing their arguments both within the Beatles' pre- and post-*Pepper* career, and within popular music in general. In addition, the majority of the essays are detailed, well-researched and draw on a plethora of secondary sources—many obvious, some quite obscure. However, a handful of the essays suffer from the tendency to simply make assertions without adequately demonstrating the logic behind them. Often this seems to be a result of the common academic problem where authors strive too hard to have something important to say when, in fact, their topic and the phenomena they are addressing simply do not lend themselves to such large-scale conclusions.

One of the most insightful chapters in the book is Australian professor Michael Hannan's 'The Sound Design of *Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band*'. Drawing extensively on producer George Martin and William Pearson's *The Summer of Love: The Making of Sgt. Pepper* (1994) and engineer Geoff Emerick and Howard Massey's *Here, There and Everywhere: My Life Recording the Beatles* (2006), Hannan makes a convincing case that both Martin and Emerick 'and indeed the Beatles themselves were constantly thinking in terms of sound design' (46). My only criticism is that while Hannan describes numerous instances of such thinking, he does not go into detail with regard to affect or meaning.

David Reck's 'The Beatles and Indian Music' is another one of the book's strongest chapters. A noted expert on South Indian classical music, Reck chose to explore the Beatles' use of Indian music over the course of their career, from 1965's 'Norwegian Wood' through 1970's *Abbey Road*, while only focusing on *Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band* for two of his essay's eleven pages. The result is a detailed and nuanced exegesis on the influence of Indian music on the Beatles' approach to timbre, instrumentation, texture, mode, harmony, lyrics and even the cover of *Sgt. Pepper*.

While a review such as this does not allow enough space to discuss every chapter, I would also like to mention Ian Inglis's 'Cover Story: Magic, Myth and Music'. His work is particularly rich in its account of the process through which *Pepper's* iconic cover came about, commenting extensively on the front cover, back cover, centre spread as well as the dust jacket that housed the vinyl record itself. Starting out by asserting that '*Sgt. Pepper* remains the only album within popular music whose cover has attracted as much attention and debate as the music it contains' (91), Inglis later concludes that with *St. Pepper* (the music as well as the cover) the Beatles 'shifted the function of popular music from music-as-entertainment to music-as-communication' (96).

Perhaps the finest compliment one can pay the book is that the best essays in *Sgt. Pepper and the Beatles: It Was Forty Years Ago Today* are liable to prompt the reader to hear and think about various parts of the album in new ways some forty-five years after its initial release. That was certainly my experience and, given the amount of discourse on the Beatles and *Pepper* in the ensuing years, something I would not have thought was necessarily possible. Julien is to be commended for putting such a volume together.

## References

- Emerick, Geoff, and Howard Massey. 2006. *Here, There and Everywhere: My Life Recording the Beatles*. New York: Gotham Books.
- Martin, George, and William Pearson. 1994. *The Summer of Love: The Making of Sgt. Pepper*. London: Macmillan.