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The Beatles

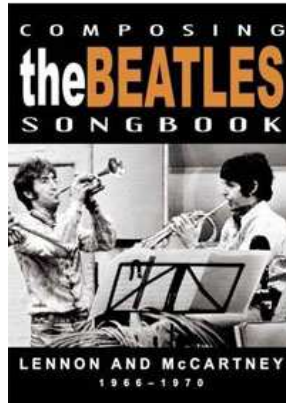
Composing the Beatles Songbook: Lennon and McCartney 1966-1970 [DVD]

Rated: N/A
 US release date: 25 November 2008 (MVD)

by [Christel Loar](#)

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Composing the Beatles Songbook: Lennon and McCartney 1966-1970 is the second DVD documentary on the compositions of the Beatles released in 2008. The first covered Lennon and McCartney's partnership from 1957-1965, and although it's unlikely, one has to wonder if there will be similar documentaries on George Harrison's or Ringo Starr's contributions to the Beatles canon in the future.



AMAZON

This program is essentially a collective academic critique of the Beatles albums following their decision to stop touring in 1966. It begins with *Revolver* and, more or less chronologically, proceeds right through to the final recordings for *Abbey Road*. As the documentary begins the voice-over and still photo and screaming-girl footage don't make much of an impression. It's not until well after the viewer is presented with portions of interviews with a panel of experts—including Beatles friends and biographers, journalists, broadcasters and eminent musicologists—that things begin to pick up.

The most interesting interview subjects are musician, artist and friend of the Beatles, Klaus Voorman and McCartney biographer, friend of the Beatles and former co-owner of the Indica Bookshop and Gallery, Barry Miles. These two, knowing the songwriters personally, are able to shed light on the Lennon/McCartney relationship and writing styles, as well as illuminate many of the things that may have been influencing the individual Beatles during the period of the late '60s (it wasn't just acid).

Composing... charts the personal growth of John and Paul, as well as the growth of their diverging song craft. By 1965, Lennon was looking toward Bob Dylan, while McCartney was perfecting his classic pop sensibility. Paul was also gaining exposure to all sorts of cultural input and underground artistic movements in London that John—then living in the suburbs with Cynthia and Julian—was not. Beginning with *Revolver*, Paul McCartney was actively expanding the Beatles' artistic horizons, influenced by his immersion in the literary, art and theatrical scenes frequented by Jane and Peter Asher. It's at this point, all of the interviewees agree, that Lennon first began to recede from "The Beatles" as an entity, and McCartney took over steering the ship.

It's also this point where some fans and historians begin bashing Paul McCartney as either a control freak or as somehow musically "soft" to John Lennon's perceived authenticity as a rocker. However, this DVD is refreshingly positive toward McCartney. Not that it is negative toward anyone else; it just acknowledges his roles in the late period Beatles in a more flattering light than they've been seen in recent years.

Because of this, among other things, the section on "Tomorrow Never Knows" is fascinating! Though often considered a "Lennon tune" because John sings it and was reading Timothy Leary's *The Psychedelic Experience* at the time, it was actually McCartney who had more to do with the song and its cutting edge, experimental sound. Paul, it's revealed, was heavily into the world of avant-garde and modern classical music as represented by composers like Stockhausen and Cage in the '60s, and this informed his tape-looping and bass sound that are the most distinctive elements of "Tomorrow Never Knows". This information is doubly interesting given that just this month McCartney announced he would like to release a "lost" Beatles track that supposedly demonstrates the experimental side

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of the band to a much greater extent than previously released work. In fact, "Carnival of Light" may be the avant-garde piece to which Barry Miles is referring in *Composing...*

There are many other fascinating tidbits of insider information in the interviews on this DVD. But if you're looking for music or new visual footage, this isn't this disc on which to find it. There are the requisite promo films for the "Strawberry Fields Forever" and "Penny Lane" double A-side, some *Sgt. Pepper*, *Magical Mystery Tour* and *Yellow Submarine*-era footage, and a great many lovely still photographs from studio sessions, but the only new material is the interviews. Also absent are any truly notable bonus materials. There is an extended clip of musicologist Allan Moore dissecting "A Day in the Life," which will delight music theory geeks and rock snobs alike, but other than that, it's all standard contributor biographies and a list of other DVDs and books by the production company.

Perhaps the lack of extras is a product of the fact that *Composing the Beatles Songbook: Lennon and McCartney 1966-1970* is not licensed or authorized and so bonus material wasn't obtainable. Or maybe it was decided that extras were unnecessary because the interview content is so good, and it is. But it's probably because, well, it's the Beatles.

RATING: **EXTRAS:**

— 2 December 2008

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