

PlayTape: a Truly Portable Tape Format

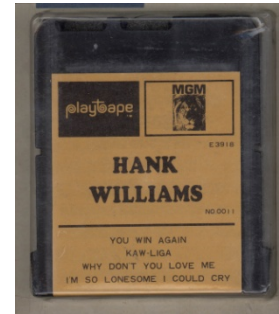
Frank Daniels

The sixties were an amazing decade for the development of audio formats. As the decade began, the only tape format available to consumers was the reel-to-reel (or open-reel) tape. In 1962-3, cartridge and cassette systems were both introduced. With the compact cassette considered largely unsuitable for music until 1966, Earl Muntz's four-track cartridge quickly came to dominate the market. The four-track had been created to use in automobiles, and within a few years the format was widespread. Bill Lear had worked for Muntz but was dissatisfied with the format; his eight-track tape came on the scene in 1965.

That leads us to 1966: the year of *Pet Sounds*, *Revolver*, and the PlayTape. For at least twenty years, Frank Stanton had been determined to make a tape format that was portable. As four tracks and eight tracks gained in popularity, Stanton pitched the idea of a format that was not restricted to homes or automobiles. He marketed portable tapes to Smith Corona as a means of eliminating what they called in advertising "the silent letter." Stanton believed that people would stop writing on paper – instead sending taped messages to one another. Within a year, his idea was regarded as a failure.

The PlayTape, however, was a seasonal success. Stanton and his partners formed PlayTape Inc. and set up offices at the twelve-story 1115 Broadway building in New York City. Together they designed several portable tape players and what they called an improvement in the tape cartridge. The PlayTape had a twin-track design, meaning that it consisted of two (mono) channels, on a one-eighth-inch wide tape. Since the need to rewind tapes was considered undesirable, all PlayTapes had a continuous-loop design (like their four-track and eight-track counterparts). However, the PlayTape was smaller and slimmer – making it easily portable. With a hand-held, battery-operated machine, you could take your music to the beach with you. The size, however, meant that no more than 24 minutes of music could be contained on one tape.

That restriction was recognized by the developers. Rather than compete directly against the formats that packaged complete albums onto single tapes, the PlayTape would typically contain two, four, or eight songs – costing different amounts of money. The two-

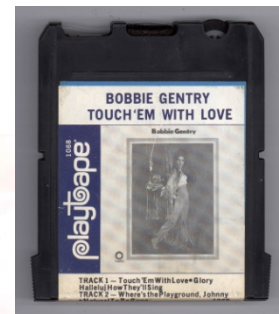


song tape would correspond to a single; cartridges for these would be red. The four-song PlayTape was recognizable as the equivalent of an extended play (EP) forty-five; these cartridges were black (for popular releases) or light blue (for children's selections). The longer white-shelled tapes usually contained the majority of songs from a long-playing album. The company planned also to market tapes with talk rather than music; these would have gray cartridges. However, the format was only popular in the three forms that we commonly find: children's; long play (white); and EP (black). It is not known whether the other two forms were sold commercially. And yes, sometimes you'll find re-used tape shells that are the "wrong" color.

As 1966 rolled along, the company gained the sponsorship of two important entities: Sears, Roebuck, and Co. (who would sell their players) and MGM (who would provide music). The product was officially announced at a meeting of distributors of MGM records that Summer, with artists like the Animals, Hank Williams, Herman's Hermits, and Sam the Sham being chosen to introduce the United States to the new format. Patents for the portable player and the tape cartridge were submitted to the US Patent Office on July 18, 1966; similar submissions in other countries soon followed. These documents show Robert Schreibler of Playtape Inc. as the inventor. Although the PlayTape would not last long, the Schreibler design is referenced by many later documents as the forerunner to most portable tape players.

By early 1967, the format had been picked up by other record companies, including ABC/Dunhill, A&M, Warner/Reprise (May), and United Artists. Motown and Capitol would soon follow. Columbia and RCA resisted the format, though, never releasing their artists on PlayTapes, but bubble packs containing PlayTapes from other artists were soon available through Sears stores and other retailers everywhere.

As the company expanded, they changed the graphics of their label/cover designs. The earliest tapes (late-1966) had covers that were all-brown with black print. By 1967, the company sought to add contrast to the covers that would make the artist and song selections stand out. Tapes made during this period have brown backgrounds along with white boxes. From Spring, 1967, to about November, 1967, PlayTapes have a simpler black-and-white motif. The first Capitol tapes appeared in June, and so the first Beach Boys and Beatles PlayTapes have black-and-white covers. Late in 1967,



photographs of the artists were added to the labels for the first time. Tapes made from that time until late Spring, 1968, have a colored background (red, orange, rust, beige, yellow, light green, olive green, blue, or magenta) and a picture of the artist.

In mid-1968, PlayTape began using the stereo catalog numbers on their labels; previous issues showed the mono catalog number. Replacing the larger colored background, a smaller bar of color is commonly found across the middle of the label of this issue. These releases came out as the format was declining in popularity, though, and are less-frequently found by collectors. Finally, PlayTapes made from the beginning of 1969 through about July of that year have graphics on them resembling the LP cover. These are the most artistic and the hardest to find.

PlayTape also flourished in other countries. A series (2000's) for Australia and another (8000's) for Japan were soon being marketed. Consorti, an Italian affiliate, emerged in Fall, 1967, while Dyn Importers ran the South American operation. The British licensee of PlayTape was A.I.R. London, run by the Beatles' producer, George Martin. Promotion drives were held in 28 countries worldwide.

The main EP series was numbered from No. 0001 to at least No. 1079. The LP series was numbered in the 3000's, ending at about 3600. Children's tapes belonged to the 7000 series; a popular Disney set exists, containing several of these and a player.

According to an article by Frank Stanton in the September 23, 1967, issue of *Billboard*, the retail prices for PlayTapes in the five color-coded formats were as follows:

Red (single)	\$0.99 each	Black (EP)	\$1.49 each
Blue (children)	\$1.00 to \$1.50 each	White (8 songs)	\$2.98 each
Gray (talk/educational)	\$1.00 to \$1.50 each		

According to another article in the same issue, PlayTape planned to open a factory in Clifton, New Jersey, in October, 1967, with the express purpose of manufacturing red "singles" cartridges and black "EP" cartridges; white "LP" cartridges were being made in Japan and Hong Kong. The singles cartridges were going to be issued beginning in November, 1968; January, 1969, was the expected roll-out date for stereo PlayTapes. An article in the November 9, 1968, issue of *Billboard* claimed that the company would soon be releasing PlayTape singles at the same time as their vinyl counterparts. The article mentioned the Beatles and Mary Hopkin as being among the first artists to have singles issued on PlayTape.

The portability of the format had made it popular in 1967-8. This did not go unnoticed. Almost immediately, sellers of eight-track cartridges began to ask if players were available for them similar to the PlayTape players. When handheld eight-track players began to fly off the shelves, the makers of PlayTapes realized that the unique quality of their format was being taken away. In late 1968, they marketed a PlayTape auto player, but this came too late. Plans to introduce stereo PlayTapes also fell by the wayside. Meanwhile, Frank Stanton and PlayTape Inc. moved on to develop video cartridges. In 1969, they partnered with Avco/Embassy to form Cartridge Television Inc. (CTI) and to work on the Cartrivision system: the first videotape system that

allowed home taping as well as the purchase of prerecorded tapes. Introduced in 1972, the format lasted one year.

In the years that passed, PlayTapes became first a curiosity and then a collectible. Realizing that fewer PlayTapes were made than eight-tracks, four-tracks, or vinyl albums, collectors have placed premiums on the format whenever they hope to assemble a truly complete collection of their favorite artists.

The first PlayTape machines were introduced in October, 1966. Several models of PlayTape machines are known, most of which were manufactured by PlayTape, Inc. These are:

Disneyland Model 1100

PlayTape Model 1200

PlayTape Model 1310 (available in beige or red; with or without MGM logo)

PlayTape Model 1320

PlayTape Model 1401 (Some of these were sold by Hanimex in Australia.)

PlayTape Model 1403 (hand-held)

PlayTape Model 1441 "Hipster"

PlayTape Model 1442 "Hipster"

PlayTape Model 1443 "Hipster"

PlayTape Model 1600 (The 1600's were wood-grain desktop models)

PlayTape Model 1601 (shown in *Billboard* 09/23/67)

PlayTape Model 1604

PlayTape Model 1605 (upright)

PlayTape Model 1900 (shown in *Billboard* 09/23/67)

The VRC Valiant (silver)

Mayfair "Swing a Tune" Model 412

Discassette model by Discatron (British player for 45 RPM singles and PlayTapes) (shown in *Billboard* 09/23/67)

Sapphire Playtape I (player/radio for Volkswagens, 1968-9)

Sapphire Playtape II (player for Volkswagens, 1968-9)

A survey of the more widely collected PlayTapes includes:

The Mothers of Invention, *We're Only in It for the Money*, No. 0882, color bar -- \$300

Jackie Lomax, *Is This What You Want?*, No. 1049, cover graphics -- \$250

The Beatles, *A Hard Day's Night*, No. 3111, black-and-white -- \$150

Mike Nesmith, *The Wichita Train Whistle Sings*, No. 0908, color bar -- \$100

George Harrison, *Wonderwall Music*, No. 0989, cover graphics -- \$100

The Beach Boys, *Pet Sounds*, No. 0537, black-and-white -- \$75

Jimi Hendrix Experience, *(Axis) Bold as Love*, No. 0829, colored background -- \$75

As with any format, though, there are plenty of these tapes that still sell for under \$10 each. Prices vary widely, depending on condition, with "still-sealed" copies in Near Mint bubble packs commanding a premium.

Continue to the next page to read about Beatles Playtapes.

Beatles Two-Track Tapes

Lost Format #2

Page updated on **29 May 13**

Most people have never seen a Playtape and wouldn't know what to make of one if they saw it. These tapes resembled a miniature 8 track or 4 track and typically contained four songs in mono. Playtapes with white shells (in the 3000 series) were intended to have eight songs; Playtapes with red shells were intended to have two songs like a single; although they were advertised as coming soon, it is not known whether any red-shelled "singles" tapes were ever manufactured. Only one known Beatles Playtape has a white shell.

PlayTapes were the precursor to the cassette single of the 1980's-90's. You'd carry the machine with you to the beach or in your car. The first Beatles Playtapes appeared on the scene in June, 1967. These continued to be manufactured until 1969, when stereo Playtapes were supposed to become available. There are at least nineteen known players for Playtapes; these vanished mysteriously, never to reappear on the market. Apparently, when Capitol was working on its licensing for tapes in 1969, they decided to cancel the Playtapes. Perhaps this contributed to the death of the format, which does not seem to have survived much beyond that point.

Label Styles: As the company expanded, they changed the graphics of their label/cover designs. The earliest tapes (late-1966) had covers that were all-brown with black print. Since Capitol Records had no deal with PlayTape at this time, there are no Beatles tapes with this configuration. By 1967, the company sought to add contrast to the covers that would make the artist and song selections stand out. Tapes made during this period have brown backgrounds along with white boxes. Once again, there are no Beatles tapes in this configuration. From Spring, 1967, to about November, 1967, PlayTapes have a simpler black-and-white motif. The first Capitol tapes appeared in June, and so the first Beatles PlayTapes have black-and-white covers. Late in 1967, photographs of the artists were added to the labels for the first time. Tapes made from that time until late Spring, 1968, have a colored background (red, orange, rust, beige, yellow, light green, olive green, blue, or magenta) and a picture of the artist. In mid-1968, PlayTape began using the stereo catalog numbers on their labels; previous issues showed the mono catalog number. Replacing the larger colored background, a smaller bar of color is commonly found across the middle of the label of this issue. These releases came out as the format was declining in popularity, though, and are less-frequently found by collectors. Finally, PlayTapes made from the beginning of 1969 through about July of that year have graphics on them resembling the LP cover. These are the most artistic and the hardest to find.

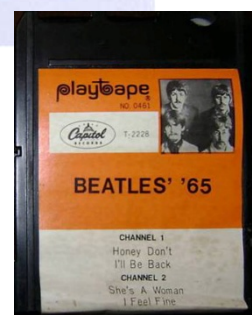
The different pressings of Beatles PlayTapes are detailed below. A listing of all **known** Beatles PlayTapes is given here. If you have any others, please photograph them and send the photos to me.

Pressings of Beatles Playtapes	
"Black and White"	
	All Beatles Playtapes prior to c. 0600 (in late 1967) were issued originally on black and white labels with no graphics. See below for the label of a first issue "black and white" PlayTape.
"Hello Goodbye"	
	In late 1967, around the time of the "Hello Goodbye" single, PlayTape began adding graphics to their labels. At that time, Capitol sent the graphics for the "Hello Goodbye" picture sleeve, and this became the photo used on all Beatles Playtapes. See below to view photos of the "colored background" issue. Since this issue is the most common among Beatles tapes, in the listings below I will mention only the color of the background. E.g., "red background" means that the tape has the "Hello Goodbye" PS photo in front of a red background. Most (if not all) of the earlier Beatles tapes were reissued onto this style.
"Color Bar"	
	Later in 1968, Playtape (c. 800's), PlayTape made a few changes. One of those changes involved printing the PlayTape number (No. 0797, for example) above the word "PlayTape" on the label. Knowing that stereo was replacing mono, the company began using the stereo catalog numbers on their labels. A smaller bar of color is commonly found across the middle of the label of this issue. The <i>Beatles, Vol. 1</i> tape shown below is an example of this issue PlayTape. Only a few Beatles tapes were reissued onto this label style.
"Album Cover"	
	Near Spring of 1969, Playtape started putting individualized graphics on each Playtape. Often, this included the album cover art. The <i>Yellow Submarine</i> tape shown above is an example of the "cover" issue Playtape.

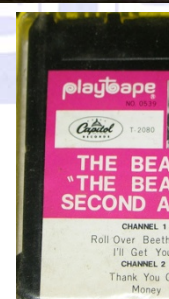
Where I know of no copies of a particular issue, I will mention it -- since I am certain of its existence. However, the listings will indicate "none known" where this is the case.

The following Playtapes were issued originally with black and white labels:

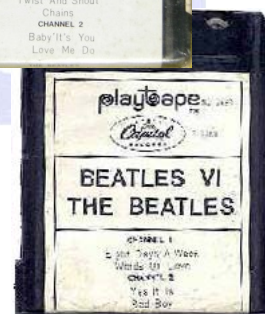
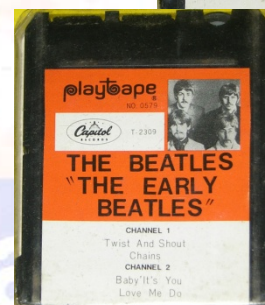
<i>Beatles '65</i>	No. 0461
first issue: black and white label	
<i>Beatles '65</i>	No. 0461



second issue: green, yellow, or orange background known	
<i>Beatles VI</i>	No. 0528
first issue: black and white label	
<i>Beatles VI</i>	No. 0528
second issue: green, yellow, or orange background known	
<i>Help!</i>	No. 0529
first issue: black and white label	
<i>Help!</i>	No. 0529
second issue: green, orange, or yellow background known	
<i>Help!</i>	No. 0529
third issue: blue stripe known; has photo from the album	
<i>Rubber Soul</i>	No. 0530
first issue: black and white label; none known	
<i>Rubber Soul</i>	No. 0530
second issue: green or orange background known	
<i>Yesterday and Today</i>	No. 0531
first issue: black and white label; none known	
<i>Yesterday and Today</i>	No. 0531
second issue: green background, orange, or yellow background known	
<i>Revolver</i>	No. 0532
first issue: black and white label; "Eleanor Rigby" is shown as "All the Lonely People"	
<i>Revolver</i>	No. 0532
second issue: red or blue background known. Title still incorrect.	
<i>Meet the Beatles</i>	No. 0538
first issue: black and white label	
<i>The Beatles' Second Album</i>	No. 0539
first issue: black and white label	
<i>The Beatles' Second Album</i>	No. 0539
second issue: red or lavender background known	
<i>Something New</i>	No. 0540
first issue: black and white label	
<i>Something New</i>	No. 0540
second issue: red background or blue background known	
<i>Early Beatles</i>	No. 0541
first issue: black and white label	



<i>Early Beatles</i>	No. 0541
second issue: green background, blue background, or lavender background known	
<i>Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band</i>	No. 0542
first issue: black and white label	
<i>Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band</i>	No. 0542
second issue: red background or blue background known	
<i>Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band</i>	No. 0542
second issue: lavender background known; stereo catalog number	
<i>Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band</i>	No. 0542
third issue: color bar across label (orange or red color known); stereo catalog number	
<i>Second Album</i>	No. 0575
first issue: black and white label	
<i>Second Album</i>	No. 0575
second issue: green, tan, orange, or olive background known	
<i>Meet the Beatles</i>	No. 0576
first issue: black and white label	
<i>Meet the Beatles</i>	No. 0576
second issue: orange, olive, green, or yellow background known	
<i>Early Beatles</i>	No. 0579
first issue: black and white label; none known	
<i>Early Beatles</i>	No. 0579
second issue: light green, orange, or yellow background known	
<i>Beatles VI</i>	No. 0580
first issue: black and white label	
<i>Beatles VI</i>	No. 0580
second issue: beige background or orange background known	
<i>Help!</i>	No. 0581
first issue: black and label	
<i>Help!</i>	No. 0581
second issue: yellow background known	
<i>Rubber Soul</i>	No. 0582
first issue: black and white label; none known	
<i>Rubber Soul</i>	No. 0582
second issue: yellow background or orange background known	



<i>Yesterday and Today</i>	No. 0583
first issue: black and white label	
<i>Yesterday and Today</i>	No. 0583
second issue: green, orange, yellow, or rust background known	
<i>Revolver</i>	No. 0584
first issue: b/w label; "Love You To" is shown as "Love You Do"	
<i>Revolver</i>	No. 0584
second issue: yellow, green, or orange background known; "Love You To" is shown as "Love You Too"	



Eight-Song Extended Playtape

The only known eight-song Playtape containing Beatles songs is United Artists' *A Hard Day's Night*. It is also the only tape that's not on Capitol.

<i>A Hard Day's Night</i>	No. 3111
first issue: black and white label	



The following PlayTapes were issued originally with colored backgrounds and "Hello Goodbye" picture sleeve photo:

<i>The Beatles' Second Album</i>	No. 0600
first (?) issue: green, orange, yellow, or beige background known; title misspelled as "You Really Get a Hold on Me"	
<i>Beatles '65</i>	No. 0654
first issue: green, yellow, orange, or beige background known	
<i>Magical Mystery Tour</i>	No. 0797
first issue: lavender, blue, or red background known	
<i>Magical Mystery Tour</i>	No. 0797
second issue: green or orange color bar across label and photo from the <i>Help</i> album.	
<i>Magical Mystery Tour</i>	No. 0797
third issue: features the album cover photo. Light green or blue color graphics, with different layouts. The green photo was provided by Mark Galloway.	



The following Playtapes first came out in the "color bar" style or with larger cover graphics:

<i>The Beatles, Vol. 1</i>	No. 0955
<i>The Beatles, Vol. 2</i>	No. 0956
<i>The Beatles, Vol. 3</i>	No. 0957
<i>The Beatles, Vol. 4</i>	No. 0958
<i>The Beatles, Vol. 5</i>	No. 0959
The above White Album tapes feature the four photos from the album and green color bars across the covers.	
<i>Yellow Submarine</i>	No. 0972



features the album cover photo; blue or pink graphics known

Wonderwall Music (G)

No. 0989

features the album cover photo; blue or pink graphics known.

Has Capitol logo. This is the only known solo Beatles playtape.

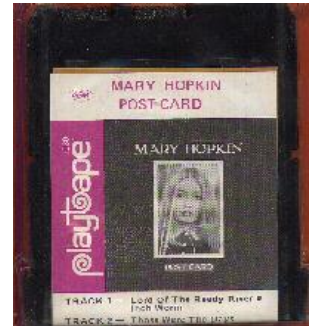


Two Playtapes by the **Hollyridge Strings** also exist. Number 0609 is *Beatles Songbook Vol. 2*. The other is from their first Beatle album and is No. 0610: "I Want to Hold Your Hand" +3.



At least two non-Beatles, non-solo Apple Playtapes have been verified to exist. These are:

Mary Hopkin	<i>Post Card</i>	No. 1030
features the album cover photo. Has Capitol logo. Plum or orange colors.		
Jackie Lomax	<i>Is This What You Want?</i>	No. 1049
features the album cover photo. Has Apple logo. Brown color graphics.		



The values are almost uniform at \$60 apiece, more if they are found sealed in their original packaging. The *Magical Mystery Tour* with "Help!" photos goes for \$60-\$75. *Yellow Submarine*, *Hard Day's Night*, and *Wonderwall Music* are all scarce to rare and are valued at \$100 each or more. A sealed copy of *Wonderwall Music* recently sold for over \$300. The "cover photo" copy of *Magical Mystery Tour* is also rare. The Jackie Lomax tape recently sold for \$250. A steady rise in price for all non-Beatles-related Playtapes has also been noted, with even the less known artists' tapes selling for \$10 each or more.

Playtapes are even more so the forgotten format than the reel tape, four track, or pocket disc. Any help compiling a more complete listing of ALL Playtapes would be appreciated. Thanks to Lynn Fuller, who was the first to research the history of the PlayTape.

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Beatles Lost Formats -- Playtapes

[Frank Daniels](#)

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