

MEET THE BEATLES

Within three days of my arrival I had in my hands a 4-track master tape fresh from Paris. A&R manager (artist and repertoire) George Martin had wanted to release a Beatles single of the group singing in German and, as the band was performing several shows in Paris, he set up a day at EMI's Pathé Marconi Studios attended by an interpreter. They recorded the German versions very quickly, and as they had time left, it was decided to try something new. That something new turned out to be "Can't Buy Me Love" and here I was, a huge Beatles fan (one of millions), holding the master tape of what would turn out to be the next Beatles single. Just one thought raced through my mind: "Bloody hell!"

It was about a month later that The Beatles came in to record the songs for their film *A Hard Day's Night*. There I was carrying a tape up to the library from Number 3 control room when I noticed coming towards me the two Georges, Harrison and Martin. I freaked and almost screamed like one of the many girls outside, but managed to bite my tongue, a feat for which I would become extremely grateful, especially when considering my many future associations with the two of them.

It wasn't long before I met Norman Smith, the great engineer who worked on The Beatles' sessions from the first test recording through *Rubber Soul*, and I began to get friendly with him. I amazed myself by being very up front and asked him if there was any chance of me poking my head in the door so I could watch the band record for a bit. He hesitated for a second, then told me, "Yes, but keep to the back and don't let anyone notice you're there. They can be a bit touchy about new people, so just be a part of the furniture." Well, of course a cocky 16-year-old couldn't stop there. "Maybe I could take some pictures?" I asked, assuming I would never get this opportunity again. "Just be part of the furniture and don't make it obvious," Norman warned.

Come the day and I have this cheap old camera in hand, and whilst watching the session, I started to take some pictures. There were

“Hare Krishna Mantra” and “Govinda” were the only two songs on the album done with a rock rhythm section, which for the latter, consisted of Alan White on drums and Klaus Voorman on bass, while the other songs were much more traditional as they used primarily Indian instruments. There would be one lead vocalist to mic, then a whole bunch of them doing answering vocals, so many that they couldn’t be miked separately, so it ended up with just one or two mics on them as a group.

This was a strange album to do because there were all of these people with all of their bells just chanting away. It was totally disorganised, especially when it was just them without the rhythm section. You never knew how many of them would turn up.

I always had a good feeling being with them. Once you got used to the way they dressed and forgot about that shell, they were good people.

Klaus Voorman, bass player

“IT DON’T COME EASY”

After working on *All Things Music Pass* came Ringo’s “It Don’t Come Easy,” which George produced. The tracking session for the song was very easy. Ringo on drums, Klaus Voorman on bass, and George on guitar. At one point Leon Russell came by and put keyboards on as an overdub and I’ve been told that Steven Stills did some overdubs as well but I don’t remember him at all. It was before Crosby, Stills & Nash had hit and I wasn’t aware of Buffalo Springfield at the time. Doris Troy, and Pete Ham & Tom Evans of Badfinger did the background vocals.

The [head]phones were so loud it blew your head off. In those days it wasn’t like it is today where everybody can comfortably turn the knobs and make his own mix the way he needs it. Everything was full throttle in those days. After those sessions I remember driving home thinking, “What a nice quiet car.” The car wasn’t quiet—it was me who was still half-deaf. It’s a miracle that we aren’t all deaf by now.

Klaus Voorman

Preproduction seemed to move so damn fast. After a few days when all the arrangements were together, the gear was moved over to the studio and we started recording.

RECORDING AT THE CHÂTEAU

This was a time of huge change for Elton. Everything about the recording was different, but Gus and I knew that there was one thing we had to try and keep as close to his past recordings as possible: the piano sound. Trident had one of the best pianos ever for recording pop/rock music, a Bechstein grand that had the brightest sound I've ever heard from a piano. We realised how much a part of Elton the piano was so we had to try to make the piano at the Château match it as closely as possible.

We worked on matching it for a bit and did a quite good job, but then hit a small snag. The problem was that Trident had an enclosed drum booth, so you didn't have to worry too much about drum leakage into the piano mics. There was no such room at the Château, however, which meant that we had to set up the drums in the same room as the piano, and that gave us a huge leakage problem. As a result, we had to find a way to block off the sound.

How did we overcome this? Easy. Gus called in some carpenters to make this big plywood box that went over the entire piano after its lid was taken off. The height of the box went about 3 feet above the top of the piano, and there were a couple of holes in it so that I could poke the mics through. It ended up working out really well.

Another huge change: this was the first album recorded with Elton's touring band. They had individually played on tracks before, but up until this time he'd used mostly session musicians. Apart from recording in a different country and studio, Elton and Gus also wanted a different feel from the previous albums. They'd done the orchestral thing before, so now they wanted this record to sound more like a band and have more of a rock feel.

They couldn't have asked for three better musicians. Dee Murray was such a beautiful and melodic bass player, and very precise in his

This was one of the few times that the saxes were session players as opposed to David playing them himself.

I've come to realise that an unusual thing about *Ziggy* is that there's acoustic guitar on every track, even the rock 'n' roll ones. It didn't seem unique at the time as I had started my rock 'n' roll listening to the likes of Presley and Bill Haley, both of whom used acoustics, so using them seemed quite natural and gave the songs a whole different feel. I wasn't into cymbals at that point (I have no idea why), so I used the high-end of the acoustic more as a percussive instrument, almost as a high-hat sort of thing. It wasn't something we consciously thought of or went for, but it's always there. The acoustic guitars were always compressed, sometimes heavily, most likely using a UREI 1176 or LA-2A, and miked with a U 67 or C 12A.

When the album was turned in to RCA they apparently didn't hear a single, so back in we went to cut "Starman" at the beginning of January 1972. The song turned around quickly, I think a day to record the basics and most of the overdubs, a day to finish overdubs, including the strings, and another to mix. The song finished up replacing "Round and Round" on the album (see Insert Figure 13.1).

There were some strange things going on with the Bowie recordings during that period that I didn't find out about until much later. There appears to be a second mix of "Starman" wherein the only difference is that the Morse code part on one mix is really loud and on the other really quiet. I have no idea which one I actually did or how or why the second one came about. After hearing both, it sounds to me like there was only one mix and that those sections were copied louder, or quieter, and had been edited in to make it different, but no one seems to have any recollection of it being done.

Another strange occurrence was with the song "John, I'm Only Dancing," which was recorded as a single to take advantage of Bowie's growing popularity after the release of *Ziggy*. The song was recorded at Trident in June of 1972 in much of the "wham, bam, thank you, ma'am" fashion of "Starman," meaning recording the basics and overdubs over two days, and mixing on another. I was

Electric Lady Gear

Working at Electric Lady, I had to move from using an AKG D 20 on bass drum to using an EV RE20 because they didn't have AKGs in the States yet. For overheads, I still used ribbon mics, but they were Beyer M 160s because STCs weren't found there yet either. Apart from that, I still used U 67s all over the place because they were plentiful.

This was the first time I ever used Pultec equalizers as well. I hadn't even heard of them until I came over to the States. The console was a 24-input DataMix (see Figure 17.1), which was a big brand around New York City at that time (Record Plant had them too). The tape machine was a 24-track Ampex MM-1000.

One of the other things that amazed me was the age of the second engineer working with me. He was maybe a year or two younger than me, and there he was still working as second. I'd come from the background where you left school by 15 or 16, and those are the years you were a second. To see one in his twenties seemed very strange.



Figure 17.1: Electric Lady's DataMix console

I just loved New York at that point. It was vibrant, a word I hate to use, but that seems to describe it best. England was on its downward spiral by this time. The '60s were over, and even though I was enjoying the success of Bowie, you could tell that England was on the way down musically, culturally, every way. People just didn't