

Helter Skelter – Playlet

PLAYERS:

JOHN LENNON Strong Liverpool accent mid 20s

PAUL McCARTNEY Strong Liverpool accent mid 20s

GEORGE HARRISON Strong Liverpool accent mid 20s

RINGO STARR Strong Liverpool accent mid 20s

KEN the recording studio engineer, twenty one year old south London secondary school type

GEORGE MARTIN the record producer. Middle-aged public school educated, mild and soft spoken

INT RECORDING STUDIO

FX long sitar drone fades out

PRODUCER GEORGE MARTIN (over intercom) Ok, that sounded good. We'll have a 10 minute break and then listen back to it and see if we need another take before we move on to the next song.

JOHN (sardonically): Suits me, your honour. Time off for good behaviour, eh? (aside) You can have too much of a good thing you know, George and believe me this maharishi music IS too much!

PAUL: Leave it out, John. You shouldn't make fun of the afflicted. Our George is intoxicated with the scent of incense and the promise of being reincarnated as one of the Andrews Sisters and it's all gone to his head.

JOHN: 'Cause he spends so much time standing on it! (mock laughter) It's a beautiful world in there where you live, ain't it our George? Not so sure about out there though, in the land of the Blue Meanies.

[FX New cigarette packet being opened and a lighter lit]

PAUL: Fag?

JOHN: Tah. (takes a puff) All those cute little dolly birds who used to scream themselves hoarse at us only a few years ago as we wiggled our wigs getting dragged up before the beak and banged up (if you'll excuse my French) for smoking Mother Nature's son -

PAUL: (in Irish accent) God's gift to the little people.

JOHN: Right. While we're detained in here at His Master's pleasure, suffocating in a cloud of stale ciggy smoke, dirty cups of cold tea and old sweaty socks.

[FX Musical Instruments being put down, tuned and put way in cases.]

RINGO (lugubriously): And George's mum's cheese and pickle sarnies.

ALL (except George): And George's mum's cheese and pickle sarnies!

GEORGE (hiding annoyance) Give it a rest fellas. Kids are getting their heads cracked open for protesting. And what do we do? Write songs about revolution which don't have the guts to take a side. 'Count me in, count me out'. What the hell's that about, eh? Our hair might be longer and we've tossed the mohair suits, but we're still bleeding puppets who can't get off the Money-go-round.

JOHN: Get 'er! Touchy ain't we? You've got your song on this one, haven't you, so what you grippin' about? [pause] And don't glower at me like that Georgie Porgie. I thought you enlightened ones left your ego at reception.

PAUL: Don't start.

JOHN: (melodramatic) He started it, sir. It was 'im. Honest sir, I'm a good boy. Don't lock me up, sir.

[CONTROL ROOM Voices arguing muffled and distant as if heard through glass window.]

GEORGE MARTIN: Don't tell me they're going at it again.

KEN: I'd better pop down and break it up or we won't get anything more done today.

GEORGE MARTIN: No, leave them be. Maybe they'll knock some sense into each other.

Did you bring that little transistor radio in today, Ken? Good. Turn it on will you. Let's hear some news and we'll phase them out for five minutes.

(Radio switched on and dial turned through stations until tuned into BBC News.)

ANNOUNCER 1: In foreign news. The Tet Offensive is gathering momentum with intense bombardment along the Me Cong Delta...

KEN CHANGES CHANNELS

ANNOUNCER 2: There has been widespread condemnation of the killing on camera of a VietCong prisoner of war by an unknown Vietnamese Colonel last week. The footage which flashed around the world is said to be turning public opinion against the American backed south Vietnamese forces -

KEN: (exhaling forcibly) Could be in the blooming jungle up here for all anyone cares. Feel like a flipping orchid in a flipping greenhouse. Wouldn't kill them on the top floor to fork out for a couple of fans.

GEORGE M: Be my guest, dear boy. Fill out a requisition and send it up stairs and perhaps by the time you get it approved, if you get it approved, it'll be Christmas and you'll be wishing you'd put in a chit for a three bar electric fire.

KEN: You'd think with all the money those boys had made for Sir Joe and the shareholders we'd only have to snap our fingers and the men in lab coats would be fawning all over us with air conditioning, cucumber sandwiches and a secretary or two to mop our brows when the control room steamed up.

GEORGE M: I think you're a little steamed up, son. Getting stir crazy are we?

KEN: Well, I ask you eight months to make an album! I know they think they have to top 'Pepper', but honestly. How long did it take to make the first album?

GEORGE M: Eight hours.

KEN: Eight hours and all first or second takes. No overdubs. Live in the studio. 1,2,3,4 wrang! (imitates electric guitar chord) Now they take eight hours to get one song into shape before their ready to put it down. And how many times have they come back the next day or the next week to have another try at the same tune slightly faster, slightly slower or with a different 'feel'? Or played on a zither or backwards and at double the speed just because their bored with playing it straight.

GEORGE M: Young Geoff talked that way just before he chucked it in. Said he couldn't take any more of the endless bickering. Said it made him sad to see them pulling themselves to pieces in front of his eyes. Said it was like watching a family falling apart. Only four years earlier, when he started, Geoff would have given his eye teeth to sit in the same room as them and hear them talk about what was on the goggle box the night before. I can understand Geoff chucking it in, but you've got to admit when they're on-form this is the best day job in the world and we've got the best seats in the house.

(radio news fades back in and then out back to studio atmosphere)

RINGO: If you lot are going to go at it again, I'll get me coat and give you some space to slug it out.

[awkward silence] kettle comes to the boil and whistles

PAUL: How about a nice cup of tea. I'll be mum.

GEORGE: Yeah, you'll have to be.

PAUL: What does that mean?

GEORGE: Nothing.

JOHN: Mr Guru's getting snarky.

GEORGE: Don't push it, Lennon.

JOHN: Ooh, fisticuffs is it? I'll get me second. Mal! Where's that little weasel when you need him. Mal – get me boxing gloves from the car. I'm going ten rounds with the Maharishi here.

PAUL: Leave it out, John. Mal's got the day off. Besides you couldn't swing a cat in here.

RINGO: There's an idea. How about a cat swinging contest instead? The winner gets another song on the album.

JOHN: Isn't one song enough for you, Bongo Herbert? Besides, I thought we'd used up all the notes you can hit.

GEORGE: You had to say that, didn't you. You just had to. Now look he's –

JOHN: Sulking. Coz he hasn't bashed his bongos all day. Coz he had to sit twiddling his thumbs for five hours while you and the three stooges from Kathmandu noodled on those didgeridoos.

GEORGE (getting irate) You know very well what they're called. Why do you always have to be such a prat, Lennon? You're not stupid so why do you have to pretend to be? No wonder you never had any real mates. You have to insult everyone, don't you. What is it with you, some sort of self-inflicted crucifixion complex? If you hate yourself so much, bang your bleeding head against the wall and you might knock some sense into it instead of -

[Loud crash as drums and cymbals are kicked over]

PAUL: What's the matter with him?

JOHN: Temper, temper. No jam and butties before bedtime for you, young Ringo, if you behave like that! Throwing your toys round the nursery.

GEORGE: Better he gets snippy than holds his breath until he turns blue, eh?

PAUL: Yeh, Nanny Martin wouldn't like that!

GEORGE MARTIN (over intercom): OK, are we ready to listen to a playback or do you want to go for another take?

JOHN: I think we need a take-out your honour. Send out for another drummer.

PAUL: And not too spicy!

GEORGE: Leave off will you, he's really gone and done it this time. He's not coming back.

JOHN: Please your honour can we have our drummer back.

PAUL: Yeah, he wasn't too bad that one, was he?

GEORGE M (over intercom): What's going on down there? Is this another wind up, Lennon?

JOHN: I think he wound himself up sir. Bloody prima donna's walked out on us.

GEORGE M (over intercom): Look fellas, it's been a long day. Why don't we call it a night and start afresh tomorrow?

ALL: Ok, it's a night (sniggers)

GEORGE: I could bring me ukulele to school tomorrow.

JOHN: Not unless you want to eat it for lunch, you won't.

PAUL: Not the Ukulele! Don't torture us. Have mercy your honour, we'll be good. Promise we'll do what we're told tomorrow.

GEORGE: There might not be a tomorrow if Mr Richard Snarky doesn't come back to his chums.

JOHN: Just a long meaningful silence where his great hooter used to cast its shadow over our proceedings.

PAUL: Leave my proceedings out of it, if you don't mind. Anyway, I thought someone said 'Tomorrow Never Nose'

(JOHN and GEORGE Groan)

Or was it 'Will You Still Love Me Tomorrow'? The Shirelles sang me to sleep with that when I was a little lad listening under the bedclothes to me wireless.

JOHN: Is that what you were doing under the bed clothes young Paul?

GEORGE: Cut it out. We have to find him or there'll be no album.

PAUL: No Beatles.

JOHN: Imagine – no Beatles.

ENDS