

THE RECORD THAT LAUNCHED THE BEATLES

One of the rarest and most collectable of all Beatles records is expected to sell for over £10,000 when it comes up for sale next month. The unique ten-inch 78RPM acetate record featuring 'Hello Little Girl' on one side and 'Till There Was You' on the other was pressed at the HMV record store on Oxford St London before being presented by the group's manager Brian Epstein to George Martin (EMI) in his desperate attempt to get them a recording contract. This meeting, despite Martin's initial reticence, was to eventually lead to the breakthrough they were looking for.

In his book *Tune In*, the leading Beatles historian Mark Lewisohn said of the disc, 'Its uniqueness is enhanced by Brian Epstein's handwriting on the labels, and the recognition of what it led to – making it one of the rarest and most collectable of all Beatles records.'

According to Ian Shirley, Record Collector Rare Record Price Guide Editor "This is one of those Holy Grail items like the original Quarrymen acetate that the band recorded themselves. This acetate is a unique item that, in many respects, helped Brian Epstein to start the ball rolling to musical world domination. It will fascinate Beatles collectors worldwide and no doubt attract bids from those with deep pockets."

The record is being sold by Omega Auctions of Warrington on behalf of Les Maguire of Gerry and the Pacemakers. He was given it by Brian Epstein in 1963 after the disc had been returned to him by George Martin. This is the first time it has come to the marketplace, having been locked away in Maguire's loft until now.

Background information

Extracted with permission from *Tune In* by Mark Lewisohn (volume one of *The Beatles: All These Years*), pages 1105–1108. Text © Mark Lewisohn

Brian's April 1961 visit to Hamburg and Hanover as a guest of Deutsche Grammophon had already proven fruitful in getting My Bonnie released in Britain, and now it paid dividends a second time. Another delegate on the course was Robert Boast, manager of His Master's Voice (HMV), the self-proclaimed world's largest record store, situated on Oxford Street in the heart of London. After Decca's rejection, Brian took the opportunity to renew Boast's acquaintance; he had no obvious plan in mind, but Boast was an address-book contact and he was exploring every possibility. Brian had with him the Beatles' Decca tape and sat in Boast's office saying his boys would become very big stars if only someone would take a chance with them.

'He said he'd had a very wearing two days visiting record companies. It seems they just weren't prepared to listen. I was, though it was beyond my powers to help him. But at that time we had a small recording studio on the first floor, where budding artists could make 78rpm demonstration discs. I took Brian there and introduced him to our disc cutter, Jim Foy.'

It made sense for Brian to pitch the Beatles from discs rather than a reel of tape. Every recording manager had an office gramophone (as they were still called), not everyone had a tape deck. The first floor at HMV included the Personal Recording Department, a smart counter beyond which customers could make one-strike records of personal greetings. Musicians used it too (the room contained a grand piano) and it was here, in 1958, that Cliff Richard recorded Lawdy Miss Clawdy c/w Breathless, which prompted Norrie Paramor to sign him to EMI's Columbia label.

Jim Foy and Brian Epstein chatted while a lathe cut the Beatles' sound into 78rpm acetate discs of heavy black lacquer. As Foy would remember:

'I remarked that the tape sounded very good, to which he replied, rather proudly, that some of the songs were actually written by the group, which was uncommon. I asked whether they had been published, and when he said they hadn't I told him that the office of Ardmere and Beechwood, one of EMI's music publishing companies, was on the top floor of the shop. Should I fetch the general manager, Sid Colman? He said yes, Sid came down, listened to the tape and he too expressed interest. When I'd done the cutting, he and Brian went back up to the office.'

It was here that the Beatles' Decca recording of three Lennon-McCartney Originals turned up trumps. If they hadn't sung those songs, Brian would not have been sitting in an oak-panelled, fourth-floor office over the hum and thrum of Oxford Street, having his first discussion about an element of the business still little known to him. He knew record companies and enjoyed memorising their catalogue numbers and titles, but music publishers were just names on record labels or sheet music, familiar in themselves while their workings, the business strategies behind them, were not.

At fifty-six, Sid Colman was a wise old bird of the song trade, in the business since 1937 and now installed by EMI as general manager of its publishing operation. As Decca had Burlington Music and Philips had Flamingo Music so EMI had Ardmere and Beechwood, formed in 1958 as an extension of Capitol Records' publishing businesses. Whatever the country, the idea was the same: owning music copyrights reaped a tidy income, and so much the better if it was from the company's own record product and every revenue stream flowed into the same pool.

Colman was interested in Ardmere and Beechwood publishing these Lennon-McCartney songs, which was good news ... except that Brian wanted a Beatles recording contract. A publisher would give the songs to someone else to record and he wanted the Beatles to have first use of them. Colman understood and told Brian he'd see what he could do to help; in return, Brian gave his word that if Colman could assist in obtaining the Beatles a recording contract, Ardmere and Beechwood would get the publishing.

Precisely what propelled Brian from here to the office of George Martin may never be known. George would always say, naturally, that Colman picked up the phone, told him about Brian and suggested they meet, but Colman's indispensable right-hand-man throughout this period, a music plugger who called himself Kim Bennett, insists this was not the case, and that George was the very last person Colman would have called because he strongly disliked him. Whatever the reason, George Martin's desk diary for 13 February 1962 includes Judy Lockhart Smith's lightly-pencilled untimed entry for 'Bernard Epstein'.

Brian was chancing his arm at EMI, trying to wrest a Yes where there'd been a No. The recording managers had already turned down the Beatles on the basis of their appearance on the Tony Sheridan disc; Brian must have been hoping this wouldn't be remembered, and that he might score a better result with a personal approach and different product. It could also be that he was after any appointment at EMI House and George Martin was the only man available – two of his three A&R colleagues, Norman Newell and Norrie Paramor, were on holiday this week.

George wasn't there when Brian arrived, so the first person he met was Judy. She would always remember appreciating how well-dressed, well-mannered and well-spoken he was, not at all like the other managers who came into the office, while Brian would later write, genuinely, of how he and Judy developed 'an instant friendship.'

George's day was filled with appointments, and when he arrived he wouldn't have been able to give his visitor much time. The two sat across a desk – one man aged thirty-six, the other twenty-seven, both in smart suits and ties, and with polite, cultured voices that had benefited from self-improvement. Brian was desperate but trying not to seem so, George was tolerant, pleasant and in a position of power. Brian told him about the Beatles, saying how big they were in Liverpool and affecting surprise when George said he hadn't heard of them. This somewhat riled his host: as George would reflect, 'I almost asked him in reply where Liverpool was – the thought of anything coming out of the provinces was extraordinary.'

By interpreting the way Brian remembered the meeting, there was probably time to hear only one of his new-cut records – a ten-inch 78 acetate with Hello Little Girl on one side and Till There Was You on the other. He'd written the essential details on the labels in blue fountain-pen. With limited space, and constantly keen to demonstrate the Beatles had more than one singer, he wrote that Hullo Little Girl [sic] was John Lennon & The Beatles – adding too the songwriting credit Lennon, McCartney – and that Til There Was You [sic] was Paul McCartney & The Beatles. Brian's recollection two years later was:

'George liked Hello Little Girl, Till There Was You. Liked George on guitar. Thought Paul was the one for discs'.

It would be a long time before anyone else got to hear the Decca recording of Till There Was You, and express wonderment first that Brian had selected it – this was the number where John said Paul 'sounded like a woman' and Pete's timing was all over the place – and second that George Martin, from this, thought Paul best for recording and liked George Harrison's guitar playing. This was perhaps George's worst guitar work of the day. (Hello Little Girl was reasonable, though.)

If this isn't perplexing enough, George Martin would remember the meeting quite differently. In his first lengthy quote on the subject – a Melody Maker interview nine years later – he specifically mentioned Your Feet's Too Big being on the tape [sic] Brian played him, and added, 'I wasn't knocked out at all – it was a pretty lousy tape, recorded in a back room, very badly balanced, not very good songs and a rather raw group.' This strongly suggests he wasn't listening to the Beatles' Decca test but a recording of which nothing else is known.

The meeting came to an end with George not 'knocked out at all.' He kept the acetate and might have said he would get in touch if he was interested in hearing more, but he wasn't and he didn't. It was just another disappointing encounter for Brian, one of way too many for his liking. He was having a far harder job selling the Beatles than expected.

Auction Details

Omega Auctions
Unit 3B Penketh Business Park
66-70 Liverpool Rd
Great Sankey
Warrington

Contact:

Karen Fairweather

01925 873040

www.omegaauctions.co.uk

Auction: The Beatles Collection

Date: 22nd March 2016

Bidding live from the saleroom in Warrington but also broadcast live online worldwide for worldwide bidding