

THIRTEEN REASONS TO GIVE
RINGO SOME RESPECT
By John Bryant

Ringo Starr, the luckiest no-talent on earth. All he had to do was smile and bob his head. Oh yes, and keep a beat for three of the most talented musicians/songwriters of this century. What other impression could one have when judging the role that Ringo played in the success of [the Beatles](#)? Did Ringo really make a difference? Upon listening to the latest release by [The Beatles](#), Anthology 1, you get a chance to listen to Pete Best and two other drummers play on over twenty songs. Was Ringo simply in the right place at the right time? The following items may help in going beyond the image:

Ringo was the first true rock drummer to be seen on TV. All the Rock & Roll drummers featured with Elvis, Bill Haley, Little Richard, Fats Domino and [Jerry Lee Lewis](#) were mostly R&B drummers that were making the transition from a swing drumming style of the 40's and 50's toward the louder and more "rocking" sound that is associated with "I Want To Hold Your Hand". They were dressed in tuxedos and suits and held the drumsticks in the "traditional" manner of military, orchestra, and jazz drummers. Ringo showed the world that power was needed to put the emphasis on the "rock" in Rock & Roll music, so he gripped both sticks like hammers and proceeded to build a foundation for rock music.

Ringo changed the way drummers hold their sticks by making popular the "matched" grip of holding drumsticks. Nearly all drummers in the Western World prior to Ringo held their sticks in what is termed the "traditional" grip, with the left hand stick held like a chopstick. This grip was originally developed by military drummers to accommodate the angle of the drum when strapped over the shoulder. Ringo's grip changes the odd left hand to match the right hand, so that both sticks are held like a flyswatter. [Rock drummers](#) along with marching band and orchestral percussionists now mostly play with a "matched" grip, and drum companies have developed straps and accessories to accommodate them.

Ringo started a trend of placing drummers on high risers so that they would be as visible as the other musicians. When Ringo appeared on the Ed Sullivan Show in 1964, he immediately caught the attention of thousands of "drummers to be" by towering over the other three Beatles. Elvis's drummer was looking at a collection of backs.

These same "wannabe" drummers also noticed that Ringo was playing Ludwig drums and they immediately went out and bought thousands of these drum sets, thus establishing Ludwig as the definitive name in Rock & Roll drums at that time.

Ringo changed the sound of recorded drums. About the time of Rubber Soul (released Dec. 6, 1965), the sound of the drum set started to become more distinct. Along with help from the engineers at Abbey Road studios, Ringo popularized a new sound for the drums by tuning them lower, deadening the tonal ring with muffling materials, and making them sound "closer" by putting a [microphone](#) on each drum.

Ringo has nearly perfect tempo. This allowed [the Beatles](#) to record a song 50 or 60 times, and then be able to edit together different parts of numerous takes of the same song for the best possible version. Today an electronic metronome is used for the same purpose, but [the Beatles](#) had to depend on Ringo to keep the tempo consistent throughout the dozens of takes of the songs that you know and love so well. Had he not had this ability, the Beatles recordings would sound completely different today.

Ringo's "feel" for the beat serves as a standard for pop-rock record producers and drummers alike. It is relaxed, but never dragging. Solid, yet always breathing. And yes, there is a great amount of musical taste in his decisions of what to play and when to play it. In most recording sessions, the drummer's performance acts as a barometer for the rest of the musicians. The stylistic direction, dynamics, and emotions are filtered through the drummer. He is the catcher to whom the pitcher/songwriter is throwing. If the drumming doesn't feel good, the performance of any additional musicians is doomed from the start. [The Beatles](#) rarely if ever had this problem with Ringo.

Ringo hated drum solos, which should win points with quite a few people. He only took one solo while with the Beatles. His eight measure solo appears during "The End" on the "B" side of Abbey Road. Some might say that it is not a great display of technical virtuosity, but they would be at least partially mistaken. You can set an electronic metronome to a perfect 126 beats per minute, then play it along with Ringo's solo and the two will stay exactly together.

Ringo's ability to play odd time signatures helped to push popular songwriting into uncharted areas. Two examples are "All you Need is Love" in 7/4 time, and "Here Comes the Sun" with repeating 11/8, 4/4, and 7/8 passages in the chorus.

Ringo's proficiency in many different styles such as two beat swing ("When I'm Sixty-Four"), ballads ("Something"), R&B ("Leave My Kitten Alone" and "Taxman") and country (the Rubber Soul album) helped the Beatles to explore many musical directions with ease. His pre-Beatle experience as a versatile and hard working nightclub musician served him well.

The idea that Ringo was a lucky Johnny-on-the-spot-with-a-showbiz-stage-name is wrong. In fact, when Beatle producer George Martin expressed his unhappiness after the first session with original drummer Pete Best, the decision was made by Paul, George, and John to hire who they considered to be the best drummer in Liverpool - Ringo Starr. His personality was a bonus.

The rumors that Ringo did not play on many of the Beatle songs because he was not good enough are also false. In fact, he played on every released Beatles recording (not including Anthology 1) that include drums except for the following: "Back In The USSR" and "Dear Prudence", on which Paul played drums due to Ringo temporarily quitting the band, "The Ballad of John and Yoko", again featuring Paul on drums because Ringo was off making a movie, and a 1962 release of "Love Me Do" featuring session drummer Andy White.

When the Beatles broke up and they were all trying to get away from each other, John Lennon chose Ringo to play drums on his first solo record. As John once said, "If I get a thing going Ringo knows where to go, just like that.." A great songwriter could ask no more of a drummer. Except maybe to smile and bob his head.

John Bryant is a 43-year-old session drummer and producer in Dallas, Texas. He has recorded and toured with [Ray Charles](#), the Paul Winter Consort, and currently is a member of the percussion ensemble, D'Drum. In 1976, Mr. Bryant played a rehearsal with Paul McCartney and Wings when regular drummer Joe English became ill and could not make it. Mr. Bryant started playing drums after seeing Ringo Starr on the Ed Sullivan Show in 1964.

JOHN BRYANT NOTES: This story was written in reply to a previous story for The Dallas Morning News which described Ringo as an average drummer who got lucky. It is written within the context of modern Pop music, not to compare Ringo with jazz drummers of the 30's, 40's, and 50's. Certainly Ringo was not the first drummer on a riser, but his visibility did proclaim him to be an equal member of the band. This is significant because the earlier drummers were sidemen. Ringo was not the "first" drummer to play matched grip or to muffle his drums, but his exposure as a Beatle made him the leader to the masses.