

# The day my guru fell out with his beloved Beatles

**SUSAN SHUMSKY spent six years working for Maharishi Mahesh Yogi at his Indian ashrams and was at Rishikesh when the Fab Four turned up with other famous friends**

**I**N 1968 the shockwaves from the Beatles trip to India to visit Maharishi Mahesh Yogi, the founder of transcendental meditation, reverberated around the world. The Fab Four were not the only celebrities to make the trip to the sparsely constructed ashram overlooking the River Ganges. Actress Mia Farrow, Beach Boy Mike Love and folk singer Donovan also attended but the Beatles were far and away the most famous.

I spent six years on Maharishi's personal staff and 20 years living in his ashrams all over the world, including the one at Rishikesh. I was lucky to get a unique insight into how Maharishi and the events that happened in the ashram influenced and inspired the Beatles.

During this rare respite from Beatlemania, the Liverpudlians composed 40 songs in the Himalayan foothills. Thus was born the two-record album *The Beatles* (aka *The White Album*), released on November 22, 1968.

Donovan claimed that while in Rishikesh, he suggested that since the Beatles were so famous they didn't need a photo on their next album. It could be plain white and nameless.

Pop artist Richard Hamilton, who designed the cover and poster, said: "Paul McCartney requested the design be as stark a contrast to Sgt Pepper's day-glo explosion as possible."

John Lennon and his wife Cynthia arrived on February 16, 1968, with George Harrison and his wife Pattie Boyd and Pattie's sister Jenny, Paul McCartney, Ringo Starr and their partners arrived three days later.

Despite struggling to keep his centre afloat, the famous guests were given double beds, sit-down toilets, rugs, curtains and baths with water heated by staff in disused oil drums.

Maharishi asked students to respect the band's privacy but gave them private lessons.



**TRANSCENDENTAL:** The Beatles with Maharishi in 1968 before the bust-up and, inset, Susan Shumsky

John and George were the most absorbed.

"Whenever I meditate, there's a big brass band in me head," John said. "For creating, it was great. It was just pouring out!"

On George's 25th birthday, Maharishi presented him with a book and a plastic globe with the southern hemisphere on top.

Maharishi said the world was in turmoil and asked George to make it right through transcendental meditation. George turned it right-side-up and declared: "I've done it!"

Due to childhood peritonitis, Ringo lugged a suitcase of Heinz Beans to India. His wife Maureen insisted that "Ritchie" kill even the smallest fly and after 10 days they left.

Paul and girlfriend Jane Asher stayed for five weeks, leaving to fulfil her theatrical commitments while John and George stayed on. Then on April 10, the remaining Beatles left Maharishi in a huff for three reasons:

**A film deal went south**

Maharishi granted the Beatles' Apple Corp exclusive rights to make a movie about transcendental meditation and Maharishi, so the company hired a film crew. But the guru had already given Four Star Productions, of Hollywood, exclusive rights to film Maharishi for the next five years!

One morning John, bed-headed and bleary-eyed, opened his bungalow door when a Four Star director yelled "Action!"

Infuriated, John and George holed up in their rooms feeling betrayed and used. They refused to be two-bit players in someone else's film.

**"Magic Alex" got his way**

The second reason was because Rosalyn Bonas (a schoolteacher from Brooklyn) and her paramour Alexis Mardas claimed Maharishi had made a pass at Rosalyn and "Magic Alex" talked George and John into leaving. He later admitted he only travelled to Rishikesh to split the Beatles from Maharishi.

**The Beatles broke the rules**

In September 1991, George Harrison visited Maharishi in Vlodrop, Holland. During that meeting, arranged by author Deepak Chopra, George said he came to apologise. When asked why, George answered, "You know."

Maharishi asked George to tell Deepak the real story and he revealed the Beatles were asked to leave because members of their party were using drugs and alcohol.

The topic turned to the Beatles' Ed Sullivan Show appearance, during which no crime was reported in the USA. Maharishi exclaimed, "When I heard this, I knew the Beatles were angels on Earth... It doesn't matter what John said or did, I could never be upset with angels." George then broke down and wept.

Later, George phoned Deepak and said: "A huge karmic baggage has been lifted from me, because I didn't want to lie."

● *Maharishi & Me: Seeking Enlightenment With The Beatles' Guru* by Susan Shumsky is out now, priced £19.99 on Amazon

**Meanings behind the White Album songs**

**DEAR PRUDENCE**

Mia Farrow's sister Prudence spent day and night meditating and wouldn't leave her room. Concerned, John and George burst in one day, singing Sergeant Pepper's Lonely Heart's Club Band and Ob-La-Di, Ob-La-Da. But Prudence just wanted them to disappear so she could meditate in silence. Having abused drugs and alcohol as a teenager, she suffered terrifying LSD flashbacks. But private meetings with Maharishi and daily treatments with a massage therapist returned her from the abyss. Just before leaving Rishikesh, George sent Prudence a note that John had written Dear Prudence for her.

**THE CONTINUING STORY OF BUNGALOW BILL**

On a tiger hunt, Ivy Leaguer Richard A Cooke III (Rik) and his mother Nancy Jackson trapped tigers in a "kill zone", shot a tiger then returned to the ashram to flaunt their exploits. John Lennon piped up: "Don't you call that slightly 'life-destructive'?" (a Maharishi buzzword). John later said it was written about a guy in Maharishi's camp who shot a few tigers then came back to commune with God.

**LETTERS:** John and Yoko



**EVERYBODY'S GOT SOMETHING TO HIDE EXCEPT ME AND MY MONKEY**

This song consists of Maharishi's favourite expressions and portrays meditation experiences. Maharishi frequently said, "Take it easy; take it as it comes," and "it's such a joy!" Whenever he beckoned anyone to meet with him, he would say, "Come, come," or "Come on." John later revealed that the "monkey" was Yoko Ono.

**REVOLUTION**

Revolution originated from "The Maharishi Effect", Maharishi's frequently repeated theory: "For the forest to be green, every tree must be green; for the world to be at peace, every person must be at peace." He believed politics and treaties would never create world peace but even a small percentage of the population meditating could.

**BLACKBIRD**

Paul first said he wrote Blackbird when he heard loud crowing at the ashram in the morning. Years later he ascribed it deeper significance: representing a "black bird" (female Afro-American) in the civil rights movement.

**MOTHER NATURE'S SON**

One of Maharishi's lectures about nature and mankind inspired Mother Nature's Son by Paul.

**SEXY SADIE**

While Magic Alex fetched taxis to extract the Beatles, the angry, vengeful John wrote the song Maharishi, peppered with vile epithets. When George objected, John changed the lyrics and Sexy Sadie became the seductress. Ironically, John's wife Cynthia had hoped Rishikesh would be their second honeymoon but John virtually ignored her. He moved into separate quarters and relished Yoko Ono's daily letters and telegrams.