

Turned-On Beatle

an interview with Paul McCartney...Paul Tells All

Paul McCartney
Barry Miles

1967

“Everything I say will come out just a little bit different, I don’t mean on the transcript, but as it leaves my mind and comes through my mouth, it gets a little bit messed up just around about the mouth, where the words start doing it.”

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Miles: Are there any particular influences on your music?

Paul: There’s been millions. We started off being influenced by Carl Perkins and Chuck Berry, and Bo Diddley and people, but after a bit we got a bit bored with 12 bars all the time so we tried to get into something else. When came Dylan. The Who and. the Beach Boys I suppose were all trying to do vaguely the same kind of thing. We are all trying to make it into something we know it is, but not many people know it is yet. Most people still think it’s all just pop, it’s a bit below every other kind of music, which of course it isn’t. You see, by saying those influences, they’re just the obvious musical people we pinched things off, but apart from them anyway, you might as well say Hughie Greene was a big influence on me, because he was you know. You know what I mean? Everybody is, they all are.

Miles: There are quite a lot of classical influences in your music. Particularly on things like “Eleanor Rigby”, the handling of the strings there...

Paul: I know that’s a joke. I really don’t like that kind of classical music. I can’t stand it. It’s influenced me... that’s what I mean about Hughie Greene. It’s all things like that that I just don’t like but I see how I can use them. Eleanor Rigby, if it had been about anything else I think it would have been a real mess, having the violins like that on there, having it arranged in that sort of way. But it fitted, it was just lucky that it fitted. I think I like that kind of sound of things but I haven’t got an LP like that, that I like. I’ve got LPs like that but I never put them on. I think we are being influenced at the moment by what we know we could do, because there is no one at the moment like Elvis was in the beginning. There’s no great big idols now. That’s the main pity about making it in anything, you look at things so objectively. You look at idols objectively and they are no longer idols, you just see them for what they are, and this is sometimes a great thing. But you lose that sort of fan thing, you lose the bit about being influenced, so that’s why I think we are getting influenced now by ourselves, more and more. I think for instance the Beach Boys are getting influenced by themselves.

Miles: Is what you are trying to do confined just to music or is it extended to a general attitude?

Paul: No, it isn’t. There is no end in view, there is nothing we are trying to do. There is no plan to it. It isn’t confined within music or within anything, it can’t be, nothing can be.

Miles: With the demolition of idols, do you find you are able to get a lot more from them, because once you make someone a star, then whatever they are trying to say to the public automatically gets distorted.

Paul: Well that's true, but it's nice to have a star. A lot of people like it and I think I do. It's always exciting when someone plays me a great record. It's great to have some incentive, to be able to think "Oh great, so and so's doing something great there, Stockhausen's on to something, be nice to do something like that." So when you lose them as idols it wrecks the incentive a little bit. Because you're looking at them so objectively, you know just what they are doing. And you just see their scene and it's better in a way when you don't see their scene. Think of us as idols, and how many groups must have started Up because of it. And how much musical thought must have got going because of it.

Miles: Is this why you go back to people like Jarry sometimes, because he is dead, and you can't possibly meet him and find that he's just an unpleasant little Frenchman?

Paul: Yes, there is that. This is the thing I've noticed about everything I seem to be doing. I'd prefer it if there was such a thing as magic, if magic things happened. So that magic happened in music. It used to happen a lot more in music for me until I started looking at it objectively after having written a bit. Then, what is still magic for other people, for me, it's a bit. "Well OK, I see why he's done that, and how he's done that and I'll learn from it," but I tend to just take it in and file it instead of being knocked out by it, unless it is something very special.

Miles: Does this apply to other art forms as well?

Paul: Yes, this is what I was trying to think of. With any kind of thing, my aim seems to be to distort it, distort it from what we know it as, even with music and visual things and to change it from what it is to see what it could be. To see the potential in it all. To take a note and wreck it and see in that note what else there is in it, that a simple act like distorting it has caused. To take a film and to superimpose on top of it so you can't quite tell what it is any more, it's all trying to create magic, it's all trying to make things happen so that you don't know why they've happened. I'd like a lot more things to happen like they did when you were kids, when you didn't know now the conjuror did it, and were happy to just sit there and say "Well it's magic." I use "magic" instead of "spiritual" because spiritual sounds as if it fits into too many of the other categories. If something unbelievable happened to most people at the moment they'd explain it by taking a little cross-filing out of their brain and saying "Well of course that doesn't happen you know, there aren't ghosts." And they just explain it with a great, realistic 20th Century explanation for ghosts. Which is that there aren't ghosts. Which is no fucking explanation at all! "That couldn't have been a magic vision that just happened then, I must have been a bit drunk, I must have just been high then." I don't believe that it ends with our Western logical thought, it can't do, because that's so messed up anyway, most of it, that you have got to allow for the possibility of there being a lot, lot more than we know about. To bang one note on the piano, instead of trying to put millions of notes into it, and just to take the one note of the piano and listen to it, shows you what there is in one note. There's so much going on in one note, but you never listen to it! So many harmonics buzzing around, that if that's all happening in one note and if in one frame of a picture all that's happening ... the thing is, it could take a bit of looking into.

Ghosts

Miles: In the last few thousand years only the materialistic side of man has developed and built up.

Paul: The drag about this is that everybody has realised there aren't such things as ghosts, there isn't such a thing as God, and there is no such thing as a soul, and when you die you die. Which is great, it's fine, it's a brave thought really. The only trouble is, that you don't have the bit that you did when you were a kid of innocently accepting things. For instance, if a film comes on that's superimposed and doesn't seem to mean anything, immediately it's weird or it's strange or it's a bit funny, to most people, and they tend to laugh at it. The immediate reaction would be a laugh. And that's wrong. That's the first mistake, and that's the big mistake that everyone makes, to immediately discount anything that they don't understand, they're not sure of, and to say, "well of course, we'll never know about that." There's all these fantastic theories people put forward about... "It doesn't matter anyway," and it does, it does matter, in fact that matters more than anything... that side of it. We've been in the lucky position of having our childhood ambitions fulfilled. We've got all the big house and big car and everything. So then, you stand on the plank, having reached the end of space, and you look across the wall and there's more space. And that's it. You get your car and house and your fame and your world-wide ego-satisfaction, then you just look over the wall and there's

a complete different scene there, that it really is and which is really, the scene. And looking back, obviously you Can still see 'everybody in the world trying to do what you've just done and that is what they believe life's about. And they're right, because that is what life's about for them. But I could tell a few people who are further down on the rung, trying to do exactly what I've just done, "that's completely the wrong way to do it, because you're not taking into account this scene on the other side of the wall. This is the bit you've also got to take into account. And then that bit will be easier, it'll all be easier then."

Miles: It's hard to take into account though, because to gain material things there is a well established method, but how do you investigate the other scene?

Paul: Well, did I tell you that George Martin was talking to us in the recording studio and he came down and he said: "Somebody wants to see you, somebody wants to talk to you," and we said: "Who is it then?" and he said: "Oh it's some crank talking about peace." ...and he was right, it was a crank talking about peace, because when you talk about peace, you are a crank, you're pigeon-holed, you've associated yourself with Vietnam and sitting down in Trafalgar Square and everybody thinks they know what you are then, because they've seen these people in Trafalgar Square. And if you were to burn yourself they'd know why you'd burned yourself so it wouldn't matter.

The thing that's grown up out of this materialist scene that everyone's got into, is that for everything to exist on a material level you've got to be able to discount any things that happen which don't fit in with it. And they're all very neatly disposed of these days. It's great, it's really very neat, I mean the way for instance IT would just be immediately labelled as "just one of those papers, that's all." And Pot is just that, Pot is "just drugs" and LSD is "just drugs" and every form of drugs is "just the pit of iniquity, the black pit, that terrible decadent disgusting people always fall into." There is no thought on anyone's part why anyone takes drugs. But there's thought on their part why they take drink, they are quite willing to think about why they take drink, why they need a drink. Though they're not maybe willing to admit that they take a drink to get drunk. Most people think, "Oh no, no, no, I don't drink to get drunk! No, No, No, I take a drink occasionally. I do take a drink at parties, but I must say I don't drink to get drunk." There's something dirty about drinking to get drunk, but if you do happen to get a bit drunk, it's all right. But nobody will ever admit that they're all standing there pissed because they wanted to get pissed which is the truth of it, it must be the truth. Otherwise they would stick to orangeade.

Miles: If you are able to see everything in it's own terms, do you find that this has eliminated the western concept of finding some things beautiful and others repulsive?

Paul: No, you see the pity about operating like this is that my act is not adapted to it. All that I have learned and the way I talk and the way I act, doesn't really fit in ... There is still a lot of me which has learned a lot of wrong things, that has based a lot of things on fallacies. I can't just accept everything. I can't just suddenly say, "Right, everything is as I know it is, and I know I ought to accept it all." It's difficult when you've learned for 22 years of your life that it isn't like that at all and that everything is just the act and everything is beautiful or ugly, or you like it or you don't, things are backward or they're forward. And dogs are less intelligent than humans and suddenly you realise that whilst all of that is right, it's all wrong as well. Dogs aren't less intelligent ... to dogs, and the ashtray's happy to be an ashtray. But of course we think it's just an ashtray and that kind of hang-up still occurs. I still keep thinking of people just like that as well. It's pretty difficult for me to accept someone who's lousy, I still impose the old rule of do I like them or don't I like them and if I don't like them then I can't see anything in them. It's still difficult to see anything in them. It's still difficult to see the good in bad because I've been trained that bad is bad... there's no good in bad, and I know I'm wrong. And all this on a wider level.

Rebirth

Miles: How does this approach effect your dealings with people. I mean it's a very isolated position, very objective, existentialist. Does it make contact easier or...?

Paul: It can do. The trouble is at the moment that I haven't got it going yet. It's really a question now of seeing more of what it's about. It's a question of trying to put those things into practice because when I think something which says the kind of thing that I've learned in days gone by, it tends to still stick, obviously just because of sheer weight, 22 years as opposed to two, trying to learn it like this. I'm really at the beginning of this stage. So when

people say: "I see all your ambitions as Beatles have been fulfilled, you've done just about everything, you've played in every country in the world, what does it feel like?", it feels exactly the same as it did when I was trying to get five quid for a guitar. It's a beginning again, there's no end. I know I'm going to need a new set of rules and the new set of rules have got to include the rule that there aren't any rules. So I mean ... they're pretty difficult.

It can make it difficult because if you say a thing according to the new book of the prophet, they say things in reply according to the old testament, and you find yourself saying "Well, yes, but I don't quite mean that. I know it sounds like that but is not. What I mean is, working on a new assumption of everything being fluid," you find yourself getting into cock-ups with words. It's a big battle at the moment. Trying not to say too many words and if there's a pregnant pause in the conversation, not feeling that I've got to fill it. But let someone else, who fears the silence, fill it. I don't fear it anymore. Of course it will need a bit of training. But the good thing about it is that if you are prepared to accept that things aren't just broad and wide, they're infinitely broad and wide, then there's a great amount to be learned. And the change over . it can be done. It just takes a bit of time, but it will be done, I think.

Miles: Are you trying to take anyone with you on it?

Paul: Yes I'd like to. I'm trying to take people with me of course, I don't want to be shouting to people "Listen Listen I've found it! Listen, this is where it's at!" and everyone going "Oh, fuck-off, you fucking crank," because, I see the potentiality in them as well, not just in myself. I'm not just the great wizard who's going to sort it all out, I'm just one of them. And if I can see how I ought to have compassion then it would be nice if they were going to see that too. Rather than me just standing there getting slapped on the other cheek all the time. This is the gap in electronics. There are quite a few people that are prepared for the next sound, they are ready to be led to the next move. The next move seems to be things like electronics because it's a complete new field and there's a lot of good new sounds to be listened to in it. But if the music itself is just going to jump about five miles ahead, then everyone's going to be left standing with this gap of five miles that they've got to all cross before they can even see what scene these people are on... I can see that it is in a way a progression to accept random things as being planned. Random is planned, as well, but most people won't accept that and they'd need a lead into it. You can't just say to somebody, "That machine plays random notes, but it's planned and I can control the amount of random in it." They'll say "What for? Why don't you write a nice tune, or why don't you just write some interesting sounds?" That's what I'd like to do, I'd like to look into that gap a bit.

Neopallium

Miles: Do people like Cage help you, just by their existence? Because they have done so much work with random sound, it enables you to be a bit more free without worrying too much about it.

Paul: Yes right, Right. But those people always help. These become the new idols. Like then it wasn't a question of listening to Elvis for him to become your idol, he was your idol. Elvis was the idol there wasn't any question of ever having to seek him out. But the idols now, the people that I can appreciate now are all much more hidden away in little back corners, through performing for themselves. They seem to be but they're probably not, they've been pigeon-holed into that because they're cranks talking about peace. But you've got to sort out these people, you've got to look much more, because Stockhausen isn't played on Radio London every day, so there's not much of a chance of him becoming an idol over night.

Miles: Do you think that someone like Albert Ayler can help? His music reaches quite a lot of people.

Paul: Yes, if you're talking about the communication thing, of helping in that kind of way, then it's all helping, but only in a small way at the moment, that's the trouble. I don't think it would be very easy to say to people. "Don't you think it's possible that the scene that someone like Albert Ayler or Stockhausen is getting into isn't necessarily a bad scene. It's not necessarily what you think it is, isn't necessarily weird. Why is it weird? It's weird because you don't know about it, because it's a bit strange to you. It's new. And gravity was very weird, gravity was very strange when he talked about it and microscopes, they're all strange until you know about them." The most important thing to say to people is, "it isn't necessarily so, what you believe. You must see that what ever you believe in isn't necessarily the truth. No matter how truthful it gets, it's not necessarily ever the truth because the fact that it could

be right or wrong is also infinite, that's the point of it. The whole being fluid and changing all the time and evolving. For it to be as cut-and-dried as we've got it now it's got to be cut-and-dried in an unreal way. It's a fantastically abstract way of living that people have got into without realising it. None of it's real.

I was trying to think of the people that I meet in a day that aren't acting in some way. And of course I'm acting, all the time. But at least I'm making a serious effort not to act, now, realising that most of my acting is to no avail anyway. There's no point in anyone doing a Hollywood grin because everyone knows it's a Hollywood grin. But everyone goes on in this fantastic surreal way, of accepting it as a genuine grin but knowing secretly that it isn't really. They take it and they do another grin back and they get on famously. They really get on well with each other doing these grins, and then one of them breaks a leg and the other one walks away and it falls apart a bit, and something happens, and the one who's broken a leg wonders why the grin didn't work when he had a broken leg. And it all gets very strange and very very far out. But everyone thinks that's the normal thing, that that's life. Everyone's got these great surrealist expressions... "Oh well that's life," and "You can't have your cake and eat it,"... "you can't burn your candle at both ends you know." These great, very scientific truths like "you can't burn your candle at both ends," and who the fuck said that (Laughter.) All the time they're working ... I say they, but I'm in with them, I too am working on false assumptions...

Miles: It stems from people being afraid of each other afraid to just open up the armour a little bit.

Paul: I really wish that I could. At the back of my brain somewhere, there is something telling me now that ... It tells me in a cliché too, it tells me that everything is beautiful. Which immediately comes out as phony as "Ban the Bomb." It tells me that everything is beautiful and everything is great and fine and that instead of imposing things like, "Oh I don't like that television show" or "No I don't like the theatre," "No no, I don't like so and so" that I know really that it's all great, and that everything's great and that there's no bad ever, if I can think of it all as great. But this gets back to the other 22 years of me, it's only ever been in the last two years at the most, that I've ever tried to think of anything as being beautiful, having realised that I could think of everything as being incredible, with a bit of effort, or my mind's part, on my part. So I'm only just starting to try and think of things like that, so it still is difficult, and it still is difficult to communicate with people. But the aim is to be able to, one day, sit there and not feel any of the hang-ups that people feel towards each other, not feel any of the hang-ups of say, food not being up to standard or anything. It would be too much of a hang-up to ... fight this other twenty-two years and really try and kill it off in a year. To really try and sort it out in a year is too big a project. So at the moment I'm just trying to operate within the new frame of reference but not pushing it. Because to push it really would be to alienate myself completely from everything. It really would make me into a very strange sort of being, as far as other people were concerned.

Miles: You have a more difficult situation anyway being a Beatle, because people's responses to you are always conditioned quite a lot by this.

Paul: Yes sure, that's very difficult, but there is also the added advantage, of people being conditioned to listen to me in one kind of way. When you're listening to someone who's famous, you're prepared to listen. You're not going to shout them down quite as much. If I knew how to say this all in three words to get it over to everyone, I would be in a great position. At the moment it's not so good, because anyone I do talk to, talks to me in their conditioned way, and I can break that down. That's not too hard to break down because it's pretty obvious anyway that it doesn't exist within me, it only exists for them. Having broken down that, it sometimes is easier to get through to people because they've got a vague respect for you, for what you've done in the one field. For instance in the money field, that happens to impress a lot of people you know. Which is in fact the least impressive bit of it, but that's the bit that impresses most people and so you find that a lot of forty year old men who would have never listened to anything I had to say are now a bit more willing because they're trying to make the money like I've made it. So they think, "Well Christ he must have something to have made that."

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