RANDOM HOUSE eBOOKS

McCartney

Christopher Sandford

CONTENTS

About the Book
About the Author
Also by Christopher Sandford
Title Page
Dedication
List of Illustrations
Acknowledgements
Epigraph

Chapter One: Get Back
Chapter Two: A Sort of Presence
Chapter Three: The Toppermost
Chapter Four: ‘I Got My Thick Cardboard‘
Chapter Five: The End
Chapter Six: Pizza and Fairy Tales
Chapter Seven: Coming Up
Chapter Eight: Vegetable Matter
Chapter Nine: ‘Him and the Queen Mum’
Chapter Ten: Heather
Chapter Eleven: CODA

Picture Section
Bibliography
Sources and Chapter Notes
Index
Copyright

About the Book

Sir Paul McCartney first picked up a guitar as a bereaved teenager in 1956. In the fifty years since he's become the most successful pop music composer in history, enjoying a virtual season ticket to the Guinness Book of Records. McCartney's ballad *Yesterday*, which he wrote in his sleep, has since been covered by 2,400 other artists – making it the most popular song of all time.

Now Christopher Sandford reveals the man behind the myth … Among the eye-opening stories is the surprising love-hate relationship with John Lennon, not to mention with Lennon's widow, as well as an insider's account of McCartney's controversial marriage to Heather Mills. Likewise, Sir Paul's restless creativity – both mainstream and avant-garde – his second group and his marriage to the late Linda McCartney are seen here in fresh and stunning detail.

This behind the scenes story takes readers right up to today, as Sir Paul passes his 64th birthday. It's a hard, fast, sometimes shocking saga of sex, drugs and rock 'n' roll – the true adventure of the last showbiz superstar.

About the Author

Christopher Sandford has reviewed and written about rock music for over twenty years. A regular contributor to titles on both sides of the Atlantic, himself profiled in *Rolling Stone* magazine, he's published acclaimed biographies of Mick Jagger, Eric Clapton, Kurt Cobain, David Bowie, Sting, Bruce Springsteen, Steve McQueen and Keith Richards. His bestselling life of Kurt Cobain is currently in development as a feature film. A dual national, Christopher Sandford divides his time between Seattle, Surrey and Lord's cricket ground. He's married with one son.

Also available by Christopher Sandford

Fiction
Feasting With Panthers
Arcadian
We Don’t Do Dogs

Sport
The Cornhill Centenary Test
Godfrey Evans
Tom Graveney

Film
Steve McQueen

Music
Mick Jagger
Eric Clapton
Kurt Cobain
David Bowie
Sting
Bruce Springsteen
Keith Richards

McCartney

Christopher Sandford

To Hilary and Robert

List of Illustrations

Paul McCartney with four-year old brother Mike, 1948 (© *Keystone*).

Copy of Paul’s birth certficate, 18 June 1942.

Paul’s childhood home, 20 Forthlin Road (© *S. E. Sandford*).

St Peter’s Church Hall, Woolton (© *S. E. Sandford*).

Paul with his father and brother Mike, circa 1960 (© *Keystone*).

McCartney in 1962 (© *Keystone*).

Paul with girlfriend Jane Asher at the London premiere of ‘Here We Go Round the Mulberry Bush’, 5 January 1968 (© *Central Press*).

Wimpole Street, London, Paul’s home for three years (© *S. E. Sandford*).

Paul relaxing in the Atlantic at Miami Beach with two fans during the Beatles inaugural US tour, 15 February 1964 (© *Bettmann/Corbis*).

The Beatles in America, 1964 (© *Hulton-Deutsch Collection/Corbis*).

Paul at the NME Poll-Winners Concert, Wembley 1965 (© *Peter Perchard*).

The Beatles arriving in London with manager Brian Epstein, 8 July 1966 (© *Bettmann/Corbis*).

The Beatles performing at Shea Stadium, 23 August 1966 (© *Bettmann/Corbis*).

A hand-written draft of a six-page letter from Lennon to McCartney, circa 1970 (*Reuters/Corbis*).

Paul and Linda McCartney with their band Wings, December 1971 (© *Hulton-Deutsch Collection/Corbis*).

Paul with Linda and daughters Stella, Mary and Heather at Heathrow Airport, circa 1973 (© *Express*).

Customs officer at New Tokyo International Airport with marijuana seized from Paul's luggage, 16 January 1980 (© *Bettmann/Corbis*).

Paul leaving Tokyo Detention Center, 25 January 1980 (© *Bettmann/Corbis*).

Paul at his home in Rye, Sussex, after his release from Tokyo, 28 January 1980 (© *Hulton-Deutsch Collection/Corbis*).

Paul and Linda at Ringo Starr's wedding to Barbara Bach, 27 April 1981 (© *Terry O'Neil*).

Paul and Linda at the British Video Awards, 1985.

Paul during a performance at The Forum, 1989 (© *Neal Preston/Corbis*).

Paul performing at the Live Aid concert at Wembley Stadium, 13 July 1985 (© *Neal Preston/Corbis*).

Exhibition of Paul's paintings at the Mark Matthews Gallery, 2 November 2000 (© *Mitchell Gerber/Corbis*).

Paul with Heather Mills at the Adopt-a-Minefield benefit gala dinner in Beverly Hills, 14 June 2001 (© *Reuters/Corbis*).

Paul with police officer at Concert for New York, 20 October 2001 (© *Reuters/Corbis*).

Stella McCartney receiving honorary degree from the University of Dundee, 8 July 2003 (© *Reuters/Corbis*).

Paul with Russian President Vladimir Putin at the Kremlin, 24 May 2003 (© *Reuters/Corbis*).

Paul performing at Superbowl XXXIX Halftime Show, Jacksonville, Florida, 6 February 2005 (© *David Drapkin*).

Acknowledgements

This is an ‘unauthorised’ biography so I’m particularly grateful to the 300 or so people who spoke to me, if only to vent. I would also like to acknowledge publicly and for all time my respect and admiration for Sir Paul McCartney’s talent, drive, restless creativity, exquisite taste, eclecticism – especially the last, in tackling the worlds of children’s film, poetry and abstract art. Nothing in the following pages is intended in any way as an attack or slur on him, his family or his fabulous body of work.

For recollections, input or advice I should thank, institutionally: Abacus, Amazon, Ananova, ASCAP, *Billboard*, Book Mail, Borders, the British Library, British Newspaper Library, Chapters, Companies House, *Daytrippin*’, FBI – Freedom of Information Division, Focus Fine Arts, Foyles, General Register Office, Helter Skelter, Liverpool Business Centre, Liverpool Tourist Information, London Beatles Store, Maltese Falcon, Merseyrail, MultiMap, the Music Box, Performing Right Society, Public Record Office, Rock and Roll Hall of Fame, St Peter’s Church Woolton, Seattle Public Library, *The Times*, Vital Records, waronsex.

Professionally: Tim Andrews, Mark Booth, Jonathan Boyd, Randy Brecker, Ben Brierley, Gary Brooker, the late William Burroughs, Chris Charlesworth, Noel Chelberg, Dan Chernow, Allan Clarke, Lucy Conlon, Lol Creme, Micky Dolenz, Paul Du Noyer, Rex Evans, the late Adam Faith, Chris Farlowe, Ros Fielden, Libby Fields, Judy Flanders, Alan Foulder, Lucy Gentry, Tony Gill, Charlie Gillett, Sarah Goldstein, Roger Greenaway, Jeff Griffin, Bob Harris, Alan Hazen, Dick Heckstall-Smith, David Henshaw, Jill Holmes,

Tony Huss, David Jacobs, the Jaggers, Norman Jewison, Lenny Kaye, Joan Keylock, Tom Keylock, Max King, Alan Lane, Nichola Lee, Barbara Levy, Steve Loder, Nick Lowe, Angie McCartney, Ruth McCartney, Henry McCullough, Roger McGough, Kara McMahon, John Major, Robert Mann, Dave Mason, the late Mickie Most, Mark Noble, the late Jack Paar, Graham Paisley, Max Paley, May Pang, Graham Parker, Andy Partridge, Andy Peebles, Peter Perchard, Bruce Perret, Dave Peters, Harold Pinter, Ken Pitt, Jim Repard, Tim Rice, Neil Sedaka, Pete Seeger, Brian Setzer, Ravi Shankar, Ned Sherrin, Don Short, Pat Sims, Nancy Sinatra, David Sinclair, Grace Slick, Eric Stewart, Ed Strauss, Dick Taylor, Al Tilbrook, Kathy Ward, Adele Warlow, Christine Webster, Rusty West, Alan Weyer, Bobby Whitlock, Mark Wilson, Robert Wise, Tom Wolfe, David Wood, Glen Woodman, Tony Yeo, Irfan Zuberi. It’s a pleasure to particularly thank Marshall Terrill, my co-worker on the biography chain gang and an indefatigable source of McCartney facts, figures and interviews over the past two years.

Personally: Adis, John Aeberhard, Amanuel, the Attic, Pete Barnes, Ray Bates, Benaroya Hall, Mihir Bose, Hilary and Robert Bruce, the late Alan Burrough, Changelink, Albert Clinton, Cocina, the late Doris Cohn, Ernst Cohn, Richard Cranfield, Cricketers Club of London, Deb K. Das, Mark Demos, Monty Dennison, the Dowdall family, John and Barbara Dungee, Fairmont Waterfront Hotel, Malcolm Galfe, the Gay Hussar, Gethsemane Lutheran Church, Audrey Godwin, James Graham, Peter Griffin, Richard Hill, Amy Hostetter, Ivar’s, JCC, Jo Jacobius, Bill and Morgan Johnson, Lincoln Kamell, Kinko’s, the late Joan Lambert, Terry Lambert, Belinda Lawson, the late Daphne Lorimer, Vince Lorimer, Lee Mattson, Jim Meyersahm, Sheila Mohn, the Morgans, National Gallery room 34, Peter Oborne, Chuck Ogmund, Larry Olsen, Valya Page, Pan Pacific Hotel, the Parishes, Chris Pickrell, Prins family, Queen Anne Office Supply, Keith Richards, the late Peter Rushbrooke, St Paul’s

Hospital Vancouver, Debbie Saks, Delia Sandford, my father Sefton Sandford, Sue Sandford, Peter Scaramanga, Seattle CC, Kempton Segerhammar, Fred and Cindy Smith, the *Spectator*, Sportspages, the Stanleys, Subway 3674, Jack Surendranath, the Travel Team, Ben and Mary Tyvand, Valhalla Coffee Co of Tacoma, Wa., the Villars, Tony Vinter, Von's, John and Mary Wainwright, Jim Wheal, the Willis Flemings, Betty Wolstenholme. As usual my greatest debt is to Karen and Nicholas Sandford, who I hope will feel it's been worthwhile.

Thanks again, Fields family.

C.S.
2006

‘The first string that the musician usually touches is the bass, when he intends to put all in tune. God plays this one Himself’

John Bunyan

‘We were madmen’

Paul McCartney

CHAPTER ONE

Get Back

AS FAR AS rock music goes, Japan was the far side of the moon in 1980, long before the likes of the Stones blasted away its parochial charm and turned it into a virtual colony of Los Angeles. In those days it was a remote, enigmatic place, aloof and forbidding, of the sort ancient map-makers used to label ‘here be dragons’. Paul McCartney had been applying for his work permit to tour here for nearly a decade, and was said to be ecstatic when the papers finally came through early that new year. The plan was to play eleven concerts, scheduled to run from 21 January to 2 February, raising both funds for McCartney’s latest crusade – emergency relief for Kampuchea – and his own profile. On the way, he, his family and band enjoyed a three-day layover in New York, where Paul signed autographs and posed for pictures with scores of fans and well-wishers at the airport. Up until then, nobody had ever seen him unhappy in a crowd, even in those that ripped pieces of his clothes off as souvenirs.

On the evening of Monday 14 January, Paul put in a call from his suite at the Stanhope hotel to a number just across Central Park. As it happened, John Lennon (whom McCartney hadn’t seen in nearly four years) had recently become more visible around town. Since flying back from his own family break in Japan the previous autumn, Lennon had taken to walking the chilly Upper West Side streets, greeting all and

sundry with a friendly if adenoidal hello, dressed in a fur coat, a fedora jammed down onto his thin nose that never seemed to get unstuffed. Of late, he and his wife Yoko Ono had both enthused about enjoying greater access to and from their many admirers in New York. The couple's welcome didn't, however, extend to McCartney, whom Yoko allegedly told, 'This isn't a good time. We're busy.'

'OK, listen. All I'm asking is to drop by, have a smoke and chew the fat with Himself.' There was a dubious silence. 'I can't stay,' McCartney stressed; it was the phrase he always used in delicate situations. 'We're off tomorrow to these gigs. Bring 'em on,' he added in a stagey, roll-right-up sort of way. 'I feel like kicking some ass again.'

'Oh, Paul, Paul. Is *not* a good time,' Yoko reiterated. 'We're busy on our houses.'

The call ended on a sour note when McCartney mentioned that he and his family were booked into the presidential suite of the Okura hotel, the Lennons' own semi-official residence when staying in Tokyo. There's no evidence that John was ever told that Paul had rung him.

The McCartneys' flight landed at Narita airport in the early afternoon of 16 January, Paul, dressed in a lime green suit, chugging into the Immigration hall holding his infant son James in one hand and a red women's make-up box – allegedly the property of wife Linda – in the other. Mysteriously, there were no reps from CBS Records immediately on hand to meet him. Japanese Customs, however, were there in force; their inspection quickly turned up a small plastic bag in Paul's hand luggage. It contained eight ounces of marijuana, with a street value of 600,000 yen or approximately £1,120. Relieving him of his son, two police officers informed McCartney that he was being arrested for possession. 'It's all a mistake,' he allowed as he was being handcuffed. 'A serious mistake.'

They flashed him a look and led him away.

The next three days were to be the worst of McCartney's life to date. First he was ushered to the airport's Drug Supervision Centre and grilled not only about the dope but also a statement he'd provided just weeks earlier, assuring the Japanese government that his pot-smoking days were behind him. From there McCartney (now known officially as Prisoner 22) was transferred to a four-by-eight-foot cell in Tokyo's metropolitan jail. His wedding ring and other personal effects were removed. Meanwhile, authorities impounded the jet freighter bringing in the band's twenty tons of sound equipment, each and every piece of which was stripped down and searched. The tour was cancelled. Turning the singer of Silly Love Songs back into a vice case and subversive, all of McCartney's music was banned by state radio. Around midnight on the 16th he was allowed his first two visitors, a public defender named Tasuko Matsuo and the British vice-consul, one Doland Warren-Knott. Both men advised him that he could get seven years.

Unable to sleep, McCartney spent much of his time sitting cross-legged with his back to the wall of his cell and gamely trying to sing a few show tunes like Baby Face, his favourite at moments of stress, for his fellow cons. His request for a guitar was denied. At dawn, breakfast was taken with a blunt spoon. After twenty-four hours in custody, Paul was ushered into a room furnished by a wooden table and three chairs, where two English-speaking interrogators announced that they meant to take him, step by step, over his entire life. 'What do you want to know?' he asked them.

The reply was equally blunt. 'Everything.' And for the next six hours McCartney gave them the lot: Liverpool; Hamburg; certain promoters with shotguns; Beatlemania; Eppy; the Maharishi; Apple. The old days. The narcs listened to this restless tale of social upheaval and culture-changing creativity in total silence, their faces deadpan. Following some perfunctory words of acknowledgement, they then attempted to march their prisoner – now manacled again –

outside and across a normally deserted back alley leading to the main cell block. This plan backfired dramatically when three to four hundred fans were found to be barring their way, accompanied by a gale-force squeal of ‘Paul! Paul!’ While McCartney himself appraised the scene calmly, his two jailers took him by the arms, lifted him up, and ran for it.

Next day and all that week, the ‘MACCA IN CHAINS’ headlines kept up a breathless drumbeat. Intense efforts were made to find larger significance in the bust, and the case brought together some unlikely allies. The ‘straight’ press spoke of McCartney’s folly and arrogance, while most or all of his band (which would fold shortly thereafter) were similarly unimpressed. Meanwhile, a twenty-nine-year-old fan named Kenneth Lambert presented himself at Miami International airport, without money or a passport, and demanded a first-class ticket in order to fly to Tokyo to ‘free Paul’. After debating the matter for some time, Lambert suddenly pulled a realistic-looking toy gun from his pocket and was shot dead by police. Other admirers saw McCartney’s case as authority run amok, while in years ahead a story went round that the whole thing was actually the doing of John and Yoko, who had spitefully tipped off a contact in Japanese Customs. The facts of Paul’s ordeal could fit almost any agenda.

On the fourth day, McCartney was allowed writing paper, books and a first visit from Linda. After a week he enjoyed a communal bath, entertaining the murderers and rapists joining him there by bravely singing all five minutes of Mull Of Kintyre. Outside, the fans grew more vociferous in their support, and some ill-advisedly pelted the jail with stones. One teenaged girl wearing a *Help!* T-shirt would be shot and wounded by the police. An international media furore was also in full cry, putting pressure on the yen. Planeloads of lawyers began arriving from New York, demanding their

client’s release, and at that stage, after nine days inside, the Justice Ministry decided it would be in the public interest to set McCartney free. He was deported on the evening of 25 January, telling reporters on the flight home, ‘I’ve been a fool. What I did was incredibly dumb . . . I’m never going to smoke pot again.’

Before touching down for a refuelling stop in Alaska, McCartney began to fret about the publicity the ‘Jap thing’ might bring, and quickly realised how much he’d underestimated it when two camera trucks raced up to meet him on the runway before his jet had even come to a stop. The bust only intensified interest in both him and the Beatles, those slightly poor relations of their own fame who, collectively, stood as tall and mythic as Stonehenge. George had sent his old oppo a ‘Thinking of you’ telegram to the Okura hotel. Ringo had nothing public to say on the matter, but, in a related development, found himself first taunted and then strip-searched when, a month later, he flew into Mexico City to begin filming *Caveman*. John, for his part, would continue to scoff at much of the Beatles legacy, if only for public consumption. He remained the most wildly changeable of the four. Indeed, it seemed to some in 1980 that Lennon was one of the many New York-area residents to have already had their identities stolen. Perhaps it was an old platinum card, carelessly tossed in a Dakota Building dustbin, which allowed the criminals to strike, or perhaps the purchase over the phone of a round-the-world air ticket. Whatever it was, it was difficult otherwise to reconcile the bouncy young turk of the 1960s with the beaky, 40-year-old contrarian so full of spit, vinegar and surprises. On 28 November, John gave a legal deposition as part of a suit against the producers of a Broadway show caricaturing Paul and himself. His affidavit, which would go unpublished for six years, began: ‘I and the three other former Beatles have plans to stage a reunion concert, to be recorded, filmed and marketed around the world.’[1]

For McCartney, the honours and rewards would roll on through the Eighties and right down to the present day. Back home that spring, he collected an Outstanding Music Personality award and won the Ivor Novello for International Achievement. He soon added a Grammy and on 16 May flew to Cannes, where Oscar Grillo's short film *Seaside Woman*, based on Paul and Linda's song of that name, took the Palme d'Or. He and his music seemed to be everywhere: when Lennon strolled in for tea at the Plaza hotel, the house violinist, as usual, serenaded him with Paul's Yesterday. Later that same week McCartney put out a solo album, about which the critics used terms like 'dumb', 'trite' and 'flat-out awful'. It went straight to number one.

Paul, Linda and their brood spent much of the summer on holiday in the Caribbean before moving to their beachfront home near Linda's family on Long Island. By then Lennon happened to be only ninety minutes away in the studio, cutting his own first album in four years. On Wednesday 13 August, McCartney rang John to suggest that he, Paul, 'drop by to help out on a few tracks. Just for a couple of hours . . . I can't stay,' he added. Just as she had seven months earlier, Yoko reportedly intercepted the call and made it very clear that both she and her husband were busy. Paul persisted; would she at least pass on his offer?

'Sure,' said Yoko, and hung up.

Every culture creates psychopaths in its own image: it's difficult to imagine transferring the typical British madman to America. Likewise, the 'lone nut with a gun' seems oddly indigenous to the US. While the two boyhood friends continued to circle one another, just such a character, a twenty-five-year-old flop named Mark David Chapman, working as a part-time security guard in Hawaii, began to entertain thoughts of murder. By early October, Chapman was reading everything he could get his hands on about the newly public John Lennon. At least one such profile, in

Esquire, would speak of this ‘conscience of his generation’ re-emerging as ‘a forty-year-old businessman worth $150 million.’ There were other pieces extolling the percipience of John and Yoko’s investments, the commercial boon of the whole comeback, and the goldmine of the Beatles back catalogue. Chapman began to denounce his one-time hero, complaining that he was a phony. When he left work for the last time on 23 October he signed the employees’ log as ‘John Lennon’, before violently stabbing the name out.

Four days later in London, McCartney began cutting the soundtrack for a projected film about the beloved *Daily Express* children’s character Rupert Bear, to which he owned the rights. Among the tunes recorded were Rupert Song (Parts 1 and 2), Tippi Tippi Toes and The Castle Of The King Of The Birds. A thirty-eight-piece orchestra and a boys’ choir joined Paul to lay down both vocal and humming versions of the rousing We All Stand Together, which would be a British hit some four years later.

McCartney was sipping a Scotch and Coke when the young choristers filed out, in a reflective mood; the song had moved him. Around midnight, a Cinderella moment in the empty studio when the gear was being stowed, he turned to Linda and one or two friends and told them that it reminded him of the famously trippy session for All You Need Is Love. ‘It was that same vibe. I just looked around, and there were all these flowers and happy faces smiling up at me.’ Another sip or two, and he began murmuring huskily, ‘John . . . John . . .’ And Paul bent over chuckling, as though it had been yesterday rather than thirteen years before. At about that same moment Mark Chapman was in the J&S gunshop in Honolulu, where, for the equivalent of £65, he quickly concluded the purchase of a Charter Arms .38 calibre revolver.

On 4 November, a Tuesday, Ronald Reagan was elected the fortieth president of the US. John Lennon continued his now full-pelt media campaign prior to the release of his and

Yoko's album *Double Fantasy*. And McCartney made his third and last attempt of the year to reach his former partner by phone. By then Paul, too, was back in New York, overseeing the final edits of his concert film *Rockshow*, which would premier on 26 November. An employee at Lennon's home took the call and assured McCartney, 'OK, he'll get back to you.'

Five weeks passed. Then one day in December, McCartney was at AIR Studios in London, the phone rang and it was Lennon's people getting back to him. They wanted Paul to co-sign the deposition against the producers of the *Beatlemania* stage show, alleging that its sole purpose had been to commercially exploit the band even as its four members planned a major comeback concert. (This came as news to George and Ringo.) The lawyers were polite enough, and said that their client felt it might be a good idea for the Beatles' two 'capital generators' to present a united front on the issue, but John himself – already back at work on a new record, even as Chapman stalked him – never rang to discuss it.

Instead, in the early hours of Tuesday 9 December, Yoko phoned Paul's office, who in turn found him, with the unthinkable. John's assassination by Chapman would become the major news headline and talking point throughout the world for that week. The press immediately descended on McCartney's farm, cornering him among the sheep and goats, and got the shot everyone wanted, the *News* splashing it all over page two. And next day there he was, the so-called cute one, grizzled, puffy-eyed and surrounded by hairy animals. 'I can't take it in,' Paul announced. 'John was a great man who'll be remembered for his unique contributions to art, music and peace. He's going to be missed by [everyone] . . . He belongs to the world.'

The press thought both Lennon and McCartney still belonged to them, and in the hours and days ahead they

doorstepped Paul wherever he went. (Many of these same papers who gave over entire editions to their editors' unbearable expressions of grief had ignored or panned *Double Fantasy* just three weeks earlier.) Around seven that Tuesday night, ducking out of the side door of AIR Studios towards his car, Paul was swarmed by a small mob of fans, reporters and TV cameramen. Amid the riot of upside-down faces mouthing 'How do you feel?' questions through his windscreen, he turned round and said, 'It's a drag, innit?' McCartney would come to rue the exact choice of words, which many in the media considered glib.

The cheeky Beatle became heartless. He 'shrugged off the news' one American music weekly wrote, 'as though bemoaning a light rain shower.' Actually McCartney was shaken to his core, and genuinely sad at how things had been left between the two of them. On the morning of 10 December, just twenty-four hours after hearing the news, Paul asked to meet Andy Peebles, the BBC DJ who interviewed Lennon the weekend before his death. Peebles went to AIR, where he found McCartney 'absolutely gutted . . . and like anyone in shock, totally fixated on a single issue. In this case, what had John said about him? How'd he really felt?'

McCartney's official statement on the tragedy, issued later that day, hinted at some of the same concerns:

> I've hidden myself in my work, but it keeps flashing into my mind. I feel shattered, angry and very sad. It's just ridiculous. [Lennon] was pretty rude about me sometimes, but I secretly admired him for it, and I always managed to stay in touch with him. There was no question that we weren't friends – I really loved the guy. John often looked a loony to many people. He had enemies, but he was fantastic . . . He made a lot of sense.

McCartney had suffered one other significant loss, when his mother Mary succumbed to breast cancer on 31 October 1956. For twenty-three years she'd been a hardworking maternity nurse, and for the last ten, on and off, the family's main breadwinner. Her husband Jim had come back from the

hospital that dark Wednesday night and broken the news to his two bewildered sons. After a long silence, Paul had said, ‘What are we going to do without her dosh?’

Fourteen years old. He’d had no real idea of how to cope and would soon turn to music as a release. Paul’s ‘It’s a drag’ observation of twenty-four years later may well have been fuelled by the fact that, as a child, he’d learnt to keep certain things to himself. So, too, his teenage concern about ‘dosh’ in time led to the shrewd, hard-headed businessman worth some £820 million.

It’s somehow fitting, even if the facts are appalling, that McCartney should have survived Lennon. He was always the long-distance runner of the Beatles, an unabashed lover of his grannie’s music, for whom aging gracefully was in the game plan all along. Unlike John, Paul’s also enjoyed the ability to strike a sympathetic chord with a huge, worldwide public which feels him to be, at heart, ‘just like us.’ Of course, it’s not true, but it’s a rare gift that people should think it so. Like a Reagan or a Princess Diana, to name two, McCartney has gradually acquired special status as a much beloved Great Communicator.

The story that’s led up to this began on that bleak Halloween in 1956, when overnight Paul became obsessive about playing music. Stewing over the awkwardness of the wake and the weeks that followed, he took refuge in his first guitar. In the fifty years since, he’s done the following: become the most successful pop composer and recording artist in history, selling more than 140 million singles and roughly the same number of albums; scored at least eighty gold discs; acquired the copyright to over 1,000 other songs, including the works of Buddy Holly, Marvin Hamlisch, Sammy Cahn and Ira Gershwin, as well as the soundtracks to *Annie*, *Grease* and *A Chorus Line* (the list isn’t exhaustive); collected an MBE, a knighthood and much else in-between, from Chile’s Order of Merit to a fellowship of the

Royal College of Music; been involved in at least four drugs busts; caused Billy Graham to fall to his knees to pray for his soul; flirted with various alternative lifestyles; had smash hits as a solo artist and also as a member of a duo, trio, quartet, quintet and sextet; casually written the most popular song of all time, Yesterday, since jazzed up, slowed down or otherwise mangled by 2,400 other artists, ranging from Elvis to Frank Sinatra. As a result, McCartney has enjoyed a virtual season ticket to the Novellos and the Grammys, and in 1992 was the first ever recipient of Sweden's Polar Music Award, sometimes known as the Nobel prize for the arts.

He's given his name to everything from a planet to a groundbreaking punk group (the Ramones, who were all big fans, especially of McCartney's old stage moniker, Paul Ramon). Snapped up the rights to such standards as Chopsticks, Sentimental Journey – and Happy Birthday. Written a chart-topping James Bond theme. Dabbled in, among other forms, electronica, classical, swing, ragtime, soul and disco. Compared himself to Bach. Starred in one of the best musical films of all time, and also in one of the worst. Published poetry and exhibited a painting called *The Queen After Her First Cigarette*. Graced the *Guinness Book of Records* for having played to the largest stadium audience in history, as well as for the fastest ticket sale in history. Generally soared far above the level of other Sixties pop stars with their vaudeville routines for the curious and the disturbed. Enjoyed the distinction of seeing a school in Cracow, Poland, teach eight-to-twelve-year-olds to speak English purely by studying his lyrics.

There are plenty of other prolific tunesmiths around, but none have touched McCartney at his peak. It'd be going too far to call him, as John Lennon once did, a ditty factory; going too far, but not going in totally the wrong direction. He was staggeringly productive. Whereas even Lennon would take two or three days to write a three-minute song,

back then Paul actually took three minutes to write a three-minute song. He dreamt up hits-in-waiting while out walking his dog or sitting in the back of taxis. The melody of his most famous song came to him fully formed in his sleep. McCartney was *totally* musical; when not busy with his own career he found time to write for or produce everyone from Cilla Black to the Bonzo Dog Doo-Dah Band to the Everlys. Somewhere along the way, he became known, to Lennon and to millions of others, as the doe-eyed softy and perky melodist of breezy, lightweight fare like Hello, Goodbye, not to mention The Frog Chorus.

But like a stagnant pond, apparently calm to the naked eye, McCartney has always teemed with furious, invisible activity. As well as the Uncle Albert-style froth he's also been responsible for some of rock's more thrilling innovations. He was the first of the Beatles, and about the first pop star anywhere, to buck the old Tin Pan Alley convention of what a 'proper song' should sound like. That would have been legacy enough. But along with all the heady pranks involving wrong keys and tape loops and unsynchronised orchestras, McCartney was also restlessly shuffling styles and idioms right from the start. By the late Sixties he was regularly mixing old-fashioned showbiz 'oomph' with startling little novelties – for instance, the swampy bass lick, beloved of rap artists, he improvised on Come Together. He was 'into' Indian music before either Lennon or Harrison, and reggae fully a decade before chancers like the Police. Just turn on the radio. Every song harmonising in fourths and fifths rather than conventional thirds, that's McCartney. Every giddily vertical melody, that's McCartney. Jumping bass lines, wild octave leaps and yeah-yeah choruses – McCartney. Even in later years he never failed to take risks, whether pioneering the use of found sound or forgoing his brand name to trade under the aliases 'Thrills' Thrillington, the Fireman or plain Wacca, host of 1995's seminal *Oobu Joobu* radio show. No wonder his

company logo shows a juggler keeping various planets aloft. McCartney himself often cites astrology when attempting to rationalise how an inveterate hoofer like him can also be an avant-gardist. ‘I’m a Gemini, and we’re supposed to be like this and that. We’re quite schizo.’

Some, but not all of the McCartney story has grown threadbare through constant retelling. PhD theses about him have been accumulating for years, and there are whole books devoted to curating the exact dates and details of every song their subject ever recorded, and what he was wearing when he did so. Relatively few of them have challenged the McCartney stereotype: a happy-go-lucky, sweater-clad sort of bloke, more tuneful but not that much more hip than Val Doonican. That’s the myth.

After finishing work in the studio shortly after John Lennon’s death in December 1980, Paul and his family went back to the farm in Sussex. They’d remain in seclusion there, under armed guard, for the rest of the winter. He chose his occasional guests with care, refusing all interview requests and, not surprisingly, further enhancing security. One of his few visitors in the week before Christmas was an old Liverpool friend who remembers ‘Paul talk[ing] a lot about the Fabs, and how John had always been the one of them to wear his heart on his sleeve.’ Late one evening over a bottle of wine, McCartney said something that would stick in his friend’s mind. It was something that might also have surprised the many fans who for twenty years had read about him in print or listened intently to his music, but it cut to the core of the man. What Paul said that night was, ‘Nobody knows *me*, do they?’

---

1 This was in stark contrast to Lennon’s remarks, two months earlier, in *Newsweek*: ‘The four guys who used to be that group can never, ever be that group again, even if they wanted to be,’ he said. ‘What if Paul and I got together? It would be boring . . . I was never one for reunions. It’s all over!’

CHAPTER TWO

A Sort of Presence

ON THE NIGHT of Christmas Eve 1936 Liverpool was in the grip of the worst thunderstorm in living memory. By seven o'clock the rain was so heavy that, for most of the short journey, none of the passengers huddled on the deck of the foot-ferry ploughing across the river Mersey to Wallasey could see the lights of either shore. Once docked, a few of these hardy souls made their way by bus up Liscard Road, past darkened houses and down a long lane bordered by pine trees and the town park, before alighting at a low, nondescript building, covered with peeling builders' tarpaulins, of about the size and feel of a scout hall, on which hung a sign: 'THE GROSVENOR BALLROOM & PARAMOUNT ENTERPRISES PROUDLY PRESENT – OLD TYME DANCING TO JIM MAC AND HIS BIG BAND'. Inside sixty or so customers milled around, discussing the weather.

When the headline act hit the stage, he was received like a king. 'Jim Mac' was actually a cotton broker and only a weekend musician, a lover of fast women and slow horses, but over the years he'd built up a loyal following. The lights dimmed and there was a big hand as he ran on, a chirpy-looking man in his mid-thirties with arched eyebrows, dressed in a dinner jacket, followed by the band. You'd never have known that he was suffering from arthritis, and could barely get out of his bed that morning. On their way in to Wallasey Jim's sister Milly had tried to talk him out of

performing, but as soon as he got in his dressing room he'd turned to her and said, 'It's OK, love. I'm not sick any more. Let me give them what they want. I belong to them.'

He was right. For the next two hours Jim worked the small but increasingly vocal crowd, hammering at his piano, sometimes jumping up, both thumbs aloft, all the while keeping up a brisk repertoire of jazz and blues standards. In Jim's hands, the faster numbers were a riot. The midtempo, lovesick stuff, all plush vocals and brass, went down a treat. Once or twice, when introspection called, he sang while sitting quite still on a bar stool, stage centre, dragging on a cigarette. You could have heard a pin drop. Around ten that night, just as the church bells out on Manor Road began ringing for Christmas mass, Jim closed proceedings with the ever-popular Lullaby Of The Leaves:

Rustling of the leaves used to be my lullaby,
In the sunny south when I was a tot so high.
And now that I've grown
And myself alone,
Cradle me where southern skies can watch me with a million eyes . . .

Oh sing me to sleep
Lullaby of the leaves
Cover me with heaven's blue and let me dream a dream or two,
Oh sing me to sleep
Lullaby of the leaves.

It was spellbinding. You could see the Louisiana sky, and that lonesome train winding through the Dixie cotton fields. Those diehard fans who'd come on the ferry forgot all about the weather and the abdication crisis and the news from Germany, which, just a week earlier, had signed an anti-British axis with Italy. On the last note, there was a moment

of awed silence, then cheers and applause. In a rapid gear shift, Jim and the band changed their minds about leaving and dashed off a Benny Goodman-style raver, which they brought to a runaway-truck climax. At the end of the number the shouts and whistles were as violent as a storm and lasted almost as long as the song.

It was wild. Jim and the boys came back for two more encores. He'd long since gotten over the arthritis and, after jogging back into the wings, reappeared sporting fake white whiskers and a Santa Claus hat which he doffed while jigging around and yelling, 'Merry Crimble!' After the final curtain the audience got to their feet and stood for two minutes, applauding that little man with gammy legs and bad teeth who'd made them all feel like shouting and dancing along with him.

'Milly timed them,' Jim would often recall in later years. 'Two minutes is long, you know. You have time to think. I listened to them . . . it was beautiful. It was so good it hurt! I went out there that night feeling like death, and I gave 'em everything. You can't imagine. It's the greatest feeling on earth!'

In time the lesson was well learned by Jim's son, who, twenty-four years later, would rock the same hall with his own band, then going under the name the Silver Beetles.

In fact, nobody could remember a time when the McCartneys didn't play music: the name comes from the old German for crate- or case-carrier, more often a strolling minstrel. For most of the nineteenth century the family were Protestants, builders and amateur performers in County Wicklow, before migrating across the water around 1867. There's some doubt of the actual date, but ample family folklore about the circumstances. At the docks Paul's grandfather Joe, then an infant, arrived with a tag around his neck asking that he be delivered, if lost, to the address of an Irish mission in the town centre. Not long afterwards,