



# Tune In

*Mark Lewisohn*

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## **Tune In** Mark Lewisohn

This extended special edition of Mark Lewisohn's magisterial book *Tune In* is a true collector's item, featuring hundreds of thousands of words of extra material, as well as many extra photographs. It is the complete, uncut and definitive biography of the Beatles' early years, from their family backgrounds through to the moment they're on the cusp of their immense breakthrough at the end of 1962.

Designed, printed and bound in Great Britain, this high-quality edition consists of two beautifully produced individual hardbacks printed on New Langely Antique Wove woodfree paper, with red-and-white head and tail bands and red ribbon marker. The two books will sit within a specially designed box and lid featuring soft touch and varnish finishes. The whole product comes shrinkwrapped for extra protection.

Mark Lewisohn's biography is the first true and accurate account of the Beatles, a contextual history built upon impeccable research and written with energy, style, objectivity and insight. This extended special edition is for anyone who wishes to own the complete story in all its stunning and extraordinary detail. This is genuinely, and without question, the lasting word from the world-acknowledged authority.

## **Tune In** Details

Date : Published November 14th 2013 by Little, Brown (first published October 10th 2013)

ISBN : 9781408704783

Author : Mark Lewisohn

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# From Reader Review Tune In for online ebook

## Monty Ashley says

This book probably goes more detail than you want. It's almost a thousand pages and only gets to December 31, 1962, when the Beatles are about to record their first album. Mark Lewisohn wants to know absolutely everything the Beatles did. His annoyance is palpable when there's a day trip that almost definitely happened but nobody remembers taking.

But as it happens, I *\*do\** want all this detail. If you're sufficiently interested in the Beatles to consider reading it, it's going to blow your mind. I particularly like the amount of time that's spent on Ringo, because a lot of Beatles origin stories just bring him in when Pete Best leaves the band.

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## Clay Banes says

It's a Beatlelife.

Hard to reckon how long we'll wait for the next volume. Make healthy eating choices—exercise, don't smoke ciggies, etc.

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## George Bradford says

Does the world really need another book about The Beatles? After reading the 803 pages of Mark Lewisohn's "Tune In" I'd say emphatically "Yes!" "Tune In" is a great book. And if the subsequent volumes in this trilogy are anywhere near the quality of the first, the world not only needs them, it needs them as soon as possible.

I'm a student of The Beatles. (Yes, I'm a fan.) I've read almost every book ever written about The Beatles. And Lewisohn's "Tune In" is the most objective, detailed and well written account I've ever seen.

The individuals are revealed in all their complexity (much of which is not flattering). The circumstance and events of their lives are documented with both depth and precision. And the narrative flows with a crispness that keeps the pages briskly turning.

If you are like me and you think you already know this story, you are in for a surprising experience. There is an incredible amount of new information in "Tune In". Numerous events are documented for the first time. Many myths are debunked. Several legends are deconstructed to their origins. Conflicting accounts are laid side by side and evaluated on the verifiable evidence.

And the story . . .

Here is one of the greatest stories of the 20th Century. And on these pages it is told better than ever before. The conception, birth and rise of an irresistible force.

"Tune In" is one of the greatest books I have read in my life.

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## **F.R. says**

The body of this book is 840 pages long.

That's eight hundred and forty pages.

840 pages, and by the end of this weighty tome, The Beatles have got as far as recording their first two singles – one of which hasn't been released yet. As the astute amongst you can guess then, this means a ridiculous amount of detail. There are successful presidents of the United States whose lives have not been chronicled with this level of meticulous care. Yes, this is *The Beatles* and The Beatles are important, but really, Lewisohn has made it damned simple for the smirking critic to write off this book as the kind of ridiculous self-indulgence that makes the Magical Mystery Tour resemble a sensible, rational headed enterprise. It's The Beatles, but it's The Beatles in paperwork, guitar shopping, burping, farting, shagging finery. If there's a detail which can be known about The Fab Four (or even reasonably speculated upon) then rest assured that it will be included here.

And yet the whole is quite fascinating. Somehow the accumulation of all this information, of all these facts, of all previously half hidden truths just becomes incredibly engrossing. Obviously everybody who picks up this book know the characters involved (although Paul comes over as a much more spiteful, cheap git than he'd probably appreciate), but all these details just make the story of The Beatles and their coming together even more incredible. It is amazing to read about just how often they were close to breaking up, of all those moments where The Beatles came close to fading away to nothing. Or how different things might have been with just the smallest of changes. Everybody knows the story of Decca turning down The Beatles, but did you know that the cost of the lunch over which Decca told Brian Epstein that they weren't going to sign the band was more than Decca's standard signing-on fee? It would literally have cost them less to sign The Beatles than it did to turn them down. The rationale giving by Decca was of course that groups weren't the future, but at exactly the same time that Decca was turning The Beatles down they were giving record contracts to singing decorators? Was 1962 really a time where singing decorators seemed like they'd inherit the Earth? But of course if The Beatles had signed for Decca they would never have encountered George Martin. Although George Martin was only assigned The Beatles because the strict and upright man who actually ran EMI had found out about Mr Martin's extra-marital affair and so was punishing him by giving him a band he didn't want.

So much is chance, so much is happenstance, so much of what we think of a divine march to glory, was complete and utter luck and fluke.

Okay, the weight of information sometimes swamps the prose style and I'd be lying if I said there wasn't the occasional boring passage, as Lewisohn is more intent on ticking off the facts than giving us sentences to toy with and bounce around the brain. And maybe when you have this amount of sheer stuff to unpack, an unflashy and unobtrusive prose style just works for the best. Certainly this is an historian's book, with Lewisohn excellent at putting The Beatles into context within culture and society of late 1950s and early 1960s England. So that as the reader approaches page eight hundred and forty, when The Beatles have 'Love Me Do' out and are playing a gig in Nuneaton, whilst at the same time The Rolling Stones are playing one of their earliest gigs in a pub in North Cheam and Bob Dylan is also on stage that night in New York (not forgetting The Beach Boys who released their first UK single the same day as 'Love Me Do'), we know the

nature of the world that's about to be swept away. And since we're already privy to the story, we know just how exciting it's all about to be.

840 pages then.

840 pages and you're left wanting to read about what happens next, and you can't ask for more than that.

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## **Marti says**

Are you that kid in high school who bought *The Beatles Live at the Star Club in Hamburg*? (And more importantly, did you listen to it....repeatedly?)

Did you make a pilgrimage to Liverpool and Hamburg back when no American in their right mind would set foot there?

Did you tape the Beatles Anthology off television, then buy it on laser disc and then DVD?

Do you celebrate every February 7th like it is Liberation Day?

If you answered yes to these questions, this is the book for you. It is literally like following the Beatles from grammar school to the cusp of fame, step by step, day by day. Remember this is 800 pages which ends in 1962 (600 words per page, making it feel more like 1600 pages). The level of detail is incredible, not to mention that it sets the record straight on a lot of stories that are accepted as gospel (for instance, John was not forced to choose between his parents Alf and Julia on a pier in Blackpool as it is so often told). One also gets the sense that if one element of this story had not occurred in its proper sequence, the band might have broken up or missed a crucial opportunity to move forward.

And of course, there are a lot of laugh-out-loud stories like hanging out with Gene Vincent -- the first time they met one of their idols. It was culture shock prompting the Beatles to wonder, "Are all the American Rock n Rollers like this?"

Is this enough? No it is not. I want more. I did not want it to end. I am not sure if I can stand to wait until 2020 for the next installment (or 2023 for the one after that).

*PS, the book also answers a burning question of mine. Were the Beatles instructed not to talk about Football (Soccer) or were they literally the only four guys in Liverpool who did not care?*

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## **Jim says**

One of the best straight up biographies I have read in a very long time. Beautifully written, never boring.

However, this is a book with a lot of information in it, over 800 pages (or 70 hours on audio). This is Volume I of a planned three volume set on the Beatles. This volume only takes you from the childhood to just before the release of their first album in early 1963. Seemingly nothing that occurred to John, Paul, George or Ringo in the years between 1957 and 1962 is left unexplored. Extensive backstories on Brian Epstein, the Beatles

Manager, and George Martin, their producer, is also included.

So, it really does help to be a Beatles fan, with a curiosity as to how they formed, and how their early lives led them to become the most successful and influential musical artists of the last 60 years. I count myself in that group, so I was hooked from the beginning.

While the book packs in a lot of information, it is never dense. You won't lose your place, or have thrown at you a lot of information in a short stretch that you struggle to remember. Lewisohn is a gifted writer so despite its length, it never becomes confusing.

The book does two very important things. First, it does a great job explaining the musical influences on young people in Britain at the beginning of the rock and roll era. Those influences were entirely American. Elvis Presley, Buddy Holly, Little Richard, Jerry Lee Lewis among many others, had a profound effect on the British rock and roll scene. So ironically, American rock and rollers were the influence for British bands, which then used that influence to create a new style that then became the biggest influence a decade later in America. I will be very interested in how Lewisohn treats that phenomenon in the next two volumes.

The second important thing about this book, is presenting the Beatles as people in a way that makes one rethink the stereotypes about them. Both John and Paul lost their mothers as teenagers, which had a profound effect on their lives. John in particular never had a semblance of an orderly home life, which helps explain the changes in his personality as the Beatles became more popular. Despite having to learn at a young age how to get by on the rough streets of Liverpool, which toughened him up, it left him most vulnerable to problems as the group got more popular. He, more than the others, always seemed to be in a period of trying to find himself. In many ways this made him a raging jerk, not thinking twice about hurting others with an offhand comment, perhaps trying to head off being hurt himself. He reacted more emotionally to being slighted than the others, which even came out in some of the interviews he did after the Beatles had broken up. This book helps explain why he behaved that way, and to have more sympathy for him in that regard.

It also dispels some of the condescension Ringo has received over the years. Sometimes viewed as the least talented of the group, in fact, it wasn't until he had joined them that they became the powerhouse group we recall today. He was the glue that held the group together musically.

There is way too much in the book to do a comprehensive review so I won't attempt it.

If you are a Beatles fan, run, don't walk to get this book. If you have an interest in social history, there is quite a bit here about the lives of the working class in Liverpool in the 1950s to interest you as well.

Highly recommended

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## **Judy says**

I read this book in preparation for a trip to Liverpool next month, where I hope to go on a Magical Mystery Tour of the Beatles' history. Although I'm not a true Beatles obsessive, I do love their music. I have read quite a few books about them over the years, but discovered loads of information that was new to me from this truly massive tome.

Mark Lewisohn clearly loves the group and his enthusiasm comes across loud and clear, even if the level of detail is sometimes overwhelming. This enormous book only goes as far as 1962 and the recording of Please Please Me, with two more volumes promised for the future. It took me a long time to read through the exhaustive and repetitive descriptions of the four group members' school days, but I truly became caught up in the story when it got on to their early musical careers.

Lewisohn lovingly traces the years when the teenagers learned their craft in Liverpool clubs and halls, and their very tough stints in the bars and cellars of Hamburg. He is especially strong on tracing their musical influences and discussing all the songs they wrote, performed and borrowed from during these early years. I was pleased to see that he gives a lot of space to Stuart Sutcliffe and Pete Best's roles in the group. It's also very interesting to learn more about Ringo before he joined - this book gave me a new appreciation for just how successful he already was as a drummer before he became a Beatle.

Even though the book is so amazingly detailed, there are some gaps. For instance, it would be nice to hear more about some of the women and girls in the Beatles' lives. Cynthia and Dot were in relationships with John and Paul respectively for much of the period covered in the book, but they remain rather shadowy figures here. It's also sometimes frustrating when Lewisohn describes a photo in great detail, but the photo isn't actually included in the book - although I imagine copyright considerations are the reason for this. Overall, a rewarding read, which has sent me eagerly tracking down early Beatles recordings and videos of them at the Cavern Club ... but I won't be rushing to read the even longer special edition!

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## **Susan says**

Over the years I have read more books about the Beatles than I care to admit to and they vary in quality from pretty good to absolutely terrible. However, when Mark Lewisohn announced that he would be writing the 'definitive' biography of the band, fans believed him. Lewisohn is not only THE Beatles expert, but he is also someone who has an obvious love for them. In other words, he is also a fan and the little details, which intrigue us, also interest him.

This first volume looks at their family history and childhood, then splits into five chapters; taking detailed looks at the years 1958, 1959, 1960, 1961 and 1962. From the first, two things become abundantly clear – that the author understands the relationship between John and Paul and that he is keen to debunk myths that have become almost accepted – especially ones built around John's childhood. Yes, his childhood was difficult, but films such as "Nowhere Boy" have created a totally fictional account of what happened and even recent books, such as "When They Were Boys" by Larry Kane, simply repeats them. Stories of Mimi dodging bombs to visit the baby John in hospital or John's mother and father forcing him to choose between them in an emotional 'tug of love' are just that – stories. Mimi also gets a much more sympathetic portrayal and we learn how, rather than trying to keep John's father away from him, she even allowed him to write to his son from prison. They may have lost touch, but it was certainly not Mimi's fault that they did.

Having established that he wants to tell the story as the truth, Mark Lewisohn is certainly not portraying the band in a better light, or concealing their flaws. They were young boys at this time, each with their own character traits and faults, as everyone has. He also ties in what was happening to other people who enter the story at a later date – Brian Epstein, George Martin and other musicians are there, sometimes almost within touching distance, but their paths not quite intersecting. Most interestingly for fans, he has tracked down people that have simply not been heard from before – school friends, those who worked with them in early jobs, fans, people who were there but have not been considered perhaps important enough to be interviewed

before – as well as the more obvious characters in the Beatles story.

This, then, is the complete timeline of those early years – the founding of the Quarrymen, John and Paul meeting at the St Peter's Fete, George joining the band, Ringo becoming part of Rory and the Hurricanes, early auditions, success and failure, and of that first trip to Hamburg, which honed their sound and changed them into a band – even if they were always, “John, Paul, George and a drummer” at this stage. Lewisohn is not afraid to state what most fans have always known – that Pete Best was asked to go to Hamburg simply because they needed a drummer in order to fulfil the contract and that, almost from the point the poor man packed his kit into Allan Williams van, he was on borrowed time as a member and certainly never a Beatle.

Returning to Liverpool, there is the show at Litherland Town Hall which showcased how good they had become, as the Liverpool scene took off and the Beatles – sneered at before leaving – were undoubtedly now the top band in the city. They were the Kings of Liverpool but, as always, wanted more. Enter Brian Epstein, who Bob Wooler remarks, came to the Cavern to watch them – “he came, he saw and he was conquered.” There follows the long road towards a recording contract, a changing image with the arrival of suits, the death of Stuart Sutcliffe and the beginning of George, in particular, conspiring to get Ringo in the band. It was also the beginning of girls hanging around their houses, which would never stop from that point on.

With the Beatles finally achieving that recording contract, it was essential to change drummers. They were then no longer “John, Paul, George and a drummer”, but changed to “John, Paul, George and Ringo”- four equal members. “Love Me Do” peaked at number 17, but considering the lack of exposure and the resistance to the Beatles it was amazing the record ever took off. “So, what’s from Liverpool?” sneered Dick James, when George Martin told him about ‘the boys’. That North-South divide was about to be smashed down, as Merseybeat would explode on a jaded British pop market. If London was uninterested at first, then the US certainly resisted anything from England. However, even they would succumb to the charm, charisma, enthusiasm, energy and talent of the Beatles. For the Beatles itself, it was no surprise. As John Lennon said, they always knew they were “the best” and “it was just a matter of time before everybody else caught on.”

Sadly, Mark Lewisohn has not yet written the second and third parts of this trilogy, but if they are anything as complete, well written (his dry humour can almost rival the Beatles themselves) and his desire to tell the story as it should be told, then they will be worth waiting for. In the meantime, there is an extended, two volume edition of this book due out soon. I cannot imagine what Lewisohn may have left out, but I am quite sure that I will enjoy reading it to find out. This book has been needed for a long while, it is a triumph and I am sure it will become the definitive biography of the Beatles.

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## Amy says

I'm often wary of reading books on people or subjects that are so prolific in pop culture; more often than not, you get a summary of information that could have been gleaned from various websites along with lots of empty filler. In the multitude of Beatles "biographies", Tune In is a thrilling standout!

Mark Lewisohn took ten years researching the book and while not officially authorized by the Beatles, he had help from several inherent sources including Paul McCartney, Neil Aspinall and Yoko Ono. The book covers years 1845-1962. No, that isn't a typo. Lewisohn actually writes about each member's ancestry, which is just one of many charming and enlightening aspects of the book.

We visit their childhood homes, spend time with their parents, siblings, schoolmates and teachers before getting a front row seat at the many clubs where they honed their craft. We get to sit in on arguments, intrigues and betrayals. We travel with them to Hamburg and back to Liverpool and later London, Scotland and Paris.

Through it all, Lewisohn keeps a tight timeline, while weaving together several different threads (Ringo would not even become a Beatle until the end of 1962, nearly 5 years after the others had formed their first band). Brian Epstein and George Martin's lives before and with the Beatles is also covered here.

The book reads like a Dickens tale, with all the characters varied, princes and paupers, before eventually coming together at the end through a series of fantastic events. And it is amazing how shifts in business, families, music and world events played a part in what would arguably be described as one of the most influential bands in history. And Lewisohn captured it all in this, his first volume of three, *Tune In Vol. 1*.

An enthusiastic 5 stars and a must read for any Beatles fan!

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## **Adam Ford says**

This is an absolute top notch historical joy-ride of a book. So much fun.

Some impressions: John was an arrogant arse. But he was the force behind the group--they never would have started without him. Paul was talented and good-hearted and the glue that created the whole and kept it together. George was the quiet one, but he might have saved the whole venture when he insulted George Martin's tie at the first recording session to break the ice and get people laughing. Stuart death in Astrid's arms was sad, but he wasn't going to be a Beatle any longer anyway. The betrayal of Pete hurts, but he really wasn't up to the task. And Richard Starkey was the odd man out for a dozen reasons, and yet the perfect fit.

It is amazing to me that after their second stint in Hamburg, as they returned to Liverpool in July of 1961, the Beatles were the most experienced rock band on the planet--and there probably wasn't a close second. On the first trip in 1960 they played over 90 nights for 6 hours a night. On the second trip they were onstage 92 nights for 7 hours a night. They worked very hard to include new material into the show--as the same old songs would drive them crazy after a while. So they knew literally hundreds of songs and had performed those songs hundreds of times. John said, "We went over [to Hamburg] as boys and came back as grown men." All the other acts in Liverpool were blown away by the transformation. The Beatles went to Hamburg as an average nothing-special Liverpool band, but when they came back, they blew everyone away when they took the stage. They owned the stage. It is ironic, and very sad, that the screaming and fainting teenage girls would soon make live performances impractical.

This is top-rate history done right. One of the better one I have ever read. If you love music and appreciate the Beatles, pick this one up.

Also, the insight to post-war England is beautiful too. This is the story of 6 families in Liverpool in the late 1950s and 1960s. The boys started a band that later became successful, but no one knew that at the time. Lives of quiet desperation in the victor-state of WWII. Very interesting study of a time and place, aside from the music.

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## Sojourner says

"Every once in a while, life conjures up a genuine ultimate," so begins Mark Lewisohn in his epic book on the Beatles, talking about them. This is not only true of the Fab Four but also of Mark Lewisohn's work itself.

In a new tome on the Beatles titled *Tune In*, which is the first of a three-volume series *The Beatles: All These Years*, Mark Lewisohn who is acknowledged as an authority on the Beatles, examines the early days of the group in superb, almost minute detail, which is likely to leave even obsessed fans with volumes and volumes of books on the Beatles in their personal collection (roughly about 800 book titles are devoted to the band) shaking their heads in disbelief.

The content is vast as is the massive knowledge of Mark Lewisohn on the subject. In order to construct a monumental and definitive work on John Lennon, Paul McCartney, George Harrison, and Ringo Starr, the author was not reliant on what he already knew, he also interviewed hundreds of people who knew, or were close to, the Beatles and their families. He even went to the extent of tracking down a friend of John Lennon's father who lives in New Zealand. And it was this family friend who deflated the oft-repeated story that John had to choose between living with his mother, Julia, in Liverpool and his father in New Zealand.

*Tune In* traces the remarkable journey of four unwavering and genuine young men whose natural gifts, combined with distinctive charisma and intelligence, won hearts and minds. The music they created was a new phenomenon. However, *Tune In* is not the full story of the Fab Four. It covers just a short period in their extraordinary journey, looking at their family history, childhood, and the years between 1958 - 1962. It is a painstaking work which takes the Beatles to the threshold of stardom, 31 December 1962.

"I declare that the Beatles are mutants, prototypes of evolutionary agents sent by God, endowed with a mysterious power to create a new human species, a young race of laughing freemen," so said the LSD evangelist Timothy Leary a long time ago. A lot of things to a lot of people, the Beatles still enjoy a huge following, their music remains stimulating, and their accomplishments is ever unlikely to be bested. And the author has captured it all. The first volume consists of six exhaustive chapters:

- Old Before Our Birth
- Year 1, 1958: Thinking of Linking
- Year 2, 1959: Three Cool Cats
- Year 3, 1960: Competence, Confidence & Continuity
- Year 4, 1961: The Rock Age
- Year 5, 1962: Always Be True

Year 6, 1963 - you'll have to wait for the second volume...

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## Ron says

Over 1000 page biography of the Beatles, only up to December 31, 1962! For those of us who have read many biographies with much information about their early days (starting with the authorized Hunter Davies book) it seems inconceivable that so much could be written in *Tune In*. It is a credit to Lewisohn's research that this biography is both readable and thorough.

My five stars is based on both the readability and the research. Lewisohn draws from many sources and interviews to discover as much truth as possible from that era. A few things became a bit more clear to me after reading this:

- Pete Best was somewhat ill-served by his sudden dismissal from the band, but as convenient (and necessary) as he was for their first Hamburg venture, the writing had been on the wall for a while. It also shows the ruthlessness of the music business in general.
- The Beatles needed breaks all along the road. Allan Williams scoring their Hamburg gig, Paul and George quitting jobs which parental pressure urged them to keep. Brian Epstein discovering them. Decca rejecting them but luckily for them landing with George Martin at Parlophone.
- Paul McCartney was not a happy camper at many points and the band could have broken up well before their success.

For fans this is a treasure trove. For newcomers to the Beatles story they might be best served with something shorter. Certainly pages will be skipped, especially during the "Love Me Do" breakthrough which seemed to go on for over a hundred pages. Publishers, publicists, fans, names are dropped all over. I look forward to the next installment. There is also musical analysis of their early sessions and what can be gleaned from Cavern and Hamburg shows.

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### **Alex Johnston says**

First off, this is not a review of the 960-page standard edition of this book, which I haven't read.

Oh no. This is a review of the boxed, two-volume 'Extended Special Edition'. I got my copy on 14 November 2013 and finished it a month later, and given that it's 1728 pages, at an average of c. 58 pages/day, that's the fastest I've read any book in my life.

I had serious doubts about Mark Lewisohn's qualifications to write this book. I know that he's the most dedicated and conscientious Beatles scholar ever, with a rock-solid grasp of the chronology of what happened when and a talent for, and love of, delving in archives and finding out stuff nobody else had found out. However, biography is an art form and Lewisohn's earlier books about the Beatles had struck me as triumphs of research but, given that they were in chronicle form, hardly works of art. I found it very hard to believe that Lewisohn was going to come up with something that might rival the great cultural biographies of our time, which for me are books like Richard Ellmann's James Joyce, Ray Monk's Ludwig Wittgenstein: The Duty of Genius or David Bellos' Georges Perec: A Life in Words.

My doubt, especially when it came to this extended edition, was that Lewisohn would drown in research and produce an inert, baggy chronicle of the Beatles' day-to-day lives. Now, the thing about the Beatles that marks them out from every other band ever is the apparently inextinguishable fascination that fans have for yet more detail of the band's day-to-day life. It's what fuels the constant flow of books and articles about them -- even in the 80s, their bibliography had thousands of entries -- and is the reason why people are still compelled to write about them. But how could anyone ever knock all that into shape?

Apparently the short version is a great read. I have bad news for anyone who thinks so, because I can't imagine how it could be better than the long version. I was wrong to doubt Lewisohn; this is a masterpiece, certainly the most ambitious and wide-ranging rock biography ever written and possibly the greatest. What Lewisohn has produced is, to paraphrase the title of Greil Marcus' great essay on Elvis in *Mystery Train*:

Images of America in Rock 'n' Roll, a Beatliad: nothing short of part one of an epic about the birth of British rock and roll, as told through the story of the Beatles. He does this by skilfully threading together the stories of the many, many players in this huge tale, so that we begin by tracing the ancestry of the Beatles and we proceed by means of lists of their grandparents' dead siblings (chilling) and page-long digressions of the history of anti-semitism in early 20th century Liverpool (by way of explaining the Epstein family's status in the city). Such is the richness of detail that Lennon and McCartney's famous first encounter at Woolton Fete in 1957 doesn't take place until almost 200 pages in, and even then, Lewisohn raises the possibility that they may have already run into each other on a separate and less mythologised occasion.

Along the way, Lewisohn's passion for going to the sources and not just relying on press material distinguishes him from basically every other Beatle biographer. One thing that emerges strongly is the thoroughly crappy nature of much of Richard Starkey's early life, given that he spent so much of his childhood in hospital. When he finally emerged as a teenager, he'd missed so much of his education that he had no prospects as a low-level clerical worker and he was so physically puny that he had no chance of getting a decent manual job. The only thing that he could do, and liked doing, was play the drums, thanks to music lessons in the hospital. It would seem that Richard Starkey was literally born to be a drummer.

Elsewhere, the vast literature of memoirs and recollections by people who knew the band is under Lewisohn's critical scrutiny, and if a source isn't supported by further evidence, he's sceptical; so Alistair Taylor's claim that McCartney wanted to sign a separate management contract with Epstein just in case the Beatles broke up is found wanting, seeing as there's no other evidence for it. Not that this is a happy-clappy view of the band, either. Philip Norman's *Shout!: The True Story Of The Beatles*, once considered the best single book about the band, painted them as John Lennon and his backing band and at the nadir of the band's critical fortunes, during the late 70s and early 80s, that's how everyone saw them. Nowadays, *Shout!* comes across as superficial, partisan and skimpily researched; Norman wasn't the first writer to seriously underestimate the collegial nature of the band, but his contempt for McCartney in particular is clear on every page. After Lewisohn, it has to be consigned to the enormous heap of not-very-good books about the Beatles.

While Lewisohn is clear that Lennon was the leader throughout this part of the band's career, he sensitively traces the central creative relationship of the band, that between Lennon and McCartney. The initial spark came from McCartney's recognition of Lennon's creativity, and Lennon's recognition of McCartney's talent; without Lennon, McCartney might never have been bold enough to become a great songwriter but without McCartney, Lennon might never have become disciplined enough to write songs at all. Another aspect that comes out strongly is the extent to which Lennon, McCartney and Harrison's friendship, which had formed because they were the only three members of the Quarry Men to exhibit genuine dedication to music, persisted even when they had no bookings and were hardly a band at all, just three restless and arrogant teenagers kicking around Liverpool stealing other people's rock & roll records. Hundreds of pages go by as this central trio's friendship mysteriously persists, based on a shared pleasure in each other's company, a common but entirely irrational self-belief, and a feeling that opportunity was waiting for them. None of the Beatles come across as especially lovely characters, especially in terms of their relationship with women, but they clearly believed that they had charisma long before anybody else did.

It was only after a shambolic Scottish tour backing Johnny Gentle that the Beatles finally managed to persuade the lumpen Pete Best to come with them to Hamburg, where hundreds of Preludin-fuelled hours of gigging to drunken Germans forged them into the manic rock monster that they became. Lewisohn has done some revealing maths, here. Thanks to the Beatles' insane performance schedule in Hamburg, by the time they returned to play an explosive comeback show at Litherland Town Hall, they had become the most experienced band in Liverpool, but there was only one musician on the scene whose sheer dedication to playing live meant that he actually had more performance hours than them. It was Ringo Starr. Before the

Beatles' ultimate lineup ever made a record, they'd played more shows than some bands manage in their entire careers.

Poor Pete Best; he emerges from this story as a man who never grasped what was going on, never understood how he was coming across to his bandmates, never lived up to the historical moment. Neil Aspinall, the Beatles' road manager and eventual factotum, was living with the Best family because he was in a relationship with the hapless drummer's mother, and the book's most chilling moment is when Pete and Neil are summoned to Brian Epstein's office only to be told that the others don't want Pete anymore and have decided that Ringo's the new drummer. They retire to a pub, Pete reeling with shock and his friend sympathetic, but when he suggests to Aspinall that they just get drunk, Aspinall has to decline on the grounds that he has to drive the band to the gig that night.

'But I've been fired,' says Pete.

'You've been fired,' says Aspinall, 'I haven't.' And Best wanders off into ex-Beatledom, while Aspinall hitches his fortunes to the rocket.

Another myth dispelled; that Brian Epstein 'tamed' the Beatles. The portrait of Epstein is one of the most convincing and sympathetic ever drawn. Lewisohn suggests that what Epstein did was show the Beatles how they came across, and persuade them that if they really wanted to make it as big as they wanted to make it, to the 'toppermost of the poppermost', then they had to smarten up -- but, and this was the realisation that made Epstein their perfect manager -- without losing their intensity. And so, over time, the leather-clad post-Hamburg Beatles gradually realise that going on stage in suits, and standing still during songs instead of jumping up and down and pulling faces, didn't make them lose fans, but actually helped them to gain more. (You could compare it, if you like, to Philip Larkin's realisation that he didn't have to 'pump himself up into poetry' but could make great poems out of something like his own voice, except that in Larkin's case it was part of a realisation that his own human weaknesses were an essential part of his greatness as a writer, whereas with the Beatles it was just about being honest that they wanted to rule the world more than they wanted to dress like their heroes.) If you watch the Beatles in their Royal Variety Performance rendition of 'Twist and Shout' with the sound turned down, they look studiously cool; turn the sound up and close your eyes, and they sound insane. Thanks to Epstein's gift for presentation, the Beatles grasped that their appeal lay in a tension between rock & roll abandon, inscrutable cool and friendly approachableness. It was much stranger and more seductive hearing raucous beat music from four guys in sharp suits than it was hearing it from four guys dressed like Johnny Ray.

The story of how George Martin came to sign the Beatles to Parlophone emerges here as far more complex than the previously-told tale of somebody hearing a demo and saying to Epstein 'Hey, that sounds good.' Assuming that Lewisohn is accurate, it turns out to hinge on devious intra-EMI rivalries, partly based on the fact that Martin's marriage was dissolving because of an affair with his secretary Judy Lockhart-Smith, which other EMI staffers disapproved of. (Lockhart-Smith soon became Martin's second wife, and Martin went on to be the Beatles' producer, effectively silencing criticism.) It now appears that Martin was even less impressed with the band than was previously apparent, and that it wasn't until they went in for the session that would yield 'Please Please Me' that he finally became convinced that they were more than merely adequate. This, too, has been lost in the legend, which likes to pretend that everyone involved immediately spotted that the Beatles were going places.

Volume one ends at the end of December 1962, with the second single in the can and the year of reckoning about to dawn. I assume that Lewisohn has been working on volumes of the book concurrently and is not, so to speak, shooting in sequence; hopefully we won't have to wait eight years for the next volume. In the

meantime, this extended edition must now be the standard against which other Beatles biographies will be measured. There will always be room for more critical writing about the band, but from now on, critics will need to have thoroughly absorbed *Lewisohn (2013)* before we start pontificating about the Beatles' early years.

*Erratum: The original version of this review, published in Dec 2013, referred to Neil Aspinall as having a relationship with Pete Best's 'brother'. Pete Best has a half-brother, but Neil Aspinall was of course in a relationship with Mona Best, Pete Best's mother. Apologies for any embarrassment caused.*

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## **Paul Bryant says**

A five star book with a one star title and a no star cover, so let's get that out of the way now – Mark, what were you thinking? Tune In? It's from Timothy Leary, right? So I am assuming that your three volumes will be Tune In, Turn On and Drop Out. It must have sounded cute to you. Not to me. It's a wretched idea. And the cover – there are gorgeous photos of the young Beatles on the inside cover, where they can't be seen. They would have done wonderfully. Or anything except what you ended up with! What a horrible cover.

Rant over. Review now follows.

## **A THOUSAND PAGES, GIVE OR TAKE A FEW**

Like a stunning camera obscura or one of those enormous 19th century travelling dioramas, this huge book recreates a particular British working-class past in abundant, lavish, sensuous and psychological detail. Yes, you've all been here before – here's sisters Mimi and Julia, posh Cyn, sullen Pete, and tragic Stu, and there's sickly Richy, and arty Astrud, indeed the whole kit and caboodle, really the act you really have known for all these years. But in this incarnation, instead of whizzing by at speeds too fast to take everything in, everything is slowed down to the point where you can walk right round the events as they unfold, and see them in three dimensions, like one of those exploded diagrams of car engines. You can peer into the drawers in all the rooms, you can poke around the piles of rubbish in 3 Gambier Terrace or stick your head through the bedroom door of 20 Forthlin Road and overhear something interesting, do you recognise it? Is it I'll be On My Way? And is that one Hello Little Girl? There are fights, divorces, pregnancies, friendships, betrayals, cruelties, goodheartedness, viciousness, wit, boorishness, nothing papered over, everything admitted.

When I heard about this book I thought : yes, it will have all the facts, it will be the complete story, but will you be able to read it? How do we know that Mark Lewisohn can actually write? It takes more than a giant Beatle database to make a good book. Well, this is no Ellman's-James-Joyce and probably not even Guralnik's-Elvis but it's just fine. He's infinitely affable without being ingratiating; it's like being in the company of an openhearted friend. Occasionally he can turn in a sentence like :

*The show's second half had the professional talent, and here at last was Gene Vincent – gut full of liquor, eyes full of mania, body full of pain – throwing himself about the stage in psychotically energetic defiance of his injuries and grief, just seventeen nights after surviving the death crash.*

But more typical Lewis sentences are :

*Stuart so enjoyed Astrid's black leather suit – the tight trousers and jacket – that she arranged to have an identical pair tailor –made for him. This was done at Hamburger Ledermodern, a smart, expensive leather*

store downtown, and it cost her DM1500 (about £128).

This book may be unique in one other respect too – no one will read it unless they want to know the arse end of every last possible Beatle fact, and so no reader will be disappointed. Can't see anyone throwing it down on page 450 saying "Oh God, this is too much!" – if you don't want nearly 1000 pages about the young pre-fame Beatles, then this is not the Christmas present for you, because that is what this is.

## **SUPERSTRINGS**

You can tell that the Beatles were committed. The first 400 pages of *Tune In* is the story of them gradually burning all their bridges, leaving school, or being thrown out, with no qualifications (McCartney got one single A level). They were going to be in a rock band or they were going to end up as van drivers and building site labourers. They were deadbeats, the despair of their parents. At the beginning of 1960 they weren't even in the top five groups in Liverpool. And the continual merry-go-round of members, never being able to find bass players or drummers, so that by mid 1960, they had John's friend Stu on bass because he could afford to buy one and he was John's friend, otherwise he had never played an instrument before in his life; and some kid they didn't know on drums because his rich mum had bought him a set – that was Pete Best. It was, really, pitiful stuff, a shambles.

In 1961, the shambles was driven in a van to Hamburg and there an alchemical process began to turn base metal into something incandescent.

In so many ways, the rise of the Beatles is as unlikely as the rise of Christianity, almost to the point where a person might start believing in divine tinkering. I do not mean to be Lennonianistically blasphemous, but it was not likely that a tiny despised sect of an obscure ethnic group in the vast Roman Empire should become an unstoppable force to the point where it took over the entire Empire. It was also not likely that a bunch of four scallies from a poor Northern provincial town who were only the 12th best group in Liverpool in 1959 (out of 18) should become an unstoppable force and take over a large part of the world within a few years. I wish to point out the majorly curious coincidence of three brilliant songwriters being born at roughly the same time in the same city, and ending up in the same group. It's one thing for Leiber and Stoller to meet up in LA or Rodgers and Hammerstein to discover each other in NYC, these are gigantic cities where all the top talent gravitates. Liverpool was the sticks. What came out of Liverpool? Ken Dodd and chip butties.

The formation of the Beatles therefore lends considerable weight to the fine-tuned universe argument - which is in this case a *fine-tuned Liverpool* argument, even more of a case for intelligent design.

## **8% HAD A FRIDGE**

Mark Lewisohn promoted his book by saying that there would be revelations at every turn. My daughter Georgia who is 17 and a Beatle fan because brainwashing really does work said "Oh we'll find out they had beans on toast when the other books said they had egg and chips" – she can be a little dismissive – but yes, I wouldn't call this book *rammed with explosive myth-busting info* – but here is the full detail, all the twists and shouts, and there are a whole lot of curious crannies to the story, and every one is filled in and made to fit with all the other elements. As you read you can hear the cogs and gear wheels clicking in to place to

create the gestalt event known as The Beatles – first John, then John brings in Paul, then Paul brings in George, then George brings in Ringo; Hamburg – click; the haircut, click; the manager, clackclack; the suits, click clack, whirr hummm; meanwhile offstage, a vast population of 10 and 11 year old kids waiting to become 13 and 14 year old kids when they will all go off their heads at the sight of what was, during the course of these 870 pages not counting the notes and index, being assembled, by means of unerring improvisation.

Mr Lewisohn also remarks on his website that he likes to think of this book as a social history of England with the Beatles at the centre. I see what he means. This must be the most detailed account of English provincial working class day to day life from the 40s to the 60s, as refracted through the lives of six or so scuffling wannabe pop musicians. The fags, the boozers (Ringo : “My parents were alcoholics and I didn’t realise it.”), the kneetremblers, the scouse, the unrelieved poverty of these lives. In 1960 only 18% of British households had a washing machine. And as for the refrigerator - by 1950 90% of American homes had one. By 1960, only 8% of British homes did.

In this story there is a lot of people not getting on with each other. J P & G did not get on with Pete Best, whose fans, when he was sacked, stomped and yelled “Pete Best forever, Ringo never” *whilst standing in front of Ringo* when he played his first Beatles gig. They were banned from various venues in Liverpool because of loutish behaviour and missing the odd concert. Mimi fell out with Julia and hated Cynthia. Paul was frosty with Brian for a while. And all parents disliked and feared John Lennon. But all of that, that’s life. Also part of life is death, and they got their fair share of people dying on them, from parents (Julia and Mary) to heroes (Buddy Holly and Eddie Cochran) to Stuart Sutcliffe.

## **I NEVER LIKED IT**

The chronology is startling. ML points out that their first night in Hamburg, 17 August 1960, was the exact 20th anniversary of the first Nazi attack on Liverpool. He can’t resist a little bit of preaching at this point, and I can’t resist quoting it :

*Rock and roll music was taken to Hamburg by the children of the survivors, to be heard in turn by the children who’d outlived the Allies’ revenge blitz of 1943. Scorned by adult society as a force for evil and the work of the devil, black rhythm music out of America – and before there, of course, out of Africa – was bringing harmony where once had been hatred.*

Well, yeah, harmony and fistfights!

Coming in at the tail end of this Brobdingnagian biography, they actually manage to release a record, Love Me Do, which I never liked, and neither did George Martin. It’s a pretty feeble song. The following year was when the music suddenly went up a few gears, and we’ll get that story in another 5 or 10 years when volume 2 comes out. But I suspect this book will be the best of the three. Wonderful stuff.

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## **Brian Bess says**

The definitive Fab Four saga (?), part one

When I first heard that Mark Lewisohn was going to publish the first of a projected three-volume biography

of the Beatles I knew the books would not lack accuracy. Lewisohn is the world's foremost Beatles authority, whose book on their recording sessions I have referred to thousands of times since it was released in 1988. Lewisohn has listened to probably every second of recorded music and between song chatter that was ever put to tape in their short but massively dense eight year recording career. The questions that arose in my mind were a) can Lewisohn tell me anything about them that I haven't already heard in at least one of the many other books about them that I've read and b) can he weave this mass of information into a coherent, compelling narrative?

Based on length alone I knew that this series would be the most in-depth study of them published to date. Volume 1 of 3 is almost 1,000 pages and only ends on the last day of 1962. One of Lewisohn's aims is to tell the story as thoroughly and as accurately as possible with impartiality and without a specific agenda. Although he has had the cooperation of surviving Beatles and spouses, Lewisohn does not favor one Beatle over another. He presents the virtues as well as flaws of each of them. Most other books about the history of the Beatles provide some summary of each individual Beatle's background, then zero in on the meeting of John Lennon and Paul McCartney, with the unfolding of the story encompassing George Harrison's joining, the Hamburg experience, the personnel changes of Stu Sutcliffe and Pete Best and then suddenly the addition of Ringo Starr into the band at the crucial moment before their meteoric rise to fame, fortune, brilliant music and world changing.

First of all, Lewisohn's book begins all the way back in the 1840's when the Lennons came to Liverpool from Ireland during the potato famine. Ancestors of each Beatle are presented and the aspects of their lives that shaped and influenced the development of their talented descendants are explored and the stage set for these boys being born and growing up in this particular city, this particular culture at this particular point in time. Not only does he trace the lives of individual Beatles, including Richy Starkey's (not known as 'Ringo Starr' until 1960) development before he became friends with John, Paul and George, but he also explores the trajectory of other essential players in the saga such as Brian Epstein and George Martin up to the points at which their lives and the Beatles' intersect and become entwined.

As much as possible, Lewisohn presents their story without foreknowledge of how it would unfold. The deck was stacked against these boys becoming successful. In the 1950's and early 60's there was no band like the Beatles, musicians who all sang, solo and in harmony, played and wrote original material. At many points everything looked extremely bleak for them. Success was not a foregone conclusion by any means. If one factor had not been present at a particular moment their lives and careers would have been entirely different.

Among the pieces of information I had never heard before was the fact that for a while John, Paul and George were a trio, all three singing and playing guitars under the name Japage 3 (a clumsy juxtaposition of the first syllables of their first names). There were many times when they were drummerless and times when Paul was the default drummer. Similarly, I knew that Beatles assistant and road manager and, until his death, default manager of Beatles product Neil Aspinall had an affair with Mona Best, mother of drummer Pete Best and owner of the Casbah, one of the first clubs where the early Beatles had a regular playing gig. I did not know that Mona had a child by Neil, at a time when big brother Pete was 20. More backstage gossip: I did not know that George Martin had a first wife who, at least at the time of his meeting with the Beatles, refused to give him a divorce with full knowledge of his affair with secretary Judy (later wife and presumably mother of Giles, who worked with his father on the latest Beatles remasters).

Lewisohn goes into extreme detail, perhaps too much, on the record industry, promoters and business dealings. However, all of this is essential to fully understand the circumstances in which the Beatles emerged. Some song titles are cited that will reappear at some point later in the Beatles' story i.e. Paul's very early songs "When I'm Sixty-Four" and "Hot as Sun" (appearing on his first solo album) and Ringo's early

attempt at songwriting “Don’t Pass Me By” (eventually finished and included on the White Album),

Most people today have at least a passing awareness of a show business and, specifically, popular music world that is built on models that were largely created by the Beatles. One of Lewisohn’s major accomplishments with this book is in illuminating how revolutionary these young men were at this point in time as they bucked trends, violated established expectations, broke rules of the music business and forged ahead with the conviction and certainty of their talent and ambition. The answer to both of the questions I asked at the beginning of this review is definitely yes. To which I have nothing more to add but ‘bring on Volume 2, Mark!’

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