



## The Beatles' Abbey Road Medley: Extended Forms in Popular Music

By Thomas MacFarlane PhD Music Education Administrative Coordinator Department of Music and Performing Arts Professions New York University Steinhardt School of Culture Education and Human Development



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In September 1969, the Beatles released their final recorded work, *Abbey Road*, using a variety of progressive musical ideas that expressed the group's approach to multi-track recording and offering songs that constituted a highpoint in the Beatles' musical corpus. Of particular interest is the concluding sequence of songs (tracks 8-17): seemingly unrelated fragments woven together into a musical form that has thus far defied attempts at categorization. *The Beatles' Abbey Road Medley: Extended Forms in Popular Music* offers an analysis of these fragments, commonly known as the *Abbey Road Medley*, in order to understand and explain the emergent musical form and to clarify the relationships between music recording and music composition.

Thomas MacFarlane provides an overview of the Beatles' their history and their music within the context of popular music and culture between 1962 and 1970, paying particular attention to the production of the album *Abbey Road* and the pivotal role of producer George Martin on the *Abbey Road Medley*. After explaining his method of analysis, MacFarlane applies it to the recording and transcription of the *Abbey Road Medley*, examining the implications of the work's structure and demonstrating how the Beatles expanded the parameters of the popular music form by incorporating recording technology directly into the compositional process. Drawing conclusions about musical form and practice in the recording process of the 1970s and beyond, MacFarlane also suggests other examples of rock music that were influenced by *Abbey Road*. An appendix transcribing the author's interview with the Beatles' de facto manager Peter Brown, a selected discography, a bibliography, and a selection of photos conclude the book, which will be of particular interest to musicians and Beatles fans alike.



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## Editorial Review

### Review

Through his analysis of the music, MacFarlane demonstrates the strong interaction between the music itself, the technology available for creating and recording music, and the personal relationships of the musicians. The well-documented tension between Paul McCartney and John Lennon about the medley approach, in particular, rises to the surface in his discussion, but MacFarlane also presents intriguing musical arguments for a greater level of cooperation and sympathy between the two on this project than is often described elsewhere.... This information will most likely appeal to an audience of music specialists rather than to the idly curious, though much of MacFarlane's textual and onto-historical analysis will find a welcome audience with nonmusicians. In the long run, the value of this source will be in its careful documentation of the medley as a whole in an age when album tracks are splintered and shuffled into nonserial playlists, often with no respect for the compositional intent behind their original creation and arrangement. By looking at the medley as an extended popular form, MacFarlane makes a case for respecting the album and the compositional process that extends beyond the track level and by doing so encourages closer and more careful listening to *Abbey Road*. (*Music Reference Services Quarterly*)

### About the Author

**Thomas MacFarlane** teaches courses in Music Theory and Composition at New York University while also working as a composer and a writer.

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