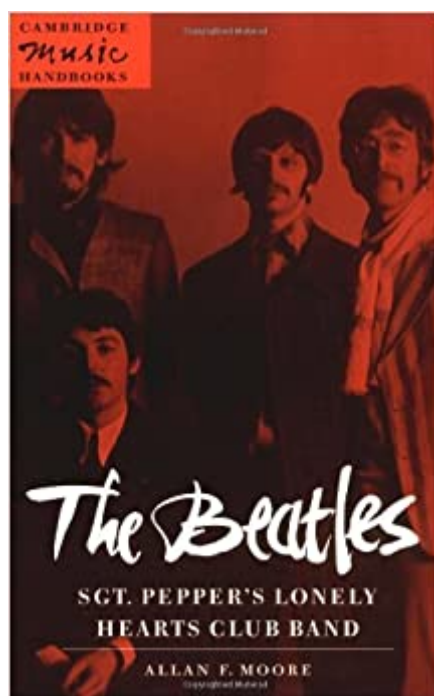


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The Beatles: Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band (Cambridge Music Handbooks)



Synopsis

Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band (1967) represents the highpoint of the recording career of the Beatles. This is a detailed study of this album, and it demonstrates how serious discussion of popular music can be undertaken without failing either the approach or the music. Dr. Moore considers each song individually, tying his analysis to the recorded performance on disk, rather than the printed music. He focuses on the musical quality of the songs and the interpretations offered by a range of commentators. He also describes the context in which the album was written--both within the career of the group itself and within the development of popular music globally, both before and since.

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Customer Reviews

"Dr. Alan F. Moore packs each sentence with profound observations, each paragraph with thought-provoking concepts." Discoveries March 2002

Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band (1967) represents the highpoint of the recording career of the Beatles. This is the first detailed study to be made of this or any other such album, and it demonstrates how serious discussion of popular music can be undertaken without either the approach or the music. Dr. Moore considers the musical qualities of each song and describes the context in which the album was written within the career of the group itself and within the development of popular music globally, both before and since.

I loved the musicology bit, but insight into the creative process is weak. The problem with his approach is that it is hampered by the influence of academic post-modernist 'surfaces-only' vision. He is sceptical of the most extreme versions of this, which would be that the meaning of a text is only 'socially constructed' among its listeners. Nevertheless, I think he leaves unanswered the question of how they could have written an album that had such long-lasting appeal. Hence the description of their creative process in the studio (Ch.3 - 'Inception') lacks depth. One approach to this could be to consider the role of bodily-felt meanings - the body as a knowing body. The composer isn't only in a society (audience), but the society (audience) is in their body as felt interactive process. Moore does mention the 'experiencing body' elsewhere. About the mother in 'She's Leaving Home,' he says, "It is as if the experiencing body is only now beginning to appreciate the crisis.") So he's in the territory - he only has to apply his knowledge of an 'experiencing body' to the actual writers, to strengthen his analysis of the band's creative process. As an academic exercise, and within the constraints already mentioned, I thought he was fairly balanced in his assessment of other's views on the sociology. It's a fun read if you're familiar with some musicology and social theory. It's too technical for 'popular' tastes, but not necessarily too technical for 'pop' tastes. To be fair, I doubt he wrote it for the 'average reader.'

The Cambridge Music Handbook series usually focuses on canonical works by classical composers, but alone among popular music recordings it recognized here the greatness of the Beatles' 1967 album SGT. PEPPER'S LONELY HEARTS CLUB BAND. Allan F. Moore has written an overview of the record that combines the history of the recording sessions, the Beatles' place in the 1960s musical marketplace, and an analysis of each of the songs. A major weakness of this volume is that it is only 100 pages long and most of Moore's comments are too general. A lot has been written about SGT. PEPPER and 1960s pop music in general, and anyone wanting to read about these extramusical aspects of SGT. PEPPER can find them discussed in greater detail elsewhere. However, the musicological commentary on each of the songs makes this volume worthwhile. Viewing the songs "Strawberry Fields" and "Penny Lane", released as a single a few months prior to SGT. PEPPER, as in the same vein as the album, he analyses them as well. To choose just a random passage from the commentary: "In the outer sections (22"-43" and from 1' 38"), this extends to a 'blue third' above G, but the melody remains static. In the central section (from 56"), the melody extends to a fourth below G. This also reverses the first section's upward tendency with the downward scale (in the brass), itself giving rise to motif 'b' in the central section

(the direct reversal of the first section's melodic profile - again see Ex. 4.1). The first brass interlude approaches a structural G from below without achieving it, a process intensified in the central section and again in the vocal version of the interlude, such that the arrival on G at 1 '38" feels exhaustively prepared, supporting the stylistic fusion mentioned above. Thus, the song neatly balances the processual and the architectural (the 12-5-12-5-12 bar layout). "If you are looking for such a detailed description of the music on this classic album, then Moore's work is where you should turn to. As a listener with an intellectual bent, Moore's careful study of the progression of each song has helped me to get more out of SGT. PEPPER.

At the heart of the matter is the question: Is Sgt Pepper a piece of modern classic music? If one were to look at the other books in the Cambridge Music Handbook series (they're all on works of classical composers, [and here I do not refer to the "Classical" period, but to the generic category of classical]), the question seems already answered, and all that remains is to see just how Mr. Moore will prove this. This he does achieve, albeit through much technical information (both musical and socio-cultural), rather than through truly moving and eloquent persuasion. Moore's analysis of each song's music is fascinating (how the Beatles aurally represent concepts) and his thematic analysis is equally good, even if you don't always agree with him (I mean, is "Within You, Without You" really the pivotal song of the album?) But that aside, his commentary on "A Day in the Life" is excellent. Here even the distanced scholar is moved, he writes (paraphrase here) "...the final chords [of the Sgt Pepper reprise] have not yet died away when the strumming of a lone acoustic guitar begins and the innocent listener is led into one of the most harrowing songs ever written...". All in all, a good effort and worth the reading of every Beatles fan, student of music or pop culture.

If a series of books concerned with serious music embraces the Beatles it's the final word. Yet it's not that surprising when you realise the Beatles were being discussed by classical music critics as far back as 1963. A couple of years later we began to find things like The Baroque Beatles and it went on through the years to the interpretations by different Symphony Orchestras. Today Paul McCartney is, himself, in the classical catalogues courtesy of things like Liverpool Oratorio and Standing Stone. In the early 60s classical and pop were a great divide and the Beatles were to narrow it immensely when their music was picked up by orchestras. Sgt Pepper is their most famous album and has been treated many times to symphonic interpretations. It's now gone full circle as the Beatles are a musical genre

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