

The Beatles already had a cover designed by a Dutch group called the Fool, but my gallery dealer, Robert Fraser, said to Paul "Why don't you use a 'fine artist', a professional, to do the cover instead?" Paul rather liked the idea and I was asked to do it. The concept of the album had already evolved: it would be as though the Beatles were another band, performing a concert. Paul and John said I should imagine that the band had just finished the concert, perhaps in a park. I then thought that we could have a crowd standing behind them, and this developed into the collage idea.

I asked them to make lists of people they'd most like to have in the audience at this imaginary concert. John's was interesting because it included Jesus and Ghandi and, more cynically, Hitler. But this was just a few months after the US furor about his 'Jesus' statement, so they were left out. George's list was all gurus. Ringo said "Whatever the others say is fine by me", because he didn't really want to be bothered. Robert Fraser and I also made lists. We then got all the photographs together and had life-size cut-outs made onto hardboard.

EMI realised that because many of the people we were depicting were still alive, we might be sued for not seeking their permission. So the Beatles' manager, Brian Epstein, who was very wary of all the complications in the first place, had his assistant write to everyone. Mae West replied "No, I won't be on it. What would I be doing in a lonely hearts club?" So the Beatles wrote her a personal letter and she changed her mind.

Robert Fraser was a business partner of Michael Cooper, an excellent photographer, so he was commissioned to do the shoot. I worked in his studio for a fortnight constructing the collage, fixing the top row to the back wall and putting the next about six inches in front and so on, so that we got a tiered effect. Then we put in the palm tree and the other little objects. I wanted to have the waxworks of the Beatles because I thought that they might be looking at Sgt. Pepper's band too. The boy who delivered the floral display asked if he could contribute by making a guitar out of hyacinths, and the little girl wearing the 'Welcome the Rolling Stones, Good Guys' sweatshirt was a cloth figure of Shirley Temple, the shirt coming from Michael Cooper's young son, Adam. The Beatles arrived during the evening of March 30. We had a drink, they got dressed and we did the session. It took about three hours in all, including the shots for the centre-fold and back cover. I'm not sure how much it all cost. One reads exaggerated figures. I think Robert Fraser was paid £1500 by EMI, and I got about £200. People say to me "You must have made a lot of money on it" but I didn't because Robert signed away the copyright. But it has never mattered too much because it was such a wonderful thing to have done.

Peter Blake

Peter Blake