PART 2: NOTHING IS REEL
THE STORY OF THE BEATLES
STAR-CLUB RECORDINGS

In the concluding part of our investigation into The Beatles' Star-Club recordings, Dr Hans Olof Gottfridsson and Richard Moore dig into the detail of what was actually on the original tapes.

This is the second part of a two-part story about The Beatles' Star-Club recordings, Hamburg, in December 1962. What follows is the first complete review of the recordings found on the Star-Club tape in their original recorded order. This has been made possible with the kind help of Larry Grossberg, director and producer of the Auldworks, who recently made digital Lingasong releases, and Robert Auld of Grossberg, whose studio notes from September 1975 as well as other source material gathered over years of research.

THE TAPE THAT WOULDN'T DIE ...

Taylor's Philips RK 14/EL3541 recorder used at the Star-Club was 4-track, but this should not be confused with professional four-channel multi-track machines which allowed recordings to be layered. His machine allowed him to record four separate recordings on to the same length of tape. Two tracks on the first side of the tape and then two more on the other side when the tape ran in the opposite direction. All tracks were totally independent of each other. The two tracks on each side were changed using a switch on the machine and could be swapped at any time — even when the tape was recording. This and the fact that the tape, during the course of December, was re-recorded over and over again many times in a very random way, with very little regard to any previous recordings, means the material on the tape is not always in chronological order.

The running time of the Star-Club recordings is approximately 294 minutes (based on the running time of the three 7.5ips safety copy dubs). The tape includes, not only recordings with The Beatles but also other acts at Star-Club during December 1962, Kingsize Taylor & The Dominos, Carol Elvin, Tony Sheridan & The Star Combo and Cliff Bennett & The Rebel Rousers. No recordings with Johnny & The Hurricanes or The Strangers & The Star Combo and Cliff Bennett & The Rebel Rousers. No recordings with Johnny & The Hurricanes or The Strangers have been identified.

Every good story has its unsolved mystery, so has this one. All in all, the Larry Grossberg, 1 Studio log book/three 7.5ips safety copy dubs include 44 complete or incomplete recordings by The Beatles (all accounted for here). Besides these, there is one track by The Beatles released by Lingasong unaccounted for. The song is Twist And Shout. The origin of this recording remains to be proven.

Over the years, many claims have been made that the original Star-Club tape may have been lost or simply had deteriorated due to age and wear. This is not the case. It came into the hands of Paul Murphy when he took over the business in the mid 70s and later it was handed by Murphy to Double H.

After work on the Star-Club tapes was complete and the disc released, Double H left both the masters and work tapes at the Sound Idea Studio, New York. Amongst the material was also the original Star-Club tape. When in the 80s, George Klabin, Sound Ideas owner, decided to sell the studio, all material from their vaults was sent back to its owners. Double H had by then given up their offices and Lee Halpern could not be located. In 1991 Double H was formally dissolved, and today Larry Grossberg is the legal owner of the tape.

Larry Grossberg: “Because they couldn’t locate the Halperns they dumped the recordings at Double H. With no success and truly forgot about them until a few years ago, when I came across a nondescript box holding them...”
Larry Grossberg: “We did some overdubs live in the studio and then mixed the additional and new parts into the tape. We also did some minor instrumental and vocal overdubs and added a lot of clapping to reconstruct many passages as the content had so much loss and aberrations.”

The backbone for the review is Larry Grossberg’s new quote about The Beatles’ contract for the Star-Club, which was produced from three 4-track references tapes transferred directly off the original tape. Of importance to clarify is that 4-track recorders, like Kingüte Taylor’s were configured so that the first track recorded on side one was track 1 and the second track 3. Side two would hold tracks 2 and 4. For this article they are presented in brackets.

PLAYING THE ORIGINAL TAPE

The Lingasong/Dutronc’s and work tapes lay dormant in storage for many years, but in early 2015 the cache of tapes were retrieved and were being reviewed and analyzed prior to a planned release. At this point, Grossberg contacted Robert Aud of Artwork, a specialist in historical and archival recording technology. From 19 February the pair sat down in Auld’s studio and played excerpts from the original Star-Club tape. After listening to several musical selections, they agreed that the original tapes were in fragile condition and they should avoid playing it further, if possible. Subsequently, they found that work copies made some years after the original were of good quality, and these were reconstructed by looping or repeating sections.

With the on-stage dialogue, the more common overdub segments have also been edited out. There has also been some overdubbing done to cover up technical flaws in the material. Finally the original raw tape in mono, whereas the Lingasong discs are stereo.

Larry Grossberg: “He was talking about a new track recorded on 12 November 1962, and he also talked about the studio and the audience on that night.”

The first section on the tape (see Section A box at bottom of previous page) starts quite suddenly and ends the same way. Even though there are no evidences on the recordings on the tape they may well be among the last recorded. It appears that this wasn’t an ordinary gig, since there was no audience and the band was playing it for themselves. After a brief moment, the group is joined by the audience who are singing and clapping.”

(See Section B box at bottom of page) This section starts in the middle of the set and ends in the same way. It starts and stops with incomplete songs and it’s apparent that this section has been partly over-recorded by the group before the set, and then further recording was done by the group after the set, playing it further, if possible. Subsequently, they agreed that the original tape was partly over-recorded by the group before the set, and then further recording was done by the group after the set, and then played excerpts from the original Star-Club tape.

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The audience on this set are rather loud and enthusiastic, something not heard on the other recorded segments. Because of this, when preparing the material, Larry Grossberg and his team were forced to artificially reinforce the crowd’s cheers for overdubbing sections of disconnected applause from the original tape.

 Larry Grossberg: “We did add a bit, but balanced to not be overly enthusiastic, as they were not close to the microphone.”

The Beatles’ contract for the Star-Club, 18-31 December 1962, stipulates that they should be on stage three hours a day, seven days a week and after an hour of playing, should have a one-hour break.

Frank Allen (Cliff Bennett & the Rebel Rousers) said in his autobiography that he would play maybe three or four spots between 6pm and 4am, and each spot was an hour. It was not the same time every night. A list would be put up giving the next day’s playing times.”

One hour on stage, including pauses between songs and on-stage chat, would mean that closer to 20 songs would be performed per set. None of the recorded tapes have been overdubbed or mixed.

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The Beatle's set, including a warm-up, but with only four songs recorded the set is incomplete. With the abrupt loss of sound during this section the last two songs may come from a different set.

Tony Sheridan with Roy Young and Star Combo were the resident band at Star-Club, and besides providing entertainment for the guests, their job was also to support guest artists like Carol Elvin. For this section A Taste of Honey is announced as a request for Tony Sheridan. It has been suggested that he sings backing vocals on this song. Whilst it's possible, there is however nothing, despite close listening indicating this. Paul Murphy, who was Sheridan's manager in the mid 70s, does not mention this in his notes made whilst going through the material. If Sheridan was featured, shouldn't he have noticed? A note of interest is that for this section and most others, many of the songs played by the bands were audience requests.

The original tape used at Linsgogon reveals distortions and crackles which are not evident on the unedited version on bootleg. The damage was evidently so bad that part of the song had to be sacrificed. The version on this tape was a different take from the one used on the final release.

Brian Johnson (The Strangers): "Ringo and I, both being drummers, obviously talked to each other. He said just tell me what you think of this... I was standing by the steps of the Star-Club stage when they went on. After a couple of numbers they went straight into Please Please Me and as soon as I heard that bass note a cold shiver went right down my back and I just put two thumbs-up to Ringo – that's the one!"

(See Section D box below) This segment features another version of A Taste Of Honey (the legendary "A Waste Of Money" version), followed by an announcement from Manfred Wehnsdler that the time is approaching midnight. Is it New Year's Eve? Yes! Is this the last song The Beatles taped at Star-Club? Probably.

The most featured Beatles track on the Star-Club tape is A Taste Of Honey, a song introduced to The Beatles' repertoire at Star-Club during the autumn of 1962. Besides this song, the Star-Club material includes another three songs later included on The Beatles first LP Please Please Me (including Twist And Shout). It's notable that these versions are very close to the versions found on the album. It proves how complete these performances were when they walked into the studio in February 1963 (several other tracks from the Star-Club tape would later be recorded for release or BBC broadcast).

Love Me Do and the newly recorded Please Please Me would definitely have been in The Beatles' repertoire at Star-Club, though neither were caught on tape.

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(See Section E box, opposite page) There is no indication of when this section was recorded. The Beatles' section starts halfway through taking over from Carol Elvin (a London-based guitarist, dancer and band vocalist). The section includes the star of The Beatles set, including a warm-up, with only four songs recorded the set is incomplete. With the abrupt loss of sound during this section the last two songs may come from a different set.

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Chuck Battfield (Rockin' Berries): "I met George Harrison at the British Seamen's Mission in April 1962. He'd seen us at Top Ten and asked me about the guitar intro to Roll Over Beethoven. I said, 'Well, if you come into the club tonight, after 2 o'clock when it starts to quiet, I'll teach you the introduction.' That's my claim to fame!"
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The Beatles include a number of the same songs in their repertoire. Beatlemania starts halfway through the song I Remember (See Section H below) The Beatles' section of the song made up. This riff must have come in, especially at the tempo Chuck Berry did it. So when we were both on at the Club, one, John and I sat on the front of the stage to go through the number together. As he still couldn't get it, I slowed the tempo down, with a riff that I just made up. This riff must have actually stuck in his mind for years, and was used in Come Together.

(See Section H below) The Beatles section starts halfway through the song I Remember You. Of particular note in The Beatles section is Bessie Muldo. This song probably first heard by The Coasters, but also got inspiration from Tony Sheridan's short-lived drummer, Ingo Thomas, who performed a fabulous vibraphone version of the song in Top Ten Club in late August 1960 where, during his drum solo, he would go around the club drumming on tables, chairs, glasses, lamps or anything that he came across. Bessie Muldo is also interesting since she gives some insight into what Ringo's arrival meant to The Beatles – it's apparent that his drumming on this track is much more rocking then Pete Best's on the Decca and Parlaphone audio versions. There is nothing indicating when The Beatles section was recorded. Neither is it clear if the incomplete To Know Her Is To Love Her is a part of the section or not. The fact that this section, like section E, has a brief run through of Road Runner, might link these two sections together.

(See Section I below) Here is another section where The Beatles followed Carol Elvin on stage. Maybe most interesting, the vocals are particularly bad. The Beatles version was recorded. Neither is it clear if the incomplete To Know Her Is To Love Her is a part of the section or not. The fact that this section, like section E, has a brief run through of Road Runner, might link these two sections together.

Paul Roux (the Graduates): “I saw The Beatles again at the Club in November [1962]. Now they had Ringo on drums, and there was a buzz going on at the club - 'They haven't got Pete Best with them', cos Pete Best was the soul of The Beatles then with his 1-2-3-4 on his bass drum.”

(See Section I below) Here is another section where The Beatles followed Carol Elvin on stage. Maybe most surprising is finding in The Beatles' song list, Glad All Over, a track never before coupled with the band's Star-Club recordings, but rather their television broadcasts. Also interesting is hearing George mock John by calling him Barmund Bettina (Delrin) Isi Marti (Mother), with John replying, "No, she's my Liefung, (darling). Listening to the Star-Club recordings it's apparent she had a special place at the club and with The Beatles and a fair amount of all songs played by them is dedicated to her. In the audience for this set are German rock stars Ted Herold and singer Freddie Quinn.

King size Taylor at the Star-Club at the time the recordings were made © Kingsize Taylor