

Ennuĩ R Us



The Beatles: Get Back
Disney Plus
468 minutes

by [Michael Ray Fitzgerald](#) (January 2022)

Perhaps it started as an experiment in *cinema verite* along the lines of Allan King's *A Married Couple*, released in 1969, the same year the Beatles undertook this fruitless venture.

Both films show a marriage coming undone.

It's easy to see why this ambitious project was nearly aborted during its inception. Only the most die-hard Beatles fans or dedicated historians could sit through such a tiresome and ultimately pointless exercise. Even the Beatles themselves barely got through it.

This three-part series, totaling nearly eight hours, does provide some fresh insight into the deteriorating dynamic between the four members of the Beatles, who collectively comprised one of the most significant cultural forces of their generation.

They are very rich and spoiled by success at this point, not having much reason to do anything they don't feel like doing. They don't need the money and have no further achievements to attain. Their problem, in other words, is a lack of motivation, which is a luxury few can afford. Being the Beatles had become too easy: audiences would—and still do—buy anything they create regardless of quality or lack thereof. They needed a new challenge, which they would soon acquire by launching separate solo careers.

In the first episode, the group and its staff struggle to find a fresh artistic framework to which they can apply themselves, as they had done with 1967's *Sergeant Pepper*. This project, they all agree, needs a vision. Yet nothing inspiring comes to mind other than some vague desire to “get back” to their roots (this urge was likely inspired by Canadian-American group the Band, which George Harrison had befriended). The only guiding principle here is they want to show the world they can still perform as a unit. They intend to record a live, televised performance, to be accompanied by a soundtrack album.

It's not entirely clear what the point of filming rehearsals was except to unwittingly document their incompetence. The members openly acknowledge their lack of focus and lament the passing of former manager Brian Epstein, who had been the father figure who kept them on track.

McCartney tries to step up and provide some leadership but the others mock him for behaving like a schoolmarm, though it's apparent he mainly just wants to get some work done. He has appointed himself the band's musical director and arranger. There is some resentment about this—especially from a petulant

George Harrison, who walks out in the middle of the proceedings but is coaxed into returning.

By Episode Two, they cancel the upcoming television appearance because they literally can't get their act together.

In 1970 John Lennon, shedding some light on the proceedings, told interviewer Jan Wenner of *Rolling Stone* that he didn't want to do it in the first place: "[O]f course we're lazy fuckers ... we couldn't get into it. We put down a few tracks and nobody was into it at all." He also explained that the members didn't feel much like playing music at 8 a.m. It probably doesn't help that they are drinking on the job.

McCartney finally joins the others in time-wasting antics, compulsively goofing off. This might be fun for the boys in the band, but bottom line it may not be something audiences care to sit through for hours on end.

Lennon reaches a point in Episode Two where all he seems to contribute are silly wisecracks. This might be amusing if they were actually funny, but they mostly consist of pointless, inane gibberish.

One of the few meaningful exchanges occurs off-camera when a hidden microphone captures a private conversation between Lennon and McCartney in which McCartney humbly acknowledges Lennon's leadership. Lennon demurs.

It appears Lennon's passivity belies his unstated intention to leave the group. He seems to—perhaps subliminally—sabotage the group's progress on the upcoming television project by forestalling and procrastinating, much to McCartney's confusion and frustration.

Lennon did indeed announce his imminent departure privately several months later, but McCartney beat him to the punch, being the first to publicly announce his departure.

Six years later Lennon explained to television interviewer Tom Snyder on NBC's *Tomorrow* why he had planned to quit the most successful band in the world: he was simply bored playing with the others. "We had just become stale, musically," he said, and welcomed the idea of working with different musicians. As a solo artist, he added, "I can change musicians whenever I like."

Music producer George Martin, who had previously helmed the group's recordings, rarely appears during the rehearsals. He seems less than thrilled but is perhaps too diplomatic to come out and say so. His palpable lack of commitment here is puzzling—evidently he was not officially engaged to supervise this project but only popped in as a courtesy (his name did not appear on the credits of the resulting album, *Let It Be*). A few weeks later—after apparently having learned their lesson about working without supervision—the group would return to EMI studios to record a proper album, *Abbey Road*, with Martin at the helm.

As many Beatles fans and scholars know, the group, disheartened with the results of the *Let It Be* sessions, turned the audio tapes over to Los Angeles-based producer Phil Spector to figure out what to do with them. Spector's mixes—to which he added orchestras and choirs to such songs as The Long and Winding Road and Across the Universe—were greeted with disdain by McCartney but released to radio nonetheless. These have since been restored to their original five-piece scope (the four Beatles plus keyboardist Billy Preston).

The only really entertaining segment in this film occurs during the finale in Episode Three, the group's live performance on the rooftop of Apple headquarters on Savile Row, which demonstrates that the band *could* still focus—and turn on the juice—when it wanted to (however, playing in tune is not much of a concern). This was a sorry substitute for a live performance, but dramatic tension, cinematically speaking, is inadvertently achieved when the police come

banging on the doors to shut down the rooftop jam.

In sum, this new film is serviceable as a historical document that sheds some light onto the group's by-then dysfunctional dynamic and subsequent breakup. It's astounding—and perhaps embarrassing—how immature the members behaved at this point, which is probably the reason this material has been withheld for 52 years. Indeed, during the proceedings, McCartney asks the others if they really want to behave this way in public, i.e., in front of the cameras.

Many viewers I've spoken with about the series say they find themselves fast-forwarding through the incessant chatter. The 1970 film *Let It Be* captures the same moment in time and makes the same point—without the meandering mess and minutia—and would probably suffice for most viewers.

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