

Joseph Niezgoda

THE LENNON PROPHECY

A NEW EXAMINATION OF THE DEATH CLUES OF THE BEATLES

New Chapter Press

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Do You Want To Know A Secret?

I've sold my soul to the devil.

— John Lennon

The Beatles first landed in the United States on February 7, 1964. It was a Friday. It was also my eighth birthday.

On the school-bus ride home, some older girls were sitting ahead of me and one of them said, “Oh, The Beatles are on *Ed Sullivan* this weekend.” I didn’t know what that meant. I didn’t know what The Beatles were. But I did know I was going to watch *Ed Sullivan*.

I remember sitting that Sunday night in front of the family television with my parents and my brother Mick. The show opened with the traditional shot of the empty lit set, and I remember the announcer bellowing, “And now, here he is ... Ed Sullivan!” In my mind I can still see the iconic host walking from the wings to his spot on stage, dressed in a suit and diagonal-striped tie, a white handkerchief peeking from his breast pocket, his hair slicked back, nodding a head-bow to the cheering studio crowd. I remember him explaining the excitement that had been stirring around the

production all week, how hundreds of news writers and photographers had descended upon his theater. And he wasted no time introducing his most special British guests; just a half minute into the show he called out, “Ladies and gentlemen ... The Beatles!” And the young crowd, barely obeying the laws of gravity as they bounced in their seats, yelled and screamed in ways never before witnessed on national television, all in reverence for a band that had never previously performed on American soil. The camera cut to the boys from Liverpool standing center in a circle of large prop arrows, each pointing toward the focus of 73 million American television viewers. I remember Paul McCartney turning toward his mates, nodding a count, singing the words “close your eyes,” and the band simultaneously starting in together on the music for the song “All My Loving.”

I was instantly a fan.

Like so many others across the country and around the world, I became fascinated with the Fab Four. They were absolutely my idols. And John Lennon, in particular, I idolized the most. In fact, he’s the only person I have ever felt that way about. I’ve been a lifelong music fan, and a lifelong sports fan, but no other individual has stirred such adulation in me. That admiration was shared by my brother and my mother, both of whom were also avid music fans. My mom still has a Mother’s Day card from 1967 that’s signed, “With love, your boys, Joe, Mick and John Lennon.”

I had all The Beatles’ albums. My cousins gave some to me as I was growing up, and in 1967 I bought my own for the first time, spending \$3.18 of hard-earned snow-shoveling money on a copy of the brand-new *Magical Mystery Tour* record. Between my older sister Linda and me, we owned all The Beatles’ singles. We listened to the songs so much that I came to memorize the lyrics sheerly from auditory repetition. We used to play a game wherein someone would recite three consecutive words from a Beatles composition, and I could name the song. I also avidly read about the band, and to this day I can recall all that information—it just stuck in my consciousness. When I began playing guitar, the first song I learned on my uncle’s hollowbody Gibson electric was “Ballad of John and Yoko.”

Years later, on the evening of December 8, 1980, I was in my dorm room at King's College in Pennsylvania, watching Monday Night Football with my study partner Mike. That's when my life changed. Commentator Howard Cosell announced that John had been shot and killed in New York City.

I was in absolute disbelief. I said to Mike, "They made a mistake. It can't be."

Later that evening, the reality of John's death set in. I still remember the feeling inside me. I couldn't sleep. I was sick. I had lived a charmed life to that point—aside from my grandmother, no one who had any real value or meaning to me had passed away. It really hurt deep. I made a black arm band to wear for a week. I also listened to the radio all night—every station seemed to be playing Beatles and Lennon songs. The next morning, I read about the assassination in every newspaper I could find.

Then something else happened—something that changed my life even more, though I didn't know it at the time. I'd been recording the night's radio tributes on cassette tapes, for no particular reason; I didn't know why I'd been doing it, and still don't. One of the tapes already contained some music: songs by Badfinger, a group that had recorded in The Beatles' Apple Studios, a group that had purportedly gotten its name from "Bad Finger Boogie," the original title of John's composition "With a Little Help From My Friends."¹ Tuesday morning I was playing back one of the radio broadcasts, and it ended with the disc jockey saying, "John Lennon, dead, at 40 years old." I pressed the stop button and pondered the reality for about the thousandth time. Then, just to humor an inexplicable curiosity, I flipped the tape over to hear what was recorded in the same spot on the other side. I pressed play, and it was perfectly cued to Badfinger's song "Sweet Tuesday Morning." That really freaked me out—not so much because it happened to be Tuesday morning in Pennsylvania, but because I realized that at the moment John had been shot, it had been Tuesday morning in his hometown of Liverpool, England. Moreover, I knew that Badfinger's Joey Molland wrote and recorded that song at the same time he was working with John Lennon on the *Imagine* album.

I listened closely to the lyrics:

*Sweet Tuesday morning, came and you smiled,
Love was the answer you gave me.*

I thought, “Yes, that’s what John preached: Love is the answer.” The song continued:

*I’ve been to places all around, astound me.
I’ve seen the breaking of the souvenir.*

I wondered, What could that possibly mean, “the breaking of the souvenir”? Then I soon learned that before being murdered, John had autographed an album for his shooter, Mark David Chapman.

That string of relationships between facts was, I thought, too uncanny to be coincidence. Over the next several years, more clues appeared. I rarely looked for them; they just seemed to arrive in front of me, uninvited but clear and concise. I often discussed them with Mick—we’d talk on the phone for hours, rehashing lyrics from songs and tidbits from articles and backgrounds in photographs. But I still didn’t know what it all meant. Then one day the answer just came to me. And again, I felt sick about something related to The Beatles.

Could John Lennon have sold his soul to the devil?

I was angered because I thought it crazy that he would do something like this. I was upset and disappointed.

I was, of course, not the first person to notice possible hidden clues in Beatles history. Nor was I the first to wonder about the band’s enigmatic success.

The Beatles—John Lennon, Paul McCartney, George Harrison and Ringo Starr—rose from utter obscurity in Liverpool, England, and in only a few years captured the attention and imagination of the world. It was the 1960s, a time when music was more than just a pastime for passionate fans; it was

also a cultural phenomenon that created a storm of social change throughout the industrial world.

The Beatles were the eye of that storm. Their success transcended stardom and understanding. The image they portrayed—long hair, dress, attitude, humor and lifestyle—at once led and reflected the transformation of a generation. Unlike other rock 'n' roll bands, The Beatles had a perplexing effect on the masses. Wherever they traveled, the boys from Liverpool were met by thousands and thousands of screaming, sobbing and hysterical fans, even at unscheduled stops. Old newspaper clippings, news films, books and magazine articles don't begin to reflect even half of what the craze was like; no journalistic portrayal has been able to fully convey the cultural delirium. The Beatles achieved near god-like worship from fans around the world. Girls went to their concerts and wept uncontrollably; they covered their ears and screamed at the mere sight of the band. Boys as well were lured by their charm. Audiences were described as hypnotic, spellbound, transfixed and in ecstasy. Nothing before or after came close to equaling the rapid, widespread emotional sensation surrounding these four young men from England. The public's overwhelming response was so unique that it was given its own name: "Beatlemania." And while other entertainers have since matched or bettered Beatles' record sales, no one has managed to equal their universal popularity.

Moreover, all that hysteria and mania left the world dumbfounded.

From the very beginning of The Beatles' success, people asked: Why the mayhem? What did these four men have that no one else did? What could possibly explain the rapid and spontaneous worldwide overreaction to this band? Their songs were no more catchy and lyrical than those of The Kinks or The Rolling Stones, and they were never highly regarded as live performers. Many have speculated that the cult following was produced not just by the music, but also by The Beatles' personalities. They seemed to possess a kind of magic. Where that magic came from was always a mystery.

Of course, mysteries unsolved grow more fascinating as time passes. Something beckons us to reexamine them. We relentlessly pore over the evidence; we analyze every angle and clue. And sometimes what we can uncover can be truly unbelievable and frightening. One clue about the mystery of The

Beatles' success may come from a simple statement John Lennon made in the middle of the 1960s, at a time when the world idolized him, when nearly every creative decision he made changed the course of culture, when he was traveling the globe meeting presidents, kings and queens, and when he was selling millions of records and performing for millions of spectators and being mobbed by millions of fans. At the height of that very popularity, John said to his friend Tony Sheridan: "I've sold my soul to the devil."²

Mystery also surrounds the star's untimely death. On December 8, 1980—almost 20 years to the day that The Beatles became a sudden sensation—John Lennon was gunned down in the archway leading to the Dakota Apartments in New York City. Was his murder really a random, senseless act committed by a deranged fan, or is there a greater story to tell?

As a teenager, John had a strong desire to be rich and world-famous. In the very early days of The Beatles, he would say, "Where we going, fellas?" and the others would respond, "To the toppermost of the poppermost!"³ In his desperation for stardom, could John really have turned to the devil to fulfill his dreams? Did John go so far as to enter into a contract with Satan in exchange for 20 years of wealth, women and fame? Were the circumstances that led to John's violent death the result of this pact?

Furthermore, how could these questions even be answerable? One needs only to look in a place millions already have: the music.

The idea that Beatles compositions contain hidden messages is almost as old as the band itself. During the late 1960s, the public began noticing cryptic communications on Beatles album covers, in pictures and in the lyrics, all of which seemed to reveal or foretell the death of someone in the band. Once analyzed, the collective belief was that the doomed member was Paul McCartney, and the body of evidence became known as the "Paul-is-Dead Clues." The analysis supposedly revealed that at 5 a.m. on November 9, 1966, Paul was killed in an automobile accident and was replaced in the band by a look-and sound-alike musician. Supporting clues included lyrics such as "He blew his mind out in a car" from the song "A Day in the Life," and "Wednesday morning at 5 o'clock" from "She's Leaving Home." The Beatles—Paul, in

2 Coleman, p. 348

3 *The Beatles Anthology*, p. 68

particular—denied the rumors. But that never quenched the public’s desire to continue dissecting the group’s material. For one thing, the messages weren’t going away; on the contrary, they were becoming more frequent. Something strange was going on. Everyone, on some level, knew it.

Not only were the messages hinting of death, but some were being delivered in ways associated with the occult. Many people believe that the devil’s presence and power is exposed in backward communication, in mirror images, and in words and symbols that have double meanings. All of these can be found in The Beatles’ work. In fact, the first cases of reversed sounds in rock ’n’ roll history were produced by The Beatles. John Lennon pioneered the technique. In his song “Rain,” he included five backward segments of music and words; in “Tomorrow Never Knows,” music was sped up and slowed down and reversed; and the same technique was used again in “Strawberry Fields Forever.” Those were all deliberate manipulations, but other voice reversals in Beatles songs are even more eerie, because they are seemingly unintentional. Two of the most clear instances are in the songs “Revolution 9” and “I’m So Tired.” Both tracks, played backward, distinctly mention a “dead man.”

There is no doubt John was aware of these messages—by the late 1960s, most of the civilized world was aware. But did he first learn about the clues from the public or through his own observation? And if the clues weren’t singling out Paul, then who? Did John recognize the clues as being about his *own* death, about his spiritual transgression, about his bargain for unfathomable fame?

I believe the answer is yes, and this book is my proof.

No one is sorer than I about what is written here. It’s a horrifying topic and a difficult subject for me. I wish my interpretation was wrong.

Nonetheless, I remain a fan. My wife has asked me, “How can you still listen to those songs the same way, knowing what you know?” I have no answer. I never did understand why I was obsessed, even when I was eight years old watching *Ed Sullivan*. Like millions upon millions of fans from nearly every arc of the globe, I just absolutely can’t hear enough of that music.

John was a phenomenal song writer and performer. I still feel such sorrow for him. I enjoyed his music. I enjoyed the way he looked. I enjoyed his performing skills, and his voice. He is still very much alive in his music, and very much alive in my heart.

I still mourn John Lennon. But I have to accept what I believe he did.

—Joseph Niezgoda, 2008