

'The Sgt Pepper Album Cover Shoot Dissected'

30th March 1967

In July 2007 I decided it would be a good idea to gather all the known Sgt Pepper cover out-takes. I like to play around with animation and editing and I thought it would be cool to try and get the images in the right order and scale and then fade from one to the next in a short 'slideshow'. I thought that as the background was the same in all of them it should be fairly straightforward to assemble something that looked reasonably seamless.

I started keeping every one I could find in a layered Photoshop document. At this point I realized that the camera had moved slightly between virtually every shot, so they didn't really line up very well, even after using some digital trickery to adjust the perspectives and skew between them. I was a little disheartened as it would take more work than I'd imagined so I turned my attentions elsewhere for a while. However, It dawned on me one afternoon that I could achieve the effect I was looking for by cutting The Beatles out of every photo and then pasting them on to a common background, and as I had a good few different poses by now I figured that I should be able to copy background details from all the different shots and make one 'master' background of the empty set.

Clearing the set...

Some initial experiments proved quite fruitful and I 'got into it'. Recreating the empty set ended up taking me months on and off, copying tiny details from one source, colour-balancing and scaling them and dropping them into my montage. Hours of painstaking experimenting into the small hours would sometimes yield just the smallest amount of progress.



Copy and paste...

Eventually, I had something I was pleased with and was ready to move on to phase 2: Copying and pasting The Fabs from the various outtakes onto the master background. This was also much, much more time consuming than I had anticipated and with every result there was a new problem. However, after staring at these pictures for 100s of hours while I did this, little revelations started to occur to me...



Fakes!!



The three pictures featuring Paul with his Rickenbaker bass are all fakes. The images of Paul, and of John and George with their guitars, are probably from stills taken on the set of the 'Hello Goodbye' video which have then been pasted into the original. I did think for a while that the 'Paul' figure was genuine and that he must have had a couple of shots taken of just him on the Pepper set for posterity. But toward the end of the whole project I realized that he has the same expression on two of the shots and that actually all three shots had his head pasted in from genuine Pepper outtakes. By the time of the 'Hello Goodbye' video he had shaved off his moustache so I guess the pasted-in faces were to disguise this. Of the other Beatles in these 'outtakes', the bottom halves of George's legs are pasted in in addition to the image from the 'HG' shoot, there is some messy Photoshopping to the right of Ringo (seated) where you can see several tell-tale signs of John having been obscured by the insertion of a rogue brass instrument and some traces of an attempt to airbrush out a further image of George (leaving a trace of the tuba he was posing with). John with his guitar just doesn't 'look right' (there is no drop shadow between his right arm and Paul) and, more incriminatingly, he has a new head. There are also a couple of fakes floating around which show the alternate bass-drum skin pasted onto variations of the genuine outtakes, but for the following reason these are all identifiable at a glance.

Chronology

The alternate bass drum skin (which was on the 'back' of the same drum) was only professionally photographed once, in the very first shot of the day. The drum was then rotated to display the more famous head and the second shot, with The Beatles in a very similar pose, was the one used on the finished cover. Once these initial two planned, posed shots were done then the rest of the shots were taken, seemingly with improvised poses in the main, and with a couple of changes to the props on the set which helped greatly in establishing the probable chronology of the photos, which is detailed below.



Shot #1



Shot #2

The most noticeable change after shots #1 and #2 is the position of the doll sat on the chair wearing a 'Rolling Stones' sweater (this doll is often referred to as the 'Shirley Temple Doll', but it isn't - the image of Shirley Temple is peeping out from the left of 'Diana Dors'). After the two main shots were done the camera was moved in closer and this prop was moved from a 'far right' position to in front of the DD waxwork, presumably to keep it in shot.



**Detail showing
movement of doll**



Detail showing movement of hookah pipe

At the same time, the hookah pipe was draped over the waxwork of Ringo, and John places the horn he is holding on the top of the bass drum. It's on the right in Shot #3 and then moves to the left for shots #4 to #7. Paul is still holding the cor anglais from the first two shots. George and Ringo have removed their hats. In shots #3 to #5 the euphonium on the floor in front of the waxwork 'Ringo' is upright then in shots #6 and #7 it has been tilted to its right, perhaps to prevent it from being stepped on and damaged. There is a shot of George stooping to his right and apparently pointing at the instrument. He is possibly about to move it (shot #5). This shot was recreated in the slideshow with the instrument at the wrong angle (sorry). The correct sequence (cropped) is pictured to the right. All the subsequent shots have the euphonium tilted to its right. There may be further photos from this specific sequence but at the time of writing I only have the five featured here.



In shot #8 George and John have sunken closer to the floor and Paul has swapped his cor anglais for a trombone. Ringo is unmoved! In shot #9 they have a little change around. Maybe George and John were getting bored of crouching. Paul hands the trombone to John who leans on it for shot #10, as Ringo heads around the back of the bass drum.



More props are required so Paul gets up to bring them on to the set (shot #11). It's all smiles again (shot #12) as George is handed a tuba, Ringo the horn only from a sousophone, and Paul equips himself with a tuba like George's. Shot #13 is very similar to shot #12, the main difference being that Paul has been handed the 'sci-fi' trophy that was in the flowerbed, in front of letter 'L'. Shot #14 is in turn very similar to shot #13, Ringo having now lifted the sousaphone horn to chest height.



There is a further 'informal' photo (below) which shows a pose involving Paul & George standing side-by-side in front and to the right of the bass drum. There is no colour photograph (as far as I know) of these two in this position.



Obscured

Everybody knows that images of Hitler, Jesus and Elvis were made but not used and that two further characters (Gandhi and Leo Gorcey) were later airbrushed out before the album was released, but what of the poor people that were there but ended up being obscured from the camera lens? How sad to be so close to appearing but remaining unseen! Below are some of the people who can be seen in informal shots of the set.



Who is the old man in picture 'A'? You can still see part of his head on the finished album but he's mostly obscured by Lawrence Of Arabia. I've never seen him credited anywhere but he does look familiar. Please do [get in touch](#) if you recognise him. The little girl in picture 'A' was moved from next to him to the far left of the set (behind the Beatles' waxworks) (B). I'm almost sure this is Queen Elizabeth 2 as a child. If it is we have both Queen Elizabeths on the set (QE1 is hidden behind George on the final album cover). The 'couple' in picture 'C' are also unseen behind the Beatles' waxworks on the final cover. Is it Sophia Loren and Harold MacMillan? Or is she Pat Phoenix?! Again, if you know please fill me in!



Is that Elvis in picture 'D'? He was standing furthest on the left during the shoot and missed out! The man in picture 'E' can be seen on the finished cover, obscured by Diana Dors. 'F' and 'G' just show the 'Rolling Stones Doll' in her original garb, and then changed into a hat and rosette before pulling on her famous outer garment!

'The Slideshow'

Thanks very much for reading so far. I hope you enjoyed it and, as I said earlier, if you have any comments, ideas, theories or observations regarding anything on this page please [email](#) them to me!

So anyway. This slideshow. Well, turn on your speakers, click play on the youtube link below and peek in on some of the events of the day that the arguably most instantly recognisable photographs of all time were taken.

Michael Mason March 2009

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