



The songwriting of John Lennon and Paul McCartney during their careers with the Beatles is examined on this DVD. (Photo by MVD Entertainment Group)

Composing the Beatles Songbook: Lennon and McCartney 1966-1970 (Pride DVD, 112 min.). Both nostalgic and fascinating at the same time, this looks at the songwriting partnership between John Lennon, from whom rock 'n' roll was rebellion, and Paul McCartney, who favored more classical pop. In many ways they were opposite personalities, yet with guitarist George Harrison and drummer Ringo Starr, made roughly a dozen albums for the ages. "Rubber Soul," two albums before "Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band," was the turning point for the band creatively and also was the last album made as a true collaboration. Gradually, McCartney took over more and more control in the studio and, while the songs were still credited to Lennon and McCartney, increasingly there were solo-penned or, most famously in the case of "A Day in the Life," had separate songs by each magically fused together (the middle is McCartney's).

The DVD contains at least part of a dozen Beatles songs and their sound is most striking in the front-rear speaker separation on both "Helter Skelter" and "Happiness is a Warm Gun" (the latter song required 97 takes to get right in the studio). Intriguingly, the viewer learns that "Helter Skelter," the most dangerously rocking sound of the whole Beatles' output, was penned solely by McCartney, who wanted to outdo The Who as creating the loudest rock song. Helping with the insights are interviews with a dozen Beatles friends, co-workers or authors. They include bassist Klaus Voorman, who played bass on several albums and created a couple of album covers, and musician Allan Moore, who dissects "A Day in a Life" in a 5:21 bonus interview. There also is Barry Miles, who helped expand McCartney's world view by introducing him to literary lights of the time. Miles points out that it was through his then-girlfriend Jane Asher (her brother became half of the group Peter and Gordon) that McCartney was introduced to a wider cultural palette, including theatrical contacts, while Miles says he used to lend Lennon's a variety of experimental music, which became reflected in "Tomorrow Never Knows" and later "Revolution No. 9" (although most feel that was mainly a Yoko One song, she then being Lennon's girlfriend). Journalists Paul Gambaccini and Robert Christgau also are interviewed. The Beatles music is now taught in college courses; this definitely should be part of the curriculum. **Grade: A**