

= Free as a Bird =

" Free as a Bird " is a song originally composed and recorded in 1977 as a home demo by John Lennon . In 1995 a studio version of the recording , incorporating contributions from Paul McCartney , George Harrison and Ringo Starr , was released as a single by The Beatles . It was released 25 years after the break @-@ up of the band and 15 years after the death of Lennon .

The single was released as part of the promotion for The Beatles Anthology video documentary and the band 's Anthology 1 compilation album . For the Anthology project , McCartney asked Lennon 's widow Yoko Ono for unreleased material by Lennon to which the three remaining ex @-@ Beatles could contribute . " Free as a Bird " was one of two such songs (along with " Real Love ") for which McCartney , Harrison , and Starr contributed additional instrumentation , vocals , and arrangements . Jeff Lynne of Electric Light Orchestra , who had worked with Harrison on Harrison 's album Cloud Nine and as part of the Traveling Wilburys , was asked to co @-@ produce the record .

The music video for " Free as a Bird " was produced by Vincent Joliet and directed by Joe Pytko ; from the point of view of a bird in flight , it depicts many references to Beatles songs , such as " Strawberry Fields Forever , " " Penny Lane " , " Paperback Writer " , " A Day in the Life " , " Eleanor Rigby " , " Revolution " , and " Helter Skelter " . " Free as a Bird " won the 1997 Grammy Award for Best Pop Performance by a Duo or Group with Vocal and was The Beatles ' 34th Top 10 single in the United States . The song secured the group at least one Top 40 hit in four different decades (1960s , 1970s , 1980s and 1990s) .

= = Origins = =

McCartney , Harrison and Starr originally intended to record some incidental background music , as a trio , for the Anthology project , but later realised , according to Starr , that they wanted to record " new music " . According to Harrison , they had always agreed that if one of them was not in the band , the others would never replace them and , " ... go out as the Beatles " , and that the " only other person that could be in it was John . "

McCartney then asked Ono if she had any unreleased recordings by Lennon , so she sent him cassette tapes of four songs . " Free as a Bird " was recorded by Lennon in 1977 , in his and Ono 's Dakota building apartment in New York City , but was not complete . Lennon introduced the song on the cassette by imitating a New York accent and saying , " Free ? as a boid " (bird) . The other songs were " Grow Old With Me " , " Real Love " , and " Now and Then " . Ono says that it was Harrison and former Beatles road manager Neil Aspinall who initially asked her about the concept of adding vocals and instrumentation to Lennon 's demo tapes . Ono stated : " People have said it was all agreed when Paul came over to New York to induct John into the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame , but it was all settled before then . I just used that occasion to hand over the tapes personally to Paul . "

McCartney went to Ono 's home after the induction ceremony at the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame to listen to , and receive , the Lennon demo tapes ; he recalls the meeting with Ono :

She was there with Sean ... and she played us a couple of tracks . There were two newies on mono cassettes which he did at home ... [s] o I checked it out with Sean , because I didn 't want him to have a problem with it . He said , " Well , it 'll be weird hearing a dead guy on lead vocal . But give it a try . " I said to them both , " If it doesn 't work out , you can veto it . " When I told George and Ringo I 'd agreed to that they were going , " What ? What if we love it ? " It didn 't come to that , luckily . I said to Yoko , " Don 't impose too many conditions on us , it 's really difficult to do this , spiritually . We don 't know , we may hate each other after two hours in the studio and just walk out . So don 't put any conditions , it 's tough enough . "

During an interview for the Anthology project , McCartney revealed that he was surprised to learn that Lennon 's demos of " Free as a Bird " and " Real Love " had already been released and were well known by Lennon fans . Starr admitted that when he first listened to the recording he found it very emotional .

= = = Recording = = =

George Martin , who had produced most of the Beatles ' 1960s recordings , turned down an invitation to produce " Free as a Bird " due to hearing problems (though he subsequently managed to produce and direct the Anthology series) . Harrison , in turn , suggested Lynne as producer , and work commenced at McCartney 's studio in February 1994 . Geoff Emerick and Jon Jacobs were chosen to engineer the new tracks .

The original tape of Lennon singing the song was recorded on a mono cassette , with vocals and piano on the same track . They were impossible to separate , so Lynne had to produce the track with voice and piano together , but commented that it was good for the integrity of the project , as Lennon was not only singing occasional lines , but also playing on the song .

Although Lennon had died in 1980 , Starr said that the three remaining Beatles agreed they would pretend that Lennon had " gone for lunch " , or had gone for a " cup of tea " . The remaining Beatles recorded a track around Lennon 's basic song idea , but which had gaps they had to fill in musically . Some chords were changed , and the arrangement was expanded to include breaks for McCartney and Harrison to sing extra lines . Harrison played slide guitar in the solo .

The Beatles ' overdubs and production were recorded between February and March 1994 in Sussex , England , at McCartney 's home studio . It ends with a slight coda including a strummed ukulele by Harrison (an instrument he was known to have played often) and the voice of John Lennon played backwards . The message , when played in reverse , is " Turned out nice again " , which was the catchphrase of George Formby . The final result sounds like " made by John Lennon " , which , according to McCartney , was unintentional and was only discovered after the surviving Beatles reviewed the final mix . When Starr heard McCartney and Harrison singing the harmonies , and later the finished song , he said that it sounded just like them [The Beatles] . He explained his comment by saying that he looked at the project as " an outsider " . Lynne fully expected the finished track to sound like The Beatles , as that was his premise for the project , but Harrison added : " It 's gonna sound like them [The Beatles] if it is them ... It sounds like them now " [in the present] .

McCartney , Harrison and Starr all agreed that the recording process was more pleasurable than when they later recorded " Real Love " (the second song chosen for release) ; as it was almost finished , they had very little input , and felt like sidemen for Lennon .

= = Music video = =

The music video for " Free as a Bird " was produced by Vincent Joliet and directed by Joe Pytko and depicts , from the point of view of a bird in flight , many references to Beatles songs , such as " Penny Lane " , " Paperback Writer " , " A Day in the Life " , " Eleanor Rigby " , " Helter Skelter " , " Piggies " , " The Continuing Story of Bungalow Bill " , " Strawberry Fields Forever " , " Doctor Robert " , and " The Fool on The Hill " . Between 80 and 100 allusions to the Beatles ' story , music and lyrics in the video have been estimated . Although the bird can be heard at the beginning of the video , it is never seen . Neil Aspinall (Apple Records executive at the time) said that this was because no @-@ one could agree on what kind of bird it should be . Pytko had to send his ideas to McCartney , Harrison and Starr , as well as Ono , to make sure they all agreed before he could proceed with the filming of the video . Derek Taylor (ex @-@ Apple Records executive) sent a two @-@ page letter to Pytko confirming that he could proceed , and personally encouraged and supported Pytko 's ideas . The video was filmed in as many authentic locations as possible : Penny Lane was made by Pytko 's art department to look as it was in the 1950s , and other locations filmed were The Liver Building , and Liverpool Docks (as a reference to Lennon 's father Alfred Lennon) .

Although Pytko fixed the ideas on a storyboard , he abandoned it as soon as filming began , and followed ideas based on what angles and perspectives the steadycam camera produced . One instance was the filming of the car crash , which Pytko filmed for hours from above , but realised that a steadycam shot on the ground was a much better idea . Archive footage was used by imposing it on scenes shot by Pytko , who utilised a greenscreen stage to digitally blend it into the finished film , such as Paul 's Old English Sheepdog in the graveyard , and the elephant in the ballroom

procession scene . The elephant was put in last , as Aspinall phoned Pytko and said that Starr liked the scene , but insisted an elephant be put in it , which Pytko later did , as he had already put a sitar in at the request of Harrison . Apart from the steadycam shots , Pytko used a Russian @-@ made Akil @-@ crane for sweeping overhead shots , such as the Abbey Road zebra crossing shot at the end , as well as a remote @-@ controlled toy helicopter with a camera added to it for intricate aerial shots . To make it more interesting , two Blue Meanies make cameos .

Harrison played the ukulele in the studio for the song , and asked to appear as the ukulele player seen only from behind at the very end of the video . Pytko resisted this , as he felt it would be wrong for any contemporary members of the Beatles to appear on screen . Pytko later stated that it was " heartbreaking " that Harrison had not played the role , particularly after Harrison 's death in 2001 and upon discovering that the ukulele was not a sample of an old song as Pytko had assumed . The video won the Grammy Award for Best Short Form Music Video in 1997 .

On 6 November 2015 , Apple Records released a new deluxe version of the 1 album in different editions and variations (known as 1 +) . Most of the tracks on 1 have been remixed from the original multi @-@ track masters by Giles Martin . Giles Martin , with Jeff Lynne also remixed " Free as a Bird " to accompany the music video for the DVD and Blu @-@ ray releases . The remix of " Free as a Bird " cleans up Lennon 's vocal further , and uses a different take of Harrison 's vocal phrase , replacing the lyric " whatever happened to the life that we once knew " with " whatever happened to the love that we once knew " . Towards the end of the track , this version also contains a clip of Lennon stating the phrase " turned out nice again " played forward - which was played backwards in the original mix of the song . McCartney 's lead vocal , buried in the original mix to serve as a double track for Lennon 's own vocal , can now be heard more prominently in the second verse .

= = Chart performance = =

" Free as a Bird " was premiered on BBC Radio 1 in the early hours of 20 November 1995 . It was released as a single in the UK on 4 December 1995 , two weeks after its appearance on the Anthology 1 album . The single sold 120 @, @ 000 copies in its first week , entering the UK Singles Chart at No. 2 . It remained on the chart for eight weeks . In the US , the song reached No. 6 on the Billboard Hot 100 , becoming The Beatles ' 34th Top 10 single in America . It was the group 's first Top 10 song in the U.S. in nineteen and a half years , the longest span for the group between Top 10 hits since first charting in America in 1964 .

= = Critical reception = =

" Free as a Bird " marked the first time a single containing new material had been released under The Beatles ' name since " The Long and Winding Road " in the United States in 1970 . The promotional video was broadcast during episode one of The Beatles Anthology that aired on ITV in the UK and ABC in the US .

" Free as a Bird " was greeted with mixed reviews . Its release was criticised by Caroline Sullivan in The Guardian as a publicity gimmick , exploiting the Beatles brand , and owing less to the Beatles than to Lynne . Andy Gill in The Independent called the song " disappointingly low @-@ key George 's guitar weeps gently enough when required , but the overall effect is of a dirge . " Chris Carter , now the host of Breakfast with the Beatles , commented : " I would value any song (especially if it was great) performed by John , Paul , George and Ringo , no matter how (or when) it was recorded . " " Free as a Bird " later won the 1997 Grammy Award for Best Pop Performance by a Duo or Group with Vocal .

= = Personnel = =

According to Ian MacDonald :
John Lennon ? lead vocal , piano

Paul McCartney ? lead vocal , harmony vocal , bass , acoustic guitar , piano , synthesizer
George Harrison ? lead vocal , harmony vocal , electric slide guitar , acoustic guitar , ukulele
Ringo Starr ? drums , harmony vocal

= = Track listings = =

All songs written by John Lennon , Paul McCartney , George Harrison and Ringo Starr , except where noted .

7 " UK : R6422 / USA : NR @-@ 58497

" Free as a Bird " ? 2 : 42

" Christmas Time (Is Here Again) " ? 3 : 02

Music recorded 28 November 1967 at EMI Studios , London ; Christmas greetings recorded 6 December 1967 at EMI Studios , London

CD UK : CDR6422 / USA : CDP 58497

" Free as a Bird " ? 4 : 26

" I Saw Her Standing There " (Lennon ? McCartney) ? 2 : 51

Recorded 11 February 1963 at EMI Studios , London

Produced by George Martin

This version (take 9) was recorded after the version released on the album Please Please Me (take 1) . The introductory count @-@ in from take 9 was edited onto the start of take 1 for the album .

" This Boy " (Lennon ? McCartney) ? 3 : 17

Recorded 17 October 1963 at EMI Studios , London

Produced by George Martin

Two incomplete versions (takes 12 and 13) , which both break down into laughter .

" Christmas Time (Is Here Again) " ? 3 : 02

= = Charts and certifications = =