



# **Tell Me Why: The Beatles: Album By Album, Song By Song, The Sixties And After**

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## **Tell Me Why: The Beatles: Album By Album, Song By Song, The Sixties And After** Tim Riley

A unique combination of musical analysis and cultural history, *Tell Me Why* stands alone among Beatles books with its single-minded focus on the most important aspect of the band: its music. Riley offers a new, deeper understanding of the Beatles by closely considering each song and album they recorded in an exploration as rigorous as it is soulful. He tirelessly sifts through the Beatles discography, making clear that the legendary four were more than mere teen idols: They were brilliant innovators who mastered an extremely detailed art. Since the first publication of *Tell Me Why* in 1988, much new primary source material has appeared—Paul McCartney's authorized biography, the *Anthology* CDs and videos, the complete Parlophone-sequenced albums on CD, the *Live at the BBC* sessions, and the global smash *1*. Riley incorporates all the new material in an update that makes this a crucial book for Beatles fans.

## **Tell Me Why: The Beatles: Album By Album, Song By Song, The Sixties And After Details**

Date : Published May 30th 2002 by Da Capo Press (first published 1988)

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Author : Tim Riley

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# **From Reader Review Tell Me Why: The Beatles: Album By Album, Song By Song, The Sixties And After for online ebook**

## **Marcel Daguerre says**

Riley achieves what I would have thought impossible - he allows us a fresh listen to the most familiar music of the late twentieth century. Plus he makes it clear how underrated Ringo Starr is. This book (which must be read with recordings of all the songs at the ready) is a must for any serious music fan.

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## **Tad Davis says**

### **OK, served the purpose**

At times Riley describes the sweeping movement of a song with eloquence. At other times he bogs down in an obsession with which instrument or voice is playing on which stereo channel - the (left), (right), and (center) tags appear repeatedly and are emphasized as if they somehow contribute to the meaning of the song. Maybe they do: my ears (and equipment) are often not good enough to pick up the details the author refers to; but it seemed to me an irritating mannerism.

On the bright side, he follows the order of the British releases - was he, as he claims, one of the first authors to do so? - and he clearly articulates his emotional response to many of the songs. And he does a pretty good job summarizing the solo careers. McCartney's disappointing efforts come in for particular criticism: he has, says Riley, come to see songs as "product" rather than art and grinds them out mechanically, with one good one for every 30 released. Seems about right to me.

There are many weaknesses in Riley's approach. But the job of the book, for me, was to provide something to read as I listened to all the albums and tracks in order. It did that job quite well. It gave me a perspective other than my own, which is all I wanted. I don't see it as anything more than a beginning, though: other books with a similar track-by-track commentary are beckoning.

UPDATE: I meant to comment on something I found odd. His antipathy to George is nothing to his antipathy to the producer Jeff Lynne. Because of this, he undervalues the song "Free as a Bird," which I happen to love.

What's curious is that Riley accuses Paul of plagiarizing the middle eight. I have a recording of John doing this solo on the piano; I don't know if it's the same version used as a basis for the new production, but John most definitely wrote the melody for the middle eight; and he even starts it with the words "Whatever happened to..." before trailing off into filler syllables. Riley is right that the first line of the middle eight is almost identical, verbally and musically, to a line from "Remember Walk-in' in the Sand" by the Shangri-las. But the similarity ends there, at least in my opinion; and if there IS plagiarism involved, the guilt is shared by John and Paul.

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## **Lisa says**

For the diehard Beatles fan-- as its title proclaims, the book goes over each song written by the Beatles and discusses who the primary author of the song was, the instrumentation used, background singing, lyrics.....and every other kind of detail you could want.

**\*\*#5 of 120 books pledged to read/review in 2016\*\***

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### **Terence Towles-Canote says**

Tell Why: The Beatles: Album by Album, Song by Song, the Sixties and After is a must read for any Beatles fan. Tim Riley goes through, album by album, song by song, and critiques each and every one. What makes this book so good is that Mr. Riley isn't simply some music critic with a journalism degree. He is an actual musician himself, both a pianist and composer. He has a bachelor's degree and a master degree in piano. Mr. Riley then has a good understanding of music theory, which he puts to good use in this book.

Indeed, for the most part I agree with Mr. Riley in his assessment of The Beatles' various songs. In fact, off the top of my head, there were only three times I disagreed with him. The first is his assessment of "All You Need is Love," which Mr Riley doesn't think too highly of. For me it is one of my favourite songs of all time. The second is "Ob-La-Di, Ob-La-Da." While he doesn't praise the song, he doesn't condemn it either. For me it is the only Beatles song I actively hate (I don't count "Revolution No. 9" as a song. The third is "Maxwell's Silver Hammer." Mr. Riley dislikes the song. I actually like it. I enjoy the contrast between the bouncy, music hall tune and what is described in the lyrics (namely, Maxwell Edison running around killing people with his silver hammer). It's not one of Paul's best songs, but it is very enjoyable. Of course, even when I disagree with Mr. Riley, I at least understood and respected why he didn't like certain songs. This is much more than I can say for many music critics!

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### **Rick says**

Outstanding detail and insights about how the Beatles constructed every song and album recorded on the EMI/Parlaphone and Apple labels. An unflinching, fair and honest discussion authored by a man who degreed in Piano and Music Theory. At times technical and intricate in deconstructing the Beatles work, it might overwhelm the non-musician at times - but not enough to detract from the enjoyment Riley gives the reader. Musicians, on the other hand, will greatly appreciate Riley's attention to detail. Having read more than a few books on the Beatles, I was pleasantly surprised that I came across one that was able to further my understanding and appreciation of the greatest pop group ever.

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### **Joel & Christie says**

I accept the role of professional critics. We've got food critics, movie critics, political commentators, etc. Somebody annointed Siskel and Ebert as movie critics and people like me listen to their recommendations and act or not accordingly. Don't ask me what makes their opinion more valid than my next door neighbors, although my next door neighbors opinion on restaurants and movies and such carries as more weight with me as the professional opinions do, often times. Yet we still assume that critics know more about their subject

than we do.

Tell Me Why is written by a rock music critic, Tim Riley. He reviews every Beatle song and every Beatle album in this book. I have a lot to say about this. One, I am glad this book was written. There are books ad infinitum about the Beatles' lives and events. I've often looked for a book, however, that delves into their music and not their marriages. As Lennon always said, 'It's about the records. The Beatles is about the records'. The Beatles considered themselves recording artists. It says a lot about their abilities as recording artists that this book was even written. Seen any books lately about Madonna's records? The Rolling Stones? Too many in the music industry are personalities with music as a sidelight. The Beatles were both. Personalities and Musicians. Songwriters and recording artists. And they were better than anybody.

Riley explains why, from the music point of view, the Beatles are better than anybody. Not that I understood half of what he says. The reader needs two foundations to get anything out of this book. One needs to know their music. When Riley explains why the intro to I Want to Hold Your Hand creates a 3 measure buildup that explodes when the vocals come in with "Oh Yeah I..", you've got to hear the song in your head. Second, one needs musical theory to understand some of his analysis. Speaking of 'Birthday' off the White Album, Riley notes that 'song sections play off one another; after the main riff (in A major) with the bass echoing the rest of the band (center), Paul's leading vocal (doubling himself at the octave) enters on the far side of both channels.' Huh? This is one of his easier to understand sentences.

The best part of the book is its appreciation of the Beatles as musicians. People rag on Ringo as being the Ed McMahon of rock n roll; lucked out in being in the right place at the right time. Riley exposes this misconception with their very first song, Please Please Me. Riley shows why and how Ringo's drumming compliments a song, how his drumming allows the band to surge or retreat as the song requires, how Ringo knows just when to fill in a space, leave a gap of silence, or compliment a vocal, all which turns the song into a superior listening experience. George always said the Beatles never hit it big until Ringo joined the group. Riley confirms why. Riley also gives Paul his props as a bass player. Bass and drums go together underneath, while George's and John's lead and rhythm guitars play on top of each song. Paul, like Ringo, had an intuitive feel for bringing in the bass at those perfect moments.

Tell Me Why is not for the casual fan. One has to be a serious groupie nerd to get anything out of it. But if you are a serious groupie nerd, and I am one, this is about the best book about the group written.

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## **Duval Spit says**

Growing up with the Beatles, I took them for granted. They were a constant - they always were and always would be. One year I decided to finally attempt to contextualize them, listening to the albums in order with other music from the period. As I listened, I read this book. It has become my favorite Beatles book by far - I don't agree with all of the opinions, but the musical breakdown provided by Riley is impeccable. With each album, Riley plays his own critical analysis and synthesis back and forth, building to a deeper understanding of the What and the Why of all their music. This is an invaluable resource that I cannot recommend enough.

Leave "A Hard Day's Write" and the innumerable memoirs/tabloid splashes behind, this is the Beatles book for the truest of Beatles fans.

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### **Robert S says**

*Tell Me Why* is one of the definitive books to analyze The Beatles discography and make sense of every song that the Fab Four took the time to create in their illustrious time together.

Most of the salient points about *Tell Me Why* made here are fairly accurate: Riley knows his stuff, Riley gets a bit conceited at times (although that's a larger issue with music criticism as a whole), and he has some strange thing against George Harrison. I do find it kind of strange that Riley would fail to mention Frank Sinatra's praise of "Something", where Sinatra even called it "the greatest love song of the past 50 years".

Still, Beatles fans both old and new will find lots to take away from *Tell Me Why*. Definitely an interesting read.

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### **Thomas Cavanagh says**

Very good book. Not thrilled with the anti Harrison stance. I think Riley underestimates his songs. Sometimes this book tends to ramble and be repetitive. However it is worth reading and does do something almost every other Beatle book doesn't, deals with the music and not the mania. I recommend it to friends and students all the time.

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### **Rebecca McNutt says**

Albeit a little pretentious at times, *Tell ME Why* is one of the few books that manages to capture and explain The Beatles' cultural influence on the world during a time of great change and movement forward.

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### **Dominick says**

Song by song (literally) account of the Beatles' recordnigns ,with a focus on discussing them from th epersepctive of music, so there's lots of technical terminology I don't understand. Riley is generally good at providing concrete examples (e.g. by quoting lyrics) to help on figure these thing out, and there's certainly plenty here ot interest the fan as opposed to the musician or scholar, but it's fairly heavy going for someone not well-versed in musical terminology. Still, a book any Beatle fan ought to find insightful.

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### **AustinT says**

Almost bailed on this one, but I rarely put away a book without finishing it. I thought this book would describe stuff that happened in the studio during the recording of the music similar to Geoff Emerick's *Here, There, and Everywhere*. I would recommend Emerick's book over Tim Riley's. I did use the time it took to read this book to listen to the entire Beatles catalog of songs which I've collected though the years.....even

the 3 Anthology CD's that my brother gave to me a few years ago that I've never listened to.

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### **Stephen says**

Loved this book. Great explanation and critique of The Beatles' songs and albums. Mr. Riley does an in-depth job of breaking down the songs, perhaps too in-depth because there were passages that I didn't quite understand (not having a background in music theory). However, overall I found this to be a very entertaining and informative book.

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### **John Porcellino says**

Been meaning to read this one for a couple years, and finally picked it up at my library. In it, Riley analyzes the Beatles published output song by song, chronologically. I would agree with most of the criticisms others have made-- he seems to have a grudge against George, dismissing most of his songwriting contributions until Rubber Soul, and ragging All Things Must Pass. I'm a big George fan, and always thought his off-kilter early tunes made for a nice contrast to the L/McC stuff (and I think ATMP is the best solo Beatles record -- Apple Jam notwithstanding).

Riley is a highly educated musician and so he can get bogged down in jargon, but if you know what he's talking about I'm sure his descriptions are enlightening. (From page 95: "The added harmony for this line is C major, the neapolitan of the dominant, B major, pivoting on the held tonic note E as a common tone between E major and C major.")

Additionally there are numerous factual errors throughout the book, including some that would be considered Beatles 101 (he repeatedly states that George played the solo on Taxman -- it was Paul; and he attributes Helter Skelter's "I've got blisters on my fingers" tag to John, when everyone knows it was Ringo). I was reading the first edition of the book, from the mid-80's, so I don't know if these errors have been corrected since then.

I started at the back for some reason, reading his takes on the Beatles solo material, then went back to the beginning of the book. Around Sgt. Pepper's, where Riley's interest begins to wane, mine did too, but then things pick up again with the White Album and continue in an interesting fashion to the end.

All in all, it's a book Beatles fanatics will enjoy reading, even if, and maybe because, you disagree with the author's opinions. It's a great gateway to thinking critically about this ubiquitous music if you haven't before, and there's a lot to chew on here. There's another book of this type (song by song analysis) called Revolution in the Head that adds more of a sociological slant to the analysis, and I recall liking that one better.

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### **Rob S. says**

This book was a gift from a friend and I thought for some reason I wouldn't dig it. But I totally did! Basically a chronological examination of the music of the Beatles with some armchair personal biography going on. The music theory mentions were of course over my head, but this book made me appreciate the Beatles more than I already did.

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## Thomas says

it was stupid, got stuff wrong.

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## Allan Carpenter says

I enjoyed some of the author's more esoteric analysis of the Beatles' songs; he's clearly thought deeply about the music. However, the book is riddled with errors, from mistakenly attributing the authorship of songs to which Beatle handled lead vocals on a given track. And this is the "revised" edition!

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## Alan says

I vowed to lay off Beatles books but this was in the library and couldn't resist. It was so much like the later 'Revolution in the Head' - going through song by song, that I didn't read from cover to cover, just picked favourite songs (eg Rain, And Your Bird Can Sing: *the guitar solo is flourescent irony.. it glitters with supremacy.*) and also read all the stuff on their solo careers (up to late 80s - George still alive). Again too dismissive of George I thought, saying of his wonderful 'All Too Much' *points up everything that can go wrong.. subtleties are scattered.. a lack of immediacy*, and not mentioning 'I Live for You', my favourite from 'All Things Must Pass'. Really rates Ringo though - as other reviews point out - quite properly.

Worth reading for the bibliography alone, with some great biased comments. He says of DiLello's 'The longest Cocktail Party': *Tattle-ales from an office boy whose job included rolling joints and sending out for barrels of apples for press conferences. Paperback writer becomes flesh.* I love the chapter in Derek Taylor's 'As Time Goes By' about Paul's trip up north to work with a brass band and how, on acid, they stop in a village on the way back and Paul sings his new song 'Hey Jude' in the local pub, but Riley says the book has *a fondness that verges on patronisation*. He's probably right.

The edition I read wasn't the one portrayed above, but from 1988, the one above might have been updated.

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## Melissa says

Riley offers an accessible but musically informed analysis of every album and significant single released by the Beatles. Lots of intriguing and satisfying discussions of melody, innovative uses of harmony and instrumentation, and other aural aspects of the music on record.

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## Roderick says

Okay, he's a real music critic, so therefore he takes himself too seriously at times (I mean, suggesting songs



should end a different way, now really?), but it's fun reading about the music, described over my head, in personal, technical and lyrical ways for the Beatles; meanwhile listening to their albums at the same time; and when he loves songs, he goes into great detail about them, even though it was all focused on the Brit albums, which were so carefully crafted by the Fab Four--little did we know, learning the music through all the Capitol albums here in the OO-S of Ahhh. I give it a 92, Dick, you can dance to it.

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