

2019

# Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band: A Journey Inside the Creative Genius of the Beatles

Kevin Sandri

*University of the Pacific*, [k\\_sandri@u.pacific.edu](mailto:k_sandri@u.pacific.edu)

Kevin Sandri (2019) is pursuing a degree in Psychology.

This article was written as part of the curriculum for the Bachelor of Music in Music Management and the Bachelor of Science in Music Industry Studies at University of the Pacific. Each student conducted research based on his or her own areas of interest and study.

To learn more about the program, visit: [go.pacific.edu/musicindustry](http://go.pacific.edu/musicindustry)

All images used from album covers are included under the Fair Use provision of U.S. Copyright law and remain the property of their respective copyright owners.

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholarlycommons.pacific.edu/backstage-pass>

 Part of the [Arts Management Commons](#), [Audio Arts and Acoustics Commons](#), [Composition Commons](#), [Ethnomusicology Commons](#), [Music Education Commons](#), [Musicology Commons](#), [Music Pedagogy Commons](#), [Music Performance Commons](#), [Music Practice Commons](#), [Music Theory Commons](#), [Music Therapy Commons](#), [Other Music Commons](#), [Performance Studies Commons](#), and the [Radio Commons](#)

## Recommended Citation

Sandri, Kevin (2019) "Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band: A Journey Inside the Creative Genius of the Beatles," *Backstage Pass*: Vol. 2 : Iss. 1 , Article 11.

Available at: <https://scholarlycommons.pacific.edu/backstage-pass/vol2/iss1/11>

This Concert and Album Review is brought to you for free and open access by the Conservatory of Music at Scholarly Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in Backstage Pass by an authorized editor of Scholarly Commons. For more information, please contact [mgibney@pacific.edu](mailto:mgibney@pacific.edu).



# Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band: A Journey Inside the Creative Genius of the Beatles

By Kevin Sandri

*Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band* by

The Beatles is a classic album that pushed the genre of pop rock to experimental places, featuring both intricate and psychedelic production and abstract lyricism while still remaining accessible--never lacking the group's trademark catchy, danceable pop tunes. John Lennon, Paul McCartney, George Harrison, Ringo Starr, and other contributors take the listener on an adventure, starting in a live

performance setting, as they capture the "audience" with their "performance" of the opening track "Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band." As the applause of the audience smoothly transitions into the second track, the setting switches to what I can only describe as now being *inside* the album; the crowd noises go away until the end of the record. Songs like "Lucy in Sky with Diamonds," "Being For The Benefit Of Mr. Kite!," and "Within You Without You" take the listeners down a rabbit hole of a psychedelic reality while "With A Little Help From My Friends," "Getting Better," "Lovely Rita" and "When I'm Sixty Four" feature the catchy pop songwriting and performance that had previously captured the hearts of people all over the world. Near the end, listeners are brought back to what I would call *the present* with the "live performance" of "Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band - Reprise," a shorter closing version



of the opening track that thanks the audience and sets the stage for the album finale, “A Day In The Life,” which sounds, though complex and intricately produced, very human, leaving the listener feeling ambiguous with lingering emotions. Listening to the whole work as an album feels like a break from reality, beginning with the attendance at an event that takes the listener on a new, existential and wondrous journey, before gradually returning to reality with perhaps a new and refreshed perspective. The main elements of this album’s performance and production that make it stand out among other albums of its time (or any time) include its concept and flow from track to track, accessible melodies, harmonies and background vocals, panning, and a variety of sounds and instruments that enhance the already interesting lyrics that sit on top of the backing tracks.

By starting the album off with crowd noises and some instruments tuning up in the background, the listener feels as if they have come to a concert to be entertained, which they subsequently *are* with the high energy performance of “Sgt. Pepper’s Lonely Hearts Club Band.” This felt like I was breaking the surface of the album and was now physically *inside* of it, unaffected by laws of reality--as if I had entered a tube slide full of curves. If the first track was being half inside the tube and half outside the tube, by the second track, “With a Little Help From My Friends,” I was now fully inside and continuing the listening journey. The middle nine songs take the listener on an adventure down this tube, with several “curves” of experimental production plus a number of tempo and time signature changes which enhance the mostly straightforward pop rock songs. The middle nine tracks do not feature any special transitions with songs blending into each other, as each song either ends with a fade out or a full ending prior to the start of the next track. Songs still flow pretty seamlessly from one to the other,

maintaining that feeling that I am on an adventure going down this tube slide. The next real segue the listener hears is toward the end of the album, from the track “Good Morning, Good Morning” into “Sgt. Pepper’s Lonely Hearts Club Band - Reprise,” which they creatively did by making the squealing live electric guitar note and knocking sound onstage of the “live performance” in “Sgt. Pepper’s Lonely Hearts Club Band - Reprise” mimic the crowing and clucking rooster that ends “Good Morning, Good Morning.” Arriving back at the live performance feels like I am at the end of the tube slide--back at the surface that separates the album from reality. There is one more transition, from “Sgt. Pepper’s Lonely Hearts Club Band - Reprise” into “A Day In The Life,” via crowd applause (which shortly fades out into the studio recording). It completes the transition of exiting the tube slide and returning me fully to reality, “read[ing] the news,” as the final song’s lyrics reference multiple times. The flow of the album takes the listeners to many different places and seems to make the album transcend time and reality, a quality of *Sgt. Pepper’s* that makes it special when compared to others.

Though this album has sound and production qualities unlike any album of its time, The Beatles’ knack for crafting melody and harmony are still a primary attraction to *Sgt. Pepper’s*. Every song on this album is melody-driven, aside from “Within You Without You,” which stands out instead, with memorable lyrics and production. Even songs such as “Lucy In The Sky With Diamonds” and “Being For The Benefit Of Mr. Kite!” with their strange lyrics and experimental production, uncharacteristic of pop music of the late 1960s include infectious melodies. The group’s well-known vocal delivery and use of layered harmonies as well as other various background vocals make such songs widely accessible to the Beatles’ worldwide audience. Every song on the album, besides “Within You Without You” and “A Day In The

Life,” feature the use of either harmonies or some sort of “oohs” and “ahhs” in the background - a signature in The Beatles sound. The weakest song on the album is “Fixing A Hole” because it has a bit of a weaker, but still decent melody without as much interesting production to fully make up for its weakness, but it remains a worthwhile track with relevant lyrics about self-improvement.

The rest of *Sgt. Pepper’s* lyrics range from psychedelic-influenced philosophy, a variety of imaginative visual images to relatable songs about trust, loyalty, self-improvement, and playful flirtations. A major strength to this album is the tasteful production and fitting choices as to when to be bold and experimental and when to let the tune carry itself. One of the main techniques that sticks out is the use of panning throughout the stereo version of the album, which could be seen as extreme when compared to current production styles. The drums and bass are often panned completely to the left while electric guitar and vocals are often panned completely right. This is not always the case, as sometimes vocals and other instruments are panned to the middle in the mix or switch from one side to the other throughout the song. This producing tactic helps give the songs space, make instruments easier to pick out, and strategically puts emphasis on certain aspects of a song. For instance, on “Being For The Benefit Of Mr. Kite!” the doubled vocals are panned completely to the right, the drums center, and the bass and weak-sounding organ pulsing on the upbeat are panned completely left in the verses, making for a very interesting listen. When the time signature changes to  $\frac{3}{4}$  part way into the track, a strange noise collage comes in with such a variety of sounds panned to separate ears, the listener gets the sense of being at a carnival. Other songs, such as “Getting Better” and “With A Little Help From My Friends,” feature more traditional and straightforward production styles, letting the catchy tune

carry the song. The wide variety of instruments used on the album make for some very tasteful yet unusual choices, such as the prominent clarinets that drive the song “When I’m Sixty Four” which, at different times in the song, offer steady notes to place the vocal melody over, chime in with licks in response to the vocal melody, or harmonize with Paul’s vocal. The song “Lovely Rita” features a yelping kazoo that fits perfectly with the playful subject matter of the song. “She’s Leaving Home,” “Within You Without You,” and “A Day In The Life” all include an orchestra in order to capture the dramatic and more serious nature of the lyrics in those songs. Other sounds such as the sitar, harpsichord, reverse tapes, harps and horns all contribute to keeping the album’s sound refreshing today, fifty-plus years after its creation.

The Beatles’ *Sgt. Pepper’s Lonely Hearts Club Band* succeeded in pushing the envelope for studio recording, pop music conventions, and the album listening experience. The album was widely adored by the public, as it spent 27 weeks at number one on the UK album charts and 15 weeks at number one in the United States. It won four Grammy Awards in 1968, including “Album of the Year.” The album not only bridged the gap between what was seen as “popular music” and “high art,” but also provided a representation of the 60s counterculture referencing psychedelic drugs, peace, and love. Young people could relate to it, dissect it, and listen to it over and over again while still picking up something new each time. It is also classified as an early concept album introducing the fictional Sgt. Pepper Band, alter egos for the four Beatles, that linked the album’s beginning with the end, creating a wild ride down a figurative curvy tube slide of an album. Selling more than 32 million copies worldwide as of 2011, this is regarded as one of the greatest albums of all time, and rightfully so.