

not prepared to be expelled. The struggle for the right to renounce undoubtedly radicalised him, as he brilliantly presented his personal campaign as a fight for the democratic rights of the electors of Bristol. But the diary leaves no doubt that what motivated him was his own fierce sense of disinheritance.

In fact, the climax of the peerage struggle is told not through diaries but through contemporary interviews with David Butler, which do not have the same immediacy. It is a pity that the diary fails just when Benn has a story worth telling, since much of the earlier material is disappointing. Benn was too junior for his account of the internal feuds of the 1950s to add much to existing knowledge. Compared with the subsequent volumes, most of this one is interesting only as artless autobiography.

It is characteristically honest of Benn to let his long-term editor Ruth Winstone—who finally gets her name on the cover—publish some of this stuff, from his adolescent mooning after girls and his prissy teetotalism to his uncritical admiration for anti-colonialist dictators (Nkrumah, Bourguiba) and his gushing enthusiasm for all things Soviet. (The launching of Sputnik is “far more momentous than the invention of the wheel, the discovery of sail, the circumnavigation of the globe or the wonders of the industrial revolution”). There is comic self-parody in his self-consciously adopting a pipe as a 17-year-old air-force cadet (“With all the lovely coloured plastic tabs I think it is the most beautiful thing I have ever seen”). Like all good progressives in the 1950s, he loves high-rise flats; but Benn even drools over airports (“All air terminals are wildly exciting”).

Or is it just characteristically exhibitionist? Behind the self-deprecating smokescreen, there is a self-importance about Benn which leads him to believe that everything he has ever said or thought is significant. We know that for years he has recorded every speech and interview he has given. In 1959 he spent a whole day solemnly preparing “a lifetime diary” running from 1925 to 2025 (the Benns are a long-lived lot). “It is a most interesting project which will provide an index to all my past records and a pointer towards the future.” Seeing his life as a voyage of enlightenment, he is proud to put his youthful illusions on display.

The six volumes of diaries now published run from 1940 to 1990. He cannot go any further back; and it will be some years before he has enough material to carry the series forward. He has published a video of his speeches in the House. But the self-exposure business is insatiable. What bit of himself can he possibly market next?

*John Campbell's life of Sir Edward Heath recently won the 1994 NCR Book Award*

## All you need?

### REVOLUTION IN THE HEAD: THE BEATLES RECORDS AND THE SIXTIES

Ian Macdonald

FOURTH ESTATE, £15

### THE SUMMER OF LOVE: THE MAKING OF SGT PEPPER

George Martin

MACMILLAN, £14.99

LIZ THOMSON

Writing in 1967, on the eve of *Sgt Pepper*, American musicologist Joshua Rifkin observed that “the vast quantity of prose concerning the Beatles... has somehow neglected to provide any serious analytic discussion of their music”. Almost a quarter-century after the Beatles played their last, little has changed. We have but a tiny handful of essays—notably by Deryck Cooke, Ned Rorem, Glenn Gould and Rifkin himself—and one book, Wilfrid Mellers’ *Twilight of the Gods*: a post-Leavisite musicological squib that still strikes sparks.

The musicology of pop remains underdeveloped because rock is still seen as lacking the aesthetic import of other musics. Semioticians are happy dealing with the visual and literary signs, while critics prefer to deal in the lyrics, the iconography, the “manufacture” and “consumption” of the “product”. Those seeking to study the actual music are stymied by the perennial problem of rock criticism: the absence of classical music’s full score.

The Beatles *et al* commit their work to tape, not paper, and empirically-created yet definitive studio effects cannot be replicated in print. Ian Macdonald, “a writer with an interest in many kinds of music... a songwriter and record producer”, recognises the problem. In *Revolution in the Head*, he attempts to discuss each of the group’s 186 recorded songs in the context of both the generalities of the 1960s and the specifics of the Beatles’ daily lives, interweaving subjective, pseudo-musical commentaries with information from the EMI archives.

The result is only occasionally illuminating. Details of Beatles recording sessions have long been in the public domain, detailed by Mark Lewisohn in *The Complete Beatles Chronicle* (Pyramid), an altogether more appealing book for the average Beatle fan. *Revolution in the Head* is for the completist only and he (obsessive collectors are invariably male) is sure to be irritated by some of it.

“Here, there and everywhere”, a McCartney love song, is dismissed as “chintzy and rather cloying” while “Honey pie”, a perfectly-formed miniature from the so-called *White Album*, has

an air of “faintly smarmy pointlessness”. Mellers, who knows a good song when he hears one, thought it “neatly witty... very fetching... recalling Rodgers or Cole Porter”. From the same album, Lennon’s “I’m so tired” is despatched in nine lines that fail to note the song’s audacious harmonic progression. Or is that what Macdonald means when he writes of its “semitonal slouch”?

As to “All you need is love”, that anthem of 1960s togetherness, while it’s certainly true that the song’s impact owes much to its first performance (on the BBC satellite link-up, *Our World*, itself a perfect expression of the Summer of Love), it cannot be written off as “comfortable self-indulgence”. Macdonald overlooks the melody’s “Three blind mice” motif, a common denominator in much of Lennon’s writing, preferring to comment on the song’s “inelegant structure in alternating bars of 4/4 and 3/4”.

While Macdonald’s prose resembles treacle, George Martin’s is gin-clear but riddled with clichés that bear little resemblance to his speech. A great pity, because he is one of the few writers on Beatle life who was there—in the studio, coaxing, arranging and recording, pushing mid-1960s technology to its limits.

In its quiet, chatty way, *The Summer of Love* is an engaging read. It’s fascinating to hear from the producer how each of the sound collages on rock’s most influential album were built up. By mixing *Abbey Road*’s four tracks down to one and then starting again, Martin had eight tracks at his disposal. Today’s producers have an average of 48! No wonder *Pepper* required 700 hours of studio time and cost £25,000, a fortune in 1967.

Lennon and McCartney often came to the studio with specific ideas of how a song should sound. After numerous takes, they might arrive at a “finished” version. Then more ambitious ideas came into play, many of which tested the ingenuity of Martin and his engineers. For example, the orchestral track of “A Day in the Life”—McCartney had wanted a “spiralling ascent of sound”—had to be synchronised with the original four-track master. No easy task before the advent of SMPTE, an electronic code that nowadays “locks” tapes together in perfect synchronicity. Macdonald observes that it is “a brilliant production by Martin’s team, working under restrictions which would floor most of today’s studios”.

As Aaron Copland remarked, those wanting to know about the 1960s should listen to the Beatles. Despite their considerable shortcomings, both Martin and Macdonald send you back to the aluminium aspic of the CDs. But the book Joshua Rifkin long ago envisaged has still to be written.

Liz Thomson co-edited the Macmillan “Companion” to John Lennon

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