

The Beautiful Couple Who Almost Made It Work...

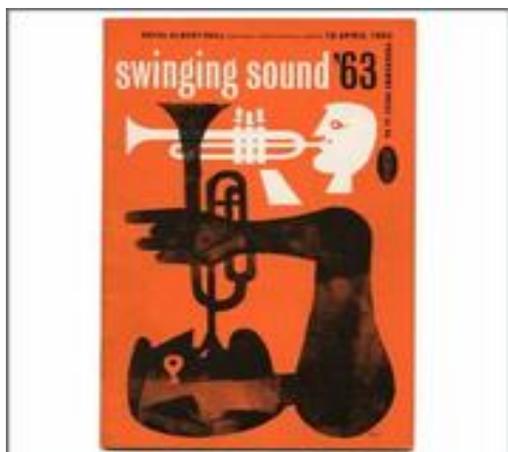
Written by Andy Owen



It was a cool 8°C in London on 18th April 1963.

The wind was blowing and there was also some thunder around.

John, Paul, George and Ringo were at the Royal Albert Hall for the first time, for their appearance on the BBC's *Swinging Sound '63*. The concert was to be broadcast live on the BBC Light Programme.



At this time, the Beatles were at the start of a meteoric rise that would make them the biggest band of all time.

But they were bored, as they were hanging around for most of the day, for rehearsals.

They were top of the bill at the event, which also featured Del Shannon, The Springfields, Rolf Harris, Kenny Lynch, Matt Monro and others, with the colourful George Melly as host.

The concert took place in two parts, separated by an interval, with The Beatles taking the stage twice - at 8.40pm and again at 10pm.



The Beatles performed just two songs in their first set - *'Please Please Me'* and *'Misery'*. Incredibly, neither song was broadcast by the BBC.

They had planned to perform *'From Me To You'*, coupled with *'Thank You Girl'* in the second half. However, they took the last-minute decision to lead with *'Twist and Shout'* before segueing into *'From Me To You'*, taking organisers by surprise in front of an ecstatic audience.

The show's finale saw the band return to the stage to perform *'Mack the Knife'*, alongside everyone on the bill.

Most of the second half of the concert was also relayed live on the BBC's General Overseas Service (now the BBC World Service) but unfortunately the overseas link only lasted until 10pm, missing the entire Beatles performance by two minutes!

In the audience that night, was a very young Jane Asher, who was covering the event for the Radio Times.

She was 17 years old.

Part of her evening's assignment was to get an interview with The Beatles.

She went backstage.

And a part of the Beatles legend was about to be born.

Paul recalls what happened...

"We had a photo taken with her for the magazine and we all fancied her.

We'd thought she was blonde, because we had only ever seen her on black-and-white telly doing Juke Box Jury, but she turned out to be a redhead.

So it was: 'Wow, you're a redhead!' I tried pulling her..."

After the concert, the party moved to the Royal Court Hotel, and then to the house of a journalist they knew.

Brian Epstein returned to his own hotel and Ringo stayed behind to have an early night.

Singer Shane Fenton, who'd also been on the concert bill that day, drove John, Paul, George and Jane to journalist Chris Hutchins' flat, situated on the top floor of Kings House on the Kings Road.

Initially, it was George who seemed to engage most of Jane's attention.



During the course of the next few hours, Paul began to show his interest in Jane and the others left him to talk to her alone.

After a few hours chatting, Jane and Paul had clearly connected.

What's more, Paul was instantly smitten.

Later he escorted her home and arranged to meet her again.

It was to be the start of a five-year relationship.

Recalling that first meeting at The Albert Hall, Paul commented,

"We all said, 'Will you marry me?' which is what we said to every girl at the time. She was a rare London bird, the sort we'd always heard about."

The romance became public when they were snapped by a photographer as they left the Prince of Wales Theatre after attending Neil Simon's play *'Never Too Late'*.

That picture had *everyone* talking...



Cynthia Lennon said "Paul fell like a ton of bricks for Jane. The first time I was introduced to her, was at her home and she was sitting on Paul's knee.

My first impression of Jane was how beautiful and finely featured she was. Her mass of Titian-coloured hair cascaded around her face and shoulders, her pale complexion contrasting strongly with her dark clothes and shining hair.

Paul was obviously as proud as a peacock with his new lady. For Paul, Jane Asher was a great prize."

As to why she favoured him rather than any of the others, McCartney had no conclusions, when asked later in 1997:

"Because I'd maybe made the strongest play or maybe she fancied me, I don't know why. I probably just sort of mentioned:

'Ful semyly hir wympul pynched was, Hir nose tretys, hir eyen greye as glas, Hir mouth ful smal, and therto softe and reed. But sikerly she hadde a fair forheed.'

It was from Chaucer's Canterbury Tales. Paul had remembered it from school.

It represents the beautiful sound of the middle-English. It's so smooth and melodic.

It's easy to see how someone with McCartney's ear would have been attracted to reading it or hearing it spoken out loud.

Translated it reads:

'The courtly appearance of the Prioress is described here: wimple pleated in seemly manner, fine nose, eyes grey as glass, small red mouth and a handsome forehead.'

Paul knew she was smart and thought she'd be impressed.

He was right on both counts.

Despite being young, Jane was extremely well educated and sophisticated. She also had great self-confidence.



She came from a remarkable family.

Her father was an eminent consultant in blood and mental diseases at Middlesex General Hospital - and her mother Margaret had been George Martin's oboe teacher at the Guildhall School of Music and Drama.

At the age of 12, Jane made her stage debut as Alice in 'Alice in Wonderland' at the Oxford Playhouse. In 1960, she became the youngest actress to play Wendy in a West End stage version of 'Peter Pan.'

Her stage roles included the Broadway production of 'The Philanthropist', playing Perdita in 'A Winter's Tale' and Cassandra in 'The Trojan Women.' She also featured in various productions for the Bristol Old Vic, including the title role in 'Cleo' by Frank Marcus, the part of Ellen Terry in 'Sixty Thousand Nights' and Eliza in 'Pygmalion.'

It's easy to see why Paul was taken with Jane.

He wouldn't have met anyone quite like her before. And, unlike millions of young girls around the world, she wasn't dumbstruck by the band's fame.

But, of course, she hadn't met many men like Paul, either.

He had something about him, even at his young age. Yes, he was rough around the edges, but his confidence was off the scale.

And his talent was obvious.

They say opposites attract. This was clearly a case in point.



The romance blossomed quickly.

Was it love? I don't think there's any doubt.

They were besotted with each other.

Every time Paul was in London, he would go and visit Jane - and spent a great deal of time at her parents' house in Wimpole Street, where she lived.

They talked late into the night - not just together - but also with her family.

Paul soon became very well-liked by them all.

He was respectful, charming and bursting with energy and ideas.

One night, Paul missed his last train home to Liverpool, following a date with Jane and stayed the night.

Margaret Asher suggested that he regard the house as his London home, as it would save him paying out for hotels.



Paul had always enjoyed a family atmosphere and after a while, he accepted the invite and moved in with Jane and her family.

57 Wimpole Street was a large six-floor Georgian townhouse, which also had a music room where Margaret Asher taught her students.

That music room was to play another key part in the Beatles' legend, as it saw the birth of a number of Beatles' classics, including, among other songs, 'And I Love Her', 'Every Little Thing', 'I've Just Seen A Face' and 'Eleanor Rigby'.

Paul spoke about 'And I Love Her' in a later interview, saying:

"It was the first ballad I impressed myself with. Having the title start in mid-sentence, I thought that was clever. It was a nice tune, that one. I still like it.

I can actually see Margaret Asher's upstairs drawing-room. I remember playing it there."

Paul moved into the top floor attic, where there were two rooms and a bathroom.

The second room was Peter's bedroom, Jane's brother.

Peter Asher was to have quite a significant contribution to the music business in the next few decades.



He went on to be a manager and record producer for James Taylor, Linda Ronstadt and others.

He became a Senior VP for Sony Music Entertainment and was awarded a CBE in 2015, for his contribution to music.

('World without Love', P&G's first single was a million seller in 1968. It was written by Paul.

You can picture him playing it in the music room, Peter saying he liked it and Paul handing it over.

The stuff of dreams, really...)

Peter is now 78, but still playing shows.



Jane with Peter

Jane and Claire had the two rooms below Paul's.

Paul's relationship with an upper middle-class family, certainly broadened his cultural horizons.

They had stimulating discussions around the family dinner table – and he learnt a lot from them.

He was a great listener and took it all in.

Paul and Jane became inseparable and they attended musicals, classical concerts, plays and exhibitions - and went on holiday together to exotic places.

Paul even opened an account at Coutts, the Queen's bankers - and ordered Jane's birthday cake from Maxim's in Paris.

When Paul decided to buy a new car, Jane helped him decide on a midnight-blue Aston Martin DB6.

They were very, very happy.

And it showed.

They were the perfect couple.

A visually stunning combo, who became the darlings of London's social scene.



Back at Wimpole Street, Paul eventually got a piano of his own up in the attic room. He has very pleasant memories of it.

"Very artistic. That was the piano that I fell out of bed and played the first chords of 'Yesterday' on. I dreamt it when I was staying there.

I wrote quite a lot of stuff up in that room actually. 'I'm Looking Through You' I seem to remember after an argument with Jane.

There were a few of those moments."

The young actress became the inspiration for a number of his songs, initially purely love songs, which changed as the relationship entered a bit of a stormy patch.

It was said that the early form of '*She Loves You*' was written in the family music room at Wimpole Street.

Other songs inspired by Jane that Paul wrote in that period, also included '*We Can Work It Out*', '*You Won't See Me*', and '*Here, There And Everywhere*.'

But, after a while, their relationship started to struggle a bit, as Paul wanted Jane to dedicate herself to him.

Perhaps it was because this was how it generally worked in relationships common between men and women in working-class Liverpool.

But this was upper-class London.

And Jane was ambitious.

And she was strong.

She was doing well in her career and she was determined to develop and grow it.

A subservient woman she was certainly not.

They fell out. At one point she refused to answer his telephone calls, which inspired *'You Won't See Me.'*

Jane was appearing in *'Great Expectations'* at the Theatre Royal, Bristol, when he recorded the song. He obviously tried to give her messages through his songs.

He told Beatles' biographer Hunter Davies:

"I knew I was selfish and it caused a few rows. Jane went off and said 'OK, then, leave. I'll find someone else.' It was shattering to be without her. That was when I wrote 'I'm Looking Through You.'"

Paul couldn't understand why Jane was wanting to pursue her career instead of being with him. The feminist movement hadn't hit yet and Paul wanted her with him.

That was a plea that sounded like it was from the heart, yet it never stopped him from cheating on her. Jane clearly didn't know.

She said, *"I won't give up my career unless it interferes with our being together.*

I love Paul. I love him deeply and he feels the same. I don't think either of us has looked at anyone else since we first met."

Jane had moved across to the Bristol Old Vic and was playing Barbara Cahoun in John Dighton's *'The Happiest Days Of Your Life'*.

Paul went to Bristol to see her.

While he was there, he noticed the name on a shop near the theatre called, 'Rigby & Evans Ltd, Wine & Spirit Shippers', which he says gave him the surname for the song *'Eleanor Rigby.'*

That visit seemed to rebuild the relationship and they were soon seen out together regularly again and their happiness was obvious.

Rumours of the couple getting married were starting to surface, but were always denied by Paul and Jane.

However, a headline on Jack Bentley's show business page in the Sunday Mirror on 15th August 1965, changed all that.

It read: *"Says Jane: 'Yes, I AM Marrying Paul McCartney.'"*

When Bentley visited Jane, he said there were rumours that Paul and Jane were already married.

"No, I'm not Paul's wife," she told him, "but yes, we ARE going to get married."



When it was mentioned that the millions of girl fans would be dreading the news, she commented:

"If it's any consolation to them, we won't be married for a while yet, but when it happens, we've got a family planned. First, we want a boy and then, come what may."

"There's no particular reason why we are not getting married right away, except that we're both pretty young. Paul is only twenty-three."

Jane was eighteen at the time of the interview.

Asked if her marriage to Paul would affect her career as an actress, she said:

"I shan't give up my career unless it interferes with our being together. Although I like acting, I'm not one of those dedicated actresses who would pine away if they couldn't perform. I get as much enjoyment out of good plays and good music."

They went house hunting.

Jane helped Paul to find the five-storey Victorian house in Cavendish Avenue, St John's Wood - and they moved into it in 1966.

It is just around the corner from the Abbey Road studios.



Pauls's house in Cavendish Avenue, St John's Wood

Jane decorated the house and always kept it in tip-top condition.
Paul paid £40,000 for it. He still owns it to this day.

Unfortunately, it was rumoured that during a spring-cleaning session a number of original early Lennon and McCartney songs were lost forever, when she threw away a notebook full of lyrics while emptying a cupboard.

This was never confirmed.

It was Jane who, in June 1966, persuaded Paul to buy High Farm - a 183-acre farm in Machrihanish, Campbeltown, Scotland.

She suggested it would be a good idea for them to have a remote retreat to which they could escape from the pressures of being constantly in the public eye.



Jane embarked on a five-month tour of America in 1967, appearing with the Bristol Old Vic in 'Romeo and Juliet' in Boston, Washington and Philadelphia.

Paul flew over to America to celebrate her twenty-first birthday, which took place during the tour. It was during this trip that he conceived the idea of 'Magical Mystery Tour.'

When Jane finally came back to the UK after her tour, it was clear that things were no longer the same. Jane said at the time, *"Paul had changed so much. He was taking LSD, which I knew nothing about. The house had changed and it was full of stuff I also didn't know about."*

But, despite Jane's comments, it appeared that they must have sorted things out, as they announced that they were going to get married.

During an interview in the Daily Express in 1967, Jane said, *"I want to get married, probably this year, and have lots and lots of babies. I certainly would be surprised indeed if I married anyone but Paul."*

On New Year's Day 1968, Paul proposed, gave her a diamond and emerald ring and they travelled up north to tell Paul's father.

In February 1968, Jane went with Paul, the other Beatles, plus others, including Donovan and Mike Love, to Rishikesh in India, when they visited the Maharishi Mahesh Yogi.

They stayed a month, during which time, Paul wrote a number of songs, including 'Martha My Dear', 'Blackbird', 'Back In The USSR', 'I Will' and 'Ob-La-Di, Ob-La-Da'.

But soon after they returned, their troubles resurfaced - and the five-year romance came to an abrupt end, despite the fact that they obviously loved each other.

Jane had been a virgin when they met and fidelity to a partner obviously meant a great deal to her.



Paul & Francie

On the other hand, Paul had always been a bit of a boy with the girls.

During her absences when touring, he had been dating other girls and began an affair with an American, Francie Schwartz.

One day, Jane arrived home unexpectedly and found Paul in bed with Schwartz.

Jane walked out on him and sent her mother to Cavendish Avenue to collect her belongings. It was over...

On the 20th July 1968, Jane appeared on the BBC Television show 'Dee Time' with Simon Dee.

This was a very popular early evening show in the UK, that enjoyed a regular audience of about 18 million.



During the show, when Dee enquired about her and Paul, she announced to a stunned nation, that their engagement was off.

Jane cryptically said:

"I haven't broken it off, but it is broken off, finished. I know it sounds corny, but we still see each other and love each other, but it hasn't worked out.

Perhaps we'll be childhood sweethearts and meet again and get married when we're about 70."

Apparently, this nationwide revelation was a massive surprise to Paul. He had no idea she felt this way – and was going to say what she said.

The couple did meet once or twice after the Schwartz incident, but the split was final.

It was inevitable, really, as Paul loved the girls and they loved him.

Daily Express reporter Ivor Davis, who travelled with the Beatles on their 1964 American tour, alleged that Paul was the most sexually active member of the group.

Davis recalled Paul's affair with a certain 16-year-old called Peggy Lipton, who'd been introduced to him by a photographer in Los Angeles.



Paul and Peggy became extremely close and were in touch for years after the tour ended. She later starred in the *'Mod Squad'* television series and eventually married Quincy Jones.

When she was interviewed in later years, she admitted she really loved Paul and would have married him, but he never asked her.

Jane was no fool. Quite the contrary. She recognised that he was adored worldwide and the temptations were huge. But she was very loyal and committed to Paul.

She demanded loyalty and honesty in return.

She had her suspicions about his behaviour whilst they were together. His increasing interest in LSD was also a great concern, as she felt it was changing his personality.

But, if she'd turned a blind eye to the reports, when she walked in on Paul and Francie Schwartz on that day in Cavendish Avenue, she realised that their relationship was never going to work.

Boys will be boys, as they say...

George, who tried to 'pull' Jane at the Albert Hall, had a friendly relationship with her long after her breakup with Paul.

But George was another who loved the ladies and, in fact, had an affair with Ringo's wife Maureen, around the time of the Beatles' break-up. John called him out on this affair with Mo, saying it was akin to being incestuous.

After the breakup, Paul's career went astronomic.

The Beatles ruled the world musically - they pushed boundaries and made music that was at a different level than anyone else.

A lot of it still is, nearly 60 years on.

They opened so many doors for future stars, because of their talent and influence - a fact that has been acknowledged by many - including Tom Petty, Bruce Springsteen, Billy Joel, Jeff Lynne and many, many others.

McCartney went on to date Linda Eastman and they got married in March 1969.

They had three children together - Mary, Stella, and James. Linda had a child already from her previous marriage - Heather - and Paul adopted her.

It became one of the happiest marriages in popular music history.



They released the album 'Ram' together in 1971 and formed the band Wings in the same year.

Paul and Linda McCartney got married in March 1969 in London and the couple were also nominated for an Oscar for their song 'Live And Let Die', the theme tune for the 1973 Bond film of the same name.

Linda McCartney died on April 17th 1998 at the McCartney family ranch in Tucson, Arizona, after a battle with breast cancer.

She was surrounded by Paul and their four children, Mary, Stella, James and Heather.

She was 56 years old.

Shortly thereafter, Linda was cremated and taken back to England. McCartney spread her ashes on the McCartney family farm in Sussex.

A grief-stricken McCartney released a statement where he revealed his final words to his wife. He told Linda on her deathbed:

"You're up on your beautiful Appaloosa stallion. It's a fine spring day. We're riding through the woods. The bluebells are all out, and the sky is a clear blue."

He added: *"I had barely got to the end of the sentence, when she closed her eyes and gently slipped away."*

McCartney continued: *"Our family is so close that her passing has left a huge hole in our lives. We will never get over it, but I think we will come to accept it, total heartbreak."*

Jane continued her acting career and became very successful and sought-after.

She met political cartoonist Gerald Scarfe at the tenth anniversary party of the satirical publication Private Eye. They connected immediately. It was an instant chemistry.



The two fell in love and their first child Katie was born on 17 April 1974.

Two more children were born, both sons - Alexander in December 1981 and Rory in 1984.

Jane and Gerald were eventually married in 1981 and settled in Chelsea.

They are still together.

Jane appeared in further acting parts, including a TV production of *'Romeo and Juliet'*. After the birth of Katie, she curtailed her acting career for a while, but appeared in the stage version of *'Whose Life Is It Anyway?'*

She returned to acting in the 80's and 90's, with many television and film appearances and went on to write books on entertaining, fancy dress and ornate cake decoration.

Tragically, her father died of an overdose of barbiturates and alcohol.

His body was discovered on 26th April 1969.

It's intriguing to listen to some of the songs that were written by Paul in the Asher house and on holiday whilst he and Jane were together.

They do give an insight into what was happening. Take *'For No One'* as an example.

The song was written while they were on holiday together in Klosters-Seneus in Switzerland in 1966, probably after a row. The words suggest that the relationship was starting to struggle.

The lyrics and melody perfectly captured the pain of a breakup while one person in the relationship is still clinging to a love that is no more.

John Lennon even complimented the song which he didn't often do. He said *'For No One'* was one of his favorite songs - a "superb work."

The working title of the song was *'Why Did It Die?'*

'We Can Work It Out' is another example.

Although the song is about what it takes to preserve a relationship, you can't help noticing in the lyrics that it's still his way - or the highway.

*"Life is very short, and there's no time, for fussing and fighting, my friend
I have always thought that it's a crime, so, I will ask you once again
Try to see it my way, only time will tell if I am right or I am wrong
We can work it out, we can work it out"*

It all suggests that Paul has to be a leader in a relationship. To a certain degree that also manifested itself with the band, especially towards the end.

Mind you, they were very fragmented at that time, because of many external influences, so it's fair to say that Paul only tried to show leadership to pull it all back together, because the other three were just going through the motions.

You can see it clearly in the *'Let it Be'* film.

Linda was good for him.

She was what he needed - a strong woman. She has said that she didn't look at him as Paul McCartney, only as Paul her husband.

As far as we know, he didn't cheat on Linda.

They had a very solid marriage - and were a loving couple.

You have to admire Jane Asher for not kissing and telling.

She must have been approached about it – and, without doubt, that book would have been a best seller. But her standards were always very high and this has continued.

She is clearly a very smart and classy lady.



Whether Paul and Jane are still in touch is unknown.

It's mentioned in Paul's '*Lyrics*' book, that they met briefly again in 1994 for the first time in more than 20 years, in, of all places, a Doctors' surgery.

I'm sure it was amicable.

Paul is still in touch with Peter and so is Jane, so there might be an indirect connection now and again - "Tell Jane I said hello," type of thing.

I hope so...

I keep returning to the words he wrote in '*For No One*'.

'Your day breaks, your mind aches, you find that all her words of kindness linger on, when she no longer needs you.

She wakes up, she makes up, she takes her time and doesn't feel she has to hurry, she no longer needs you.

You want her, you need her, and yet you don't believe her, when she says her love is dead, you think she needs you.

Your day breaks, your mind aches, there will be times when all the things she said will fill your head, you won't forget her. And in her eyes, you see nothing, no sign of love behind the tears, cried for no one.

A love that should have lasted years'

Says it all, really, doesn't it?

