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## Love, Music 'Driving' McCartney Into 2002

By Sean Egan

*Editor's note: This interview was conducted before the death of Paul McCartney's Beatles bandmate George Harrison, and is therefore restricted to talk of his new album and then-current events.*



PAUL McCARTNEY

As Paul McCartney approaches his 60th birthday, he is busy defying the maxim that states rock artists produce nothing of worth once they've past their early 30s. His new Capitol album, "Driving Rain," has garnered numerous accolades, including some from those who have previously accused the former Beatle of whimsy and artistic cruising.

The album is his first collection of new songs since 1997's "Flaming Pie." This relaxed release schedule is a far cry from the album-every-year routine McCartney was used to during most of his career. "We used to be told, 'The market demands you do one a year' and, like, four singles a year," he explains. "Now's it's more leisurely, really. I would actually be quite happy to do one a year, but it's just I don't have to, so I just do it whenever I fancy it."

The album came together almost by accident when McCartney arranged a trial run with producer David Kahne (the Bangles, Sugar Ray) in Los Angeles. "I was just gonna go out there on a slightly experimental thing to see if I enjoyed working with the producer," he says. "I'd met him personally and liked him but it didn't mean I was gonna enjoy working with him or that it would work out. He rang me about 10 days beforehand and said, 'Well, if we're gonna be that loose on it, isn't it a good idea if I ring a couple of guys to be just ready in case we want to work kind of live-ish?' So I said, 'Yeah, great.'"

"He happened to have in mind three people, so those are the guys that showed up on the Monday morning," he continues. "The idea was if it worked out, we'd keep to it like that, if it didn't then I might go to multi-tracking and

layering the things with me playing bass, drums, and stuff. But in actual fact we really enjoyed playing together and got through a lot of work quite quickly."

The musicians -- guitarist Rusty Anderson, keyboardist Gabe Dixon, and drummer Abe Laboriel Jr. -- are all around half McCartney's age or less. This raises the question of whether musicians to whom McCartney has always been a legendary figure are able to muster the courage to tell him he is doing something wrong in the studio. "People always think that with me," McCartney offers. "I try and make it clear to everyone that I don't want to be treated like that. Personally, when I'm just hanging out with people, there's no question of that. It's really people who don't know me or haven't met me [that] tend to think, 'Well, he did do that' or 'He's a bit of a legend.' But really when we sit down and we have a cup of tea and we start talking about the songs, everyone speaks their mind."

The band gelled so well that the entire album (including some cuts held over for the next release because their lush nature was against the project's rough-hewn grain) was completed in two weeks. Though McCartney is a fluent guitarist, he concentrated on bass, continuing a rediscovery of the instrument that began on 1999's covers album "Run, Devil, Run." He enthuses, "It's f\*\*\*ing great, man! F\*\*\*ing good. Come back to me when you're playing bass as good as I am on this album and I'll give you a big kiss."

McCartney utilized his old Hofner violin bass -- seen in photographs going right back to the beginnings of the Beatles -- on many tracks, a model he admits most bass players would look down their noses at. "It was like 30 pounds it cost, so it's not exactly the world's most expensive, but the one I happen to have has got a really beautiful tone on it," he says. "I actually had it done by these people called the Mandolin Brothers in New York and they put it through the computer and the whole thing -- or whatever they put it through -- and did some real fine work in it and now it's spot on. It's really in tune. I think it's a really great instrument, actually. I think if you play it okay, it sounds pretty good. I mean, it sounded pretty good on most of the Beatles' records."

The new album opens with a track called "Lonely Road," whose message of heartache from the narrator to a departed lover some have taken to be about McCartney's deceased wife Linda. He rejects the theory. "I don't write like that," he says. "I kind of write a bit more from the subconscious so I don't actually know what I'm trying to say so much when I write; it's more when I look back on it. It probably is to do with Linda but it could be to do with anyone. What I like about writing songs is that I have my meaning and I have my

interpretation but obviously anyone who is just trying to get over someone, then it should relate to them too."

The track "Heather," however, is certainly directly related to his fiancée Heather Mills, although not in the way one might expect. When Mills found McCartney doodling a riff at the piano one morning, she assumed it was a Beatles or Wings number. "She said, 'Which one is that?'," McCartney recalls. "I said, 'What do you mean? I'm just making it up.' She thought it was part of my past repertoire. I was just jamming and I was ready to throw it away. She said, 'No, no, that's good.' So that made me keep it. I thought, I better call it 'Heather' in that case."

McCartney admits it feels strange to be close to someone who is conscious of so little of his back catalog. "Her younger sister knows a lot about the Beatles and is more into it, so it's not just a sort of ageist thing," he points out. "I said to her, 'How is that? 'Cos a lot of people know, you know, 'Get Back.' And she said it was 'cos she was raised mainly on classical stuff. She knows all about 'The Valkyrie,' whereas I don't. So it's good. It's refreshing."

"Driving Rain" was originally intended to include 15 tracks, but the new song "Freedom," written after the World Trade Center atrocity, was belatedly added. McCartney played this stomping number at the Concert for New York benefit for the victims of the attacks, and it's a remixed version of that performance that appears on the album.

"I wrote it for one reason only," he says, "which was that at the Madison Square Garden concert I had the alternative of playing all the old songs like pretty much everyone was going to do -- and so making the whole thing an oldies evening -- or try and get a little bit interesting, maybe, and try and work something out. Pete Townshend said to me, 'F\*\*\*ing hell, Paul. You are brave. You're gonna workshop a song in front of 100 million people.' But the thing is I wanted to do it so I wrote it very simply as a kind of anthemic thing."

The track's perhaps over-simple sentiment recalls the 1972 Wings single "Give Ireland Back to the Irish," written after the Bloody Sunday massacre and condemned by some as a naive and rushed commentary by an author who didn't understand the intricacies of the problem. That track has yet to appear on any McCartney best-of sets, arousing suspicions that he may agree with that analysis. "There's a risk in anything you do, but I'm glad I wrote 'Give Ireland Back to the Irish'," he demurs. "It didn't [appear] on the ["Wingspan"] Wings compilation -- it's never been up for consideration on anything else -- 'cos it maybe wasn't the best bit of work but it was No. 1 in Ireland. And Spain, interestingly

enough."

McCartney has no time for those who object to his use of the word "freedom" on the grounds that the lack of freedom of people in the Gaza Strip -- and America's complicity in it -- is partly responsible for the atrocity. "The thing is," he reasons, "if you look at any sort of attack like that, you have to then say, what could America have said? 'Okay, guys, fair enough, but just don't do it again?' This was not just a little stone's throw. This was taking out the two most important buildings in New York and attacking the Pentagon. That's an act of war, whichever way you look at it. It's easy to just say, 'Oh, this shouldn't have had a response' but I think that's like not having a response to a Hitler attack. If we'd had no response to that, you and I probably wouldn't be here right now."

"Maybe American policy is not all we would wish it to be but that's not the point," he continues. "So then go to the U.N. or discuss it. There are peace talks. Get in the peace talks. But you just don't do a thing like this and expect no response. You're taking out innocent people."

In the vein of rediscovery of past simplicities, this writer suggests to McCartney that, as stereo mixes were an afterthought in popular music up to 1967, the lack of mono CD versions of the Beatles albums "Help!," "Rubber Soul," "Revolver," and "Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Heart's Club Band" means that modern audiences are not hearing them the way the Beatles intended them to be heard. "That's right," he agrees with surprising readiness. "You get these old black and white movies -- or people might want to make a black and white movie now -- but then everyone says, 'Well excuse me, everyone's got color TVs and they want to see color.' So it's really that kind of reason and we were a bit nervous about it at first and we said, 'Well, let's hear them' and actually I thought on one they really sounded cool in stereo."

"It wasn't as we intended them -- in fact I'd heard stuff that we'd made and was on there but the original mix didn't show up because it was mono," he adds. "I think it's six of one and half a dozen of the other. I think you're right in as much as this is a kind of omission but you've got to sort of weigh it against how many people would want mono records." When it's pointed out that EMI often put out "digipak" archive releases which feature both the mono and stereo versions of an album on one CD, McCartney says, "You're just opening the can of worms to allow even more Beatles releases. And if we ever do it, you can say, 'I told 'em to do that!'"

Though McCartney is approaching the 60-years-old milestone that contemporaries like Bob Dylan and Eric Burdon have already reached, he says there is no

corresponding sense of urgency regarding his workrate. "It's not my philosophy," he says. "I'll go when the time comes. I don't have that kind of a mind that thinks, 'Better do a couple of albums.' I mean, how would that benefit me anyway? Financially? Bang out a couple more albums so I can, what, spend it in heaven? That doesn't occur to me, that kind of thing. The only reason I do this stuff is because I love it."

As to the current perception of him as a man going through an artistic renaissance, he is similarly philosophical. "I'm proud of it," he says of the new album. "It's a decent album and if that adds up to me being reborn then so be it. I don't really see it as that, 'cos I never thought I'd died."