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Sir George Martin's advice to musicians

If you want to be a record producer, get advice from the top man. And they don't get much topper than Sir George Martin



You have to get on with an artist

If you don't like the artist and they don't like you there's no future in the relationship at all. You have to have a personality that people warm to. This is one of the joys I've had working with my son – he has that, he has that rapport with people, cracking a joke, making people laugh. It's what the Beatles had: a wonderful charisma. When you were with them you felt good. That is one of the reasons I signed them. I thought: "If they make me feel happy, they'll make an audience feel happy."

Don't write off a song if it doesn't work at first

Please Please Me was a good case in point because I listened to it and I said: "Do you know that's too bloody boring for words? It's a dirge. At twice the speed it might sound reasonable." They took me at my word. I was joking and they came back and played it to me sped up and put a harmonica on it, and it became their first big hit.

Stand up to the artist, whoever it is

Even when it is Paul McCartney, the producer has to stand up to the artist; it's terribly important. If you are a "yes" man you're no bloody good at all.

The trouble is most people are. This is why Paul has trouble really, because there is no one who will say what they really think.

Deal with each artist accordingly

I was once with John Lennon in his Dakota apartment. We were reminiscing about the old days and he said to me: “You know, George, if I could I’d love to do everything over again.” I said: “You’d like to go back in the studio and rerecord all the songs we’ve done?” Two hundred and fifty songs! He said: “No, we could do it better.” “What about *Strawberry Fields*?” I said. “Especially *Strawberry Fields*,” he replied.

Never enter the studio without at least the basis of an idea

You’ve got to have something when the artist comes into the studio, otherwise it’s a complete waste of time. I suppose, in a way, in our experimentation after *Sgt Pepper’s Lonely Hearts Club Band* people felt that the recording studio was a musical workshop where you could just start off with nothing. That wasn’t really true. What we were trying to do after *Pepper* was to try to make things different from what they had heard before. They shouldn’t just wander in and say: “Shall we try this instrument?” That might give them an idea for a song that’s been in their mind but it wouldn’t give them the idea for the song.

Know when to call a session to a halt

It should go on no longer than it takes for the producer to fall asleep. I did actually fall asleep in more than one Beatles session. It was hard, long hours that they did. Before the Beatles, one had sessions of about three hours – that was what the unions dictated. Eventually, the artists became the decider rather than the producer.

Be ready to say if something isn’t working

Sometimes a song isn’t good enough. I was working with Paul, I think it was for *Pipes of Peace*, on one of the songs I had rejected on the first hearing way back. He worked on it and thought it was worthwhile and he was hammering himself into the ground, doing take after take. I went in and said: “Paul, it’s not working.” He said, “Why isn’t it working?”, looking at me accusingly. “Because the song’s not good enough.” He looked at me and there was a kind of stand-off and then he said, “Do you think I don’t know?” I thought, “Blimey.”

The artist ego in him, the composer, said that it was a great song and he should make something out of it, but then when I came in and pushed him, reality took over and he abandoned it. It was a tricky thing to do because it angered him. It was tough for me to say that, but it had to be done.

Don't let technology overwhelm you

I think *Sgt Pepper*, which was done on four-track, would have been different if I had had an infinite number of tracks, because it exerted a discipline over me and, through me, over the Beatles. They had to get things right and they knew they had to perform.

One of things about modern technology is that it gives you too many options and delays that moment. You can also get all sorts of sound effects at the press of a button, things that it took us days to work out, so you don't have to try.

Capture humanity over perfection

I'm a great believer in humanity. I went to a Frank Sinatra recording in the Fifties. Now, Frank sometimes sang out of tune and he did things that maybe he could have improved. But though he sang out of tune he sounded great; some people sing in tune and sound bloody awful. I like a little mistake, a little bit of humanity, and you got that with the Beatles. Ringo never played a quartz-controlled beat ever in his life. As told to Paul Williams.

— This appears in full in the current issue of Music Week magazine

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