

The Beatles

as released by Mobile Fidelity

Intro

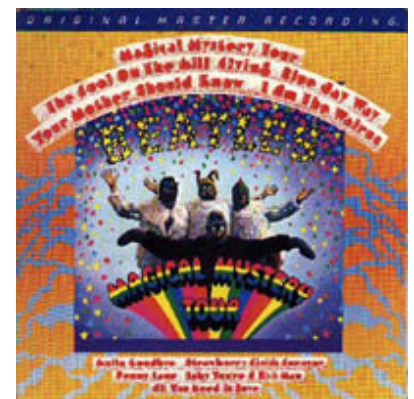
Brad Miller was both a producer and a recording engineer. In 1977, Miller expanded his Mobile Fidelity operation to found Mobile Fidelity Sound Lab, an organization dedicated to faithful sound reproduction. By slowing down the mastering process to "half-speed," by making use of a master tape as close to the original as possible, and by using high quality "virgin" vinyl made by the Japanese Victor Company, Mobile Fidelity set out to issue a series of Original Master Recordings in higher quality than commonly available to the general public.

The first OMR album was issued in February, 1978. As the process gained popularity -- especially after the release of Pink Floyd's *Dark Side of the Moon* in 1979 -- it was inevitable that Beatles records would be issued through Mobile Fidelity.

The first Beatles record to be issued by MFSL was *Abbey Road*, catalog number 1-023. This choice was not surprising, since that album made use of the most modern recording equipment available to the Beatles. Released in late December, 1979, *Abbey Road* quickly sold out its original pressing. Although information was circulated that MoFi only pressed 20,000 of each album, this was untrue; in fact, MFSL's own literature only indicates that they would press no more than 200,000 of any album. Repressings were done, depending on the popularity of a given album. Quite a few copies of *Abbey Road* are out there, proving that it was quite popular for MFSL. Gregg Schnitzer of MFSL says that about 50,000 copies each were pressed of the (first few) Beatles records on MoFi. Stan Ricker, who mastered the album, no longer recalls the source from which Mobile Fidelity obtained their master for this album; however, the original story (as it circulated prior to summer, 1982) was that a sub-master was obtained from Capitol for this release, rather than obtaining an earlier generation tape from England. This story was reported in sources such as *The Beatles on Record*, which Mark Wallgren released in spring, 1982. An article in *Stereo Test Reports* from 1981 claims (again without a source) that MFSL obtained a copy of Capitol's sub-master for *Abbey Road*, calling it the "EMI/Capitol master tape." This was the story prior to 1982; some people dispute that account.



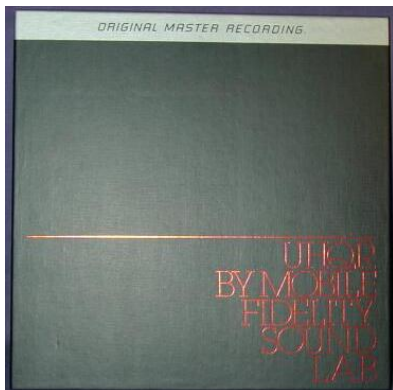
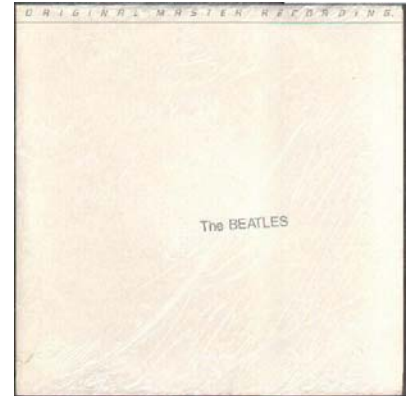
The success of the first Beatles half-speed master eventually brought a second and third. Capitol's *Magical Mystery Tour* was an interesting choice for the next release. With catalog number 1-047 and released in February, 1981, *Magical Mystery Tour* also proved to be a rapid seller for MFSL, who by now were doing a terrific business with most of their albums. To my ears, MMT seems to fare a bit better than AR, perhaps indicating that Mobile Fidelity was improving their process. This time for certain, MFSL sought to obtain a tape copy directly from Parlophone in England. However, since Parlophone's *Magical*



Mystery Tour album used sub-masters obtained from Capitol, the last three songs on the album are in rechanneled stereo – as they were on the US LP. On May 8 and May 12, 1980, copies were made for MFSL of Parlophone's dub of the Capitol sub-master. These were the source of the LP release. Later that year, MFSL began to release Chromium Dioxide ("type II") cassettes, and for that release (C-047) true stereo copies of the three songs were obtained from Parlophone – just as they had been obtained by German Odeon in late 1971. Therefore, "Penny Lane" and "Baby, You're a Rich Man" saw their first true stereo release in the United States on the MFSL cassette. The cassette was popular, too, and was eventually reissued with a new cover design.

Following their pattern of releasing a new Beatles album every year, MFSL issued the classic "White Album" (formally known as *The Beatles*) in January, 1982. From this point on, all Beatles releases were made to correspond with the British issues, and the master tapes were obtained from England. The album's tracks have finer definition here than one is accustomed, although many listeners prefer the German "Direct Metal Master" from 1985. The catalog number was 2-072.

MFSL obtained the cover art for the first three releases and for *Let it Be* from Capitol Records in the USA; for each of the others they used artwork sent to them from Parlophone in England.



October, 1982, saw two special issues: an "Ultra High Quality Recording" of the famous *Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band* album and a limited-edition fourteen-record set of *Magical Mystery Tour* and the British catalog. The UHQR recording received rave reviews, but many people appear to have bought the set in order to resell it (UHQR 1-100). The *Collection* boxed set (catalogued BC-1) featured different covers for each LP, showing photographs of tape boxes and log sheets. The notes to *Let It Be* indicate that the album had been EQ'd for LP, but that tapes were to use the original master. The

notes for the *Sgt. Pepper* LP are also intriguing; they point out that a quad remix was made in April, 1973, but never released. As for the UHQR series, most people would call that "200-gram virgin vinyl" today; a typical album from 1982 weighed 100 grams. Supposedly, about 5,000 copies were made of the UHQR recording. The boxed set shows up for sale regularly online with numbers as high as 17,000, so the number pressed for that album might be much higher; one MFSL insider estimated the number at 25,000.



The pressing of the boxed set was a big deal. For this project, Mobile Fidelity obtained direct access to the original master tapes. This was reported in 1982 as the only time that the tapes had ever left the EMI vault. They were delivered via courier (NOT through the mail!) to Mobile Fidelity in California. As a publicity stunt, they were insured by Lloyds of London, reportedly,

for the very low sum of \$1,000,000 (each). Mobile Fidelity hired a local graphics company to photograph the tape boxes and to assemble the artwork for the inner sleeves of the boxed set.

Reportedly, *Rarities* was considered for inclusion in the boxed set, and test pressings were made; however, that LP was never included in the set. Herb Belkin, president of MFSL, also reported to *Billboard* in June, 1982, that he hoped to include an album of BBC recordings. That did not happen, of course, and fans would have to wait until 1994 to hear *Live at the BBC*.

Although Mobile Fidelity's own website lists the next release as *Sgt. Pepper*, giving a date of June, 1983, that album was not released at that time. Instead, the next Beatles release from MFSL was *Rubber Soul*, issued in June, 1984 (catalog number 1-106). That album was issued on LP and cassette (C-106) at the same time. The album is an improvement over a beat-up regular pressing, but the cassette is the

release that really shines. Although MFSL did not publicize the information, a member of the MFSL team who worked on cassettes indicates that their album releases were occasionally "limited" and/or "compressed" in order to make them more suitable for vinyl. The cassette releases, however, were not treated to such treatment. The *Rubber Soul* cassette from Mobile Fidelity stands as one of the superior releases of the album worldwide. Only here do the guitars on "Nowhere Man" appear in full volume and high-register, the way that Paul McCartney describes them in his interview with Mark Lewisohn (for *Recording Sessions*).



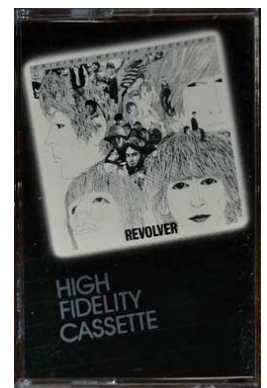
Nineteen eighty-five saw the release of *Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band* on "regular" album (1-100) and cassette (C-100). With only a slight loss of quality from the UHQR edition, the cassette is certainly worthy of a listen. The album pressing is somehow not as crisp and clean as its UHQR predecessor. The 1985 date is verified by the Beatles Price Guide series, which documented the releases as they came out.

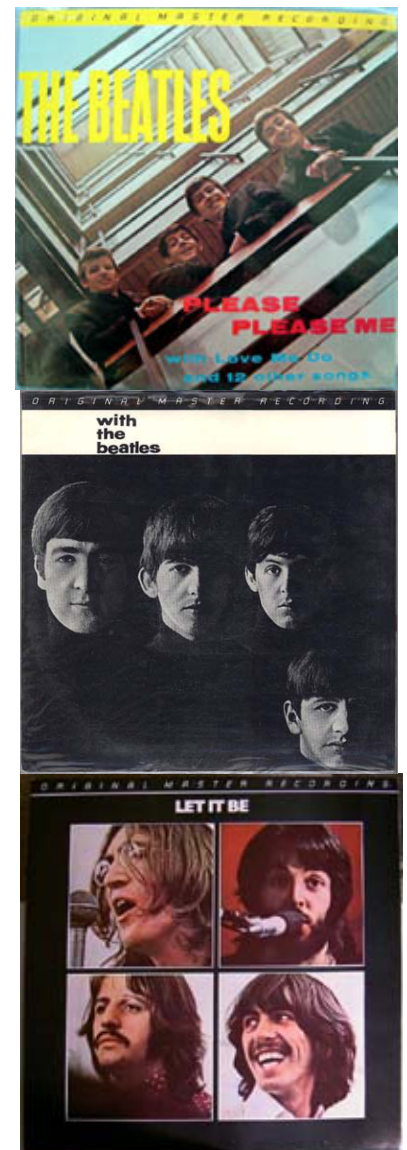
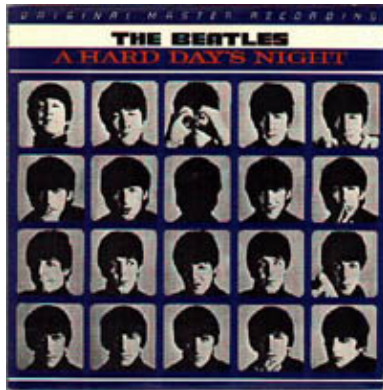
My own note-keeping from the '80's shows that the next release, *Help!* came out later in 1985 – speeding up Mobile Fidelity's timetable of one Beatle album per year. Once again, the album came out on LP (1-105) and cassette (C-105), and again the cassette's sound is most outstanding, although the LP is no slouch, either. All in all, an excellent release, with MoFi continuing to improve their sound reproduction.



astonishing.

At about this same time, *Revolver* was issued on cassette only (C-107). The album was to be released early the following year. Once again, the sound reproduction is





The following year, *Revolver* came out on LP. By this time, however, many audiophiles had heard that the Beatles catalog was being "worked on" for eventual release on compact disc, but NOT through MFSL. With that, their album series lost some of its popularity, and it appears that their contract to release Beatles records and tapes was about to expire. Therefore, the "later" records are all harder to find than are the "earlier" ones. From November of 1986 through January of 1987 (I bought my copies in January, 1987), the company released all of the remaining Beatles LP's: *Please Please Me* (1-101), *With the Beatles* (1-102), *A Hard Day's Night* (1-103), *Beatles For Sale* (1-104), *Yellow Submarine* (1-108), and *Let It Be* (1-109). Although cassette releases were considered for some of these albums, none of them were ever issued that way. The MFSL pressings of these albums are all of excellent quality, and *With the Beatles* became an "instant rarity" since the stamper was damaged; no effort was made to replace it. Supposedly, there are about 1,250 copies of *With the Beatles* out there. Except for *A Hard Day's Night*, all of the albums in the last batch are somewhat scarcer – maybe 5,000 to 10,000 copies each.

Please, Please Me and *With the Beatles* received high marks from audiophiles, while the others that came out in the last batch were regarded well (but not as highly as those two).

The first Beatles CD's were released in the US in February, 1987. MFSL had been "switching" to CD since 1984 and discontinued their first line of Original Master Recordings. With trouble brewing throughout the '90's, MFSL had been planning to offer new releases of the Beatles catalog but went out of business in 1999. They have returned, offering some solo material, but they have yet to release the Beatles catalog in any format since their revival.

Identifying Early Copies

The A- and B-sides of each album were cut with pressing identification numbers. These numbers (following the letters A and B) indicate how many lacquers had been cut to that point. So, the earliest pressing of an album would have A1 and B1 in the vinyl. A12 or B10, for example,

might appear in the vinyl of a later copy. Gregg Schnitzer reports that only "a few thousand" of each cassette were made.

He also points out that if a hyphenated number is given like A1-1, then MFSL had gone through their initial set of stampers and returned to the master tape to make further copies. So, an album marked A5 and B6 would be from the first set of stampers (from mothers 5 and 6), but a copy marked A1-1 and B1-1 would indicate the first stamper made from their second set -- the second time they referenced the master tapes. This information was recorded by hand on the covers of test pressings and appears to correspond essentially to the information that we find in the matrix of each record.

The matrix numbers appear to break down as follows. In addition to the short form (e.g., A8), each side contains a three-digit number. That number usually indicates a number corresponding to the lacquer master, followed by what appears to be the mother number, and then the stamper number. The mother number corresponds to what is found in the short-form matrix number. Example: If we see B6, then the number might be H 161. Every album except for *Sgt. Pepper* only had one set of lacquer masters; therefore, the first number will be a "1" nearly all of the time.

For the reader's amusement, I have listed the matrix information for the records in my copy of the boxed set:

Please, Please Me

Side 1: A4 H 141*A

Side 2: B1 H 111 ***

With the Beatles

Side 1: A2 H 121**XA

Side 2: B1 H 112*

A Hard Day's Night

Side 1: A5 H 152*A

Side 2: B4 H 142*

Beatles for Sale

Side 1: A7 H171*XA

Side 2: B1 H111*

Help!

Side 1: A3 H132**A

Side 2: B6 H161*

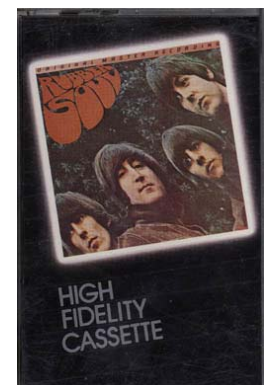
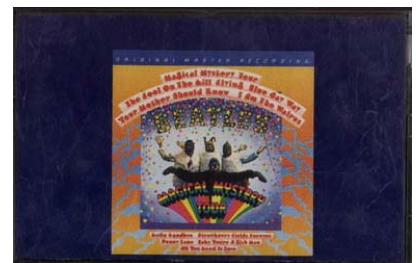
Rubber Soul

Side 1: A2 H123*XA

Side 2: B2 H121*

Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band

Side 1: A2 H121*



Side 2: B1 H111*

The Beatles

Side 1: A3 H132 *[]

Side 2: B4 H141*+

Side 3: C4 H145*XA[]

Side 4: D5 H151*

Yellow Submarine

Side 1: A1 H112*XA

Side 2: B2 H121*

Abbey Road

Side 1: A10 H1101**XA

Side 2: B8 H181***+X

Let it Be

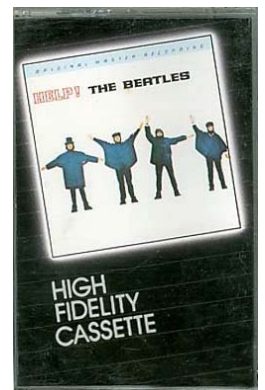
Side 1: A8 H181*XA

Side 2: B5 H153**+

Magical Mystery Tour

Side 1: A1 H113*[]

Side 2: B1 H111**+



You will observe that by the time of the boxed set, *Abbey Road* was on its tenth mother. Herb Belkin of MFSL reported to *Billboard* in June, 1982, that he expected the album to “sell out by fall.” Also, *Let it Be* seems to have had some difficulty in preparation; notice how many mothers were made for the album. Now, the UHQR recording of Sgt. Pepper – my copy is numbered #49 – has the following marks:

Sgt. Pepper's LHCB

Side 1: A3 UH132*T

Side 2: B2 UH121*+

Notice the appearance of “UH” (ultra high) instead of “H” (high) in the matrix of the UHQR record.

I have open copies of eight of the albums. This is the matrix info for those:

A Hard Day's Night

Side 1: A5 H152*W

Side 2: B5 H151*

Help!

Side 1: A2 H121***L

Side 2: B4 H143*

Rubber Soul

Side 1: A2 H121**O+

Side 2: B3 H131*+

Sgt. Pepper's LHCB

Side 1: JH/2 A2-1 H211*+

Side 2: JH/2 B2-2 H221*

Yellow Submarine

Side 1: A2 H121**+L

Side 2: B1 H112**+

Abbey Road (with Shakespeare inner)

Side 1: A6 161*[]

Side 2: B12 1121*

Let it Be

Side 1: A8 H181*0?W

Side 2: B7 H171*+

Magical Mystery Tour (with original inner)

Side 1: A1 111*

Side 2: B1 111*

As I indicated earlier, only *Sgt. Pepper* was mastered a second time. The first lacquer master of each LP was made by Stan Ricker and bears his initials in the matrix: "SR / 2. The master for the individual release of *Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band* was prepared by Jack Hunt.

The story that a stamper for *With the Beatles* broke during production goes all the way back to 1987, but it may be false. Stan Ricker wrote that he had no memory of JVC having broken any stampers, and, "If a stamper then broke, it would then be a simple process of re-plating the appropriate metal mother to generate another stamper." Therefore, when I asked him if that story could be false, he replied, "I have no idea...Wouldn't be surprised."



What Do they Sell for Now?

Album	NM Value	Sealed Value
<i>Abbey Road</i>	\$50	\$75
<i>Magical Mystery Tour</i> (LP)	\$50	\$75
<i>Magical Mystery Tour</i> (first issue cassette)	\$60	\$75
<i>Magical Mystery Tour</i> (second issue cassette)	\$60	\$75
<i>The Beatles</i>	\$100	\$200
<i>The Beatles</i> (test pressing, each disc)	\$200	N/A
<i>Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band</i> (UHQR)	\$350	\$400
<i>The Collection</i> (with all inserts)	\$800	\$1200
<i>Rubber Soul</i> (LP)	\$75	\$100
<i>Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band</i> (LP)	\$100	\$125
<i>Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band</i> (test pressing)	\$750	N/A
<i>Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band</i> (cassette)	\$80	\$100
<i>Help!</i> (LP)	\$80	\$120
<i>Help!</i> (cassette)	\$150	\$175
<i>Help!</i> (cassette, test pressing)	\$200	N/A
<i>Revolver</i> (LP)	\$125	\$150
<i>Revolver</i> (cassette)	\$80	\$100
<i>Please, Please Me</i>	\$125	\$175
<i>With the Beatles</i>	\$200	\$450
<i>Hard Day's Night</i>	\$100	\$150
<i>Beatles For Sale</i>	\$125	\$150
<i>Yellow Submarine</i>	\$150	\$200
<i>Let It Be</i> (gatefold)	\$100	\$125
<i>Let It Be</i> (single-pocket) – rumored to exist	\$100	\$200

NOTE 1: An MFSL sticker on the cover of a sealed album adds about \$20 to the value.



NOTE 2: Unlike "regular" albums, Mobile Fidelity albums in VG+ or lower condition sell for considerably less than the NM value -- perhaps \$20 for a typical VG+ copy. The most popular albums may not sell at all in lower than NM condition.

NOTE 3: You may find CD's of the above albums. These are bootlegs, some of which were made during the early 90's; others were made around 2000. These are second-generation CD's made from the LP's.

NOTE 4: Mobile Fidelity changed its protective cardboard wrapper (inner sleeve) throughout the years. An early copy of the LP must have an appropriate inner wrapper (and rice paper sleeve) in order to be complete.

Interestingly, the most expensive album, the UHQR release of *Sgt. Pepper* has appreciated the LEAST over the years.

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