

# Editor's introduction

This special issue of *Popular Music* marks the twenty-fifth anniversary of the Beatles' first recordings with producer George Martin – the first of the recordings which made the quartet the most well-known artists in popular music history. Through the fledgling global communications systems of the 1960s the name and the sound of the Beatles reached virtually every country of the world, in a process which is now commonplace but which in the 1950s would have been unimaginable.

If the Beatles were the most well-known and, on commercial criteria at least, the most popular white Anglophone musicians of their era, were they also the best, or the most original? As successive waves of new artists have emerged in Anglo-American music, each with its critical champions ready to claim genuine originality or authentic inheritance of tradition, these issues have been marginalised. Tim Riley's article returns to them, in pointing to the innovatory character of the Beatles' ensemble work, their conservation and transformation of the rock 'n' roll heritage and in exploring the alchemy of the Lennon–McCartney relationship.

There is a more parochial reason for this special issue. It is arguable that without the advent of the Beatles, a journal like *Popular Music* would not have been possible. For reasons that deserve fuller exploration than vague references to a sixties *Zeitgeist*, the music of the Beatles proved to be a catalyst for the serious and scholarly study of contemporary Anglo-American pop music. When William Mann, chief classical music critic of *The Times*, summarised the musical highlights of 1963, he singled out the songs of Lennon and McCartney, comparing them with Schubert's lieder. So began a trail which led through articles, theses and courses to Wilfred Mellers' *Twilight of the Gods* (1973), the first full-length study of the group's music, and beyond.

As a result of this process, the first bridgeheads for academic study of popular music were built in music departments, but also in sociology, literature and elsewhere. The current series of essays is not intended to summarise all aspects of the Beatles' career or to cover all intellectual approaches – the important and relatively uncharted economic dimension is missing for example. But while these articles represent simply some of the current work in this area, they also illustrate the value of the present multi-disciplinary status of popular music studies.

Beatles' musicology is represented in this issue by Toru Mitsui's and Peter Ingham's close analysis of some of the group's earliest work. In addition to being a piece of musical detective work, it offers a glimpse of a style in formation. Some much more recent work in a different medium is the subject of Henry Sullivan's article. It uses a form of narrative analysis drawn from psychoanalysis to consider the dream structure of Paul McCartney's 1984 film, *Give My Regards to Broad Street*. In doing so, he examines once again the elusive character of the Lennon–McCartney partnership.

Discussions of musicians' influence on others frequently focus on stylistic traits. By taking a sociological perspective Lawrence Zion shows how far the Beatles' musical example was part of a complex of factors in the emergence of a new Australian beat group music in the 1960s. In particular, he emphasises the role of

recent immigrants from Europe in mediating new styles and forms. Finally, in presenting the first close examination of the anti-rock music ideologies of the religious Right in America, Mark Sullivan's article is a reminder that not everybody loved the Beatles!

**Dave Laing**