

“ They had such duff equipment. Ugly, unpainted, wooden amplifiers, extremely noisy with [humming] earth loops and goodness knows what. ”

NORMAN SMITH, EARLY BEATLES STUDIO ENGINEER, RECALLING THEIR EMI RECORDING AUDITION AT ABBEY ROAD

1962

THIS WOULD BE A YEAR OF GREAT CHANGES FOR THE BEATLES – INDEED THE FIRST DAY OF THE NEW YEAR STARTED WITH A BIG STEP FORWARD. ON JANUARY 1ST LENNON, MCCARTNEY, HARRISON AND BEST PACKED THEMSELVES AND THEIR GEAR INTO NEIL ASPINALL'S LITTLE VAN AND TRAVELLED TO DECCA'S STUDIOS IN NORTH-WEST LONDON FOR THEIR RECORDING AUDITION WITH THE COMPANY.

Mike Smith, the A&R representative for Decca who had set up the audition, met the group and Brian Epstein that morning for the 11am session. Smith's first reaction was that the group's equipment was not suitable for recording. His complaints about the inadequacies of their gear must have been a shock and an embarrassment for Epstein. This was the first time he'd been made aware of the value and importance of good equipment for a professional group - though not be the last.

We can assume that after countless shows and many long hours of use the group's amplifiers were not in optimum working condition. They were probably in dire need of a good overhaul, and most likely required the fitting of new sets of valves (tubes). In proper working condition, the Fender Deluxe and Gibson GA-40 amps would have been more than adequate in the studio. Even by today's standards a vintage Deluxe or GA-40 in good operational condition are considered prize finds, and would hold their own at any modern recording session.

In any case, the group's gear was battered and Smith deemed that they could not use their own amplifiers. Instead he said they had to use the studio's equipment for the recording session. The amplifiers that The Beatles used for these Decca sessions are unknown, but Best says he at least used his own drums.

The session was captured live on to a two-track tape recorder. Fifteen songs were recorded in all, including three Lennon & McCartney originals, 'Like Dreamers Do', 'Hello Little Girl' and 'Love Of The Loved'. After the hour-long session Smith hurried the group out and promised Epstein that he would be in touch to let him know the outcome of the audition. (Four tracks from the session were officially released decades later on *Anthology 1*.)

The group returned to Liverpool and continued performing at an intense pace. *Mersey Beat* published the results of its group popularity poll, placing The Beatles at number one. "Beatles Top Poll!" ran the paper's headline. It seemed that Epstein's plans were working out well. On January 5th Polydor officially released in the UK the 'My Bonnie' single that had been recorded in Hamburg the previous June, this time correctly crediting it to Tony Sheridan & The Beatles. It was not a proper Beatles single, but Epstein knew that their appearance on the respected Polydor label would be viewed with interest, and that he could use it to help elevate his group by boasting about them as "Polydor recording artists".

But the run of good luck didn't last. By the beginning of February, Epstein had the bad news that Decca had turned down The Beatles. Mike Smith had played the session tapes for Dick Rowe, head of pop A&R at Decca. Rowe rejected the tapes, saying famously that guitar groups were on their way out. Rowe was later dubbed "the man who turned down The Beatles" - but quickly redeemed himself by signing The Rolling Stones.

With resilience and without flinching from Decca's rejection, Epstein immediately began using the same Decca demo tape to try his luck with other major British record labels. After more disappointing rejections he was eventually introduced to George Martin, head of A&R (standing for Artiste & Repertoire) at Parlophone, a division of EMI. Epstein played the Decca demos for Martin, who expressed interest, even suggesting he might like to see The Beatles perform. But no formal arrangements were made. Epstein returned to Liverpool full of hope but unsure of Martin's true interest in The Beatles.

The Beatles blamed Epstein for the rejection at Decca, feeling they had lost their big chance. It was Epstein who had picked which songs they recorded at the demo session, and the group believed the selections failed to show their true abilities. This only made Epstein work harder to try to find a record deal. Meanwhile Epstein kept the group busy, adding ever more frequent dates outside Liverpool. On one such occasion, at the Kingsway Club in Southport on February 5th, Best was ill and could not play, so they turned to the drummer from Rory Storm & The Hurricanes. The Hurricanes did not have a show that day, and so Ringo Starr filled in for Best.

Starr recalled, "Back in Liverpool, whenever Pete Best would get sick I would take over. Sometimes it was at lunchtime. I remember once Neil [Aspinall] got me out of bed, and I had no kit.

I got up on stage with only cymbals and gradually Pete's kit started arriving, piece by piece." ¹ It may have been on these occasions when Starr sat in with The Beatles that Lennon, McCartney and Harrison began to think about changes to the group's line-up.

Beatle suits

Epstein worked diligently to improve The Beatles' standards, pointing out the need for professionalism and always trying to raise the quality of their performance. The next change was to the group's appearance. Their dapper manager convinced the band that if they wore matching suits he would be able to book them in better venues and get them more money. At first they resisted, not wanting to look like the dreaded "established" bands such as The Shadows.

Lennon described later how they had all been in a "daydream" until Epstein had come along. "We had no idea what we were doing. Seeing our marching orders on paper made it all official. Brian was trying to clean our image up. He said we'd never get past the door of a good place. He'd tell us that jeans were not



At the Star Club in April 1962, with Roy Young on piano. The group used the club's own backline of Fender amps, but brought their guitars and Best's kit across to Hamburg.

particularly smart, and could we possibly manage to wear proper trousers? But he didn't want us suddenly looking square. He let us have our own sense of individuality. We stopped chomping at cheese rolls and jam butties on stage. We paid a lot more attention to what we were doing, did our best to be on time. And we smartened up, in the sense that we wore suits instead of any sloppy old clothes."²

"We were pretty greasy," Lennon recalled. "Outside of Liverpool, when we went down south in our leather outfits, the dancehall promoters didn't really like us. They thought we looked

like a gang of thugs. So [Epstein suggested suits]. A nice sharp, black suit, man ... we liked the leather and the jeans but we wanted a good suit, even to wear off-stage ... If you wear a suit, you'll get this much money ... all right ... I'll wear a suit. I'll wear a bloody balloon if someone's going to pay me. I'm not in love with the leather that much."³

Best says he wasn't so keen on the matching suits. His recollection is that he and Lennon were anti-suits, Harrison and McCartney for them. "We liked the image of the leathers, we liked the feel. We felt it was conducive to what we were playing on stage at the time. So it was yes, we'll do it - but we still like our leathers. And for a certain period of time there was a compromise, depending on the venue we were playing, whether we'd wear leathers or the suits."⁴

Perhaps when Lennon and McCartney had been to Paris the previous year and purchased collarless jackets they were thinking of having suits made later. Perhaps Epstein's idea for suits wasn't quite what they had in mind. Whatever the motivations, on March 7th The Beatles wore their new matching suits by Liverpool tailor Beno Dorn for the first time, on the stage of the Manchester Playhouse. This was an important date because Epstein had arranged for it to be their first radio broadcast, for a BBC programme called *Teenager's Turn - Here We Go*.

A new club had opened in Liverpool named The Odd Spot. On March 29th The Beatles performed there for the first time, smartly dressed in their new and now standard stage attire. Photographs of the performance show them dressed in the new matching suits, with Lennon on his natural-finish Rickenbacker 325 with added Bigsby vibrato and radio knobs, playing through his tweed Fender Deluxe amp. Harrison is seen with his black Gretsch Duo Jet, going through his tweed-finished Gibson GA-40 amp. McCartney plays his left-handed Hofner 500/1 violin bass through the Selmer Truvoice amplifier connected to the Barber-Coffin bass cabinet, and Best is behind his blue pearl Premier drum set.

The first 'Beatles' drum-head

All of the existing photographs of The Beatles with Pete Best on drums show him playing his Premier drum set with a plain white bass-drum head, and never with a Beatles logo. But during interviews for this book Best revealed that there was a Beatles drum-head during his time with the group. "I was trying to get the name on the drum kit, but I didn't have stencil sets or anything like that. So I painted the calfskin bass-drum

head a bright orangey flame red. I think it was the most hideous colour you could think of, but it was something that was bright and eye-catching and it would stand out on stage.

"Then I over-painted the name Beatles on top of that in white paint, in capitals. There was no The, it was just Beatles. The others thought it was good. It added a little bit more to the act because not many people in Liverpool at that time had been blazing the front of their drum kits as we did. It was quite adventurous.

"But there's not many photographs of it. That's because when you break through one side of the bass drum you flip it over quickly and use the other side. And so my front skin ended up as the back skin. The head I'd painted ended up being the playing side, and I just played on dial until I eventually broke through that too. In those days you didn't keep them for posterity. I never painted one again - it was a one-off experiment."⁵

Preparing to leave for yet another season of shows in Hamburg, the group made a special appearance on April 5th at the Cavern for The Beatles' fan club. For this special show they wore leather outfits for the first set, and for the second their new matching suits. Photographs of this performance show that in the second set Best took centre stage as lead vocalist, while McCartney played drums and Harrison used McCartney's left-handed Hofner bass right-handed. Lennon remained on his Rickenbacker.

Best says he didn't go out front that much, but on the odd occasion he'd sing a couple of songs, 'Matchbox' and 'Peppermint Twist'. It seemed that every drummer in Liverpool sang 'Matchbox'. "Then a couple of times Bob Wooler tried to move me forward with my drums to the front of the stage," says Best, "because he thought it would add another dimension to the band. But that was very shortlived because the minute I moved them to the front they were yanked off the stage. We used to try to do something different on the fan club nights, and on that particular night I decided I'd get up the front and sing 'Peppermint Twist' and dance the twist like Chubby Checker. It was a lot of fun and was just pure entertainment for the kids who were there."⁶

At this point Best was one of the most popular members of the group. He even had his own fan club, and *Mersey Beat* published reports of girls camping out in Best's garden. A little jealousy probably began to grow among the other three, along with some resentment at Best's refusal to conform to the new Beatle hairstyle.

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John Lennon

Hamburg third trip - the Star Club

The Star Club was the newest venue in Hamburg to attract talent from Liverpool. During December 1961 Peter Eckhorn had come to Liverpool and met Epstein to discuss booking The Beatles for his Top Ten club. Epstein asked for more money than Eckhorn was willing to pay, so no deal was struck. In the following weeks Horst Fascher, a former bouncer at the Kaiserkeller, came to Liverpool to book bands for the new Star Club. Roy Young, house piano player at the club, accompanied him. Epstein not only booked The Beatles into the Star Club but also managed to negotiate bookings for some other artists in his growing stable, including The Big Three and Gerry & The Pacemakers.

For this trip Epstein decided that The Beatles should travel more comfortably, so manager and band flew to Hamburg, from Manchester airport. Upon arriving in Hamburg the group were met by Astrid Kirchherr who had the unenviable task of telling them that their friend Stu Sutcliffe had died of a brain haemorrhage.

The group's seven-week engagement at the Star Club started on Friday April 13th and, unlike some of the other dives, conditions were designed to cater for the bands that performed there. The club provided a complete backline of Fender amplifiers for visiting acts to use, and photographs taken of The Beatles

performing show a complete line of cream Tolex-covered Fender amps and speaker cabinets. Some of these photos show piano player Roy Young, who sat in with the group during their stay.

Young was a rock'n'roll piano player in the style of Jerry Lee Lewis, with what he describes as "Little Richard vocal overtones". He'd appeared on British TV shows in the late 1950s and early 1960s - including the famous early rock programme *Oh Boy*, created by producer Jack Good, and the later BBC equivalent, *Drumbeat* - and he'd toured with Cliff Richard. Then he'd ended up in Hamburg for a few years, sometimes playing with Tony Sheridan in a band called The Beat Brothers and, at the Star Club, The Star Combo. Ringo Starr had played with Young in The Beat Brothers at the Top Ten club.

"When The Beatles played at the Star Club they asked me to sit in on piano," Young remembers. "They said they'd love to have me come up and play with them - and I ended up playing all the shows with them. I had the grand piano that the club provided for me: it had my name on the side in glitter. They also provided me with a Hammond organ, and that and the piano were on the stage permanently for me to use. The Beatles were playing with Pete Best at the time, and one night we were sitting around having a drink with John, George and Paul when they asked what I thought about Ringo. I think John and Paul knew they weren't going to pull it off with Pete. They knew I played with Ringo so they asked me what I felt about him, and John was a good friend of Ringo's. I told them he was obviously a great drummer."⁷

Another band booked into the Star Club at the time was The Big Three, which included guitarist Adrian Barber. He had not got on too well with the group's manager, Brian Epstein. Barber says that in Hamburg he'd left the group because he didn't like Epstein's plans. The Big Three were the second band Epstein had signed. They wore canary-yellow and pink suits, and Barber had long hair. Epstein had told them to get rid of the garish suits and to clean up their act.

"And then he wanted to put another guy in the band," recalls Barber, who thought this an odd idea given the name of the group. Arguments ensued, with the result that Barber left and gave his equipment to Epstein. He spent some 18 months in Hamburg working for Horst Fascher as stage manager at the Star Club. While there he built another of his Coffin bass cabinets for the visiting bands to use, feeling it would work better than the Fender Bassman cabinets already there. This new Coffin cabinet was powered by one of the club's cream-coloured Fender Bassman amps.

The Beatles brought their own guitars on this trip to Hamburg, but their amplifiers stayed behind in Liverpool. Lennon and Harrison each played through the club's cream Fender Bandmaster "piggy-back" amps while McCartney used a cream Fender Bassman head with the Coffin speaker cabinet. Best, however, brought his entire Premier drum set to the Star Club.

The new fifth Beatle?

Epstein had stayed in Hamburg for The Beatles' opening nights at the Star Club to ensure that all was going well. While there, he asked Roy Young to join The Beatles. Young says that one night as he was finishing playing with The Beatles and walking down through the club, Epstein came up to him. "He said, 'Oh, Roy,' with this very posh accent, 'may I have a quick word with you?' I said sure, what's up?"

Epstein told Young that the group wondered if he'd be interested in going to back England with them and getting a record contract. "Well," says Young, "I looked at my position. I had a three-year contract with a car written into it, everything that people would love to have, I had it all there. I was making great money, and I think up until then The Beatles weren't making much money. Not that money was the only reason, we all loved to play. But anyway, I said to Brian that I'd have to think about it."

Young then walked away across the bar, and began to think some more about the madness of giving up his good contract at the club. "So I turned around and went back to Brian and said to him that I'd made a decision right there. He said great! But I said I was declining his offer. He asked why, and I told him that I couldn't break my contract - even though I could. I don't know why, maybe it was just security."⁸ To this day, Young still wonders how things might have been had he said yes to the offer. From Germany, Epstein left for London where he turned his sights once again on his main goal: to secure a recording contract for The Beatles.

Still with his foot in the door at EMI, Epstein met A&R man/producer George Martin for the second time on Wednesday May 9th at EMI's Abbey Road studios in north-west London. There Epstein and Martin formalised a deal and set a recording date at Abbey Road for June 6th. The excited Epstein left his meeting with Martin and immediately sent a telegram to Bill Harry at *Mersey Beat*. It read: "Have secured contract for Beatles to record for EMI on Parlophone label. 1st recording date set for June 6th."

Another telegram was sent to The Beatles in Hamburg: "Congratulations boys. EMI request recording session. Please rehearse new material." According to Epstein's later book, *A Cellar Full Of Noise*, the band replied to the telegram with postcards. "From McCartney: 'Please wire £10,000 advance royalties.' From Lennon: 'When are we going to be millionaires?' From Harrison: 'Please order four new guitars.'"⁹

As we've seen, Harrison had showed signs of his love of guitars before, but this comment surely indicates the depth of Harrison's guitar lust. While his bandmates were thinking of money, Harrison could only think about guitars.

The Beatles completed their 48-night stay at the Star Club and left Hamburg on June 2nd, returning to Liverpool where they held two days of private rehearsals at the Cavern. They then travelled to London for their big break.

Abbey Road, George Martin, and better amps

On Wednesday June 6th The Beatles, Neil Aspinall and Brian Epstein arrived at studio 2 at Abbey Road studios for a 7pm session. This first visit to EMI's recording base was initially intended as an artist audition. The group set up their equipment: Fender Deluxe amp, Gibson GA-40, Selmer Truvoice with Coffin speaker cabinet, and Best's Premier drum set. With their trusty guitars in hand they ran through a number of songs. Ron Richards, George Martin's assistant who was in charge of the session, then picked four of the songs to record. 'Love Me Do' had attracted Richards and Norman Smith, the balance engineer. Martin was then called in to listen to the track, and he stayed for the remainder of the session.

Smith later recalled the bad condition of the group's gear. "They had such duff equipment," he said. "Ugly, unpainted, wooden amplifiers, extremely noisy with [humming] earth-loops and goodness knows what. There was as much noise coming from the amps as there was from the instruments. Paul's bass amp was particularly bad and it was clear that the session wasn't going to gel underway until something was done about it."¹⁰

Ken Townsend, a technical engineer on the staff at the studio, also remembers distortion from McCartney's speaker. "George Martin turned to Norman and I and said, 'You know, we've got to do something about this.' Fortunately that evening there wasn't a session in studio 1, which meant that studio's echo chamber wasn't in use. So Norman and I went in and carried out the echo chamber's great big Tannoy speaker, which weighed about half a ton. We carried that through - it was on the same floor - into studio 2 for the test. I then fixed up a Leak TL12 amplifier, soldering a jack socket onto its input stage. It wouldn't be considered very high wattage today, but they were quite powerful amplifiers at the time. I think it took about a quarter-of-an-hour to do. We plugged it in and there was no distortion any more on the bass guitar, so we used that system for the session."

That evening The Beatles recorded 'Love Me Do', 'Besame Mucho', 'PS I Love You' and 'Ask Me Why'. After the session George Martin explained some technical aspects of recording to The Beatles. Townsend says that at first this chat was done over the playback speakers in the studio. "He told them about the different techniques for recording compared to playing on stage, and that the microphones we used were much higher quality." Townsend mentions by way of example the Neumann/Telefunken U47 and U48 microphones used for vocals at Abbey Road. First sold in the late 1940s, these exceptional mikes were made by Neumann but at first branded Telefunken, the exclusive distributor of Neumann products until the late 1950s. "For their vocals we quite often used a U48," says Townsend, "with Paul sitting on one side and John on the other - just one mike to get the balance between the two."¹¹

Studio gear was not the only topic of conversation that evening. Norman Smith recalls another talk about their own equipment. "We gave them a long lecture about what would have to be done about it if they were to become recording artists."¹² This was now the second time that the group had been told by professional studio engineers about the inadequacies of their gear. The first time was at the Decca sessions, and now here was the same message at Abbey Road. At this point Epstein must have decided that something had to be done. He may have ignored Decca's warning, but now here he was hearing it all again. Perhaps after this latest lashing he might even have thought that a lack of good equipment may have been partially to blame for their failure at Decca - and that ignoring the need for decent gear could be their downfall at EMI as well. Epstein was not going to make the same mistake again. He took the advice from Martin and his EMI staff and set out on a new quest. New gear for The Beatles!

WHEN ARE WE GOING TO BE MILLIONAIRES?

John Lennon,
on hearing the band had secured a
recording session with EMI

PLEASE ORDER FOUR NEW GUITARS

George Harrison

Epstein not only left with the idea that The Beatles needed new and better equipment. He also now faced a problem in the personnel department. After the session, Martin had expressed criticisms to Epstein about Best's drumming. Martin recalled recently: "I said to Brian, when we do the next session ... I'm going to provide the drummer." ¹³ New equipment could be sorted out, but Martin's opinion of Best would not be so easy to resolve.

Time for new gear

Following the EMI session Epstein and the group took a fresh and more serious look at their equipment. The subject became a new focus for Epstein, and from this point on he would pay close attention to their musical equipment needs. There was another factor in addition to the complaints from Decca and EMI. On June 4th, prior to the recording date at EMI, Epstein had been contacted by Hessay's store about loans that had been unpaid by members of The Beatles.

According to the hire-purchase receipt for Harrison's Selmer Truvoice amp, Hessay's had tried to make collections in December 1961. The report reads, "Finance company rep called, [Harrison] not at home. Spoke to mother who informed him that goods were not in his possession. Was told as far as the finance company are concerned they still look to [Harrison] for settlement." The document also shows that Hessay's had discovered that McCartney now had the amplifier in question. Another entry for December 1961 reads simply: "Mr. Paul McCartney, 20 Forthlin Rd, LP 18. Has goods." The document backs up Harrison's amused recollections of buying guitars and amps on credit, as mentioned earlier. "We got them what they call 'on the knocker' - a pound down and the rest when they catch you!" ¹⁴

Clearly, Epstein made a judgement: he knew he would have to deal with the music shops in the future, and so he paid off the group's outstanding loans. The hire-purchase receipt for the Truvoice amp, for example, shows that in June 1962 Epstein settled the account with Hessay's.

The Beatles made their second BBC radio appearance on June 11th. McCartney's brother Mike (later of The Scaffold) documented the BBC session, photographing the group in rehearsal as well as during their performance in front of a live audience. The pictures reveal McCartney still using the Selmer Truvoice amp and Coffin speaker cabinet with his Hofner bass, Lennon with Rickenbacker and Fender Deluxe amp, Best on his Premier kit, and Harrison playing the Gretsch Duo Jet through his Gibson GA-40 amp (which appears now to be painted black).

Beatles and Vox

Some time in July, Epstein made his way to the Jennings music shop in Charing Cross Road, central London. Jennings Musical Industries, or JMI, was owned by Tom Jennings. While the Jennings Organ Company had existed earlier in the 1950s, JMI was established in 1958, manufacturing and distributing Vox amplifiers, which were devised by JMI's chief design engineer, Dick Denney. The operation also started to produce Vox guitars during 1962. The Vox factory was at Dartford, Kent, just to the south-east of London.

Vox amplifiers were made in England by Jennings Musical Industries. Pictured is the factory in Dartford, Kent, during the early 1960s.



Epstein met the Jennings shop manager, Reg Clarke. "Brian said he had a band that had been playing in Germany. They were now back in England and, he said, were going to grow very big," recalls Clarke. "But the equipment they were using was pretty clapped out. He said he'd like to do a deal with us to get some of the more up-to-date gear we were doing then. He meant our pretty recent [Vox] AC-30 amplifiers."

Clarke told Epstein that a deal was possible, but the group's manager said he wanted Vox to give The Beatles a set of amplifiers. "He told me his boys were going to be so big and do so much promotion for us that it would pay off a thousand times over," says Clarke. "So I had to phone Tom

Jennings, the owner of Vox, telling him of this conversation. I remember Tom's exact words very well. He said, 'What does he think we are, a fucking philanthropic society?' But I took it upon myself to do that deal with Epstein ... because Tom really didn't say no."

Epstein told Clarke that if the deal was done the way he wanted, Vox could use the group for any promotion at all, and it would never cost the company a penny. The group would never use anything but Vox, said Epstein, while he remained their manager. "They never did," confirms Clarke. "And every time I got photographs from Epstein, it never cost a thing. He kept his word." ¹⁵



The first Vox amplifiers that The Beatles used were a pair of AC-30s, finished in Vox's tan, or beige, colour. Contrary to popular belief, The Beatles never used Vox AC-15 amplifiers. According to Clarke, the deal he made with Epstein was that Jennings would take Lennon and Harrison's old amps as a trade on the new AC-3Us.

Clarke can remember getting Lennon's tweed-colour red Fender amp as part of the trade. Had the group paid full retail for their AC-30s, each would have cost them £105 (about \$300 then), around £1,340 (\$1,870) in today's money. The official model name was AC-30/6 Twin Normal: "6" meaning six inputs, "Twin" meaning two speakers, and "Normal" meaning the guitar rather than bass version.

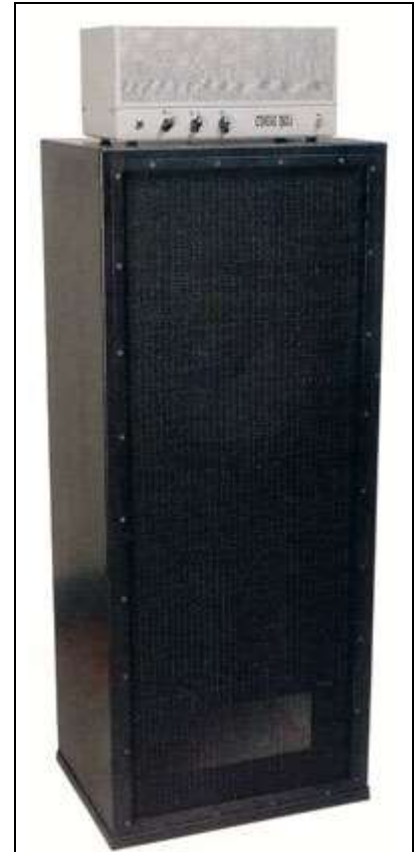
Why did Epstein choose Vox? The manager probably had a number of motives. He would be well aware that the most famous British group of the time, The Shadows, prominently used and promoted Vox amps. His boys were going to be big, too, so they should also be using the best. And as Vox was a British manufacturer, it would be easier to deal directly with the company. As it turned out, Vox was a perfect choice for The Beatles. The AC-30 was a great little amp, well made, with a loud, clean, punchy sound.

Dick Denney, chief design engineer at Vox and the man who created the AG-30, recalls those first Beatle amps and their "retrofitted" top-boost circuits. "I had designed a little add-on unit that could be fitted to the back. It was a simple treble-boost circuit with two knobs on a piece of bent aluminium. For those who wanted it, we would cut out a small square hole in the back of amp. The top-boost unit went in there - quite simple really. People used to swear that was the best AC-30, rather than having the boost built into the main circuit. And that's the type The Beatles had, with the add-on treble boost." Vox said the extra circuit would "give you ultimate top boost - over 30 decibel rise at 10 kilocycles". A contemporary news report confirms that this was the type of AC-30 the group received. "Both The Beatles and [Billy J Kramer's] Dakotas are using the same make of amplifier," it said, "but with a specially added treble booster supplied by the manufacturer." ¹⁶

Denney had started the Vox line of amplifiers with a 15-watt unit in the late 1950s. But soon he reasoned that what musicians needed was a twin-speaker amp with six inputs. Denney recalls Tom Jennings's reaction to the idea. "He said to me, 'Well, you do what you like, Dick, but if it doesn't work, your head's on the chopping block'. As it turned out, the AC-30 became the jewel in Vox's crown, without any doubt. It's what put Vox on the map. I made the amp so that it sounded good to me. It was old technology - and I think old technology still prevails."

One of the design oddities of the AC-30 was the situation of its control panel at the back of the top of the cabinet. Denney explains that his fellow guitarists at the time often sat behind their amplifiers, providing a reverb-type effect into the hall from the front and a "dry" sound from the open back.

Another distinctive visual feature of the amp was its optional chrome stand. Denney says that at early trade fairs when Vox displayed their new amps he would get some beer crates, cover them, and put the AC-30 on top. Tom Jennings suggested that something more permanent and professional might be a good idea. "That's when we got this tubular engineer from Dartford to come down and have a look," says Denney. "That's how the first stand got designed - and I didn't have to put amplifiers on beer crates any more. Being a little hard of hearing, I liked to have the amp up higher on the stand, I used to like to hear that treble. If it



A recent reproduction of Paul McCartney's 'Coffin' bass rig.



The Beatles acquired two tan-coloured Vox AC-30 amps like this during 1962.

was on the floor, once you get a load of bodies in a venue it sounds as if you have cotton wool in your ears." ¹⁷

One of the first shows for which The Beatles used their new matching tan-coloured Vox AC-30 amps was on July 27th at the Tower Ballroom, New Brighton. This was a big event that Epstein's NEMS Enterprises promoted. The headliner was Joe Brown & His Bruvvers whose single 'A Picture Of You' had hit number two in May, and which Epstein regarded as one of his favourite records. The Beatles had even covered the song for their second BBC radio broadcast, on June 11th, with Harrison singing. A photograph taken by Mike McCartney shows The Beatles on stage at the Tower with their new Vox AC-30s, although the same picture reveals that Harrison's black-painted Gibson GA-40 amp was in position behind the new AC-30, presumably as a back-up.

The Beatles would soon become invaluable to Vox's promotional efforts, and the deal struck with Epstein would suit both parties well. But during 1962 the group barely registered in Vox advertising, reflecting their still lowly status. In a December ad in *Melody Maker*, for example, the Dartford-based company listed 20 endorsers of Vox gear, from the still top-of-the-pile Shadows right down to virtually unknown bands such as The Echos. But not a sign of The Beatles. Not yet.

George and the Gibson ES-335

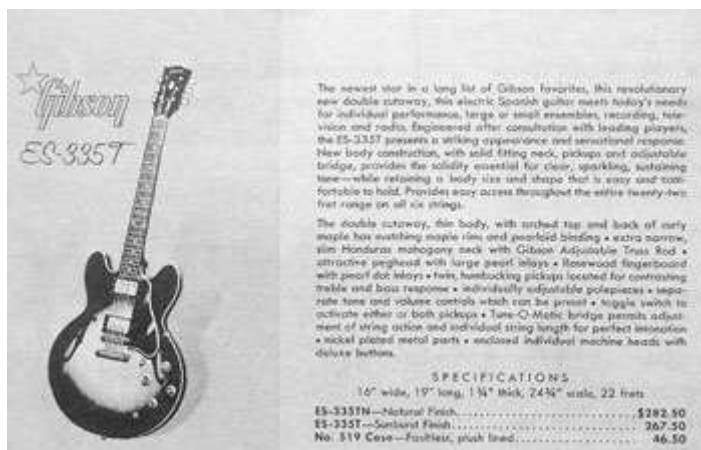
Backstage at the Tower show, Harrison had his first brush with a Gibson ES-335 guitar. This thin, twin-cutaway, semi-hollow-body electric model had been launched by Gibson in 1958, its design effectively mixing the tonal advantages of a hollow-body guitar with the power and sustain of a solidbody electric guitar.

Joe Brown says his 335 was one of the first to arrive in England, and that he bought it at the Selmer shop in London's Charing Cross Road. He was pleased to have a Gibson with a Bigsby vibrato fitted, because he'd been impressed by the sound of the Bigsby on Eddie Cochran's Gretsch. "I'd done some work when I was only 18 years old backing Eddie Cochran and Gene Vincent when they came over to Britain. I learned this little trick from Eddie that presumably everybody was doing in America, but in England it was unknown. He would put a thinner second string on instead of the third string. Everyone does that now, but in those days it was unheard of. And with that thinner string, you could bend them much more easily. That was the sound everyone wanted. I used to get to do all the recording sessions because of that string."

Brown says that for the two dates he played with The Beatles in July, they would appear in the first

half and he'd be on during the second. In a break, Harrison had a snap taken of him with Brown's Gibson ES-335. 'Apparently I had gone out to go to the toilet,' recalls Brown, "and George picked my guitar up. All the guys were saying put it down, he'll kill you! And he said no, I've got to have my picture taken with Joe's guitar. Which he did. I didn't even know about it." ¹⁸

This incident once again reveals Harrison as the true guitar enthusiast in the group. If there was an unusual guitar around, Harrison wanted to see it. And, even better, have his picture taken with it. Brown and Harrison are now neighbours and good friends. It was Brown who in more recent years introduced Harrison to the ukulele and the George Formby society -which celebrates Britain's best-known ukulele player. Harrison is an avid uke enthusiast today and has a collection of the instruments.



George had to wait until 1965 to get his own Gibson ES-300 series electric, but in 1962 he tried out a 335 owned by British guitarist Joe Brown.

A Quad for Paul

Now that Lennon and Harrison were set up with new gear, it was time to update McCartney's bass amplification. At the time Vox did not have a proper bass amplifier or any type of speaker cabinet that was equivalent to the Barber Coffin.

As we've seen, when Epstein and Barber parted, Epstein demanded Barber's Big Three equipment. According to Barber, one of the pieces of gear that Epstein acquired was a modified Quad amplifier that Barber had made for The Big Three's bass player, Johnny Gustafson. This same Quad amp ended up in

McCartney's possession. A weekly accounting statement issued to McCartney by Epstein and dated July 27th shows calculations of booking fees, expenses, commissions... and an individual expense item detailing McCartney's payment for the amp. It reads simply, "To Adrian Barber for Amp - £5."

The Quad II valve (tube) amplifier was rated at 15 watts, though Barber says its output was closer to 40 or 50 watts and that he modified the associated model 22 pre-amp to pass more bass. The Quad 11/22 combination was and still is considered a great mono amplifier, full of tone and punch. With Barber's modifications it became a great bass amplifier, and a perfect companion to the Coffin speaker cabinet.

Barber had mounted the Quad, as we've said, in an army-surplus ammunition box with a metal top and handles at the sides. He remembers acquiring this particular Quad amp in unusual circumstances. Promoter Allan Williams opened a new club in one of the rougher parts of Liverpool, on Soho Street, and Barber installed the sound system. "On the opening night, Allan threw out some teddy boys who were causing trouble," says Barber. "The next day the place burned down. He gave up on that club - but paid me with the sound system's Quad amp that survived the fire. It was the first Quad amp I got, and I worked on it to go with the Coffin cabinet. It became Johnny Gustafson's bass amp, and then Paul got it."¹⁹

McCartney would use the combination of Barber's modified Quad bass amplifier through the Coffin speaker cabinet as his bass rig for the next eight months.

**I DIDN'T WANT TO
BE A GUITARIST, I
DIDN'T WANT TO
PLAY BASS. I
WANTED TO BE A
DRUMMER... IT WAS
IN MY SOUL**

Ringo Starr

From Pete to Ringo

Changes were not limited to the group's equipment. With no definite decision from George Martin and EMI on the fate of their single, The Beatles and Epstein took no chances with Martin's warning about the inadequacies of Best's drumming for recording. There was also the feeling that in some circles Best was more popular with the fans than the other Beatles - and he refused to go along with the band's newly adopted haircuts. Lennon, McCartney and Harrison were convinced that Best did not fit in to the band, and they decided to look for a new drummer.

They set their sights on a friend whom they had already played with on a couple of shows when Best was sick. They asked Richard Starkey - drummer of Rory Storm & The Hurricanes, stage-name Ringo Starr - to join them. The Hurricanes were playing a summer season at a Butlin's holiday camp when Starr was approached with the idea. He gave his group three days' notice and left to return to Liverpool and join The Beatles.

The task of telling Best the bad news was left to Epstein, and on August 16th he was dismissed from the group. The Beatles had an engagement that night and, unsurprisingly, Best refused to play. Starr had to fulfil his last three shows with The Hurricanes at Butlin's, so The Beatles - once again drummerless - had to enlist the help of Johnny Hutchinson, drummer from The Big Three, who filled in for two gigs. On August 18th at Hulme Hall, Port Sunlight, Birkenhead, Starr performed with The Beatles, officially joining the group. The band was now in place as the world would soon come to know them: John Lennon, Paul McCartney, George Harrison and Ringo Starr.

Starr had decided in his early teens that he wanted to be a drummer. "I had to wait until I was 18 to get my first drum kit, which was just a mish-mash that my father found me from a relation who had had enough of it," Starr remembers. "It probably cost me £12 or so. It was just old bits and pieces of stuff. And of course being 18 I wanted a new kit. So I bought one, made by Ajax. I've actually regretted getting rid of all those old drums ever since. It was in my soul, I just wanted to be a drummer. I didn't want to be a guitarist, I didn't want to play bass. I wanted to be a drummer, and that's how it is. My grandparents played mandolin and guitar and they gave me their instruments -and I just broke them. I had a harmonica; I dumped it. We had a piano; I walked on it. I just was not into any other instrument."²⁰

He began his playing career as drummer for The Eddie Clayton Skiffle Group in 1957. Pictures of Starr with this outfit show him standing up to play a snare and floor tom. He then became drummer for The Raving Texans, who later evolved into Rory Storm & The Hurricanes. An early photograph of The

Hurricanes performing in May 1960 at Liverpool's first rock'n'roll show, with Gene Vincent headlining, shows Starr playing his Ajax kit.

By July of that year Starr had purchased a basic four-piece Premier model 54 drum set which cost him a whopping £125 (about \$350 then; around £1,600 or \$2,200 in today's money). It came with a 20-inch-by-17-inch bass-drum, 12x8 rack tom, 16x20 floor tom and 14x4 Premier Royal Ace wood-shell snare-drum. The rack tom was mounted on the bass-drum using Premier's "disappearing" tom-tom holder. Starr's 54 kit came in a Duroplastic "mahogany" coloured finish, and was one of the least expensive Premier kits. It is listed in an early 1960s catalogue as being "for the busy modern group; for the recording drummer who wants the sharpest response and fidelity of tone". The 54 came with Premier's Zyn cymbals, and Starr used the standard Premier stands for the crash and ride cymbals and the hi-hat.

While with The Hurricanes, Starr decided to put the initials "R-S" on the front of the bass-drum, which also had the normal Premier logo toward the top of the head. Johnny Guitar of The Hurricanes says the initials could be interpreted two ways. "It could stand for Rory Storm, or for Ringo Starr. So he was killing two birds with one stone. Later on when we became more well-known he put his full name on the head." ²¹ Starr's Premier drum set with "Ringo Starr" on the front of the bass-drum is the one he used upon joining The Beatles.





This kit was sold as Ringo Starr's Premier outfit, the one he was using at the time he joined The Beatles, and that he played until he got his better-known Ludwig in 1963.

"We were playing with a group called The Barons," says McClinton. "I remember we toured in a British World War II ambulance with half of the floor gone and all the exhaust coming through. It was a nightmare. We only did one show with The Beatles, at the Tower Ballroom in New Brighton, but they came out to see us on at least two other shows. I think one was when we played at the Cavern.

"John Lennon was one of the many guys that would come to the dressing room. It got to be just about every night that somebody in one of the other bands would come around with a harp to ask me how to play. They'd ask how to play a part, but it's hard to show a guy how to play harp. To this day I still don't know how to show it, because you can't really see what you're doing," McClinton laughs. "One of those nights, I think in New Brighton, Lennon came around and we jammed, playing some harp. I hung out with John more than any of The Beatles because we had harmonicas going all the time. John took me to an after-hours joint one night that just freaked me out. This was 1962 and you didn't see anything at all like this in the States - and especially not in Fort Worth, Texas. I was shocked! I was thrilled! I felt that I had crossed the line into another world. It was such a magic time."²²

Perhaps McClinton's harmonica style did influence Lennon's harp phrasings on 'Love Me Do' and later recordings. But it's much more likely that it was specifically McClinton's playing on Bruce Channel's 'Hey! Baby' single that was the primary influence on Lennon's work on 'Love Me Do'. Channel's record was a big hit, and The Beatles were trying to make a hit of their own, so lifting an idea probably made a lot of sense to Lennon. More importantly, however, the recordings made of 'Love Me Do' on the first EMI sessions, back on June 6th, already had Lennon's signature harp phrasing in place. This predates the group's gig with Channel and McClinton by two weeks.

New jumbos - Gibson's J-160E

Returning to Liverpool from the September 4th studio session, the group continued with daily live shows. Earlier in the year, just after Abbey Road staff had complained about the poor state of much of the group's gear, Lennon and Harrison had ordered a pair of new Gibson electric-acoustic J-160E guitars, and word now came through that these had arrived.

The J-160E had been launched by Gibson in 1954, and was an unusual hybrid. Looking like a regular Hat-lop acoustic, it was nonetheless fitted with an electric-guitar type pickup and controls. This meant that it could be used unplugged as a normal acoustic guitar, for example for songwriting on the road, or plugged-in to give an amplified approximation of an acoustic guitar, either on stage or in the studio.

The group's J-160Es were ordered from Rushworth's - one of the few shops in Liverpool where musicians could buy American-made instruments. The J-160E was not one of the Gibson models generally on sale then in the UK through distributor Selmer, so Lennon and Harrison had to order the guitars from a catalogue and wait for them to be sent specially to the store from the United States.

The reason the two guitarists chose this unusual model may be linked to Tony Sheridan. He recalls: "At the time everybody was using a cricket bat - a piece of wood with strings on it. Not too many people were into big jazz guitars, but I was. So I guess it rubbed off on the Liverpool crowd. I think that had something to do with The Beatles using those big hollow-body acoustic guitars." Sheridan believes that Lennon and Harrison intended to order the archtop Gibson ES-175 - the model he had used in Hamburg and that the two Beatle guitarists had tried - but that they somehow ended up with the flat-top J-160E. He says that they had enjoyed using his Gibson ES-175, and would refer to it as "the jumbo".

Perhaps Lennon and Harrison liked Sheridan's 175 so much that, when it came to shopping for new guitars, they really did mean to get that model for themselves. The two guitarists certainly did refer to their Gibson J-160Es later as "the jumbos". Maybe when Lennon and Harrison ordered the Gibson guitars at Rushworth's they asked for "the Gibson electric: jumbo", with the intention of ordering a model like Sheridan's "jumbo". Early 1960s Gibson catalogues list the J-160E as the "Electric Jumbo Model" -hence the J and the E. The ES-175 is listed as an "Electric Spanish Model". Maybe this accounts for Lennon and Harrison ending up with their J-160Es.

But Sheridan also points to a more attractive second theory: that it may have been the influence of another guitar he used in Hamburg, his pickup-equipped Martin D-28E, an instrument much closer in style to the J-160E. Whatever inspired their purchase, Lennon and Harrison's J-160Es were certainly specially ordered through Rushworth's. The total credit price noted for Lennon's Gibson J-160E (and presumably Harrison's too) was a cool £161/1/- (£161.05, about \$450 then; around £2,050 or \$2,850 in today's money). Tracing the serial number 73161 listed on Lennon's original hire-purchase receipt to the log still in Gibson's archives shows that this J-160E (and, again, presumably the pair) was shipped by Gibson on June 27th. The receipt also reveals (hat Epstein paid for the guitar in full almost exactly a year later.



Rushworth's, one of Liverpool's main music stores, was where John and George ordered their Gibson J-160E electric-acoustic guitars.

So when did the group start to use their new J-160E guitars? They may have been sent by sea from the US, which would account for them taking more than two months to arrive. Rushworth's boast that the guitars were "specially flown to England by jet from America" ²³ was probably just part of the promotional hype.

That receipt for Lennon's Gibson is dated September 10th, and certainly he and Harrison were never pictured with the J-160Es prior to that date. This seems to rule out the Gibsons from the first two recording sessions for 'Love Me Do', with Best on June 6th and with Starr on September 4th.

Dezo Hoffmann's photographs of that September 4th session do not feature the Gibsons, nor is there any evidence of these guitars being at

the studio. Surely if Hoffmann and The Beatles took the time to set up the famous "pile of gear" shot in the studio the guitarists would have made sure that any lovely new instruments were prominent? The Beatles proudly displayed their J-160Es later in numerous photo sessions. So it is safe to assume that Lennon and Harrison did not use the Gibsons for the September 4th session - and indeed did not, even have them in their possession.

To complicate matters further, the presentation of the guitars to the group at Rushworth's may not have happened on September 10th. In the photographs taken of the event, the guitars already have smudges on the finish, as if they had been well played. Both guitars have string tied around the headstock for a shoulder strap, which would not have been how they were shipped from Gibson. Perhaps the photo session was staged later, an afterthought by Epstein and Rushworth's with an eye to a promotional opportunity? Indeed Bill Harry, publisher of *Mersey Beat*, remembers ²⁴ that the event was set up specifically for his paper, to help promote the group and the music store. The pictures did not appear in *Mersey Beat* until October.

On September 11th, the day after Rushworth's sold them their new guitars, The Beatles once again visited EMI's Abbey Road studio 2 in London to try again to record their first single. Dissatisfied with Starr's drumming, producer George Martin this time employed session drummer Andy White, with Starr left to play maracas and tambourine. White used Ajax drums for the session. The group once again recorded 'Love Me Do' and 'PS I Love You'. All three versions - June 6th, September 4th, September 11th - have since been released, and all bear a similar guitar sound. So maybe the same guitar was used for all three sessions - meaning either Lennon's Rickenbacker or Harrison's Duo Jet.

It is of course possible that the J-160Es were used for the recording on the 11th. When Lennon and Harrison first used their Gibson J-160Es in the studio they recorded them by plugging the guitars into their amplifiers - the guitars were not recorded acoustically, and the tone came from a miked-up amplifier. If one plays a J-160E, a Rickenbacker 325 and a Gretsch Duo Jet today through an AC-30, it's relatively easy to get the same sound quality from all three guitars - essentially a very clean and full tone.

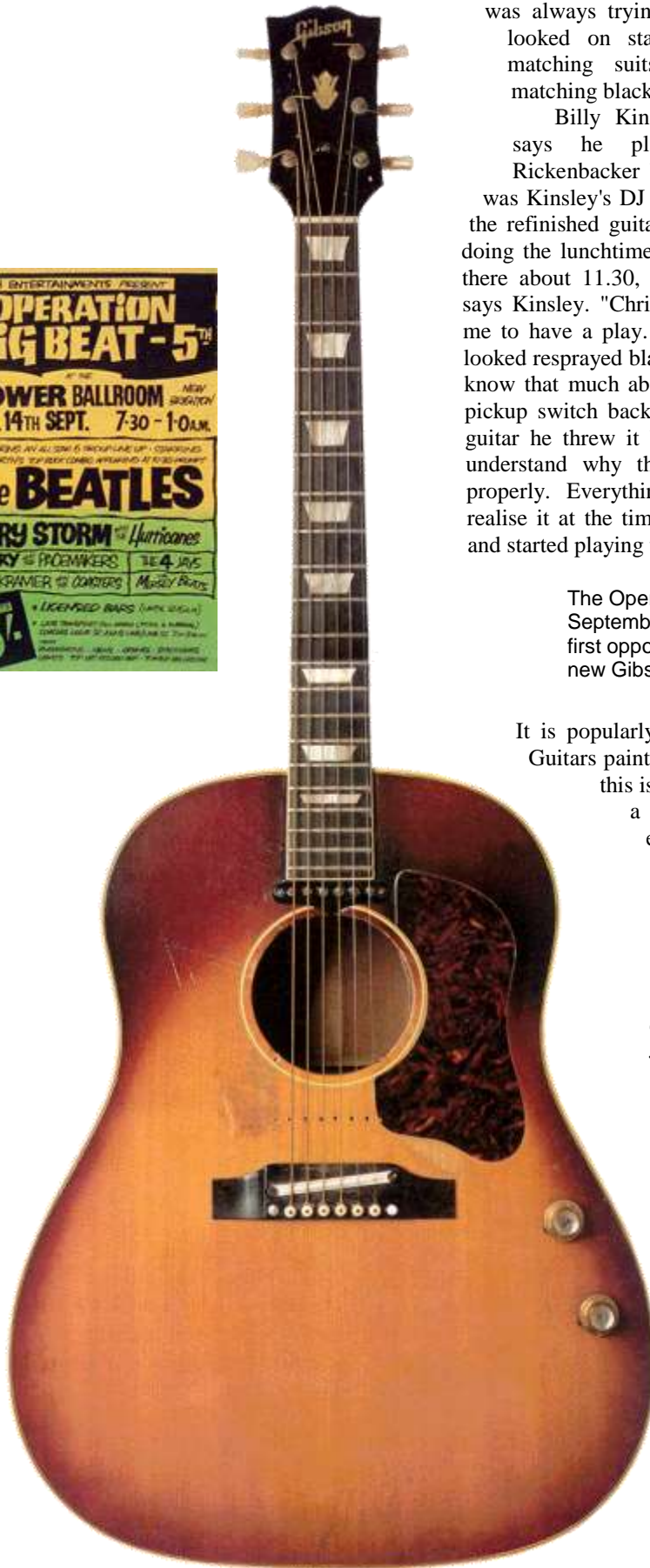
Anyway, regardless of dates of delivery or how and why the guitars were acquired, all the indications are that the group and Brian Epstein were now taking a more serious and professional approach to their musical gear. In any case, George Martin had decided on 'Love Me Do' as the a-side and 'PS I Love You' as the flip-side for the band's debut single. The songs were mixed on the evening of September 11th and the first British Beatles single was released on the Parlophone label on October 5th 1962.

IT WAS BRIAN'S IDEA TO HAVE MATCHING SUITS, MATCHING AMPS, SO WHY NOT MATCHING BLACK GUITARS?

Adrian Barber,
guitarist with fellow Liverpool band
The Big Three

Painting the Rickenbacker 325

Improving on the group's equipment in any way was now seen as a distinct advantage, and the next major upgrade was a facelift to Lennon's Rickenbacker 325, which he decided to have painted black. Ex-Big Three guitarist Adrian Barber says that black was now the colour of choice for Beatles gear. "Brian Epstein



was always trying to improve the way The Beatles looked on stage. It was Brian's idea to have matching suits, matching amps, so why not matching black guitars?" ²⁵

Billy Kinsley, bassist for The Merseybeats, says he played the freshly-painted black Rickenbacker before even Lennon did, because it was Kinsley's DJ friend, Ghis Whorton, who brought the refinished guitar to the Cavern. "The Beatles were doing the lunchtime session, and Tony Crane and I got there about 11.30, way before the show commenced," says Kinsley. "Chris showed me the guitar and invited me to have a play. I just couldn't believe how good it looked resprayed black. But the guy who painted it didn't know that much about guitar electrics, and he'd put the pickup switch back to front. So when John played the guitar he threw it back at the guy, because he didn't understand why the switch wasn't selecting pickups properly. Everything was reversed, and John didn't realise it at the time. So he grabbed his Gibson jumbo and started playing that." ²⁶

The Operation Big Beat show in September would have been among the first opportunities for the group to use their new Gibson J-160Es.

It is popularly believed that Jim Burns of Burns Guitars painted Lennon's Rickenbacker black, but this is not true. In fact the job was done by a coach-painter in Birkenhead, effectively a suburb of Liverpool, just across the River Mersey. Chris Whorton was a small-time dance promoter there, and like most people in the local music business was familiar with The Beatles.

"I don't know how it came up in conversation," says Whorton, "but John wanted his guitar painted black, and I offered to get it sprayed for him. I worked for my father who had a meat haulage business in Birkenhead, with plenty of lorries. So we got Charles Bantam, who coach-painted my father's wagons, to spray the guitar. The Rickenbacker was natural-wood coloured, and had a gold control panel which we left alone. When I took it back I'd put the control panel back the wrong way and he made a bit of a fuss about that. But John didn't pay me, it wasn't necessary to pay me, it was done as a favour.

George Harrison's Gibson J-160E. This is one of the two 160s that the group acquired in 1962 from Rushworth's store in Liverpool. George still owns this one today, although the serial number on the hire-purchase receipt (right) indicates that it was originally sold to John. The guitars became muddled later, and the one John used was stolen at the end of 1963.



Original Gibson shipping record indicating that John's J-160E, serial 73161, was shipped from the factory on June 27th 1962.

Bantam was a perfectionist. He used Tekaloid black coach paint, and did the job at his garage in Birkenhead. It took about three days because we had to let the paint dry." ²⁷

As well as having his Rickenbacker painted black, Lennon decided to change his volume control knobs to cream-coloured Hofner knobs with gold "dish" tops. Lennon's newly refurbished Rickenbacker is first evident in photographs taken by McCartney's brother Mike on October 12th at the Tower Ballroom in New Brighton, where the group performed as support with a number of other groups for headliner Little Richard.

For the Richard show the group used their two matching tan-coloured Vox AC-30s. Both amps were on Vox stands, Harrison's the standard type, Lennon's the "tray" style. Harrison played his Gretsch Duo Jet and Lennon the refinished black Rickenbacker with Hofner control knobs. McCartney used his Hofner 500/1 bass, plugged through the Quad amp and Coffin cabinet.

Starr played his Premier drum set with "Ringo Starr" and Premier logo on the bass-drum head. For this performance Starr also had a set of new Premier bongos, matching the brown colour of his kit and fixed to the bass-drum rim with a chrome-plated Premier bongo mount.

Gibson guitars were distributed in the UK by Selmer in the 1960s; here's the J-160E in a Selmer catalogue. Gibson US still have the log book with the shipping record for George's J-160.



The Cavern PA system

The Beatles were purring in seemingly endless hours every week at their home-away-from-home, the Cavern, not only performing at the club but often using it as a rehearsal space.

"The Cavern had its own very basic PA system in those days," explains local promoter/DJ Chris Whorton, "with a Vortexion amplifier and Reslo ribbon microphones. But that was a Rolls Royce system compared to some of the PAs back then.

Epstein did some promotions at Queen's Hall in Widnes, a town just east of Liverpool, and he would hire a PA system from Alpha Sound Services, run by Brian Kelly. It had a simple 25-watt amp, with bass and treble controls for three microphone inputs, and two 12-inch speakers. But this 25-watt PA was still adequate to cut above the volume the groups were producing themselves with their amplifiers, in a fairly big place that held about 800 people. Quite astonishing these days!" ²⁸

With 'Love Me Do' peaking on the singles chart at number 17, Epstein was able to book The Beatles ever more frequently outside Liverpool, and the group's busy schedule was including an increasing number of radio shows and, now, television appearances.

But there was a brief pause in the new momentum.

On November 1st they flew once again to Hamburg for a 14-night engagement at the Star Club, sharing the bill with Little Richard. For these shows the group took only their guitars and drums, again using the club's own Fender amplifiers.

Returning to London on November 16th, they continued with live performances and promotional work for their single. With the chart success of 'Love Me Do', George Martin decided that it was time for them to record again. This meant another visit to Abbey Road, on November 26th, to record their second

Parlophone single, 'Please Please Me' and 'Ask Me Why'. Another original song, 'Tip Of My Tongue', was also taped that day.



John and George with their new matching Gibson J-160E guitars.

The group's career was moving forward ever faster as Epstein worked hard at pushing The Beatles. At the end of 1962 they won their second *Mersey Beat* popularity-poll award. On December 15th at the Majestic Ballroom in Birkenhead the group performed at a special award show where they received a celebratory plaque from master-of-ceremonies Bill Harry.

For this show they used their tan-coloured Vox amplifiers, McCartney played his Hofner bass, Harrison the Gretsch Duo Jet and Lennon his black Rickenbacker. Starr played a pearl-white Trixon set, most likely borrowed from one of the other bands performing on the bill, as The Beatles closed the show - at 4am - and probably didn't want to lug Starr's kit home at that time in the morning.

Just a few days after winning a popularity poll and with a new single on the horizon, the group had to fly once more to Hamburg to fulfil their final commitment there - a two-week engagement at the Star Club.

Fifteen clubs a day

This was the last time The Beatles would perform in Germany until their triumphant return in 1966. During these shows in Hamburg the group used their normal guitars - Rickenbacker 325, Gretsch Duo Jet and Hofner bass - through the Star Club's amplifiers, while Starr played his Premier drum set.

Photographs taken at the club again reveal Lennon having more problems with loose controls as a volume knob made a bid for freedom.





Entertaining a north London crowd: Paul with '61 Hofner; Ringo on his Premier kit; George with Gretsch Duo Jet; and John with recently repainted '58 Rickenbacker 325. (Picture from early 1963.)

Some of these final shows at the Star Club were recorded by Adrian Barber, who had built a large PA (public address) system and installed recording gear at the club. Barber wanted to improve upon the generally poor PAs used in Hamburg clubs, and was given the opportunity by Manfred Weissleder, owner of the Star Club.

"With a partner he also ran 15 strip clubs," says Barber. "Remember in 'She Came In Through The Bathroom Window', the bit about 'she said she'd always been a dancer, she worked in 15 clubs a day'? Well, that was it. And with this many places, each with a PA, Weissleder had mountains of surplus gear."



Live at the Star Club in Hamburg, John with his Rickenbacker that has recently been repainted black. The guitar also shows signs of electrical problems: one control knob is missing, apparently inside the guitar, and more work seems to be planned as the pickguard is only held on with two screws.



Two receipts from the Star Club in Hamburg for performance fees. George signs for himself (top) but note that Ringo signs for the band (misspelled as 'The Baetles').

Star Club on tape

So Barber was set to work to build a good PA for the Star Club, and he ended up creating a system that for the time was unusual in several ways. It had two 25-element speaker columns on each side of the stage, with a low-voltage line feeding each of the 10-inch speakers. Barber additionally used powerful Telefunken valve (tube) amplifiers rated at about 200 watts to drive the columns.

"I also had Binson Echorec echo units, which were Italian-made and used discs rather than the regular tape. It was most unusual to have separate systems for the lead vocal and

the horns and the back-up vocals, and each with its own distinct echo unit. I even had side fills, or stage monitors, which was also unusual. The bands thought the system was wonderful. We'd have really good nights when every note was perfect and everything fell into place. And I thought wow, if only we could have recorded them."

So then Barber rigged up a recording system at the club. He says the idea was simply to record every gig in order to remember the good ones. Barber used a domestic-style Telefunken tape recorder that belonged to Weissleder, and the club owner also provided a small mixer.

"At first I had another little tape recorder that I used in order to record the ambience of the club room," says Barber, who would use the results to improve the system's sound.

"Once when I recorded the room ambience it happened to be The Beatles. As time went by I built better and better miking, and improved the general system." ²⁹

Fifteen years later, Ted "Kingsize" Taylor, who'd led Liverpool band The Dominoes in the 1960s, released Barber's recordings of The Beatles at the Star Club as the album *Beatles Live! At The Star Club, Germany, 1962*.

Meanwhile, with The Beatles willing to be guided by their enthusiastic and astute young manager, the prospects for 1963 looked good - although the group could surely not have guessed just how important the coming year would be.

**I'LL WEAR A
BLOODY BALLOON
IF SOMEONE'S
GOING TO PAY ME.
I'M NOT IN LOVE
WITH THE LEATHER
THAT MUCH...**

John Lennon