



Review of Walter Everett, *The Beatles as Musicians: Revolver Through the Anthology*

Yrjö Heinonen



KEYWORDS: Everett, Beatles, songwriting, recording, analysis

ABSTRACT: *The Beatles as Musicians* offers an historical survey of the second part of the Beatles' career. It includes analyses of every song that members of the Beatles wrote and released during 1966–70, as well as a brief review of the Beatles Anthology releases of 1995–96. Each song is discussed in terms of songwriting, recording, and musical expression. Though some of the musical analyses may likely be too demanding for readers without, or with only a little, training in music theory, the book will nevertheless be fascinating for anyone interested in the Beatles. The book's focus is clearly on music, but it also offers much to readers more interested in the cultural life of the 1960s. This is a splendid book and surely a milestone in Beatles research.

[1.1] Walter Everett has published numerous articles on the music of the Beatles. He has approached the topic from the point of view of voice leading and has developed a method of applying voice-leading analysis to answer questions about the expressive content of individual works or songs. The culmination of that program of research is *The Beatles as Musicians*, which, when completed, will be a two-volume compendium covering the Beatles' entire career. The second of these volumes, *Revolver Through the Anthology*, has appeared first and forms the subject of this review. I consider Everett's book to be well researched and thought provoking. Despite of some critical comments presented below, I generally agree with his point of view.

[1.2] The title of this book—*The Beatles as Musicians: Revolver through the Anthology*—might strike some Beatles scholars as puzzling. First of all, it seems to associate the “musicianship” of the members of the Beatles with the second half of their career, which is generally known as “the recording years” (the years preceding *Revolver* are usually referred to as “the touring years”). In 1970, John Lennon told Jann Wenner of *Rolling Stone* magazine that “the music was dead before we even went on the theatre tour of Britain.” This tour took place in early 1963! Lennon went on to say, “The Beatles' music died then, as musicians. That's why we never improved as musicians; we killed ourselves then to make it” (quoted from Miles 1978, 17). “Making it” means, of course, the national and international breakthrough of the group. During the same interview Lennon observed, “Later on we became technically efficient recording artists—which was another thing—because we were competent people and whatever media you put us in we can produce something worthwhile.” Lennon's train of thought seems to be that the touring years—or, rather, “the performing years,” the years he associated with *musicianship*—were over when the Beatles entered the recording studio. Although I recognize the point of Lennon's words, I do not personally consider Everett's title to be misleading. Lennon associated “musicianship” with stage performance, not with studio work, and it is indeed quite clear that during the days of Beatlemania the Beatles became impoverished as *stage* musicians. Nevertheless, it is equally clear that they subsequently improved as *recording* musicians. Surely they were still *musicians*.

[1.3] A second quibble is connected to the period the book covers. One would expect that the first of the two volumes would be devoted to the years 1957–65 (from the Quarry Men days through *Rubber Soul*) rather than to 1966–96 (from *Revolver* through the *Anthology*). Had Everett started with a volume dealing with the first half of their career, he could have avoided the 25-page chapter, “The Beatles before 1966,” altogether. Starting the second volume with *Revolver* may be well grounded with respect to the quite sharp stylistic change evident in *Revolver*. Moreover, this particular album, to quote Everett, “happens to fall exactly at the midpoint of the telling of the story” of their career.

[1.4] Yet the whole thirty-year period from the release of *Revolver* in 1966 to the release of the three volumes of the *Anthology* in 1995–96 hardly constitutes a coherent “period.” In practice, Everett’s focus is almost solely on the “recording years” (1966–70). The solo careers of the former members of the Beatles are summarized very briefly in five pages and only ten pages are devoted to the *Anthology* release. It must be noted, however, that when discussing songs originally released during 1966–70, Everett refers to the early or alternate versions of the same songs released in the *Anthology*. In this sense the *Anthology* is present throughout the whole book.

[2.1] In writing a history of the Beatles as musicians, Everett strikes a balance between two competing contemporary approaches to the historiography of music. One is the “Dahlhausian” concept of presenting music history as a narrative that takes the musical “work” as the unit of the chronology. In the extreme case, the resulting narrative should consist of musical works arranged in chronological order according to the principle of novelty (that is, according to the date of the premiere or publishing the work). The other is the “Treitlerian” concept of music history as criticism. According to this view, much more attention should be paid to the interpretation of historical phenomena than to enumerating “facts” in their chronological order. All history—including the previous literature on history—is *present* in the sense that it is always perceived and interpreted at present. And as the term “criticism” implies, Treitler encourages music historians to evaluate the music that is the focus of their study. In consequence, the study of music history becomes a part of (general) music criticism.

[2.2] At the broadest level, Everett presents “the complete history” of the Beatles in the second half of their career as a chronological narrative, with due attention to the novelty principle—“innovations are carefully noted as they appear” (p. ix). This approach is most evident in the chronological summaries (time lines) of the musical events over particular periods. At the level of particular albums, however, he tends to rely more on the “criticism” approach. The order in which he discusses songs, for example, is influenced by his emphasis on, for instance, the unity of *Sgt. Pepper* and *Abbey Road* or the subjective value of the songs in *Magical Mystery Tour*. The “narrative” approach is evident only in *Revolver*, whose songs are discussed in chronological order according to the date they were taken into the recording studio.

[2.3] In serving both the “narrative” and “criticism” approaches, it is possible to omit something that fits neatly into neither scheme and yet may be important (see Heinonen & Eerola 1998). Thus Everett pays practically no attention to the *Yellow Submarine* soundtrack LP, which EMI/Apple officially released as a Beatles album in early 1969. There were four new songs by the Beatles in *Yellow Submarine*. Everett discusses these songs as parts of other more important projects (which they undoubtedly were). Three of the songs—“Only A Northern Song,” “All Together Now,” and “It’s All Too Much”—are discussed briefly under the heading “‘All You Need Is Love’ / ‘Baby You’re A Rich Man’ and Some Shelf-Sitters” (pp. 124–129). The fourth song, “Hey Bulldog,” is discussed together with “Lady Madonna,” “The Inner Light” and “Across The Universe” (pp. 152–158). Despite the fact that *Yellow Submarine* can by no means be compared to any other British album release—its contents come quite close to the

United Artists’ soundtrack releases of the films *A Hard Day’s Night* and *Help!*—it deserves to be treated as an independent album by virtue of being an official Beatles release. Similarly scant attention is paid to the seven songs by George Martin added to the *Yellow Submarine* album from the actual film soundtrack. Six of these “songs” were his original compositions and one was his orchestral arrangement of “Yellow Submarine.” When will we have serious analyses or commentaries of these “Beatle” songs in the Beatles literature?

[3.1] In general, each song is treated in a similar manner: first Everett describes how the song was written, then he relates how it was recorded, and finally he gives an analysis of the musical expression. This plan is similar to that used by Ian MacDonald in his *Revolution in the Head*, first published in 1994. In describing the genesis of the songs, Everett has combined data from various sources. One category of sources includes statements by the songwriters themselves as well as by people who (have claimed to have) witnessed the writing of a song or a part of it. Another and perhaps more reliable category of sources includes demo tapes and lyric sketches as well as early and alternative takes for the songs. These “drafts” are treated as equivalents of the compositional sketches and drafts written by classical composers.

[3.2] The book includes many references to general influences as well as to concrete sources of inspiration for particular

songs. Everett presents, for example, a transcription of the Kellogg jingle on which the refrain of Lennon's "Good Morning Good Morning" was based. He also discusses intertextual relationships that he does not necessarily claim to be real "influences" or "sources of inspiration." Perhaps the most astonishing of these is the almost verbatim similarity between "Hey Jude" and John Ireland's *Te Deum*. One cannot avoid the impression that if McCartney was familiar with Ireland's work, then this work was an actual—although by no mean conscious—source of inspiration for "Hey Jude."

[3.3] With respect to songwriting, the book has some shortcomings. If one is familiar with the extensive literature on the writing of famous Beatles songs, then the omission of some landmark statements is hard to explain. Let us take, for example, "Eleanor Rigby" and "Lucy In The Sky With Diamonds." Donovan Leitch has claimed that McCartney started "Eleanor Rigby" with Ola Na Tungee as the protagonist. This claim is mentioned both in *A Hard Day's Write* by Steve Turner (1995) and *Many Years from Now* by Barry Miles (1997). Donovan's account would seem to bear repeating. Everett does of course mention that, according to Lennon, the title of "Lucy In The Sky With Diamonds" was based on his son's drawing of the same name. But he fails to mention that Turner (1995) presents a drawing that he claims to be Julian Lennon's original depiction.

[3.4] Due to the scope of the book, it is not the place to look for solutions to Beatles "mysteries." "Eleanor Rigby" and "Lucy In The Sky" can also serve as examples of the way Everett tends to leave conflicting claims or interpretations unresolved. As anyone familiar with the Beatles literature knows, "Eleanor Rigby" is one of the songs where Lennon and McCartney disagree as to the extent of their respective authorship ("In My Life" is the other). Everett sets out the problem and mentions the conflicting sources, but closes the case by saying "No matter who composed the lyrics . . . it likely was a group effort." As for "Lucy In The Sky," most commentaries regard it as a drug song, although both Lennon and McCartney have denied this and have pointed out that the song is based on Julian Lennon's above-mentioned drawing and Lewis Carroll's *Through the Looking-Glass*. The matter of being or not being a drug song is duly discussed in the book. Everett even points out the similarity between "Lucy In The Sky" and the dreamy final poem of Carroll's *Through the Looking Glass*. But again, he closes the case by stating that "Whether dream-based, drug-based, or both, the song's amphibolous phantasms entice the listener away from all concerns with reality." I tend to agree that reading "Lucy In The Sky With Diamonds" as "LSD" is more myth than fact. Solving Beatle myths is surely not Everett's aim, as he himself writes in the preface of his book. "In many cases, my explanation as to the 'meaning' of a given passage or song—often based on combined elements of the musical and poetic texts, along with knowledge of the composers' biography and intent—is offered, but all listeners must solve the Beatles' many mysteries for themselves" (p. xi).

[3.6] As to the recording process, Everett's account is based mainly on Mark Lewisohn's *The Beatles: Recording Sessions* (1988), in which the group's studio work is documented extremely well. In my opinion, Everett's most important contribution to the existing knowledge concerning the recording process of the Beatles is the identification of every part, its performer, and the instrument used in each song. He also clearly indicates where a particular part is positioned in the stereo picture. Fine work indeed.

[4.1] Everett's sources consist not only of the official "canon"—the Beatles' LPs, singles, EPs, and CDs recorded in London and released by EMI and Apple—but also of "every available document of a Beatles' musical activity during the period covered" (p. viii). These documents include various audio, video, print, and multimedia sources, including various "bootleg" releases. The way he takes the "bootleg drafts" and lyric sketches as equivalents of the compositional sketches of classical composers is very illuminating. The analysis of the writing and recording process of "Strawberry Fields" is fully comparable to the carefully detailed sketch studies that modern musicologists have written concerning the works of Beethoven or Mozart.

[4.1] The scores referred to by Everett in his analyses can be found in *The Beatles: Complete Scores*, published by Wise Publications (1989). This book includes transcriptions of all songs released by the Beatles from 1962 to 1970. Everett writes that this publication is "an 1,100-page compendium of practically full scores of every song appearing on an EMI single or LP during the years 1962–70" (p. xiii). He admits that the scores "are not without faults," but adds that "they will certainly not be replaced in the near future" (ibid.).

[4.4] In my opinion the scores are far from complete—partly because of the hundreds (or thousands) of faults they include, partly because the repeated sections of a song are too often presented only as they occur the first time through. Changes in arrangements in later repetitions are either omitted or represented by only the most prominent features like an added second voice or instrumental riffs or fills. Jouni Koskimaki and I have tried to illustrate this in our case study of the arrangement of "Cry Baby Cry." According to our study, the "complete" Wise score "contains only the intro, the first chorus, and the

coda. . . . In other words, some 60% (choruses II, III and IV) of the arrangement is missing altogether” (Koskimaki and Heinonen 1998). This practice saves work and paper but does not do justice to the original sound recording. Nevertheless, I agree with Everett that the expression of musical ideas in his book would have been much more difficult without the Wise scores. Even with its faults and missing parts that publication is surely the best available “Complete Beatles” score.

[5.1] Everett’s musical examples fall into two categories: (1) transcriptions of sound recordings, and (2) voice-leading graphs and other analytical constructions. With respect to the sound recording, some of them are intended as supplements to the Wise scores. All these transcriptions have been made by Everett himself, with the exception of the orchestral crescendo in “A Day In The Life,” which was prepared by Glenn Palmer. Some other sound-recording transcriptions deal with the demo versions and early or alternative takes of the songs. It is a pity that most of these transcriptions are incomplete—probably due to problems with copyrights, lack of space, or both. In any case, these transcriptions will be welcomed by all who are interested in applying the approaches of sketch or manuscript studies to the songwriting and recording processes of the Beatles (or popular music in general). Later literature will probably cite Everett’s book as the first to apply this approach extensively and systematically to Beatles research. I consider this one of the book’s greatest contributions.

[5.2] The analytical method applied by Everett rests on Schenkerian voice-leading analysis, or rather, an adaptation of it. The method itself is widely debated, as is its applicability to popular music. If one does not know the principles and techniques of this method, many of Everett’s analytical points will be difficult to understand. Without going too much into the details, I would like to illustrate how Everett applies Schenkerian voice-leading analysis to one song.

[5.3] “I Am The Walrus” is a Beatles song unlikely to be considered “tonal” in the strict Schenkerian sense. Yet Everett succeeds in finding a structure quite similar to the Schenkerian *Ursatz*. The pillars of this *Ursatz* appear as follows. The 5th occurs at 0’21” (the beginning of the first bar of the first verse A, “I am he as you are he”) and the 4th occurs at 2’47” (the beginning of the penultimate bar of the third verse A, “how they snide”). The 3rd—which is a flatted “blue” note—occurs at 2’50” (at the beginning of the last bar of the third verse A, “crying”). The 2nd occurs at 3’04” (at the beginning of the penultimate bar of the third verse B, “man you should have seen them kicking Edgar Allan Poe”), supported by II \sharp . The dominant (V) appears at 3’15” (the beginning of the last bar of the refrain, “walrus”) and the home tonic is eventually reached at 3’25” (the beginning of the first bar of the coda, “juba, juba”).

[5.4] This deep structure is, according to Everett, “deceptively ‘normal’” (p. 136). At the middleground level, he states, harmonic norms are violated especially in the bridge (2:11–2:25), whereas the foreground harmony “cynically challenges the underlying tonal centrality at nearly every turn” (p. 137). Although I have my doubts about the details and about the method in general, I agree with Everett’s main analytical interpretations. The foreground of “I Am The Walrus” is, to quote Everett, a “masterful welding of poetic and musical nonsense” (p. 138). Behind this surface there is, however, a middleground that violates tonal principles no more than do many Tin Pan Alley songs or the songs of Liszt. Behind this middleground are basically tonal *reference points*—the only “violation” of Schenkerian *Ursatz* is the flatted “blue” third in the “Urlinie.” “I Am The Walrus” is, then, not pure chaos but organized chaos. And the organization behind the chaos is, as Everett shows, basically tonal.

[6.1] The dispute between “culturally” and “musically” oriented popular music research cannot be left without mention. The “cultural” side maintains that popular music is more a cultural (or sociological) than a musical phenomenon (see, for example, Denisoff 1986, 31). The “musical” side takes music—the sounds themselves—as the primary subject matter of popular music (Middleton 1990, Moore 1993). Everett discusses this topic briefly in his preface, where he cites justification of the “musical” side. He writes that while the proponents of the “cultural” side “are certainly free to limit their own investigations in any desired way,” he hopes that his book “would suggest to them that their own endeavors might be enhanced by an objective hearing of the music” (p. x). Without denying the justification of the “cultural” approach, which Everett himself do not deny either, I very warmly welcome this point of view.

[6.2] Another common assumption from the “cultural” side is, to quote Everett again, that “popular music cannot be analyzed to useful ends with tools ‘created’ for the appreciation of classical music” (p. x). As has been said above, Everett applies basically Schenkerian voice-leading analysis to the songs of the Beatles. In support of this approach one may cite Richard Middleton, according to whom there “seems no reason why Schenker analysis could not be applied to popular songs governed by functional-tonal processes: nineteenth century types, for example, or most Tin Pan Alley songs” (Middleton 1990, 193). He too presents examples that are not so obviously tonal in the sense of Western tonality (including “Twist And Shout” by the Beatles) and maintains that “a full-blown rejection of the [Schenkerian] theory for this kind of music is less appropriate than the development of a ‘modified Schenkerianism’” (p. 196). Everett’s analysis of “I Am The Walrus”

(discussed above) is, in my opinion, a good example of the kind of “modified Schenkerianism” to which Middleton refers. I think it also succeeds in revealing quite conventional reference points behind what at first sight—or, rather, first hearing—might seem to be chaotic nonsense.

[6.3] A rather surprising endorsement of long-range hearing characteristic of the Schenkerian approach comes from no less an authority than Paul McCartney. He gave the following statement to Hunter Davis in August 1966: “I can hear a whole song in one chord. In fact, I think you can hear a whole song in one note, if you listen hard enough. But nobody ever listens hard enough.” The main idea of this statement by the then 24-year-old Paul McCartney echoes the very idea behind Schenkerian analysis.

[7.1] The back cover of the paperback edition of Everett’s book quotes John Covach who considers Everett’s book “the most important book on the Beatles to appear so far.” Without falling into the trap of comparing the book to, say, Mark Lewisohn’s *The Beatles: Recording Sessions* or Hunter Davies’ *The Beatles* (the only authorized biography of the group), I think it fair to say that Everett has written the most important *musicological* book on the group so far. This two-volume opus, when finished, will undoubtedly be a milestone in Beatles research—really a splendid book.

Yrjö Heinonen
Conference Chair
“The Beatles 2000”
June 15–18, 2000
Jyväskylä, Finland
yheinone@cc.jyu.fi

Works Cited

Dahlhaus, Carl. 1983. *Foundations in Music History*. Trans. by J.B. Robinson. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Davies, Hunter. 1992. *The Beatles. The Only Authorized Biography*. Rev. ed. London: Arrow Books.

Denisoff, R. Serge. 1986. *Tarnished Gold: The Record Industry Revisited*. New Brunswick, N.J.: Transaction.

Heinonen, Yrjö and Eerola Tuomas. 1998. *Songwriting, Recording, and Style Change. Problems in the Chronology and Periodization of the Musical Style of the Beatles*. In *Beatlestudies 1*, Research Reports 19. Edited by Yrjö Heinonen, Tuomas Eerola, Jouni Koskimäki, Terhi Nurmesjärvi and John Richardson. Jyväskylä: University of Jyväskylä, Department of Music.

Koskimäki, Jouni and Heinonen, Yrjö. 1998. *Variation as the Key Principle of Arrangement in ‘Cry Baby Cry’*. In *Beatlestudies 1*, Research Reports 19. Edited by Yrjö Heinonen, Tuomas Eerola, Jouni Koskimäki, Terhi Nurmesjärvi and John Richardson. Jyväskylä, Finland: University of Jyväskylä, Department of Music.

MacDonald, Ian. 1994. *Revolution in the Head: The Beatles’ Records and the Sixties*. New York: Henry Holt.

Middleton, Richard. 1990. *Studying Popular Music*. Milton Keynes, England: Open University Press.

Miles, Barry, and Marchbank, Pearce, eds. 1978. *The Beatles: In Their Own Words*. New York: Omnibus.

Moore, Allan F. 1993. *Rock: The Primary Text*. Buckingham, England: Open University Press.

Treitler, Leo. 1989. *Music and the Historical Imagination*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

Copyright Statement

Copyright © 2000 by the Society for Music Theory. All rights reserved.

[1] Copyrights for individual items published in *Music Theory Online (MTO)* are held by their authors. Items appearing in *MTO* may be saved and stored in electronic or paper form, and may be shared among individuals for purposes of scholarly research or discussion, but may *not* be republished in any form, electronic or print, without prior, written permission from

the author(s), and advance notification of the editors of *MTO*.

[2] Any redistributed form of items published in *MTO* must include the following information in a form appropriate to the medium in which the items are to appear:

This item appeared in *Music Theory Online* in [VOLUME #, ISSUE #] on [DAY/MONTH/YEAR]. It was authored by [FULL NAME, EMAIL ADDRESS], with whose written permission it is reprinted here.

[3] Libraries may archive issues of *MTO* in electronic or paper form for public access so long as each issue is stored in its entirety, and no access fee is charged. Exceptions to these requirements must be approved in writing by the editors of *MTO*, who will act in accordance with the decisions of the Society for Music Theory.

This document and all portions thereof are protected by U.S. and international copyright laws. Material contained herein may be copied and/or distributed for research purposes only.

Prepared by Brent Yorgason and Tahirih Motazedian, Editorial Assistants