



PAUL M c C A R T N E Y

You probably know Paul McCartney's music – I mean, who doesn't? From the songs he penned in his days as one quarter of the Beatles, through his solo work and his hits with Wings, his presence on the airwaves has been continuous. Perhaps you think of him in quick-cut aural images: "I Saw Her Standing There" and "Yesterday," "Band on the Run" and "Silly Love Songs," "My Brave Face" and "Hope of Deliverance," these intercut with visual impressions of McCartney in a collarless suit in the Sixties or giving his trademark thumbs-up at the end of a set in the early Nineties. ☞ But while they're not bad for a few seconds' free association, these barely touch on the breadth of musical projects McCartney has undertaken. The fact is, his salient feature as an artist is not, as some might assert, the ability to spin out a melody at the drop of a hat. What really drives him, as both composer and performer, is an unquenchable musical curiosity and the urge to constantly create. ☞ That combination of qualities led McCartney, in the early Beatles days, to transform the bass player's role by replacing the chord-tracing patterns typically played in the early Sixties with full-fledged melodic counterpoint. It led him to develop a vocal style that's as at home crooning a tuneful ballad as screaming a Little Richard classic. It also led him to become a first-rate guitarist and a fluent keyboardist and drummer. ☞ Compositionally, it has driven him to explore just about every mutation rock has undergone – from the folkish "Mull of Kintyre" and the pop-suite structure of "Band on the Run" to the disco-tinged "Coming Up" and the punkish "Spin It On" – while continuing to write straightforward rockers and ballads by the ream. But he has

Paul McCartney and baby Mary as photographed by Linda McCartney in 1969 for his first solo album, *McCartney*

B Y A L L A N K O Z I N N





Paul and Linda, March 1973; Wings around the time of the 1975-76 year-long world tour, yielding the film *Rockshow* and the live *Wings Over America*

also made a pair of ambient electronic albums under the name the Fireman, and his portfolio of orchestral works continues to grow. McCartney's musical ventures outside rock have puzzled some, but his tenacious persistence in the face of often harsh criticism indicates

that his diverse involvements are certainly genuine.

McCartney's solo career nearly began in 1965: There was talk of releasing "Yesterday" under his name alone, since he was the only Beatle to perform on it. The idea was vetoed, but McCartney became the first of the Beatles to undertake a musical project outside the group even so, with the tuneful soundtrack for *The Family Way* in 1967. His first solo rock project, *McCartney*, was released in 1970, a time of radical change for him. Having been one of the world's most eligible bachelors through the Sixties, he had recently married Linda Eastman and settled down to family life in the British countryside. And the Beatles — his job, so to speak — had come to an end.

That first album said a lot about its maker, musically and otherwise. The snapshots in the gatefold offered glimpses of McCartney's new life: Linda, the kids, their pets and the farm — domestic bliss, cover to cover. As if to emphasize that he could go it alone, he played all the instruments himself and offered some songs — "Maybe I'm Amazed," "Every Night" and the lilting "Junk" — that have remained durable. Its 1971 followup, *Ram*, advanced the first album's sense of domesticity: It was credited to Paul and Linda McCartney, and six of its twelve songs — including "Heart of the Country," "Long Haired Lady" and the racier "Eat at Home" — were cowritten by the couple.

But McCartney missed the collegiality of band work

and the excitement of playing for live audiences. So within months of releasing *Ram*, he assembled Wings, a group that included Linda on keyboards and Denny Laine, formerly of the Moody Blues, as a guitarist and sometime songwriter, as well as what became a changeable lineup of guitarists and drummers. *Wild Life*, Wings' hastily recorded debut, was not promising; McCartney himself later disparaged it in interviews. But by taking to the road — first on an impromptu tour of British universities, then a more formal





Above: Paul, daughter Heather and friend at home in Scotland, ca. 1970;
Below: Around the time of McCartney's *London Town* album (Number Two on the charts for six weeks), 1978

European tour – Wings quickly got its act together. When the group returned to the studio to record *Red Rose Speedway* in 1973, Wings was a cohesive unit.

As always, variety was McCartney's watchword: The kids' song "Mary Had a Little Lamb" and the caloric "My Love" were counterbalanced by "Hi Hi Hi" and "Give Ireland Back to the Irish." Things were looking up for the group in 1973, but when McCartney scheduled recording sessions in Lagos, Nigeria, most of the band resigned, leaving only the McCartneys and Laine. Nevertheless, *Band on the Run*, the album produced at the Lagos sessions, proved the zenith of the Wings years and became the album against which all of McCartney's subsequent work has been measured. With the power of the title track, "Jet" and "Helen Wheels" and the charm of "Bluebird" and "Picasso's Last Words (Drink to Me)," it remains a consistently engaging collection.

Its spirit was carried forward in 1975's *Venus and Mars*. Now fully in flight and with a new lineup, Wings toured for nearly a year, its travels yielding a concert film, *Rockshow*, as well as *Wings Over America*, the first in a series of live albums that also includes *Tripping the Live Fantastic* (1990), *Unplugged (The Official Bootleg)* (1991) and *Paul Is Live* (1993).

Typically, McCartney changed gears when he returned to the studio. On 1976's *Wings at the Speed of Sound* and 1978's *London Town*, he experimented with lighter textures. He answered critics of songs like "My Love" by declaring, in "Silly Love Songs," his intention to keep writing them. And the unabashed folksiness of "Mull of Kintyre" struck a popular chord: In England, it even outsold the Beatles' biggest hits.

Wings returned to more rugged textures in 1979 with *Back to the Egg*, the group's unintentional swan song. When a Japanese tour was

scuttled after McCartney was arrested for bringing marijuana into the country, tensions within the band came to a head. McCartney marked the band's split as he had marked the end of the Beatles – with an album on which he played all the instruments, *McCartney II*. Though it yielded a hit in his first quasi-funk experiment, "Coming Up," the album was widely regarded as unsatisfying. But the next two – 1982's *Tug of War* and 1983's *Pipes of Peace* – were



greeted as Eighties equivalents of *Band on the Run* and *Venus and Mars*. Not least among their points of interest were the collaborations with Stevie Wonder on "Ebony and Ivory," Carl Perkins on "Get It" and Michael Jackson on "Say Say Say."

McCartney's efforts of the mid-1980s – the 1984 film *Give My Regards to Broad Street* and the 1986 *Press to Play* album – were poorly received, although in retrospect each yielded some vibrant tracks. But McCartney is nothing if not resilient, and his ability to refashion his sound while retaining his musical thumbprint served him well once again: He had clearly found a fresh path while making *Flowers in the Dirt*, released in 1989 after three years' silence, and notable for its collaborations with Elvis Costello. And *Back in the U.S.S.R.* – an album of pre-Beatles rock classics McCartney recorded while trying to assemble a touring band, in 1987, and first released in the Soviet Union – showed him to be in superb form as a rocker, an impression con-





Top: Paul during his most recent tour, 1993; Left: With *Tug of War* guests Carl Perkins and Stevie Wonder; Below: With Peggy Lee and producer David Grusin, 1974

there was a wistfulness here: "Little Willow" ruminated on the death from cancer of Maureen Starkey, and together with the bittersweet "Somedays," it carried intimations of mortality that were closer to home. Linda was fighting breast cancer when the album was recorded; after her death on April 17, 1998,

McCartney's friends described him as disconsolate.

He carried on, however, encouraging young musicians in a commencement address at the Liverpool Institute of Performing Arts and putting the finishing touches on Linda's *Wide Prairie* album. But in interviews, he voiced doubts about his own musical future. He could, of course, leave the public stage secure in the knowledge that his existing work will continue to thrill people in great numbers, and with his place in musical history assured many times over. But for someone with McCartney's creativity and drive, stopping would be incomprehensibly out of character. *

firmed in 1989 when he undertook his first tour in nine years.

He kept his band largely intact for his next release, 1993's *Off the Ground*, an album that moves between idealism ("Hope of Deliverance," "Peace in the Neighbourhood" and "C'mon People," for example) and anger (the antivivisectionist "Looking for Changes"), delivering a raft of love songs along the way. The McCartneys became outspoken in the late Eighties and early

Nineties: Besides campaigning for animal rights and vegetarianism, they supported striking hospital workers and came out against British government policies on other issues as well. That did not stop the British government from awarding him a Knighthood in 1997.

McCartney always said that all of his love songs, silly or otherwise, were for Linda, and several more were included on 1997's *Flaming Pie*. But



