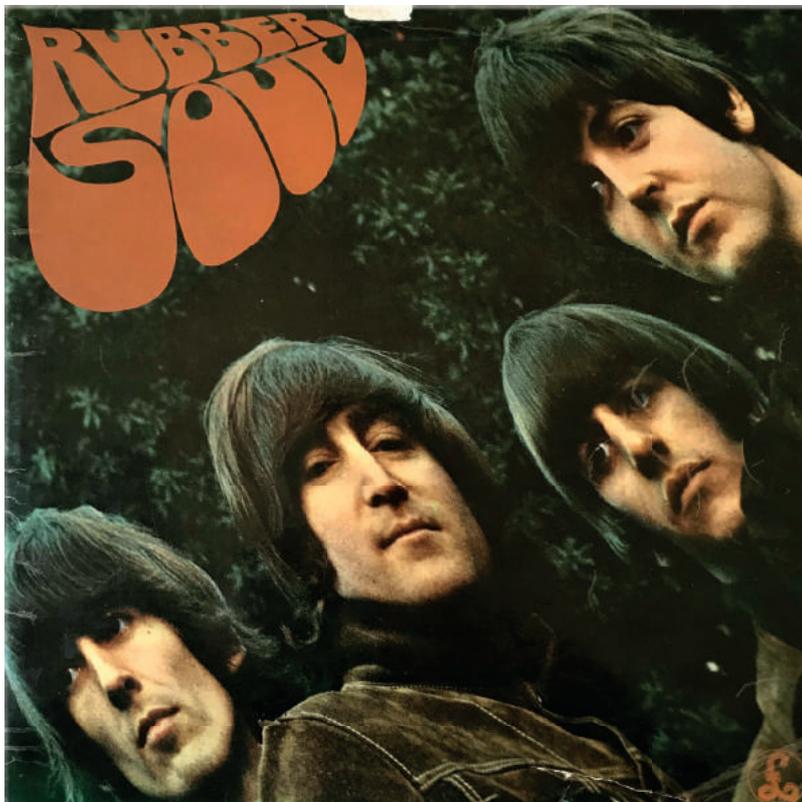


John Lennon *Rhythm, acoustic and lead guitars, organ, tambourine, vocals*
Paul McCartney *Bass, acoustic and lead guitars, piano, maracas, vocals*
George Harrison *Lead, rhythm and acoustic guitars, sitar, maracas, tambourine, vocals*
Ringo Starr *Drums, tambourine, maracas, cowbell, bells, cymbals; Hammond organ, vocals*
George Martin *Piano (In My Life), harmonium (The Word, If I Needed Someone)*
Mal Evans *Hammond organ (You Won't See Me)*



RUBBER SOUL

WITH *HELP!* ONLY JUST OUT IN RECORD SHOPS, NO ONE COULD HAVE PREDICTED WHAT A GIANT LEAP THE BEATLES' SIXTH LONG-PLAYER WOULD BE FROM ITS PREDECESSORS, WRITES STEVE O'BRIEN

In the long and winding story of The Beatles, *Rubber Soul* is generally noted as the moment The Beatles grew up. It wasn't instantaneous, of course. There are teases of a gradually flowering worldliness on every one of their albums before this, but there had never been such a striking leap between LPs as there was between *Help!* and this one. It's the first album of theirs in which you can really feel the four of them exploring the intoxicating possibilities of the studio and you can certainly hear the sonic influence of the 16-date North American tour they'd just come back from, where they'd been exposed to the creamy soul of Motown and Stax as well as the raw folk-rock of Bob Dylan. *Rubber Soul* was the sound of a band whose musical horizons had been significantly broadened.

It's also an album that feels a cohesive whole. It may have been only the second LP to feature entirely Lennon-McCartney originals (*A Hard Day's Night* pipped it there), but it's the first album of the rock era that *sounds* like it was crafted as an album. Producer George Martin later described *Rubber Soul* as "the first album to present a new, growing Beatles to the world", adding: "For the first time we began to think of albums as art on their own, as complete entities." There's a lyrical maturity on display here and an apparent lust to take their music into new, thrilling directions. What's certain is that drugs were more present than ever before in its recording. When recalling *Rubber Soul* years later, John Lennon simply referred to it as "the pot album".

"Grass was really influential in a lot of our changes, especially with the writers," reflected Ringo Starr. ▶



TRACK BY TRACK

1 DRIVE MY CAR

Rubber Soul opens with this untypically lightweight number, courtesy of Paul McCartney, telling the story of a female gold-digger who wants a man as a chauffeur and for sexual services. "Drive my car" was an old blues euphemism for sex," McCartney reflected in the *Many Years From Now* book, "so in the end all is revealed. Black humour crept in and saved the day. It wrote itself then. I find that very often, once you get the good idea, things write themselves."

2 NORWEGIAN WOOD (THIS BIRD HAS FLOWN)

The most Dylan-influenced song on the album, *Norwegian Wood* was written by Lennon as a veiled account of an extramarital affair he had in London. Notable for being the first Beatles record to feature the sitar.

3 YOU WON'T SEE ME

Written by Macca about his then-faltering relationship with long-time girlfriend Jane Asher, *You Won't See Me* was, at three minutes, 23 seconds, The Beatles' longest recording to date. The song was penned by McCartney at Asher's parents' house in London's Wimpole Street, while Asher was working at the Bristol Old Vic. The song recounts McCartney's frustration at being unable to contact her.

4 NOWHERE MAN

Nowhere Man is a striking example of Lennon's growing sophistication in songwriting. Oddly enough, it was written during the latter stages of the album, when he and McCartney were struggling to come up with enough songs. "I was just sitting, trying to think of a song, and I thought of myself sitting there, doing nothing and going nowhere," he said.

5 THINK FOR YOURSELF

The first of two Harrison songs on the album, *Think For Yourself* was recorded in a single session on 8 November 1965, under the working title *Won't Be There With You*.

6 THE WORD

Written by Lennon and McCartney after a dope-smoking session, *The Word* focused on love, not just between boy and girl, but as a concept in itself. "It sort of dawned on me that love was the answer," Lennon reflected. "The word is 'love', in the good and the bad books that I have read, whatever, wherever, the word is 'love'. It seems like the underlying theme to the universe."

7 MICHELLE

Paul had written the melody to *Michelle* as far back as 1959, but never got around to developing it. The French element to the song came from Jan Vaughn, who was the wife of his old friend Ivan Vaughn, as well as being a French teacher, who came up with the 'Michelle ma belle' line: "It was because I'd always thought that the song sounded French that I stuck with it," McCartney said. "I can't speak French properly so that's why I needed help in sorting out the actual words."

"And because they were writing different material, we were playing differently. We were expanding in all areas of our lives, opening up to a lot of different attitudes. This was the departure record. A lot of other influences were coming down and going on the record."

CULTURAL PUNCH

You'd think, given the LP's walloping cultural punch, that it had been crafted over a luxuriously long period, and yet the entire thing was crunched out in just four frenzied weeks, from 12 October to 11 November. Bound in by a schedule inked up in 1963, the boys were contracted to deliver a new Beatles album in time for Christmas '65, just four months after the release of *Help!*. But without any live gigs on the immediate horizon, The Beatles were able to concentrate wholly on making the new album, without the distraction of any touring, filming or radio engagements. Lennon would later recall that *Rubber Soul* was the first Beatles album on which the four were in total creative control, with enough studio time to develop and refine their ideas.

"Finally we took over the studio," John told *Rolling Stone* in 1970. "In the early days, we had to take what we were given, we didn't know how you could get more bass. We were learning the technique on *Rubber Soul*. We were more precise about making the album, and we took over the cover and everything."

Rubber Soul is the sound of the band experimenting with new instruments and fresh sounds.

McCartney replaced his hollow-bodied Hofner bass with a solid-body Rickenbacker 4001 for the *Rubber Soul* sessions, while George Harrison strapped on a Fender Stratocaster for the first time on the record. The album also showcases Harrison's first use of the sitar, having been first introduced to it on the set of

"You'd think, given the LP's walloping cultural punch, that it had been crafted over a luxuriously long period, and yet the entire thing was crunched out in just four frenzied weeks"





Help! “We certainly knew we were making a good album,” the guitarist said. “We did spend more time on it and tried new things. But the most important thing about it was that we were suddenly hearing sounds that we weren’t able to hear before.”

Lyrically as well, *Rubber Soul* marked an evolution in Lennon and McCartney’s work. Though *Help!* had expanded the band’s lyrical vocabulary beyond the standard ‘I love you’/‘you love me’ clichés, *Rubber Soul* would find its thematic inspiration in Christianity (*Girl*), extra-marital infidelities (*Norwegian Wood* was a virtual admission of Lennon’s affair), universal love as a path to spiritual enlightenment (*The Word*) and the power of nostalgia and regret (*In My Life*).

“*In My Life* was my first real, major piece of work,” Lennon reflected, years later. “Up until then, it had all been glib and throwaway. It was the first song that I wrote that was really, consciously, about my life... It started out as a bus journey from my house on 251 Menlove Avenue to town. I had a complete set of lyrics, naming every site. It became *In My Life*, a remembrance of friends and lovers of the past.”

Even when the words did pertain to boy-girl hook-ups, it was a noticeably less sugared take on the pop trope. Despite its poppy melody, McCartney’s

I’m Looking Through You includes some of Macca’s most sour lyrics (“Why, tell me why, did you not treat me right?/ Love has a nasty habit of disappearing overnight”), while, in *What Goes On*, Ringo sings bitterly of his lover’s deceit. We were already a long way here from *I Want To Hold Your Hand* and *Can’t Buy Me Love*.

SOUL MEN

Other songs were recorded during the four-week sessions that, for various reasons, never made it onto the album. Two numbers, *Day Tripper* and *We Can Work It Out*, were waxed as 7" cuts, while an instrumental, *12-Bar Original* (a Booker T & The MG’s-style blues workout), wouldn’t see the light of day until it was released on *Anthology 2*, 31 years later. *Wait*, meanwhile, was a track that had been recorded for the *Help!* album, only for it to be left off at the last minute. A slightly augmented version would finally find its home on *Rubber Soul*.

All told, the *Rubber Soul* sessions were held over 13 days and totalled 113 hours, with another 17 hours (spread over six days) allowed for mixing. It was released just under four weeks from that final recording day, on the same date – 3 December ▶

The Beatles recorded *Rubber Soul* after finishing their 1965 US tour



McCartney's relationship difficulties with girlfriend Jane Asher inspired the cutting *You Won't See Me*

1965 – as the *Day Tripper/We Can Work It Out* double A-side single. Again, on that day, The Beatles performed at the Odeon cinema in Glasgow, marking the start of what would be their final UK tour. Only two songs from *Rubber Soul* – *If I Needed Someone* and *Nowhere Man* – were included on that tour, a sign that The Beatles' new songs were at their best in the studio, not on the stage.

Rubber Soul would spend a total of 42 weeks on the UK albums chart, topping the *Sound Of Music* soundtrack from the No. 1 spot. In the US, the album topped the Billboard LPs chart on 8 January 1966, having shifted an unprecedented 1.2 million copies there within nine days of its release.

Critics immediately noted that *Rubber Soul* was something more than just another Beatles release. The *New Musical Express* wrote that the band were "still finding different ways to make us enjoy listening to them" and described the album as "a fine piece of recording artistry and adventure in group sound". *Record Mirror*, meanwhile, raved: "One marvels and wonders at the constant stream of melodic ingenuity stemming from the boys, both as performers and composers. Keeping up their pace of creativeness is quite fantastic". And critics in the States, too, were similarly dazzled: "[*Rubber Soul* is] an album that for innovation, tightness and lyrical intelligence was about twice as good as anything they or anyone else

8 WHAT GOES ON

The only Beatles track credited to Lennon–McCartney–Starkey, *What Goes On* was originally written by Lennon in the Quarrymen days and a version of the song, with John and Paul on vocals, was considered as a follow-up to *Please Please Me* in early 1963. It was eventually resurrected for *Rubber Soul* with Ringo on lead vocals. He also contributed to the lyrics, his first-ever composing credit on a Beatles song. When asked what his contribution was exactly, the drummer joked, "About five words, and I haven't done a thing since."

9 GIRL

Author Ian MacDonald described *Girl* as "Lennon's answer to McCartney's *Michelle*: another Euro-song, replacing his partner's suave mock-French with a decadent German two-step crossed with Mikis Theodorakis' music for *Zorba The Greek*."

10 I'M LOOKING THROUGH YOU

More Asher anguish from McCartney. With lyrics like "You don't look different, but you have changed" and "Love has a nasty habit of disappearing overnight", it appeared clear that all was not right in the Macca love camp. "*I'm Looking Through You* I seem to remember [I wrote] after an argument with Jane," McCartney said. "There were a few of those moments."

11 IN MY LIFE

One of Lennon's finest songs, its writer later claimed the track as his "first real major piece of work" because it was the first time he had penned personal lyrics about his own life. The song's original lyrics were based on a bus route Lennon used to take in Liverpool, naming various sites seen along the way, including Penny Lane and Strawberry Field, later reworking the words with a less specific meditation on his past.

12 WAIT

Wait, a McCartney composition, was originally recorded for *Help!* but was left off that album. When *Rubber Soul* fell one song short for its Christmas release, *Wait* finally found its home.

13 IF I NEEDED SOMEONE

Harrison's second *Rubber Soul* number, the guitarist had written this one for Pattie Boyd, the English model whom he'd met on the set of *A Hard Day's Night*. They married in January 1966.

14 RUN FOR YOUR LIFE

The final song on the album was actually the first song recorded. Lennon later lambasted *Run For Your Life* as his "least favourite Beatles song", claiming it as a song he'd "just knocked off". "[It was] just a sort of throwaway song of mine that I never thought much of," Lennon told David Sheff, "but it was always a favourite of George's."

"Critics immediately sensed that *Rubber Soul* was someone more than just another Beatles release. The *NME* wrote that the band were 'still finding different ways to make us enjoy listening to them'"

(except maybe The Stones) had done previously," cooed *Esquire*. Even their contemporaries were fired up by the creative strides taken by the album: "*Rubber Soul* blew my mind," said Beach Boy Brian Wilson years later. "When I heard *Rubber Soul*, I said, 'That's it. That's all. That's all folks'. I said, 'I'm going to make an album that's really good, I mean really challenge me.' I mean, I love that fucking album, I cherish that album."

That said, the version of *Rubber Soul* that *Esquire* and Wilson were most likely raving about wasn't quite the version known to us. When the LP was released in America, Capitol included only 10 of the 14 songs, omitting *Drive My Car*, *Nowhere Man*, *What* ▶

The Beatles recorded
Rubber Soul after a
busy year touring



Goes On and *If I Needed Someone*, and importing over *I've Just Seen A Face* and *It's Only Love* from the UK version of *Help!*. Beatles author Ian Macdonald suggested that the decision to jettison those four songs was to reconfigure *Rubber Soul* as a more focused folk-rock album for US audiences.

Rubber Soul had showed The Beatles' peers that albums could more than a long-playing collection of unrelated songs, that it could aspire to something greater. Brian Wilson responded to The Beatles' achievement by producing his own epochal LP, the sublime *Pet Sounds*, which McCartney later admitted forced The Beatles to think even more conceptually, eventually giving birth to *Sgt Pepper's*. *Rubber Soul* too was the first Beatles album to hint at the psychedelic experiments yet to come from the band, and certainly sowed the seeds of the oncoming psychedelia movement. Stevie Winwood sees *Rubber Soul* as the album that "broke everything open", in that "it crossed music into a whole new dimension and was responsible for kicking off the 60s rock era."

Fifty-four years on, *Rubber Soul* stands as a watershed album in The Beatles' discography. It was the album in which they waved goodbye to their teen-friendly mop-top former selves and saw them embrace a richer, more mature sound. As an indication of how vital the songs on this album are in the development of The Beatles' sound, when Apple released the LP *The Beatles 1962-1966* (otherwise known as 'The Red Album'), they included six tracks from *Rubber Soul*, more than any other album from the period. And *Rubber Soul* remained, up until his death in 2002,

George Harrison's preferred Beatles LP: "*Rubber Soul* was my favourite album," he said. "I think that it was the best one we made. We were being more influenced by other people's music and everything was blossoming at that time; including us, because we were still growing."

COVER UP

Reflecting their globe-conquering fame, *Rubber Soul* would be The Beatles' first album not to feature their name on the cover. It's an iconic cover, one that hinted at the druggy, psychedelic conditions under which the album was produced. The photo itself was taken by Bob Freeman in — Beatles historian Mark Lewisohn insists — some woods near Boldermere lake (though Freeman remembers it differently, taking place in Lennon's house in Weybridge).

"[Freeman] had a piece of cardboard that was album-cover size and he was projecting the photographs exactly onto it so we could see how it would look as an album cover," Paul McCartney would later recall. "We had just chosen the photograph when the card that the picture was projected onto fell backwards a little, elongating the photograph. It was stretched and we went, 'That's it, Rubber So-o-oul, hey hey! Can you do it like that?'"

The lettering, meanwhile, was created by illustrator (and father of *Thick Of It* actress Rebecca Front), Charles Front, who said of his design, "If you tap into a rubber tree then you get a sort of globule, so I started thinking of creating a shape that represented that, starting narrow and filling out."

In 2007, the lettering was auctioned by Bonhams, with a guide price of £10,000, after lying in Front's attic for 42 years.

From here on, The Beatles were never the same again. They had become, more than ever before, a studio band and every new album, from this point, would become a challenge to eclipse themselves creatively. When The Beatles returned in August 1966, they'd be showcasing yet another quantum leap in maturity. But it's worth remembering that it all began with 'the pot album'.

●

"Fifty-four years on, *Rubber Soul* stands as a watershed album in The Beatles' discography. It was the album in which they waved goodbye to their teen-friendly mop-top former selves"

