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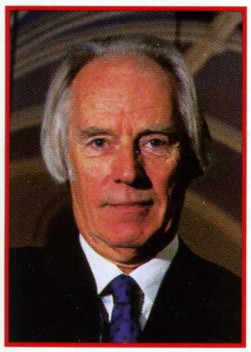
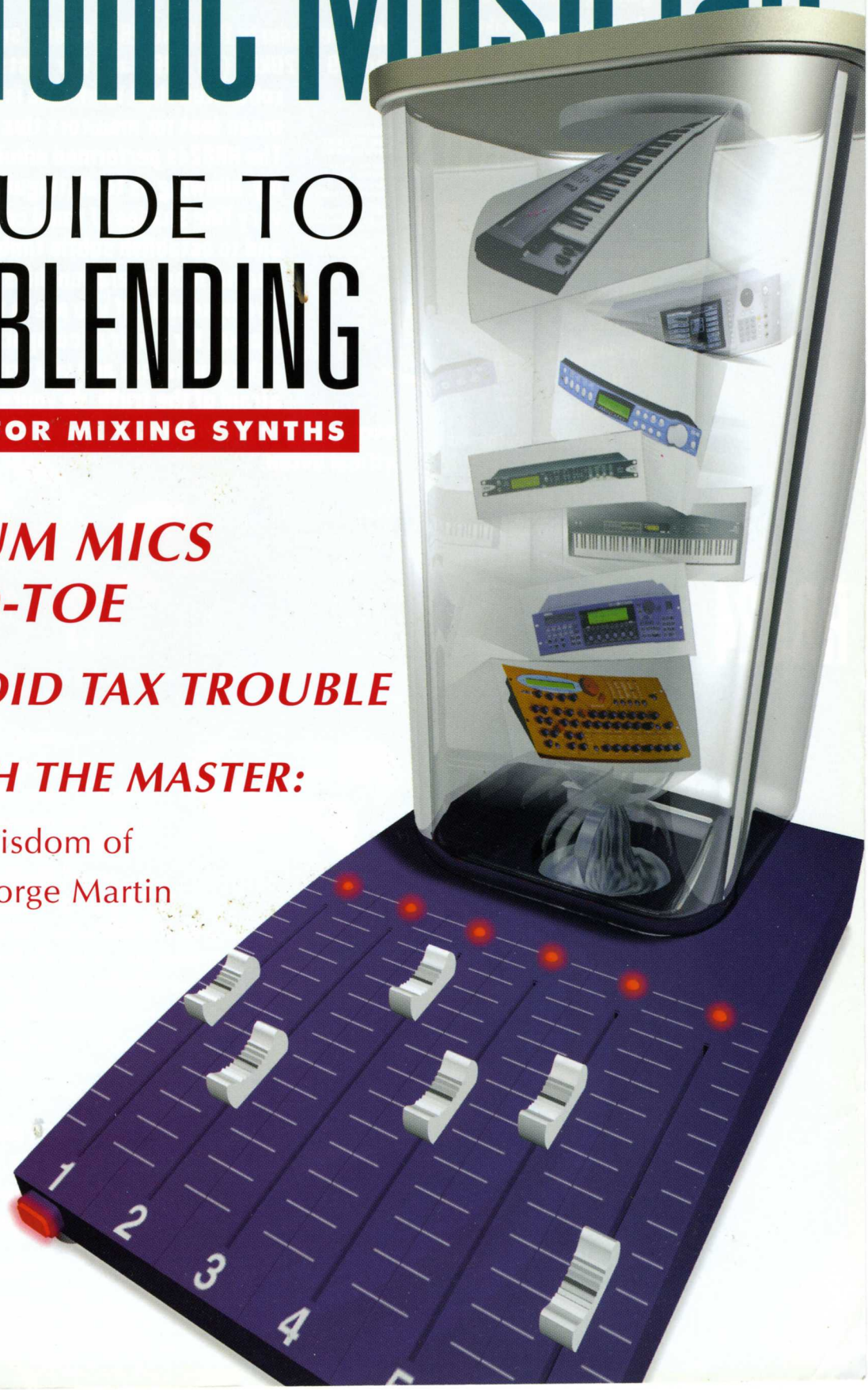


The Wisdom of Sir George Martin



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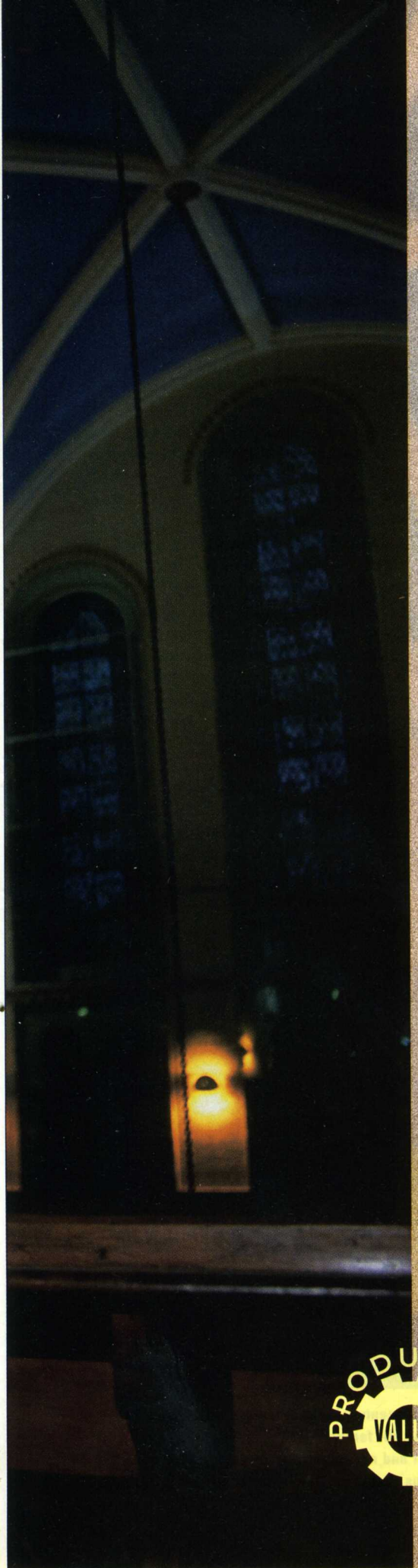


By Larry the O

To Sir with Love

Conversations with & about Sir George Martin.

To anyone who works with modern sound recording, Sir George Martin is The Man. He has produced 30 singles and 16 albums that reached the top of the British charts and attained similar figures in America and worldwide. He has received countless honors, including five Grammys, knighthood in 1996, and a rare NARAS Trustee's Award. But Martin is best known as the man who signed the Beatles in 1962, when every other label had rejected them. Martin produced every Beatles album except the chaotic *Let It Be*, which bore no producer credit. He has also produced an incredible variety of artists, including Peter Sellers, the Goons, Beyond the Fringe, America, Mahavishnu Orchestra, Seatrain, Jeff Beck, Cilla Black, Elton John, and Peter Ustinov.

Born in England in 1926, Martin started his recording career in 1950. During his years in the studio, not only has he seen the rise of such technical innovations as stereo, multitrack recording, synthesizers, automation, and digital technology in all its myriad faces, but he has pioneered and often invented the now-standard techniques for using these tools. Whether making Beatles records at EMI's Abbey Road studios or working with other artists in his own studios—AIR London, AIR Montserrat (both now history), or AIR Lyndhurst (his current studio)—Martin has always been the master of his sonic domain.

But Martin is more than a great producer and pioneer: he is a true renaissance man of music. As a trained musician (oboe was his original instrument), he brought orchestral instruments to the Beatles records, writing the scores himself and usually conducting them, as well. Martin also performed many of the band's keyboard parts, including the Bach-influenced solo on "In My Life." The avant-garde was just as much his territory, as demonstrated by his score for "I Am the Walrus" and the mad calliope rush of "Being for the Benefit of Mr. Kite." He also composed the scores to films such as *Help* and *Live and Let Die*.

PRODUCTION VALUES

To Sir with Love

In 1997, he produced Elton John's hit tribute to Princess Diana, "Candle in the Wind '97," which was recorded in just a few hours immediately following Diana's funeral. Finally, Martin decided enough was enough. Suffering from failing hearing, he decided to retire; but first he would produce an album of his own, on which he would work with whomever he wanted. The result was *In My Life,* an album consisting almost entirely of Beatles covers, along with a few of his own compositions, performed by guest artists ranging from (here's that crazy variety again) musicians Celine Dion, John Williams, and Phil Collins to actors Goldie Hawn, Robin Williams, Billy Connolly, and Sean Connery.

Martin's work with the Beatles has been well documented, so I wanted to get a broader view of him and his work. Therefore, I interviewed several others who had worked with him on non-Beatles projects—Andy Kulberg of Seatrain, producer/drummer Narada Michael Walden, Paul Winter of the Winter Consort, violinist Jean Luc Ponty, former Winter Consort member Paul McCandless, and ex–AIR London tape operator Chris Michie (now technical editor of *Mix* magazine, **EM**'s sister publication)—all of whom graciously gave me their insights and memories of the George Martin experience. Their comments are interwoven here with Martin's to give you several takes on some of the same topics.

I spoke with Martin as he was nearing the end of an absolutely brutal week of nonstop interviews and appearances to promote the release of *In My Life.* That evening, at the CD-release party, Martin was feted by MCA executives and fellow megaproducer Quincy Jones. He was given a Gold Record for *In My Life,* as well as the Trustee's Award he had been unable to accept when his wife was going into surgery. Tall, lean, and very British, Martin is unfailingly gracious, even in a state of exhaustion, careful and articulate in his speech, and more humble than one would ever expect for a man of his accomplishments. Although his manner is restrained, his passion for music and sound is clear. Retired he may be; finished working—I don't believe so.

IN MY LIFE

One thing I found interesting was that fully half the artists on *In My Life* are actors rather than musicians, and most of those are comedians.

Martin: People have said this. I don't find it surprising at all. I've been in the studios recording since 1950—a long, long time. In 1955 I was given the job of running a label, Parlophone Records, and I was responsible for all the material that went on that label. Because it was a little label that didn't have any big stars on it, I decided to do something a bit different, and I started making spoken word records and musical records with actors and comedians.

The guy I started off with originally was Peter Ustinov. I got to know the Goons very well; they were a cult thing in England, like an early Monty Python. In fact, Monty Python wouldn't have existed without the Goons. Peter Sellers was one of them; Harry Secombe and Spike Milligan were the others. Spike was the guy who did all the writing. I made lots of records with Spike and with Peter, and a whole series of albums with Peter.

Others that I have worked with include Michael Flanders and Donald Swann, the Beyond the Fringe crowd—Peter Cooke, Dudley Moore, Jonathan Miller, and Alan Bennett—Rolf Harris, Bernard Cribbins. The records that I made sold quite well.

I still, obviously, made a great deal of music. In fact, I used to record Matt Munro, who was a very good Frank Sinatra–type singer; a guy named Ron Goodwin, a very good orchestral man who wrote a lot of film music; and Jim Dale, who is now a big Broadway star. Then, in '62, the Beatles came along. When I met with them, they knew about me because they were great fans of Peter Sellers and the Goons, and they knew all the records I'd made. So we had a link already.

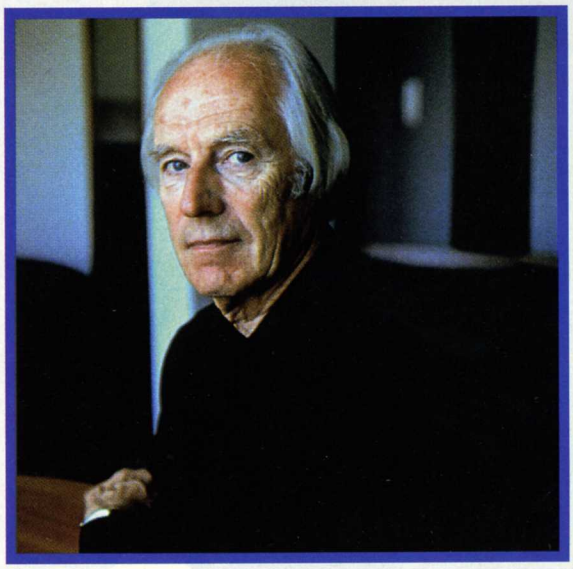
They had a zany sense of humor, also. Without that sense of humor, the Beatles wouldn't have existed, and certainly we wouldn't have hit it off as well as we did. Even after the Beatles, I did covers of certain songs with Peter Sellers; I did "A Hard Day's Night," for example, so it's a kind of tradition. I don't think there's much difference between a performer in music and a performer in spoken word or humor.

For the songs on *In My Life,* you had written some of the original orchestrations and arrangements, so you had to choose how much to duplicate as well as depart from them.

Martin: Some things were pretty well right. I wanted "I Am the Walrus" on the album. And in putting it on the album, I didn't want to deviate much from where I'd gone with John [Lennon] all those years before, partly because of nostalgia and affection, but also because I think it was the right way to do it. If you did it another way, it wouldn't sit so well.

DINOSAURS TO SPACE SHUTTLES

Andy Kulberg of Seatrain commented to me that your first job in recording studios was dropping the weight to turn the flywheel, back when albums were cut directly to disc.



JOHN STODDART

After nearly a half century in the recording industry, Sir George Martin is retiring. His farewell album, *In My Life,* features a variety of musical and nonmusical performers, including Celine Dion, Phil Collins, Jeff Beck, Goldie Hawn, and Robin Williams.

To Sir with Love

Martin: Well, it wasn't my first job, but certainly that was how the lathes were driven. The electric motors of those days weren't stable enough to give a regular rotation, so they used a falling weight, which is a very constant source of power, to drive the lathe, and it had to be wound back up to the ceiling before each take.

So that was the era in which you started, and now you're finishing up in an era of 48-track digital everything.

Martin: That's right; it's gone from a dinosaur to a space shuttle.

Andy Kulberg: One of the things that George told us [Seatrain] was that he used to have this Neve board, and the modules in the board would unscrew. He used to do crossfades by taking one of the modules, turning it upside down, and doing this *[demonstrates moving two faders together]*. He passed on little things that he was proud of like that.

And yet, throughout your whole career, you have always emphasized the tremendous importance of technology being used in the service of the music.

Martin: Absolutely. Always. They're tools, aren't they? That's what it amounts to. I *see* music; part of my life has been painting pictures in sound. Extend that simile and think of the great art that we've had. Think of Leonardo da Vinci or Michaelangelo—wonderful artists. Can you think of what they would do with a computer screen? It's fascinating. They were using primitive tools—dyes, oils, colors, and brushes—that people have evolved from nature. They had no great technological aids to their draftsmanship or their art, and they produced the most sublime works. So technology doesn't really make good art, but you can use it to help you. It's just like having an extra-good hammer or, if you're a sculptor, using a chain saw to get through some big stuff that you couldn't get through before; it saves you labor.

Same thing in sound. The tools we had were primitive in the early days. The first time I heard of this thing called a synthesizer, by Robert Moog, I was fascinated and wanted to know more about it. I met up with Bob Moog, and his early machine was a most enormous thing; it looked like a telephone exchange. I bought one of these, with the telephone jacks all over the place. Really, they were sound generators—sine waves, sawtooth, and so on—and you just had to learn how to make sounds with it, which was fascinating stuff.

When you had been used to playing real instruments, this was an innovation, and we put it to good use. But that didn't come about until *Abbey Road,* which was the first time that we used a Moog synthesizer on a Beatles album.

What did the synthesizer bring to you in terms of a palette?

Martin: Well, in fact, we didn't use it very much. We played the synthesizer on something like "Because" or "Maxwell's Silver Hammer" just as a different extra sound, but we were using other original sounds that weren't synthetic, like the swordmandela, the harp thing that George introduced, and our own innovations of using different speeds and weird sounds for harmoniums and mouth organs and that sort of thing. So Beatles songs didn't have a great deal of synthetic stuff on them. It's only in recent years that we've had the luxury of sampling and being able to create sounds from hard disk; it didn't enter the Beatle domain.

You have to remember that most of the Beatle time, we had the Mellotron, which was a kind of synthesizer, but not an electronic one. It was simple tape passing over heads and things. We didn't get computers in those days; we didn't get anything that we have today.

Even the digital watch didn't arrive until the early '70s. *Live and Let Die* is a film I scored, and in that film, James Bond wears a digital watch with a red LED dial. It was the first time we'd seen one. Before that time, watches were even windup; you never had a quartz-controlled watch. Computers still didn't exist except in enormous RCA laboratories, so for the Beatles stuff, we still had to fly by the seat of our pants, mostly.

In more recent years, have you made use of technological advances like digital audio?

Martin: Post-Beatles, I've implemented every innovation that came along if I needed it, but only as an expedient. I'll give you an example: I made an album of Gershwin songs a couple of years ago that featured Larry Adler, who is a great harmonica player [*The Glory of Gershwin,* Mercury Records]. It was Larry's 80th anniversary, so it was kind of a tribute to him and

Jim Carrey "collaborates" with Martin during the "I Am the Walrus" session.

to Gershwin, whom he had known.

That album had 18 tracks on it and 17 artists; Elton John had two tracks. It finished up with a version of "Rhapsody in Blue" that was specially scored for Larry Adler way back in the '30s by Richard Russell Bennett, who was a great orchestrator of the time, and I conducted it in Abbey Road's big studio.

When I came to do Elton's songs, he recorded them as two separate items, but I wanted them to flow into one another. We deliberately started off "Our Love Is Here to Stay" with him completely unaccompanied. So it began *[sings and snaps fingers]* "It's very clear...," then the rhythm starts "our love is here to stay," and so on, and then the orchestra comes in. It flowed out of "Someone to Watch Over Me," and I'd written a string link from the end of one to the other so that it became a segue. But when I put the two things together—and I had the benefit of digital editing, so it was quite easy to do—I found that, over the string passage, the entry of the voice was much too brittle. It was not a happy coincidence. The voice jarred when it came in; it was much too bright and perky coming out of the tail end of the previous song.

The way he sang it was *[sings in tempo]* "It's very clear...." It sounded awful, so I thought, "What am I going to do with this if I'm going to work it at all?" Using the computer and digital editing, I was able to stretch the voice without changing the pitch and actually made him sing *[sings first two words slower and more rubato, then in tempo from third word]*, "It's veeryyyyy clear, our love is here to stay...," and it worked beautifully. Then I played it to Elton, and he hadn't any idea he hadn't sung it that way. That's something you couldn't have done in the '60s.

WORKING WITH SEATRAIN AND THE WINTER CONSORT

Kulberg: When Capitol bought Seatrain from A&M, around 1970, we took some of the same material that had appeared on our A&M album and were going to make another debut album, done hipper. Part of the hipper presentation was that we were going to get a big-name producer. We had the crazy idea, of course, of having George Martin produce us.

We recorded a demo and sent it to George to see if he would be interested in producing us. To our complete shock, he was. He and a partner had just opened AIR London, and I think they were looking for something to further their business. We went over and recorded there. It was a beautiful studio, very traditional but well equipped; it was pretty advanced.

The studio was a more crudely physical place at that time, wasn't it?

Kulberg: Absolutely. George would feed Peter Rowan's guitar, which tended to be a little tinny and thin, through a two-track recorder at a very fast speed and put a little piece of adhesive tape or something on the capstan, and it would make the tape go "ooooi-innnnneeee" when it went the past the capstan. It put a vibrato on it, and it came out with a little delay. He would mix that in, and it really helped fatten up the sound.

That album did pretty well. "Thirteen Questions" was a fairly big hit—we had success with that and could kind of write our own ticket. So, for *Marblehead Messenger* [the second Seatrain album, also produced by Martin], he got a band that was not so demanding of him; we were on our own trip. We were visualizing ourselves as a success, so instead of us going over to London, he came to us. We rented a house in Marblehead, Massachusetts, which is a gorgeous little town.

Martin: Seatrain's recordings were very happy recordings. Bennett Glotzer was their manager, and he convinced me to do this series. He also managed a group called the Winter Consort, and we recorded them in tandem.

I knew that doing two albums with two different groups would take quite a bit of time. I had my family to consider: my son Giles, who is the coproducer on *In My Life*, was only two, and I didn't want to be apart from them for a long time. So I said that I would come over but that I wanted to bring my family, and I didn't want to work in New York, either, particularly in July. As the group came from Marblehead, I did a kind of reconnaissance early on, and we rented an empty house on Marblehead Neck. I took my engineer, Bill Price, over with me, and we converted it into a studio. I bought lots of sound-deadening panels, and they fixed them up in the rooms and made a little studio that would work for both groups.

I rented a house nearby and moved in with my family. I got a desk from Rhode Island and a tape machine from some where else....We assembled a studio. It was comfortable and very good. Obviously, we didn't have all the finer points

Robin Williams, George Martin, and Bobby McFerrin consult on "Come Together," which Williams and McFerrin performed on *In My Life*.

To Sir with Love

of a studio, but it was all that we needed.

Working with Seatrain was interesting because it was such a varied group, a mixture of so many different talents. I loved the homespun, folky feel of the band. Andy Kulberg wrote a lot of the songs; the keyboard player [Lloyd Baskin] was brilliant; Richard Greene was really a great electric-fiddle player, echoes of Jean Luc Ponty, but much more folk than Jean. I love what he did. All the group gelled together very well.

Paul McCandless: Paul Winter was dying to work with George Martin because Paul was looking to find the most powerful, smartest producer he could to help get his music, and instrumental music in general, out to the wider public. George's signature was putting all these unique-sounding instrumental breaks on the Beatles records. They weren't the normal guitar solos: sometimes there was a string quartet or a Salvation Army brass band or you name it.

We worked in this house in Marblehead, which was later christened "Sea Weed Studios." They made this little house sound quite good. We had a bunch of people playing live all the time and would add a few things later on. Some of the solos were overdubbed, like Ralph [Towner] taking a solo on a Renaissance Regal, which is a very ducky little reed organ. A lot of times, we were in the same room and could see each other [when recording]. It's not the way you do it nowadays.

George did a lot in terms of getting the takes that we needed; he was tireless that way. Paul Winter was famous for doing a lot of takes, as well, so we did a lot of takes with George. He brought a really high level of performance to it that we weren't used to.

Martin: The Winter Consort was another bag of tricks but just as varied as Seatrain. You had, again, some great talents there: Ralph Towner, who is a great guitarist and keyboard player. I still have fond memories of his virtuoso kind of extemporaneous pieces of acoustic guitar, jangling away with tremendous vigor. We had David Darling on cello, Paul McCandless on oboe and *cor anglais,* and Collin Walcott, a very good percussionist.

The whole group had all sorts of percussion instruments—amadindas and xylophones and gourds and things—which would fill the back of a truck. So it was ethnic music, and yet it wasn't; it was folk music, as well. It was near classical music, too.

McCandless: Paul Winter had a vast array of ethnic instruments and a bunch of Renaissance instruments that he was fascinated with, and George had some great ideas for using some of them.

I had this gigantic Sarrusophone, which is a bass reed instrument, like an octave below a baritone sax. On this one piece, we used it to double some of the bass lines, and it gave a tremendous impact. It put a real edge on it. You couldn't really hear it; you just heard that the bass had gotten more potent.

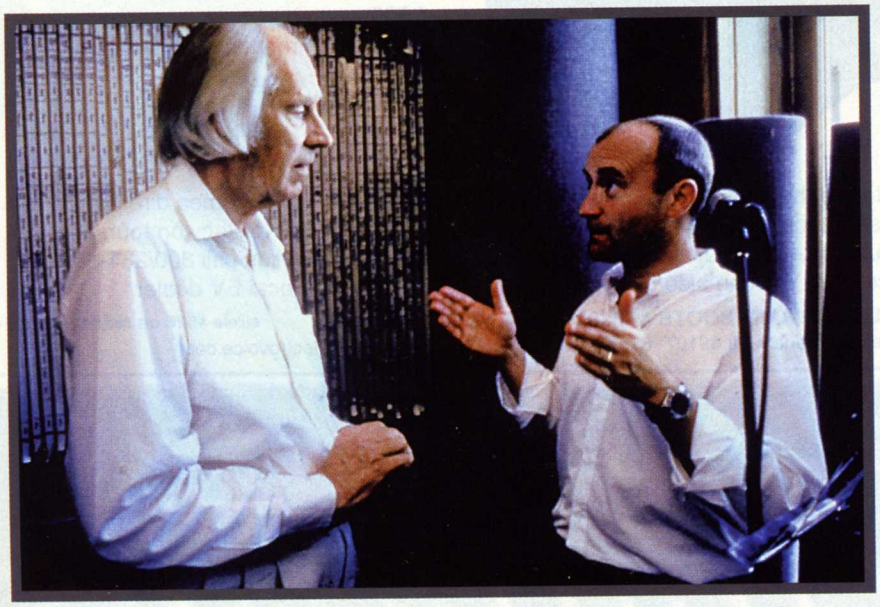
This period was before the synthesizer was in its heyday. We were trying to get a lot of these magical, fanciful sounds that no one had ever heard before, without synthesizers because we didn't have synths and didn't know anything about them.

I remember there was one piece for which we were looking for a big tamboura sound. George had the whole band come out, and we held down a chord and the middle pedal of the piano, which effectively creates a harp. Then he had the band strum the piano, and they recorded it but with the tape turned around so they were recording it backwards. So there was this big crescendo, and the engineer, Bill Price, faded it before it actually hit the attack. It had the effect of this swarming, swirling kind of thing.

It must have been interesting recording such different bands as Seatrain and the Winter Consort back-to-back.

Martin: Yeah, it was consecutive; we did the Winter Consort after Seatrain. Paul Winter himself, who played saxophone, is a very gentle man, and it was quite a happy session. The title song, "Icarus," was a simple instrumental, but it had a lovely feel to it. Darling, the cello player, had a brother-in-law who was at NASA, and he told me that he gave [his brother-in-law] a cassette with "Icarus" on it. He shouldn't have done it, but one of the astronauts took it with him and left it on the surface of the moon, so we'll have something to remember it by.

Chris Michie: The interesting thing about the Paul Winter album was that, when it came back to AIR London for mixing, there were multitracks of the songs from two sets of sessions, done at different times in different studios, edited together, basically bar by bar. They had totally different sounds, so the bass sound would change from one cut to the next. It was mixed edit by edit: they'd set up a mix and mix that



Phil Collins and Martin discuss the "Golden Slumbers/Carry That Weight/The End" tracks.

To Sir with Love

section, and then, of course, the tape would run on into the next section, at which point the mix would totally go to hell. Then they'd set up for that next section and try to match the one before and so on, then edit the 2-track tape together at the same point as the multitrack edit. It was a very painstaking process.

APOCALYPSE AND WIRED

There was a story Narada Michael Walden told me about doing the Mahavishnu Orchestra *Apocalypse* album in 1974 at AIR London....

Martin: One of my favorite albums, by the way. I loved "The Smile of the Beyond." It's one of my favorite pieces of music.

Narada Michael Walden: To save time, the symphony had to record lines that chased Mahavishnu on "Hymn to Him" ahead of time [before John McLaughlin recorded his parts].

When the rhythm section was recorded, George would conduct and cue me as to where to come in, then cut me, then cue me in again. There was one point where the strings were dragging the time, and I had to drag my time to match them. It was extremely difficult for me, but a piece of cake for him.

Martin: When I talked to John about this album, which was very ambitious and complicated, I thought we would do it live, with the Mahavishnu Orchestra and the London Symphony Orchestra—which was conducted by a young musician who is now very famous, Michael Tilson Thomas—playing together in the studio. So we assembled them in the studio, and the work started off with the strings as an introduction, and then the band started, and Michael [Walden]...Michael is not a quiet drummer.

[General laughter at the gracious understatement.]

When the drums and guitar started, all hell broke loose. I was standing by Michael Tilson Thomas on the rostrum, and he turned to me and said, "I can't hear anything." And he couldn't. With the noise of the band, you had no idea that the first violin, five feet away, was playing anything. It was that loud. I realized it wasn't going to work that way, so I had quickly to change my mind about how I was going to produce this album.

I booked another studio [at AIR] in the same block of time and put the band in one studio and the orchestra in the big studio and connected them up. We didn't even have the benefit of closed-circuit television in those days; it was just an aural hookup. We did some of the tracks like that, but it was difficult working that way, and it inhibited the band an awful lot.

I then went through the score with John and said, "Look, some of these things will work this way; some will work another way. One way is to record the orchestra first and then get the band to play on top. Another way is to do the band first, and I'll overdub the orchestra. And the third way is to do both live." Therefore, I had to conduct Michael into the ones in which the orchestra recorded first.

It was a very challenging album for me. John's music is complicated anyway; a time signature like 15/16 is quite normal for him. It was one of the most difficult albums I've ever made—and one of the most rewarding—because it's also one of the greatest albums I've ever made.

Aside from the acoustical problem, what were the other challenges? The complexity of the music?

Martin: Yes, I think so. Knowing where the damn beat lay, many times! This is where Michael excelled; he was on top of that, and he knew exactly where John was.

What flabbergasted me was that Michael said that was the first time he'd ever been in a recording studio.

Martin: I didn't know that. I was knocked out with what he did; I thought he was a fantastic musician.

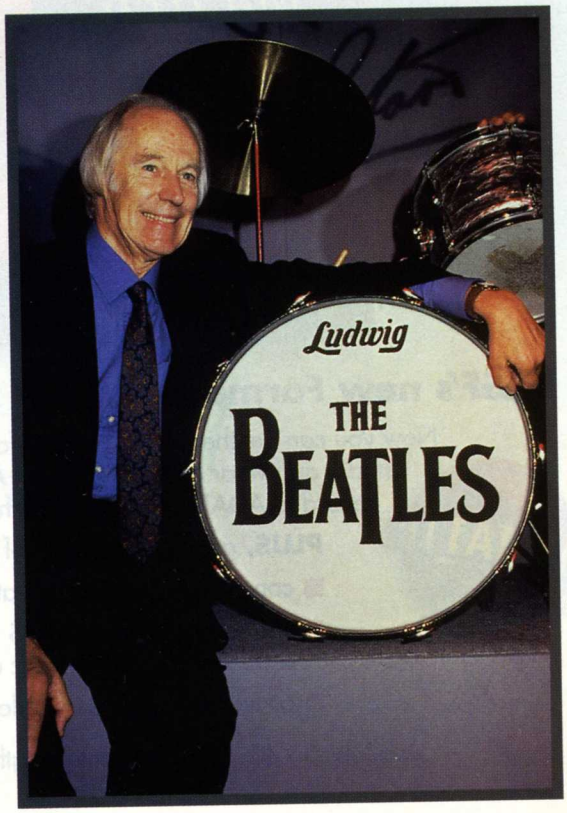
Walden: My first time out I worked with George Martin! George was working with people who hadn't even recorded before, like Ralphe [Armstrong, bassist] who was 16 or 17 years old. We had many nights where we asked him about everything: "George, are you sure this is OK?" and he'd say, "It's just great."

He's a musician, an artist; he can arrange the strings and do things that are highly evolved musically, and he's extremely detail oriented. Mahavishnu Orchestra's music was very complex and George could handle it, so that put me at ease. He is a gentle spirit with real musical vision, so you could relax and concentrate on the process of making music and recordings.

You worked with George Martin again on Jeff Beck's *Wired* album, didn't you?

Walden: Mahavishnu was making the *Inner Worlds* album at Honky Chateau in France. I'd known Jeff through touring with Mahavishnu, and he said, "When you finish making *Inner Worlds*, come over to London." I went back to AIR London, and we worked with George.

On the song "Led Boots," Jeff had given me the signal to start playing drums when the signal had not yet



THEODORE WOOD, RETNA LTD.

In 1995, Martin celebrated the release of the Beatles' *Anthology 1*, for which he remastered and remixed all the tracks.

come from the [control room] booth to start playing. The recording was all one take, and you can hear the tape machine going "gggglrrrrr" at the very start. George heard the drum solo at the beginning getting cut off, but he liked it and Jeff liked it, so that went on the record.

WITH THE BEATLES

I would be a fool to do this interview without hitting you with a few Beatles questions. *[Martin chuckles.]* You mentioned earlier that you didn't think "I Am the Walrus" could be done as well with any arrangement that strayed from the original. How did that arrangement come about?

Martin: When we did the original recording, John began by teaching me the song in my normal sort of privileged, private performance, where he would sing it in front of me just strumming his acoustic guitar. Of course, if you hear that weird song with just acoustic accompaniment, it's quite different. I was amazed at it and loved it, but I said, "Wow, John, what the hell am I supposed to make of that?"

He said, "I want you to do a score on it."

"Really? What kind of a score?"

"Well, I don't know, the kind of thing you do, strings and horns or something." He was very vague.

I went away and started thinking about it and came up with the score everybody knows. We recorded it in the big studio in Abbey Road [Studio 1]. Unknown to him, I booked a chorus of professional singers who could read music quickly, the kind of people he would normally shy away from. But they were there to do all the little noises, the swoops and the "ha ha has," which were all written into the score.

When John heard it, he hadn't realized how detailed I'd been in my score. He fell around laughing and thought it was great.

So you scored all of that? I wasn't sure where those ideas had come from.

Martin: It was all in the original score. He gave me suggestions for various things they wanted to do, but ordinarily, we'd have done it with Beatles overdubs. I thought I'd get it done in one fell swoop, and that's the way we did it, and he loved it. Then when we came to mix it, he wanted to go even more far out and had the idea of picking up a radio broadcast and putting it in over the end. By sheer chance, we struck upon someone doing *King Lear* on the radio, and that became part of the mix. We could never remix it like that because that was it.

It didn't exist outside of the actual mix itself.

Martin: Yeah. To this day, I'm amazed that nobody's ever run up and said, "Hey, you used my voice on that recording; how about paying me something?" Isn't that amazing?

> "HE WAS VERY RESPECTFUL OF ALL THE MUSICIANS INVOLVED AND SUCCEEDED IN BEING CONVINCING WITH HIS SUGGESTIONS WITHOUT EVER BEING AGGRESSIVE."
> —JEAN LUC PONTY

In the days when you were having to do a lot of bouncing, you must have often gotten into situations that were tricky to manage. There were times when you were doing drum overdubs later, which can be tough to pull off.

Martin: The drum overdubs would come about if we felt it needed something heavier—a heavier snare or something like that—or when we wanted tambourine added or whatever. Because of the lack of tracks, we often combined that with a vocal track or a guitar solo or what have you. We'd drop in and out like mad and combine sounds on the same track dangerously, but it was all we could do because I didn't want to go into too much overdubbing. I reckoned bouncing from one 4-track to another 4-track was okay. If you then went to a third generation, it worried me considerably. We did do that sometimes, but I hated doing it.

For example, on the song "She's Leaving Home," I recorded the orchestra on all four tracks: I put violins on two tracks and violas and cellos on the other two tracks because I wanted to be sure I got it so I could really handle it. Then I bounced that down to a stereo pair, which left me with only two tracks for the voices. I knew that I wasn't requiring anything else besides the voices, but I also wanted to double-track them. So I said to John and Paul, "You've got to do this live, both of you singing at the same time." As you know, the song has answering things and there's more echo [reverb] on one voice than the other, that kind of thing.

We put them on two separate mics, so when they got to the *[sings chorus call-and-response parts]* "she is leaving...what did we do with our lives," the "what did we do with our lives" had less echo than the "she is leaving." We got that balance right and got them singing it right the first time round. Then all we had to do was duplicate it—exactly. This is where the Beatles were so good, because they did duplicate it and we got a really good double track, with the same perspective that we needed in the voices, so we didn't have to go to another generation.

We only had to go to a third generation when we weren't quite sure how to finish the thing or how the arrangement should be topped off, and that's when you would add a sound or something that hadn't been thought of earlier on.

PRODUCTION STYLE

When you hear somebody play a raw song, how much are you hearing a finished product or a direction, and how much do you follow your nose?

Martin: It's a gut feeling, really. When you first hear a song, you don't know what's going to come out, and you develop your thoughts about it. You get an idea of the shape of it, and a score evolves in your mind as to what you want.

When I do my scoring, I always try to keep things simple. Every time I put my pen to paper on a score, I ask at each

bar, "Is this necessary? Do you need to have those notes in it? And if you don't, don't use them." Every bar you come to when you're doing an arrangement, you must decide which way to go, how to treat it. You're committing yourself each step along the way, but you have to do that. And sometimes you do it wrongly, but you hope that the law of averages works out okay. I've always felt that, in scoring, simplicity is the keynote, and cleanliness of line. You get that by being very critical of yourself and not pasting in too much stuff.

One problem with 48-track recording today is that you can layer and layer and layer. It's like an artist with a canvas having too many brushes and too much paint. If you keep putting one layer on top of another and saying, "Oh, I really wanted another bit there. Let's put it in and see what happens," then you get a very muddy picture and a very muddy sound.

I wrote a column recently on the problem of having too many options, and how a lot of great art comes about from artists working against constraints, where it's the application of their creativity against these constraints that pushes them to a level of greatness.

Martin: That's right. It applies to everybody. I remember being most impressed many years ago when I saw a film made for television of Picasso at work. They spent quite a long time on a sequence in which he paints on a ground glass screen with the camera on the other side of it, and you see the paint appearing with the brush strokes. You see him working vaguely and the picture takes shape.

Through time-lapse photography, you get to another day and see the paint changing and him painting over and the picture becoming different. It's a fascinating example of how his mind worked, of the way he would paint. It was a metamorphosis; he would go through different stages.

At one point, I thought, "Oh, that's terrific! Stop there! Don't do any more!" But he went on doing it. Then he came to his version, and I couldn't help reflecting at the end, "I wish he'd stopped because the earlier bit was better than that bit." But he obviously didn't think so. I thought to myself, "If it happens with as great an artist as Picasso, it can happen to us." That's why, always, from that moment on, I've told myself, "Don't go over the top; keep it back."

And yet, you worked several times with artists like the Beatles and John McLaughlin who push so hard to try and go over the top.

Martin: Yeah, so you had to know where your control lay and how you should guide those people. I probably advised them the way it had to be done. Looking back at the results, I was quite happy.

Kulberg: George liked to work on a schedule, which I really respect as a commercial producer. I like to know what's going on; I don't like waiting around for something wild to happen. That's very rock and roll. He's more methodical. You have just so many days to do the tracks, just so many to do the vocals. He would carry around a book of his studio work with the track breakdowns.

He knew a lot from observing, but he allowed the engineer to do all the mechanics, all the touching of tape and the mixing board. He was purely a conduit. He had a very neutral presence when he was working. When you were getting down to the nitty-gritty of cutting tracks or doing vocals, he would listen, but he never let us know what he was listening for. He was a catalyst and, in his own way, definitely a genius. I'm not sure what his exact point of view on things is, other than paying a lot of attention to harmonic detail.

He told me that the first time he ever did a session as a producer, he was assigned by EMI to a jazz group. He was a little uncomfortable with it, went out in the studio and tried to rearrange everything, and they kicked him off the session! As a result, he learned to keep his mouth shut and see what developed, even if he didn't understand it to begin with.

THE GENTLEMAN PRODUCER

Kulberg: He always was an excellent diplomat; that was his forte. He was like right out of *Lawrence of Arabia*—a stoic British diplomat. A gentleman, almost like royalty.

We did a song called "Broken Morning." During the session, he said, "Is that the right note in the bass line?" I was the bass player and had written the song, and one thing that I certainly owned was the bass lines. But I didn't argue with him—I just changed the note to another note, and he seemed satisfied with it. Frankly, I never heard

MICHAEL OCHS ARCHIVES

Martin and the Fab Four pose during an EMI press conference in 1964. The occasion was a DISC award for "Please Please Me."

the problem with it before that, I didn't hear what he heard.

The interesting thing is that he doesn't come from an upper-class background.

Michie: Martin was very polite, but he was also effective at getting resolution, drawing things to people's attention and working out solutions. He was like a coach: he wasn't playing the game, but he was pointing out where people were going wrong and offering possible solutions. With creative people who understood what he was doing, like Andy Kulberg and Richard Greene, they had a blast.

McCandless: I felt that since we [the Winter Consort] were an instrumental group, we were covering some of the area Martin had become kind of famous for with the Beatles. So he had a different kind of role with the Consort, which I think was enjoyable for him. He didn't have to crank out the notes or dream something up; he had to get the performances and keep the project moving forward, because if something wasn't working, the Consort tended to bog down. He kept us moving. We almost didn't feel him there except to hear him say, "Well, why don't we try another one," "We had a few problems in the break there," or "Let's move on."

Paul Winter: George Martin is one of the nobler people we ever worked with; he's somewhere between Prince Philip and Stan Kenton.

Jean Luc Ponty: The only time I worked with George Martin was for the recording of *Apocalypse* in 1974. He was one of the most pleasant persons I have ever worked with, humble and even-tempered. He was very respectful of all the musicians involved and succeeded in being convincing with his suggestions without ever being aggressive.

He seemed to enjoy his role as producer and never showed any sign of stress, despite having to deal with so many musicians in the studio every day.

Walden: George was so cool, so calm. I want to say this about George's spirit: I found him to be very humble. You never had the sense that he was going to push his ideas, other than to say, "Have you thought about *this?*" unlike some egomaniacal cat who says, "This is how you're going to do it."

Kulberg: He looked upon it as a job, and that's how he did it. He didn't interfere in it unless something needed to be done, because he had a wealth of experiences in the studio and had probably come across all these things a billion times and could just cover them all with great ease.

What can I say to George Martin, except that it was great to have crossed his path? Wouldn't it be great to have a mentor like that in your world? He's about as close to a dream come true as you can get in terms of production and the dynamics he was in control of. He is a larger-than-life figure.

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>
> —George Martin

What would you say you learned from working with George Martin?

McCandless: I learned to believe in the truth, as a recording musician—that something's in tune or it's not, it's early or late, a little half-hearted or over the top. We did so many takes that there was a lot of focus on minutiae, because we had achieved a certain level of consistency, and the elements that would rise up or sink down were the more subtle things that also were very key. He must have been pretty patient, because we did an awful lot of takes, and he was there doing everything that he could to make it happen.

That brings up another question. I just read an interview in the *San Francisco Chronicle* in which you denied being dignified or elegant. But everyone I spoke to used the word *gentlemanly* in referring to you.

Martin: *[Laughs.]* That's like the kiss of death, isn't it?

Not at all. I pursued it to find out what they meant, and what I found, especially with Kulberg, was that they felt your production style was that of a facilitator, rather than having to put your stamp on things. Is that how you see your style of production?

Martin: One is what one is, and I've never felt that one gets anywhere in life by bullying people. There are film directors who are renowned for putting their actors and actresses through hell and terrorizing them, and I know a lot of actors who have had this experience. Hitchcock was like that; David Lean, I think, could have been a bit of a Tartar, too. I've never believed in that sort of approach. I've always gotten the best results by persuading, coaxing—*leading* is a good word—because it's just my way.

In the new Lennon anthology that came out, you hear John's experience with Phil Spector. I saw John after he had been working with Phil, and John was complaining to me about him and how he [Lennon] had been handled. He said, "He's not like you at all; he's bloody mad." I said, "Look who's talking, John!" and he said, "You think I'm mad? You should work with Spector! I mean, he really is off his nut." He had a gun fetish and would come in looking like a Mexican bandit with bandoliers on. He used to fire guns off in the studio, too. There's a thing in this anthology where you hear Spector saying to John, "Now, John, this is the instrumental. You know what that is? That's the bit where you don't sing, so shut the f*** up!" That was the way that he spoke to John, and John didn't like it very much. I could never do that. So whichever way is right is the way one has to be.

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