

Richard Lester's

**"A Hard
Day's
Night"****The
Beatles**

By Jim Elyea

In
late
1963,*A Hard Day's Night*

was intended by United Artists to be done fast and cheap to exploit the fame of The Beatles in the British market in the few months before it faded. The idea behind making the picture was that even if the movie didn't do particularly well, United Artists Records would be able to make a tidy sum on the deal by issuing the soundtrack album. This was, of course, before their appearances on *"The Ed Sullivan Show"* in February of 1964, when they became literally overnight sensations in America. Walter Shenson was talked into producing this quickie comedy. When Shenson then met with director Richard Lester and mentioned the idea of the movie to him, Lester literally leapt on his chair at the Hilton Coffee Shop and said, "My God, can I direct it?" The answer was yes.

It was one of those serendipitous pairings of the right group, The Beatles, and the right director, Richard Lester. Lester, an American, had worked in England for many years, first in television, then in films. In the six and a half weeks of shooting, Richard Lester defined forever how the world thought of The Beatles. No matter what else is written about or shown of those four lads from Liverpool, it is the characters that we see in *A Hard Day's Night* that are The Beatles to us all.

A documentary style was settled upon, which involved hand-held cameras for much of the shooting, and the using of available light whenever possible. Lester constantly grabbed the camera, and shot what he wanted to at the moment. The train sequence in particular, was all shot hand-held, much of it by Lester himself wedged

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against the far wall of the train car.

One of the problems with a documentary style however, was the interruption of that mood by the surreal aspect of The Beatles magically breaking into song, as in the railway car. Lester's brilliant on-the-spot solution to this was

"My God, can I direct it?"

to introduce an element just as surreal several scenes earlier of The Beatles somehow managing to run alongside the moving train to taunt the upper class gentleman. This set up the surreal concept as being normal, and the rest of the film just flowed from there.

Lester's method was to make the filming as light as possible, "so that you are not really aware that there was anything serious or important going on." He was not afraid to alter the process in the middle of shooting in order to suit changing conditions, so improvisation was a big part of the process, such as the interviews at the press conference

being made up on the spot. It seems that the film company was thrown off the streets by the police because they were gathering too much of a crowd. Lester had the company duck inside the Scala Theatre, where the concert scenes were to be filmed, to an upstairs room, and he designed the press conference scene on the spot. On his instructions, in two hours 60 plus people, including most of the crew, were assembled to play press and photographers. Lester fed them the questions, and then later cut all the bits together, sometimes mixing up the questions and answers, but always to good effect.

Almost all of the exteriors shot on real locations had to be done in one take; as soon as The Beatles were seen by the literally thousands of fans that would assemble at each location, security inevitably broke down, and that location had to be abandoned.

Lester is actually seen in the picture, but more out of necessity than through a conscious effort a la Hitchcock, as when he can be spotted in the background walking across the stage at the Scala Theatre. There were other scenes in which it was expedient for a part of him to be in the shot. In the television control room scenes, Lester called upon his earlier television experience, and did all the actual punching in of the different monitors himself. On a day when The Beatles were shot larking about on the field in back of the theatre, Paul was sick, and so Lester donned dark trousers and Beatle boots, grabbed a hand-held Arriflex, and used his own feet and legs as Paul's.

The original ending of the film called for The Beatles to leave the theatre by car, but it was changed to a helicopter to give that feeling of a larger than life release from their prison. The sequence took only a half-day to shoot, and with the helicopter on hire for the full day, it was also used to great effect in the afternoon to shoot overhead shots of the Lads playing in the field.

It is always wonderful to go back and look at *A Hard Day's Night* because for that hour and a half, none

of us had grown up yet; not us, not The Beatles, not any of us.

Richard Lester also directed The Beatles' second feature *HELP!* (1966), as well as *How I Won the War* (1967) (with John Lennon), *The*



Paul, Producer Walter Shenson and Director Richard Lester on set.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 3

The Beatles

TIDBITS OF A HARD DAY'S NIGHT

The constant mention of Paul's grandfather being "very clean" are references to actor Wilfrid Brambell playing a rag and bone man in *Steptoe and Son* (1962), featuring the catch-phrase, "You dirty old man." *Steptoe and Son* (1962) was remade in the USA as *Sanford and Son* (1972).



Norm and Shake are loosely based on The Beatles real-life road managers Neil Aspinall and Mal Evans, respectively.



The people chasing The Beatles into the train at the beginning of the film are real fans.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 5



RICHARD LESTER, FROM pg 2

Three (and Four) Musketeers (1973 & 74) and *A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to the Forum* (1966). ■

Jim Elyea is President of the Alex Film Society, and is currently writing a book on Vox amplifiers; the kind The Beatles played.

Thanks to Phil DiFranco for his 1977 interview with Richard Lester used as a partial source for this article.



Events

ALEX FILM SOCIETY

Alex Film Society members from La Cañada to Yorba Linda gathered in downtown Los Angeles on Saturday, March 18th for a special "members only" guided tour of the 14th annual "Art of Motion Picture Costume Design" exhibition at the prestigious Fashion Institute of Design and Merchandising.

The tour lasted over 90 minutes, and provided AFS members the chance to view costumes from, and to gain insights into, the work of the Costume Designers for 25 films including *Memoirs of a Geisha*, *Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire*, *Mrs. Henderson Presents*, *Serenity*, *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory*, *Brokeback Mountain*, and *The Corpse Bride*.

This tour is a way for the Alex Film Society Board to thank you, our members, for your support, and although it is the first such opportunity made available to you, we intend for it to not be the last. Check upcoming issues of *The Voice of the Theatre* and Member letter for additional member opportunities as they become available!

Do you have a suggestion for a special AFS member event? If so, we'd love to hear it!

Not a member? You can join in the lobby after the show. Please contact AFS Vice-President Daryl Maxwell at daryl@alexfilmsociety.org ■



"A Hard Day's Night"

Directed byRichard Lester

Produced byWalter Shenson

Written byAlun Owen

Original SongsJohn Lennon &
Paul McCartney

Additional Song.....George Harrison
(song "Don't Bother Me")
Paul McCartney

Musical DirectorGeorge Martin

Director Of Photography..Gilbert Taylor

Edited by.....John Jympson

Associate ProducerDenis O'Dell

Assistant Director.....John D. Merriman

Art Director.....Ray Simm

Costume Designer.....Julie Harris

Hair Stylist.....Betty Glasow

Makeup Artist.....John O'Gorman

Sound Recordist.....H.L. Bird & Stephen Dalby

Sound Laboratory.....Michael DiCosimo
Dolby Labs

Title DesignerRobert Freeman

Title Opticals.....Ronnie Wass*

Camera OperatorDerek V. Browne

Continuity.....Rita Davison

Assistant Editor.....Pamela Tomling



Black and White – 1964 – 85 minutes
United Artists
Print courtesy of the Walt Disney Company

Cast

John Lennon.....John
Paul McCartneyPaul
George Harrison.....George
Ringo StarrRingo
Wilfrid Brambell.....Grandfather
Norman RossingtonNorm
John JunkinShake
Victor SpinettiTV Director
Anna QuayleMillie
Deryck GuylerPolice Inspector
Richard Vernon.....Man on train
Eddie MalinHotel Waiter
Robin Ray.....T.V. Floor Manager
Lionel Blair.....T.V. Choreographer
Alison SeebohmSecretary
David Jaxon.....Young boy

Bridget Armstrong.....Lead makeup woman*

John Bluthal.....Car Thief*

Pattie Boyd.....Jean (schoolgirl on train #1*

Phil Collins.....Seated fan with necktie*

Rosemarie FranklandBrunette show girl*

Kenneth Haigh.....Simon Marshall*

Julian HollowayAdrian, Simon's Assistant*

Clare Kelly.....Barmaid*

David LangtonActor*

Linda Lewis.....Audience member*

Jeremy LloydTall dancer at the disco*

Derek NimmoLeslie Jackson (magician)*

Margaret Nolan.....Grandfather's girl at casino*

Gordon Rollings.....Man with sandwich in pub*

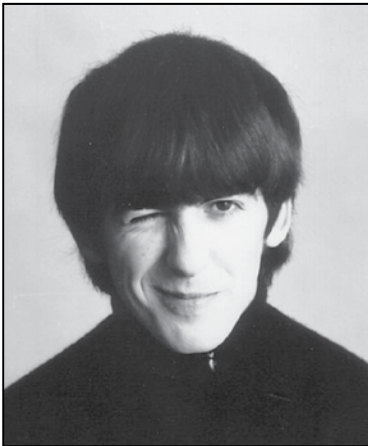
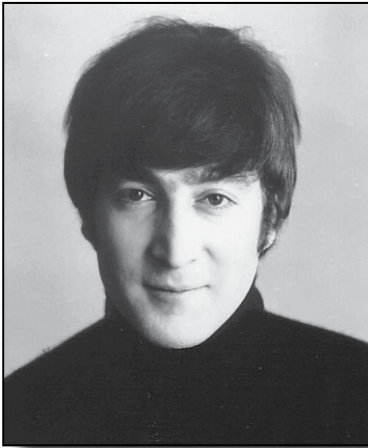
Geraldine Sherman.....Girl outside secondhand shop*

Marianne Stone.....Society reporter*

Michael Trubshawe.....Casino manager*

*uncredited

IMDb
amazon.com. credits from
Internet Movie Database: IMDB.com



Tidbits, cont'd

The movie's working title was simply "The Beatles".

The word "Beatles" is never mentioned in the movie.

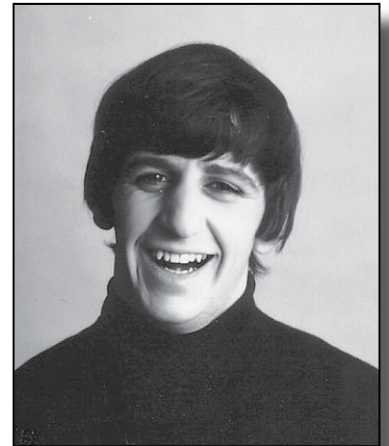
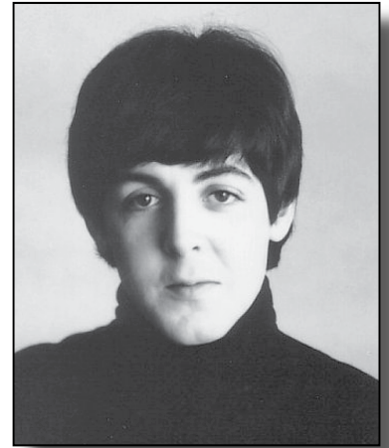
Screenwriter Alun Owen claimed that the word "grotty" was a word used in Liverpool to mean "grotesque", but the Beatles never heard it before and believed Owen made it up. It subsequently passed into general usage and linguists certainly cite The Beatles as the popularizers of the word in the early 1960's and trace its origins to Liverpool.

The song "*You Can't Do That*" was cut from the concert scene at the end of the film, but the scene in which it is performed is still intact.

Ringo Starr is invited to "Le Cercle" gambling club, the same club where James Bond makes his first appearance in *Dr. No* (1962).

Another James Bond connection is the song, "*This Boy*" (a.k.a. "*Ringo's Theme*"), an instrumental version of which was used in the film to accompany Ringo's solo scene. The guitarist was Vic Flick, who previously played on "*The James Bond Theme*" from *Dr. No* (1962).

A young Phil Collins can be seen in the audience at the television theatre. He's wearing glasses.



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Tidbits, cont'd from page 5

Director Cameo: [Richard Lester] seen briefly at the back of the stage while The Beatles perform “*Tell Me Why*”.

Besides Grandfather’s gambling at “Le Cercle Club,” there is other James Bond connections: Richard Vernon (the grumpy old man on the train) plays Smithers - the man who lectures Bond on gold in *Goldfinger* (1964), and Margaret Nolan (girl at “Le Cercle Club”) also appeared in that film, as “Dink”, the girl at the hotel swimming pool.

The Beatles first shared the bill with Wilfrid Brambell at the Royal Command Variety Performance in November 1963.

When shooting began, The Beatles had not yet joined the British actor’s union. They were hastily inducted on the set with Wilfrid Brambell proposing their membership, and Norman Rossington seconding the motion.

In the scene where The Beatles are running and playing in the field, ‘John Lennon’ was not there. He was away promoting his new book John Lennon: In His Own Write. A body double filled in for John, and close-up shots of him were edited into the scene later. A copy of the book can be seen on a mantelpiece in the background of a shot of Norm, Shake and Paul’s (very clean) grandfather.

In the scene where Paul’s grandfather suggests Ringo to be parading instead of reading a book, the book he’s reading is Anatomy of a Murder.



John’s line, “She looks more like him than I do” was dubbed in after shooting.

The woolly sweater worn by the film’s T.V. Director (Victor Spinetti) was his own. The sweater was given to him as a gift and later given to a fan club who had asked him for it.

John’s written answer to the female reporter asking him if he has any hobbies, is the word “tits”.

Pattie Boyd (later George Harrison’s first wife) appears in several scenes in the first act, all on the train. 1) She is one of the two “schoolgirls on the train” they first encounter 2) Paul chats her up with her friend. 3) She sits next to Paul and smiles and sings on “I Should Have Known Better”.

The tire that Ringo trips over in the scene at the river bank had to be thrown again and again, as it kept rolling incorrectly. Finally, after numerous wasted takes, it was offered to young actor David Janson, on hand to play the young boy Ringo meets. Janson rolled the tire correctly on the first try.

George Harrison stumbles and falls during the opening sequence of the group running down a street towards the camera. This wasn't intended and he ripped the suit he was wearing, but as he quickly recovered, laughed and continued running, it was decided to retain the shot in the film.



The song accompanying the boys' romp in the field was originally "*I'll Cry Instead*". It was changed to the previously-released track "*Can't Buy Me Love*" when the director felt the first song didn't fit the mood properly.



Screenwriter Alun Owen claims that the only Beatle who ad-libbed was John Lennon.



While Paul McCartney is singing "*And I Love Her*," the camera panning around him picks up an arc light that flashes straight into the lens. United Artists executives, reviewing the dailies and certain the shot had to be a mistake, asked producer Walter Shenson if he was aware of it; Shenson replied it had taken them all morning to get it like that.



United Artists was pressuring the producers to finally come up with a title for the film. When John told producer Walter Shenson about Ringo's malapropisms, Shenson thought that Ringo's phrase "a hard day's night" might make a good title. John agreed. Shenson called United Artists with the proposed title, which was coolly received. Shenson suggested that they ask the secretaries and other young employees, who may be fans of The Beatles, what they thought of the proposed title. The suggestion worked and the title was accepted.

Once *A Hard Day's Night* was confirmed as the movie's title, John Lennon (with help from Paul McCartney) composed the song that same night, playing it the next morning to producer Walter Shenson in their dressing room.



Ringo was praised for his solo scene at the riverside as a forlorn soul. However, his expression in that scene was actually the result of being severely hung over after a previous night of heavy drinking.



While all four Beatles attended the movie's premiere, reportedly none stayed for the whole show.

The camera's 360-degree pan around Paul McCartney during his performance of "*And I Love Her*" was achieved by dangling the camera from strings marionette-style and moving it in a circle around McCartney.



Cameo: [Brian Epstein] in the hotel lobby prior to The Beatles' appearance at the press reception. ■

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Vincent Price invites five strangers to a sinister hilltop mansion for his wife's haunted-house birthday party, promising each guest \$10,000 to spend the night. With a ceiling that drips blood and an acid vat in the basement, it seems only a matter of time before tragedy strikes. Price, ever the thoughtful host, has even provided loaded guns as party favors. House On Haunted Hill was a blockbuster for exploitation producer William Castle. With the horrifying effect process dubbed EMERGO and the scenery-chewing performances of bug-eyed Elisha Cook and slinky Carol Ohmart, Castle had crowds lining up for this camp horror classic. Price, at the start of his glorious horror film career, is supercilious, sardonic and lethally charming as the demented host. Recreating EMERGO, AFS promises to give you the chills, thrills and laughs that are hallmarks of classic October film events at the Alex. Allied Artist release of a William Castle Production (1959).



VOICE of the THEATRE

Published by and for members of the Alex Film Society

P. O. Box 4807 • Glendale, CA 91222 • 818.754.8250

ClassicFilms@AlexFilmSociety.org

\$3 (mailed free with membership)

editor	randy carter
design/layout	brian ellis
distribution	andrea humberger
printer	alco printing, glendale

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