

It is Wednesday, August 20, 1969, and the temperature in London is a humid eighty-four degrees. This is the last day the Beatles will ever be in the recording studio together. The group first began making re-cords in 1962, with “Love Me Do.” Much has changed in the world since then, but the Beatles have been a musical constant throughout.

Today’s first session takes place in EMI’s smaller Studio Three, where the band puts the finishing touches on John’s “I Want You (She’s So Heavy),” which the group previously recorded back on February 22 and 23. The song is supposed to play at the end of *Abbey Road*’s first side.

The second session goes well into the night, lasting from dinner until one fifteen in the morning. The action shifts to the control room of Studio Two, where the band works to assemble the song order. There is still editing and rerecording to do, but that will be done individually over the next five days.

Ringo’s “Octopus’s Garden” and McCartney’s “Oh! Darling” are reversed in the order. “I Want You (She’s So Heavy)” remains the last song on side one. Given her presence in the studio, the song is an homage to Yoko. It is almost eight minutes long, yet the band can’t find a way to end it. Lennon argues against a fade-out, feeling the song will lose its impact. Instead, he suggests that producer George Martin abruptly stop the tape at the 7:47 mark.

This sudden ending sounds very much like someone in the studio simply pulling the plug.

Fittingly, the final song on side two of *Abbey Road* is “The End.”*



And so, it is done. The exhausted Beatles head out into the night, going their separate ways. The goodbyes are formal and brief. It’s almost like all the lads know it is over.

The seeds of a Beatles breakup have clearly been sown. “The thing

* Side one: “Come Together,” “Something,” “Maxwell’s Silver Hammer,” “Oh! Darling,” “Octopus’s Garden,” “I Want You (She’s So Heavy)”; side two: “Here Comes the Sun,” “Because,” “Medley (‘You Never Give Me Your Money,’ ‘Sun King,’ ‘Mean Mr. Mustard,’ ‘Polythene Pam,’ ‘She Came in Through the Bathroom Window,’ ‘Golden Slumbers,’ ‘Carry That Weight,’ ‘The End’),” “Her Majesty” (hidden track).

is, so much of what they held to be truth was crap,” Paul McCartney will later remember, speaking of John and Yoko as one. “‘War is over,’ well, no, it isn’t.”

McCartney will add, “I had been able to accept Yoko in the studio sitting on a blanket in front of my amp. I worked hard to come to terms with that, but . . . John turned nasty. I don’t really understand why. Maybe because we grew up in Liverpool where it was always good to get in the first punch in the fight.”

Yet the fight will go on. There is more drama to come.

APRIL 10, 1970
LONDON, ENGLAND
AFTERNOON

Paul McCartney is breaking up the Beatles.

Or so it seems. The singer sends out a simple press release to announce his first solo album, *McCartney*. Written in the form of a question-and-answer session with himself, the statement shocks the world:

Q: Did you miss the Beatles?

A: No.

Q: Are you planning a new album or single with the Beatles?

A: No.

Q: Do you foresee a time when Lennon-McCartney becomes an active songwriting partnership again?

A: No.

The news rockets around the globe.

“Paul: I Quit,” screams one London headline.

“Paul McCartney announced today that he’s split from the Beatles,” writes the Associated Press, accidentally mistaking the bass player’s role in the band: “Paul, 27-year-old song writer, lead guitarist

and singer, blamed the break on ‘personal differences, business differences, musical differences—but most of all because I have a better time with my family.’”

Fan reaction is mixed. Some are shocked; others will say they’ve seen it coming for some time. Many are appeased by the news of forthcoming solo albums from each band member.

But because it is McCartney who formally announces his departure first, he takes the blame for pulling the plug on the Beatles.

The truth, however, is far more complex.



August 27, 1967. Thirty-two-year-old Brian Epstein lies in his London apartment, dead from an overdose of sleeping pills and alcohol. Epstein was the Beatles manager, a former Liverpool record store owner who transformed the band from an undisciplined group who often ate and drank onstage into a global sensation. He convinced the lads to dress in suits while performing and to take a bow after each number. More important, Epstein engineered the band’s first recording contract, in 1962, arranging for them to work with top producer George Martin.

Epstein effectively ran the Beatles, his cut being up to 25 percent of their earnings. He was a British version of Colonel Tom Parker, overseeing every aspect of their business affairs while living with his own personal gambling problems. Epstein was also glue for the four very disparate individuals, keeping the Beatles disciplined and focused on making great music.

On the morning Epstein is discovered dead in his pajamas by his butler, the Beatles are at a pivotal moment in their careers. They have quit touring for good and have just finished recording their most creatively challenging album to date, the psychedelic *Sgt. Pepper’s Lonely Hearts Club Band*, with producer Martin. John Lennon is spending more time with Yoko Ono and coming out of a long bout with depression. George Harrison is pursuing a growing fascination with Indian music. Ringo Starr is unsure whether he wants to remain with

the band. And Paul McCartney is enchanted with Linda Eastman, a photographer whom he met at a London nightclub.

Because of his death, the world will never know if Brian Epstein could have continued to push the Beatles in a disciplined financial direction. His forte was business acumen. The band is incredibly creative with their music and just as imaginative with the way they spend money. However, none of them is disciplined. No Beatle has the required business know-how for handling large sums of money. Since Epstein transformed them from a rough group of Liverpool youths into history's biggest musical recording act, the band members have gotten into the habit of buying whatever they want whenever they want. In the world of show business—with the emphasis on *business*—the Beatles rely on Epstein to advise them in an honest fashion.

Without Epstein, the lads are lost. "I knew that we were in trouble [after Epstein died]," John will later recall. "I didn't really have any misconceptions about our ability to do anything other than play music. I was scared. I thought, 'We've fucking had it.'"

