

Revolving & Evolving Theatre (with a little help from the Beatles)
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Since late March, I've been returning to the art of the mixtape—which is now the art of the Spotify playlist—and curating playlists of songs that reflect feelings of isolation, distance, longing, and the possibility of eventual freedom. While making a [“Quarantining with The Beatles”](#) playlist this week, I realized that their 1966 album [Revolver](#) has real pandemic vibes.

Songs like “I’m Only Sleeping” and “Eleanor Rigby” are about lonely, isolated, or unmotivated people looking out windows. “Love You To” reminds us to live in the moment: “A lifetime is so short/A new one can’t be bought.” Then there’s “Doctor Robert” who “does everything he can” to “pick you up.” In “I Want to Tell You” George has so much he wants to say that he can’t articulate, but “[he] could wait forever, [he’s] got time” By the end of the album, John is invoking Timothy Leary’s *The Psychedelic Experience* and inviting the listener to “turn off your mind, relax and float downstream” in “Tomorrow Never Knows.”

I became curious about the creation of this album and why over 50 years later it seemed to speak to our current moment of isolation and uncertainty; so, good dramaturg and Beatles nerd that I am, I did some research.

Revolver was recorded in the spring of 1966 after three months of unprecedented rest for the Beatles. No touring, no filming, no recording. Just time. It marked the first time the Beatles were not working and not in the same place since 1962. The four Beatles used this time differently. Paul expanded his knowledge of the avant-garde art scene in London. He listened to radio plays by Alfred Jarry, went to lectures on electronic music and met Bertrand Russell (he was so nervous he knocked over a lamp!). John continued to experiment with LSD and read a lot of books. George married Pattie Boyd and deepened his relationship with Indian music, practicing the sitar daily. Ringo spent time with his wife Maureen and their infant son in their house in the suburbs of London (which was outfitted with its own pub, but did not have a drum kit).

Once they reconvened in the EMI studio with producer George Martin, they recorded an album that redefined their sound and indicated their shift from touring band to studio band. *Revolver* also marked an undeniable shift in pop music forever. By taking the time away from their lives as a group for just three months, they were able to make a complete album that included philosophy, transcendence, maturity, vulnerability and levity.

If, let’s say, we are currently in our own versions of the first quarter of 1966: isolated, separate, burnt out, unscheduled, what does our *Revolver* look like? What experiences, insights, and adjustments can we bring from this experience to redefine and shift contemporary theatre?

I have compiled some questions, principles and recommendations about how theatre can change and adapt that are inspired by the songs on the UK release of *Revolver* but also reflect conversations I've had with many friends and colleagues over the last 15 years.

Taxman:

- Can we re-evaluate how money is distributed among theatremakers, producers, performers, designers, and crew?
- What needs to change about the economics of non-profit theatres as they increasingly produce commercial theatre?
- And, relatedly, what are the ethics of the enhancement model?

Eleanor Rigby:

- How can we make theatre more inclusive?
- How can we draw more people in to both the creation of theatre and the act of seeing theatre?
- How can we create community in ways that attract people who are not “theatre people”?

I'm Only Sleeping:

- Embrace rest, fallow times, dreams, laziness.
- End the cycle where playwrights feel they have to produce a play a year for “submission season” to stay relevant and/or top of mind for gate-keepers.

Love You To:

- Commit to representation onstage and off-stage when programming plays and musicals.¹
- Embrace spontaneity
- Create flash commissions

Here, There and Everywhere:

- Sharing breath and space with audience members is unparalleled. How can we make live-ness more integral to the experience of theatre going?
- When you enter a theatrical space from outside, the air should change

Yellow Submarine:

- Invest in children's theatre that adults want to see too
- Theatre should entertain audiences!

She Said, She Said:

- Always question the status quo
- Question the current model

¹ George Harrison recorded this track with Indian musician Anil Bhagwat playing the tabla, one of two session musicians ever credited on a Beatles LP.

Good Day Sunshine:

-Be optimistic (within reason)

And Your Bird Can Sing:

-How do we define success in the theater? Is it financial? Acclaim? Popularity? Notoriety?

-How can critical writing about theatre serve artists better?

For No One:

-Don't let relationships get in the way of the art

-Don't put up work for which you're still making excuses

Doctor Robert:

-What we have now is a theater of institutions rather than of artists

-How can we give more power/agency/funding to artists?

I Want To Tell You:

-How can we champion new work beyond developing it and producing it?

-How can we encourage emerging artists that we don't have the resources to produce?

-At the middle school and high school level, can we do a better job of teaching students that theatre is about more than just acting?

-Always pursue excellence

Got To Get You Into My Life:

-Can we re-evaluate how gatekeepers gate keep?

-Theatremakers should constantly explore new influences outside of theatre

Tomorrow Never Knows:

-Invest in second productions of plays

-Create a new dramatic canon

-Take risks

-Be bolder

-Accept the importance of endings. This means everything from ending tenures of artistic leadership to closing shows. Endings allow for new beginnings.