

***Get Back* to Where You Might Belong Unveiling the Beatles: Knowledge of Music Theory**

Abstract: The release of the documentary film *Get Back* in late 2021 garnered significant public attention, particularly among Beatles enthusiasts, due to its utilization of previously unreleased footage and audio recordings from the 1969 *Get Back* sessions. Unlike the original *Let It Be* film (1970), which only incorporated a fraction of these materials, the new approach and advancements in digitalization provided an unprecedented opportunity for the public to immerse themselves in this historic musical event.

This paper aims to illuminate the Beatles' understanding of various musical elements as depicted in the film. As a music theorist, the chance to delve into the depths of the Beatles' knowledge and application of music theory within their creative process has been truly captivating. Analyzing their compositional and production techniques and arrangements offers a comprehensive exploration of their musical prowess.

By examining selected musical moments from the *Get Back* sessions, this research seeks to uncover how the group's intuitive understanding of music theory informed their creative processes.

This investigation offers a fresh perspective on a pivotal episode in the Beatles' history and contributes significantly to the broader understanding of music theory and its application in popular music. The findings presented herein will enrich and deepen our appreciation of the Beatles' musical legacy, fostering a stronger connection to their lasting impact on popular music composition.

Keywords: The Beatles, film, *Get Back*, Peter Jackson, music theory

1. *Bi(bli)ographical Basis*

Hundreds of books and thousands of texts related to The Beatles have been written. The upcoming article will attempt to be different from them. Namely, most of the mentioned sources are biographical, monographic, and even sensationalistic-apocryphal; at best, they fall into the domain of popular science. In contrast, we will aim to approach this band's oeuvre from the perspective of music theory – at least in the broadest sense – to establish the extent of the group members' knowledge of this discipline.

One could reasonably question the validity of such an approach: Can a pop music group, whose intentions noticeably differ from those of classical music creators, “fit into” the methodology applied to the latter? For these reasons, we must adapt our approach to somewhat reconcile two different aesthetic perspectives. We will leave the question of “elitism”, which still prevails in some circles, for a separate discussion. It can be said with reason that two categories of scholar's study popular music, with the differences between them becoming increasingly less pronounced over the years and decades. The first category includes “traditional” musicologists, ethnomusicologists, and theorists, who, like us, are “forced” to adapt their research tools to different musical perspectives. One of the bibliographical sources we will briefly use in this article is David Machin's book *Analyzing Popular Music: Image, Sound, Text* (Machin, 2010).

The second category comprises researchers whose background lies precisely in popular music, meaning they often do not have traditional high-level music education. They may be columnists familiar with this topic or even pop musicians themselves. In that sense, a good example is the author of the book, *File Under Popular: Theoretical and Critical Writings on Music.*, drummer Chris Cutler (b. 1946) (Cutler, 1985).

Although we will strive to avoid historico-biographical discussions in this article, we will touch upon certain elements necessary for a more precise contextualization.

The Beatles achieved global fame and their greatest commercial success between 1962 and 1966, during the period commonly called “Beatlemania”. They accomplished this through highly attended concerts worldwide and record releases that consistently topped the charts. Additionally, two comedy films, *A Hard Day's Night* and *Help!*, are noteworthy mentions from this segment of their career.

The year 1966 was a turning point. The Beatles ceased touring in August, which would be a permanent decision. Until their definitive breakup in 1970, they functioned as a studio group, with only occasional television appearances and a single

“spontaneous” concert held as part of the project that is the subject of this article. This decision was almost immediately reflected in a transformation of their sound. While most albums from the “Beatlemania” era were produced within a very limited time frame, the newly emerged circumstances and financial possibilities allowed the group to reserve significantly more studio time for ambitious musical endeavors.

Although hints of this transformation had been present earlier¹, the real results arrived around the holiday season of 1966/67 with the release of the double A-side single *Strawberry Fields Forever/Penny Lane*. This single only gave a glimpse of what was to come. In June 1967, after much speculation in the newspapers that they had “creatively dried up”, The Beatles released a new LP album titled *Sgt. Pepper’s Lonely Hearts Club Band*. Leaving commercial discussions aside, this record brought the band a definitive genre transformation from the classic rock characteristic of the first half of the 1960s into a psychedelic and, at times, progressive sound. In line with this, later that year, the group released another album, *Magical Mystery Tour*, originally conceived as a double EP. This project was actually the soundtrack for the television movie of the same name, the third film endeavor for The Beatles. After a hiatus of almost a year, influenced by partial projects, business endeavours, spiritual explorations, and arduous studio work, The Beatles returned to record stores in November 1968 with a double LP album, officially titled after the band itself but referred to as *The White Album* due to its cover.

If *Sgt. Pepper’s* was a milestone in the direction of psychedelia and progressive thinking, then *The White Album* is equally significant in the band’s timeline: as it marked the beginning of the dissolution phase. The relaxed approach to creative work, interpersonal tensions, and temporary departures from the band during production show how the group functioned at that time, with different members recording different compositions in separate studio rooms simultaneously (Tobler, 2009: 169). This ultimately resulted in a pronounced genre heterogeneity among the thirty songs, but it also raised reasons for concern.

2. On “Get Back”

The new situation prompted some introspection among the group members regarding how to proceed. The band’s bassist and de facto musical leader since 1967, Paul McCartney (b. 1942), played a crucial role. His key conclusion was that The Beatles had entered a creative-interpersonal crisis due to something that had brought

¹ For example, in a handful of avant-garde on the 1966 album *Revolver*, did not make it onto the concert repertoire during the last tour.

them significant transformation just two years earlier: the cessation of concert tours and the lack of interaction with the audience. McCartney's initial notion endeavours the idea that the group must return to their roots, to joint performances, with minimal studio techniques to assist them in completing compositions as they envisioned (The Beatles Bible, 2021b). Essentially, this entailed a significant effort, considering that, not only since 1966 but also in earlier periods, The Beatles increasingly relied on the achievements of sound production. At that point, undoubtedly, the idea of touring was reactivated. However, after the exhausting sessions of *The White Album*, the group needed a quick project with mediate commercial results.

McCartney formulated an idea in December 1968, influenced by two separate instances:

1. Semi-live television spots for the Beatles' songs *Hey*, *Jude* and *Revolution* were created in late summer of that year. After several months of absence, these spots returned the group to the media spotlight.
2. The television special *Rock and Roll Circus* featured the group's major rivals, The Rolling Stones. It brought together various popular musicians of the late 1960s, including The Beatles' John Lennon (1940–1980), who participated with his side project, the supergroup Dirty Mac². Directed by Michael Lindsay-Hogg (b. 1940), it likely influenced his enlistment to direct the Beatles' project.

However, as it turned out, by the time the business-production machinery around the group was set in motion, it became evident that the project was conceived much faster than The Beatles – still tired of the lengthy *White Album* sessions – could clarify what they wanted to do with it. The agreed-upon details were as follows:

1. An album would be recorded with new material without audio production interventions.
2. Video material would be recorded, including a documentary about the album's recording (a precursor to modern “making-of” films), and a television special or movie would follow.
3. A large comeback concert would be held (location unclear), which could but would not necessarily mark The Beatles' return to the concert stage.

We need to focus on several significant chronological aspects.

2 The fact that solo and side projects became conceivable during 1968 speaks volumes about the atmosphere within The Beatles themselves.

One of the key decisions regarding this project was not to use EMI's Studio 2 at Abbey Road in London, significant because The Beatles produced most of their discography there. Instead, the band decided not to use the technical facilities of their previous record company but to rely primarily on their own label, "Apple Corps", established just a few months earlier. So, the group assembled at the Twickenham film studio on January 2, 1969, and immediately began work on the project. As The Beatles began to gather on the first day, film cameras under the direction of Michael Lindsay-Hogg started rolling and capturing every moment. Over the next few weeks, they accumulated dozens of hours of material. On January 10, George Harrison (1943–2001) left the band, dissatisfied with working conditions and the treatment of his compositions. After negotiations, he returned about a week later when The Beatles established a new, modern music studio within their company, "Apple Corps". On January 22, the group, which did not have a permanent keyboardist, was joined by Billy Preston (1946–2006), who immediately filled this position.³ The band rehearsed and recorded new songs as well as numerous old songs and covers until January 30, when it was finally decided to perform: on the roof of the "Apple Corps". building in Savile Row, London. The so-called "rooftop performance" included seventeen songs (The Beatles Bible, 2024b). Except for the composition *One After 909*, which had been abandoned years earlier, all were written in the preceding days and weeks. As the performance was spontaneous and surprising for the audience (in the business district of London), it was interrupted by the police. The next day, the group recorded a few more songs and then – left the project (The Beatles Bible, 2023).

Most of the audio and video material was initially "bunkered" in the archives of "Apple Corps" – except for the songs *Get Back* and *Don't Let Me Down*, which were released as a double A-side single later that spring. While the group worked on their chronologically last studio LP album, *Abbey Road* (released in September of the same year), various ideas emerged regarding the leftover material from the project, which, in the meantime, had been titled after its central song, *Get Back*. Initially, producer Glyn Johns (b. 1942) took charge of the audio material, as he had effectively led all the recordings back in January.⁴ However, when he presented his two consecutive mixes in

3 Sean Egan highlights that the work on the album itself actually began only at that point. (Egan, 2009c: 187).

4 At this point, it is worth delving deeper into George Martin's pivotal role in the project. A trained musician with degrees in oboe and piano, Martin arguably deserves the epithet "Fifth Beatle" more than any other candidate. In the earlier years, alongside the group's manager, Brian Epstein (1934–1967), Martin played a significant role in transforming a provincial rock and roll band into a global sensation. His contributions included creating additional arrangements, employing state-of-the-art recording techniques, structuring albums, selecting singles, and personally overseeing sound during tours, especially at major concerts. Additionally, in situations where Lennon and McCartney were barely managing to play a few

the following months, The Beatles were unsatisfied and successively rejected them (The Beatles Bible, 2018a).

What happened in the following months would be unthinkable if The Beatles were not in a dissolution phase. Ignoring the unwritten rule that all decisions within the band must be made by consensus, the three members, Lennon, Harrison, and Ringo Starr (b. 1940), bypassed McCartney. They revived the project, enlisting American producer Phil Spector (1939–2021) (The Beatles Bible, 2021d). He took over the material and began completely transforming the sound, thus destroying the idea of the album as an effort without production interventions. It soon included orchestrations, choir, and overdubs by the band members themselves. Finally, the album was released as *Let It Be*⁵ on May 8, 1970, weeks after the public was officially informed that The Beatles no longer existed (The Beatles Bible, 2018b). At the same time, Michael Lindsay-Hogg was also tasked with returning to the film (The Beatles, 2000: 316). Although he had days of material, he used just over an hour, enough for aesthetico-narrative manipulations. The pseudo-documentary *Let It Be* would become The Beatles' fifth⁶ and final achievement in the seventh art. It essentially depicts a group falling apart. (Ibid.).⁷

chords on the piano, Martin would step in to perform, such as in *In My Life* from the album *Rubber Soul*, where he transformed the piano sound into a harpsichord using tape-speed manipulation.

Martin's role shifted significantly as The Beatles evolved into a studio band. Despite the band members having their own sound ideas, their lack of formal musical education highlighted Martin's expertise in arranging and interpreting their artistic intentions. However, his influence waned during the *White Album*' work in 1968. Reports suggest that he and his chief sound engineer, Geoff Emerick, were reluctant to get involved in the escalating disputes among band members. Consequently, they distanced themselves from the work, even as Martin assumed the role of artistic director of 'Apple Corps,' the company established by The Beatles.

During the *Get Back* project, in addition to the previously mentioned aspects, it is noteworthy to underscore Martin's advisory role and his impact on specific instrumental solutions. His influence was evident in his alignment with the Lennon-McCartney 'clan' during Harrison's departure, a testament to his deep understanding of the band's dynamics. However, Martin and Emerick returned to collaborate fully with the group for the last time during the production of the album *Abbey Road*.

5 So, the approach to the material changed, and the composition *Get Back* was replaced with another central song, around which the entire project began to revolve.

6 The fourth film was the animated feature *Yellow Submarine*, accompanied by the soundtrack album of the same name. The album included very little new material (the title track itself was actually released in 1966 on the album *Revolver*), which was sporadically recorded between early 1967 and the beginning of 1968, after *Magical Mystery Tour* and before The Beatles went to India in the spring of that year. The cartoon was released in July 1968, and the soundtrack arrived while working on the *Get Back* project on January 13, 1969.

7 However, it was effective enough to convince the Academy Awards committee that at least the original music deserved the only major award that The Beatles had been missing up to that point – an Oscar. The Beatles also won a Grammy for the film – in a twist of irony, characteristic of The Beatles, the only member of the group who was not satisfied with the work on the project, Paul McCartney, officially received the award.

Unsurprisingly, the story of the *Get Back* project continued after 1970. In the following decades, materials from this project wandered. In 2003, the production machinery left behind by the band released the album *Let It Be...Naked*. The author of this article recalls how this edition was initially announced as “*Let It Be* stripped of Spector’s overbearing orchestrations”⁸. However, while *Naked* satisfied McCartney, it was just another remix (The Beatles Bible, 2021c). The next take on the *Get Back* project occurred in the late 2010s. The group’s surviving members (McCartney and Starr) handed the audio production reins to George Martin’s son, producer Giles Martin (b. 1969). Utilizing state-of-the-art technology, he approached the original master tapes. He began preparing them for the landmark release, *Let It Be: Special Edition*, which ultimately, in 2021, encompassed a staggering fifty-seven compositions – including those from the original album, as well as from Jones’ remix and outtakes (The Beatles Bible, 2021d).

Finally, it was decided that dozens of hours of film material would be handed over to the commercially successful director Peter Jackson (b. 1961). He also employed cutting-edge technology to remaster the old analog films – frame by frame. After several years of work, he curated about eight hours of material, and thus, in late 2021, three episodes of the film *Get Back* found their way to the streaming platform “Disney+” (The Beatles Bible, 2021e).

Understandably, disclosing all the details about the month-long project is impossible. However, this three-part film provides more than a solid and entirely different insight into the band’s work compared to *Let It Be*. The entire film gives the impression of a contemporary “reality show” in the best sense.

This approach finally allows fans of the band and researchers to understand numerous previously unclear aspects of the group’s work, such as their understanding of music theory.

3. *Categorization of Theoretical Concepts*

Let us return to the main discussion. Problematising theory in popular music, where we often need to encounter trained and academically educated musicians, requires, as mentioned, a certain adaptation of our methods. Some disciplines will have

⁸ An approximate quote from the Serbian rock columnist Momčilo Rajin (b. 1954) in the Belgrade daily newspaper *Politika*. The article was published at the end of 2003, but unfortunately, it is not available in public archives.

to be generalized, others specialized, and even in this specific case, we will temporarily have to “incorporate” certain aspects into music theory that conventionally do not belong to it. Author David Machin identifies pitch, melody, and phrasing as basic concepts, defining them as semiotic categories (Machin, 2010: 98–113). Additionally, he considers arrangement, which includes harmonization, sound quality, and rhythm (Ibid., 114–132).

Firstly, we will consolidate the discussion on standard musico-theoretical disciplines, namely harmony, form, and genre. In this way, we can grasp those aspects for which the Beatles did not have conventional music education, which we encounter systematically over many years of training. Of course, these aspects are not unfamiliar to the group; on the contrary, they encountered and mastered them through other methods, primarily intuitive, oral-auditory, and experiential.

The second disciplinary block we will address is creative, namely compositional, arranging, and improvisational. Although somewhat broader than the first instance, these are still standard theoretical disciplines. The film is a very valuable source material because the ideal for every theorist and analyst is to receive primary feedback from creators regarding how they compose and organize newly created material and possibly vary it.

Finally, the third theme we will cover in this article is outside the realm of music theory. Still, we will include it because it is inevitably intertwined with the other concepts. It involves audio production (recording and sound manipulation), the visual aspect, i.e., how the Beatles approached the film, the (unrealized) television special, and the rooftop concert, i.e., how it was realized musically.

3.1 *Harmony, Genre, and Form*

Our starting point is the conventional aspect primarily used in disciplinary terms in musical analysis.

However, as we will soon demonstrate, its autonomous application in approaching popular music could be better because it is almost entirely intertwined with the remaining two aspects, primarily the arranging-creative one. This can be attributed to the fact that the Beatles were not trained musicians, and their creative act was spontaneous. At the same time, the specialized terminology they used was directed and limited.

Knowledge of harmony as a discipline was, as with the vast majority of pop-rock musicians, limited to experience and ear in the case of the Beatles. Numerous scenes in the film itself evidence this. Two concepts that at least three group members (Lennon, McCartney, and Harrison) undoubtedly knew were chords (triads and seventh chords) and tonality.

Using chords was purely practical, serving the purpose of realizing the composition. They were used as substitutes for sheet music, which, by all indications, the Beatles did not know at the time. They had lyrics of new songs in front of them, often printed out. During the practicing sessions, at least in the initial stages of learning the composition, it boiled down to one band member, often McCartney (even when he was not the main author: In the song *Don't Let Me Down*, written primarily by Lennon, McCartney suggests to Harrison to arpeggiate the chords “like in the composition *Ave Maria*” [The Beatles 2021a: 00:49:45], dictating the chords, which the others would try to memorize. In the film's first part, the main songwriting duo (i.e., Lennon and McCartney) attempted to determine the key of Lennon's composition *Gimme Some Truth* on their instruments, which he likely initially wrote by ear (Ibid: 00:35:55).

Throughout the film, The Beatles would demonstrate their understanding of harmonic progressions. However, they likely did not stem from a broader disciplinary knowledge of harmony but rather from common patterns used in rock music. It is clear from these scenes that McCartney deserves an honorary place in the band in terms of theoretical knowledge. Indeed, in the second part, his “musical” conversation with the film clapper Paul Bond demonstrates this. McCartney explains to Bond that old standards already had predetermined chord patterns, which he practically illustrates on the piano. While performing his own composition from the *White Album*, *Martha My Dear*, he explains to Bond how seventh chords form the basis of every rock song, used the same way as triads (a rough quote),” but once someone starts using them, there's no turning back” (The Beatles, 2021b: 00:21:56). It remains to be seen whether McCartney, in an intuitive way, was on the trail of what more “schooled” composers had mastered over a century earlier. During rehearsals, he will use expressions like “classic rock ‘n’ roll chords” and then remark that they are (a rough quote) “like fashion and staff, are drained, like Oxford bags” (The Beatles, 2021a: 02:18:00).

Ringo Starr also had some knowledge of chords, at least on the piano, as evident from a scene in the second part of the film, where he improvises the song *I Bought a Piano the Other Day* with McCartney on the piano (The Beatles 2021b: 00:22:24). However, his and Harrison's knowledge of harmony is particularly evident in the first scene of the film's third part.⁹ At that time, Starr presented his song, *Octopus's Garden*, playing chords on the piano (The Beatles, 2021c: 00:01:27). The harmonic

⁹ The same footage was also used in the film *Let It Be*, so *Get Back* did not introduce any new material.

model he uses in the verses is in C major and includes (in order) the tonic, the sixth degree, the subdominant, and the dominant (Ibid: 00:01:47). Harrison joined him on guitar and made some modifications, primarily adding descending passing tones in the bass from the tonic to the subdominant and partially changing the harmonic rhythm (Ibid: 00:02:34). Then, both devised the bridge, with a tonicization of D minor (via the chromatic third relationship C-E-G – A-C#-E¹⁰), which resolves into a temporary tonic that is transformed into the second degree of the original C major, followed by the sixth, secondary dominant, and dominant of C major, naturally resolving into the tonic of the original key (Ibid: 00:03:26). Both emphasize this harmonic turn and return, highlighting the importance of the natural resolution where the harmonic flow started (Ibid: 00:03:37).

In the third part, along with Billy Preston, Harrison explored chord progressions for his song *Old Brown Shoe* on the piano (!) and openly expressed interest in the major seventh chord on the note “E” with the addition of the note “C” (“sixte ajoutée”, which, considering its direct resolution to the tonic chord of A minor, carries the meaning of “Chopin’s chord”), and enthusiasm for the ninth-chord on the note “E” (“E” with the addition of the note “F” as he said) (Ibid: 00:22:03–00:22:30). Then he discovered the alteration of the bass note in the major seventh chord on “F” to “F#” (Preston informed him that it was a diminished chord), and he pointed out how great it sounds on the piano. (Ibid: 00:23:20).

Based on what we see in the film, the Beatles’ understanding of musical structure was limited to the typical forms of pop-rock music of the 1960s, with terminology that developed in that regard: terms like “verses”, “middle eight/bridge”, and similar ones are prominent. Therefore, the genre of their rock compositions precisely conditions the form. At times, however, more general musical idioms can be heard. For example, during the rehearsal of the song *She Came in Through the Bathroom Window*, McCartney suggests to the band in advance that it is a three-part song (The Beatles, 2021b: 01:12:30).

The structure and chords of the composition *All Things Must Pass* had also been previously dictated, this time by Harrison (The Beatles, 2021a: 00:37:25).

From this, it follows that The Beatles were very much aware of some basic aspects of musical form, at least those arising from the rock genre and the lyrics. By 1969, this was becoming an important part of their rehearsals and initial practice sessions.

However, as mentioned earlier, these narrow theoretical aspects result from spontaneous creative arrangement, which will be discussed in the upcoming chapter.

¹⁰ Harrison’s use of chromatic progressions was certainly not unfamiliar, as evidenced by his songs from the *Abbey Road* album: *Here Comes the Sun* and especially *Something*.

3.2 *Composing, Arranging, Improvising*

The aspect related to composition, improvisation, and arrangement is where we can learn the most about the Beatles' general musical knowledge. While preparing this article, we noted that most points could be linked to these elements. By 1969, all four band members had become individual songwriters – even Starr was gradually establishing himself as a songwriter. As evident from the film, they did not always accept each other's suggestions.

As already mentioned, the lyrics of songs were written down and sometimes printed (occasionally with chord annotations), but the arrangements themselves were dictated orally. They experimented with them on the spot, likely another consequence of their lack of formal music notation knowledge.

However, in arranging, one person undoubtedly dominated: Paul McCartney. The film clearly shows that his formal writing partner, John Lennon, could not or would not oppose this stance.¹¹ On the other hand, Harrison disapproved of it and was in constant conflict with McCartney, which eventually led to his temporary departure from the band (Ibid., 2:22:18).¹² McCartney's dictation of arrangements mostly involved instrumentation, harmonization, production ideas, and rhythm patterns, which is somewhat unusual considering that drummers typically had the freedom to approach the composition from their perspective independently.¹³ For example, during the work on Lennon's song *Don't Let Me Down*, McCartney modeled the drum part and suggested it to Starr, to which Lennon commented laconically that it was done in the style of the American singer Arthur Alexander (1940–1993) (Ibid: 00:50:00).¹⁴

11 Although not directly referenced anywhere in the film, Lennon was a serious heroin addict in January 1969, along with his fiancée, Yoko Ono (b. 1933), who was present throughout the rehearsals (Womack, 2019). This might be a possible reason for his mental detachment from the project.

12 One of the novelties, which certainly was not known before the release of the film *Get Back*, is the hidden microphone with which Michael Lindsay-Hogg, apparently inclined to add a touch of sensationalism to the project, recorded a conversation between Lennon and McCartney in a restaurant during the days when Harrison's status in the group was uncertain. This conversation, although sometimes confusing, provides insight into the dynamics within the group. Lennon complained to McCartney that he had become too arrogant with arranging demands (The Beatles, 2021b: 00:13:43). He emphasized that he (Lennon) had become afraid to give suggestions and that Harrison's emancipation somewhat worked in his favor (Ibid, 00:13:50). McCartney defended himself by expressing his view that Lennon had always been the boss, and he (McCartney) had taken on the role of secondary boss in recent years, which Lennon rejected, implying that McCartney was now the main one (Ibid: 00:14:49).

13 It is worth noting here that McCartney, being a multi-instrumentalist, was a competent drummer. In fact, when Starr briefly left the band in 1968, McCartney filled in for him during the *White Album* sessions.

14 John Lennon also briefly offered rhythmic suggestions for his song *Dig a Pony* (The Beatles 2021b: 01:25:30).

McCartney's creativity, however, particularly shone through during the work on the project's titular song, *Get Back*. In this case, viewers get a sneak peek into the composing process. This song visibly emerged under the pressure to produce new material. It began with McCartney's improvisation on the bass guitar in the presence of semi-interested Harrison and Starr: (Ibid: 01:03:00). Interestingly, even in this initial phase, the same thematic and rhythmic motifs in the bass, which would "carry" the song in its final version, were established. The key (A Major) remained the same throughout.

Moreover, the vocal melody underwent only minor changes compared to the first version. However, after a few minutes, McCartney managed to capture the interest of the remaining two band members (Lennon was absent). Harrison attempted to "pick up" the chords on the guitar while Starr, tapping his hands, created rhythmic patterns. Several minutes later, Lennon arrived and joined them (Ibid: 01:06:00). Both at Twickenham and in the "Apple Studios", The Beatles continued to rehearse and modify the arrangement; however, the most significant changes were made to the lyrics. Initially, the song was intended to explicitly condemn violence against the African American population, which was fighting for great emancipation during those years. However, in the final version, the lyrics were softened (The Beatles 2021b: 00:17:13).

On the other hand, George Harrison's creative perspective could not be more different. When he presented the concept of his song *I Me Mine* on the guitar during a morning session at Twickenham, inspired (according to his words) by Viennese waltzes he had listened to on television the previous evening, only Starr accepted it amiably. McCartney attempted to pick up the chords with mild interest, and Lennon even somewhat mocked the idea (The Beatles, 2021a, :01:23:00–01:24:00).

While McCartney's, Harrison's, and Starr's compositional approaches are visible in the film, Lennon's can mostly be inferred through indirect experiences. For example, in the third part of the film, Harrison reminds Lennon of his own advice: "Finish 'em straight away as soon as you start them". (The Beatles 2021c: 00:21:47). Curiously, Lennon replied that he knew it was the best way but that he himself did not do it (Ibid: 00:21:58). Actually, in the film, he changes the lyrics several times and provides melodic suggestions for his songs.

In terms of arrangement, the most significant innovation introduced by the *Get Back* project, exclusively in its Savile Row phase, was the addition of a permanent keyboardist, effectively becoming the "fifth" Beatle. Even in the project's early days, while working on the arrangement for *Don't Let Me Down*, it was mentioned that the group needed a permanent keyboardist, implicitly to modernize the sound. Somewhat prophetically, at that stage, Harrison mentioned Billy Preston, an old acquaintance who had gained increasing prominence in Ray Charles's (1930–2004) band.

When the “Fender Rhodes” electric piano was installed in the new “Apple” studio, Lennon was the first to take it over, stating that he owned an older model. However, his skill only extended up to a few chords. Later, there were again remarks about the need for a permanent member for that instrument. Summoned or not, it soon turned out that Billy Preston happened to be in London those days, where he was recording several television shows (The Beatles, 2021b:01:26:28). Although there was a long-standing belief that Harrison had requested Preston to join the Beatles (The Beatles Bible, 2008b), the filmmakers insisted that his entrance into the studio was accidental and spontaneous (The Beatles, 2021b: 01:26:41). Preston dropped by to greet his old friends, whom he had known since 1962 from Hamburg. Almost immediately, the band sent him to the piano (Ibid:01:26:50). Before he joined the session, the Beatles played some of their previous recordings for him to get an idea of what they were working on (Ibid: 01:27:15). Following that, Preston first joined the group on the song *I’ve Got a Feeling*, instantly impressing all the band members with his improvisation that became permanent instrumentation. Lennon immediately told him that he was accepted into the group (Ibid: 01:29:25).

Improvisation plays a significant role in the sessions, as shown in the film. At times, there needs to be more discipline, especially in the first few days of the project. The group members are seen “wasting time” on songs by other artists and compositions from their past, visibly without serious intention to do anything final with them – all of this, possibly for entertainment purposes. Compositions written by Lennon or McCartney that were never realized on any Beatles release include *Song of Love*, *Madman*, *Commonwealth*, *Suzy Parker*,¹⁵etc. McCartney also improvised his song *Driving Back Seat of My Car*, which later appeared on his solo album. Among the old standards they covered were *Hi-Heel Sneakers* and the theme from the movie *The Third Man* (both improvisations led by Lennon). Among their old songs they performed were *Love Me Do* and *Run for Your Life*. The only previously unreleased composition that appeared on the album and the Rooftop concert was “One After 909”. Especially memorable was the improvisation of Roy Brown’s *Good Rockin’ Tonight*, made famous by Elvis Presley (1935–1977). Lennon led this performance, while McCartney, in a pseudo-contrapuntal manner, read aloud from various newspapers’ tabloid articles with negative and exclusivist attitudes toward the Beatles (The Beatles, 2021b: 00:59:33).

15 This song was intended for the American actress and singer of the same name (1932–2003), but she never performed it. Paradoxically, as the composition appeared in the film *Let It Be*, it is considered to have received an Oscar.

3.3 *Audio Production, Visual Aspect and Live Performance*

Technology, sound, and image production are undoubtedly the aspects of the music expertise that the group – and their team – knew best, as is evident from the film. However, as explained multiple times, the specificity of the *Get Back* project was that The Beatles attempted to minimize the importance of technology in production to recapture the band spirit from the early 1960s.

In this chapter, we will strive to cover only those audio-visual aspects that can be somewhat related to music theory.

Until January 22, the main challenge lay in acoustic and technical issues. The film studio in Twickenham was unfriendly and poorly soundproofed, and the band members and their surroundings complained repeatedly about these issues (cf. The Beatles 2021a, 00:16:20). While initially, there was an idea to film the television special right in that space, there were suggestions to install a small stage for the band itself to improve the acoustic (Ibid., 00:17:20).

However, the biggest problem during those days was with the track recorder. Throughout much of the 1960s, The Beatles used four-track recording machines, but these were mostly outdated by the end of the decade. Their record label, EMI, had an eight-track recorder at the main studio in Abbey Road, which the band requested to be delivered to them, but for unknown reasons, it was not done¹⁶ (Ibid: 00:25:40). As an ad-hoc solution, Harrison brought the eight-track equipment from his home studio, which was used until he (temporarily) left the band on 10 January (Ibid: 00:44:33). Although not commented upon, at the beginning of the second part, carriers are seen packing Harrison's equipment, evidently at his request to return it to him while he is absent (The Beatles, 2021b: 00:16:06). Ironically, Glynn Johns completed the installation of his control room in Twickenham just as the band decided to leave the premises (Ibid: 02:15:15).

When the band opted to continue rehearsals and recordings in their company's new studio, Apple Corps, on Savile Row in the middle of the month, a new kind of problem arose. Namely, the Beatles hired their confidant and friend, Yannis Alexis Mardas (1942–2017), aka „Magic Alex” to install the equipment. He claimed to understand electronic components well and even stated that he could produce certain things if needed. However, when Harrison and Johns inspected the studio before The Beatles continued their work there, they found that Mardas' makeshift equipment was unusable due to producing a lot of noise (Ibid: 00:40:39). Concerned, Johns immediately

¹⁶ This even hurt Harrison's ego, who commented that if it had been Benjamin Britten, such equipment would have been promptly sent to Paris as needed.

called George Martin, who persuaded EMI to deliver their mobile equipment (Ibid: 00:41:16). Engineers installed it over one weekend (Ibid). The new equipment consisted of two interlinked four-channel mixers connected to Harrison's well-known eight-track recorder (Ibid).

The Beatles contemplated several organizational and scenic variants during the phase when they were considering the television special. The initial question was who the Beatles addressed: the Anglo audience or the entire world.¹⁷ It remained unanswered. Lindsay-Hogg implied that this could be the band's last TV show at one point, which was not indicated earlier (The Beatles, 2021a: 01:33:58). The show's dramaturgy was discussed multiple times. Some projects from the band's earlier history – like the TV special *Around the Beatles* from 1964, where other musicians also appeared – were brought up. This time, there was the idea of setting up circular, transparent plastic scaffolds around the band (Ibid: 01:31:34).

At the same time, while preparing for the television show, The Beatles also selected the location for their grand comeback concert. The initially proposed megalomaniac idea has already been mentioned: although it was never finalized, the band considered sailing to Libya with their most loyal fans to perform in an amphitheatre from the Roman period (Ibid: 00:19:40). This plan aimed to add exoticism, exploit the excellent acoustics, and create a media sensation.

However, when The Beatles left Twickenham, they abandoned the idea of the television show and the large-scale concert organization. Instead, they focused on completing the documentary, recording the album, and a much "simplified gig". By the 26th, the idea had crystallized that the performance could be organized on the rooftop of "Apple Corps". (Ibid: 02:37:34). The concert was scheduled for 30 January at 1 PM.¹⁸

Lindsay-Hogg once again acted as a true precursor to reality show directors. He installed as many as five film cameras on the rooftop itself, one on the building across the street, three at street level, and a "hidden camera" in the building's reception.

If every aspect of this concert had to be captured on film, then the sound could not lag in any way. Full concert sound equipment (speakers and amplifiers) was brought onto the rooftop, not to mention plenty of microphones, a drum kit, and electric instruments (The Beatles, 2021c: 01:23:04 – 01:23:52). This is the only *Get Back* project segment in which George Martin fully joined his colleague Glynn Johns (Ibid:

¹⁷ In that sense, the "guy in the turban" from the *Hey, Jude* music video was mentioned (The Beatles, 2021a: 01:44:10).

¹⁸ Here, it is important to consider how much this concert was meant to evoke a sense of guerrilla action: the performance took place on the rooftop of a building in the business district of London, in the middle of a workday, without being notifying the police.

1:24:17). From the rooftop to the basement studio, cables were stretched to connect the microphones to the mixers directly. The event was monitored via a closed-circuit camera connected to a television screen to avoid mistakes (Ibid: 1:24:24).

So, although considerably simpler to organize than generous full-scale concerts, and even though this spontaneous gig was meant to be a surprise for the audience and the band's fans, for the sizable team around the Beatles, it posed a serious logistical challenge.

It is important to note that, although Billy Preston was an equal band member in terms of arrangement during the concert, the cameras mostly ignored him, as he was only seen for a couple of seconds in a gig that lasted longer than half an hour.

In qualitative terms, the rooftop concert was arguably one of the best Beatles live performances ever – save for technical faults. Although it ended less than ideally (with the police shutting it down), the positive fact is that much of the audio material was used for the *Let It Be* album (The Beatles Bible, 2008).

4. Concluding Remarks

The fact that the film and the *Let It Be* album were released when the public was already informed that The Beatles no longer existed left a bitter impression, suggesting that the band fell apart during their time at Twickenham and Savile Row. This impression is misleading. Although work on the *Get Back/Let It Be* project concluded on 31 January, The Beatles resumed their activities after a few weeks, sporadically recording material for their next project. While full-fledged work on the band's final produced album, *Abbey Road*, began in April, there is no clear-cut distinction between the two projects. More precisely, many songs rehearsed during January 1969 were released on *Abbey Road*, which hit record stores in September of that year. Among them are *Octopus's Garden*, *She Came in Through the Bathroom Window*, *Oh! Darling*, *I Want You (She's So Heavy)*, *Something*, etc.

Additionally, some songs appeared on solo albums of individual group members, namely: *All Things Must Pass* (Harrison), *Another Day* (McCartney), and *Gimme Some Truth* (Lennon). As mentioned before, *Get Back* and *Don't Let Me Down* were released as a double A-side single, and the former (in another version) also appeared in Spector's production of *Let It Be*. The album's title song and *The Long and Winding Road* were (atypically for the time) released both on the LP and as singles.

One production aspect that came to light only while making the film *Get Back* in the late 2010s and early 2020s artificial intelligence. Director Peter Jackson extensively utilized machine learning to isolate individual sound instances from noise (Gardner, 2021). This was employed to clean up the music for the film's purposes and make indistinct conversations audible (Ibid.).

This very aspect was then utilized in 2023 to produce John Lennon's 1970s demo for the song *Now and Then*, which the surviving Beatles attempted to finish between 1994 and 1996 but without success due to the poor quality of the magnetic cassette that Lennon utilized (The Guardian, 2023). However, new technology made it possible, and thus, this single found its way to the top of the charts over half a century after the band officially dissolved (Ibid.).

The most recent chapter in the story related to this project occurred when this text had already entered the review phase. In May 2024, with Lindsay-Hogg's consent, Peter Jackson released a remastered version of the original film *Let It Be* via the "Disney+" platform (The Beatles, 2024).

The film *Get Back* has shed light on the fact that the Beatles possessed an exceptionally intuitive knowledge of music theory, primarily in aspects that had practical applications in their music-making. They compensated for their lack of formal academic expertise with feeling and unique terminology. The expanded knowledge we have "attached" to music theory for this paper, such as arranging and production, was used abundantly and confidently. Although a complete reconciliation between the two worlds may never be possible, one must familiarize oneself with the "language" used in creating and realizing popular music.

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***Get Back*: Otkrivanje znanja Bitlsa o muzičkoj teoriji**

Apstrakt: Objavljivanje dokumentarnog filma *Get Back* krajem 2021. godine privuklo je veliku pažnju javnosti, posebno među ljubiteljima Bitlsa, zahvaljujući korišćenju ranije neobjavljenih snimaka i audio zapisa sa sesija *Get Back* iz 1969. godine. Za razliku od originalnog filma *Let It Be* (1970), koji je obuhvatio samo deo ovog materijala, novi pristup i napredak u digitalizaciji omogućili su publici jedinstvenu priliku da uroni u ovaj istorijski muzički događaj.

Ovaj rad ima za cilj da osvetli razumevanje Bitlsa o različitim muzičkim elementima, kako je prikazano u filmu. Analiza njihovih kompozicionih i produkcijskih tehnika i aranžmana, pruža sveobuhvatan uvid u njihovu muzičku veštinu. Ispitivanjem odabranih muzičkih trenutaka sa sesija *Get Back*, ovo istraživanje ima za cilj da otkrije kako je intuitivno razumevanje muzičke teorije članova grupe uticalo na njihove kreativne procese.

Ovo istraživanje pruža novi uvid u ključni trenutak u istoriji Bitlsa i doprinosi širem razumevanju muzičke teorije i njene primene u popularnoj muzici. Rezultati predstavljeni u ovom radu obogaćuju i produbljuju naše poštovanje prema muzičkom nasleđu Bitlsa, jačajući vezu sa njihovim trajnim uticajem na komponovanje popularne muzike.

Ključne reči: Bitlsi, film, *Get Back*, Piter Džekson, muzička teorija