

Gordon Craigie



An independent mind...

This month, I'm looking through a Glass Onion...

THERE'S A Billy Bragg song that I occasionally (regularly?) cite in my defence when my long-suffering (her words!) wife wonders exactly what it is I do all day when there doesn't appear (to her) to be an end product – very often a harsh but fair observation! In "Handyman Blues", Billy laments the fact that he's useless at DIY and points out to his better half that he'll never be "the handyman around the house my father was", a sentiment that 100% applies to me too – in fact, my preferred version of DIY is YDI... you do it! (It's clearly a much better idea to get a man or woman in!) He goes on to point out that when she catches him reading the paper, or suchlike, he's actually researching ideas that he'll "turn to gold dust later, cause I'm a writer not a decorator"... Well, the gold dust part hasn't happened for me yet, though we live in hope, but it is absolutely true that creative inspiration can be triggered by seemingly meaningless or random observations or thoughts and that, dear reader, is exactly how this month's column was conceived.

Some of my, ahem, "research" is conducted while I'm pounding the pavements of Scotland's sunniest city and, mainly to distract myself from the tedium of the long-distance

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runner, (well, *medium* distance!), listening to podcasts. Depending on my mood, my podcast of choice may be related to Scottish history, politics, or current affairs but, since I prefer not to get angry while running, more often it'll be about football or music and, to be more specific, about Dundee United or The Beatles. A particular favourite is *I Am the EggPod* where each episode takes "a jaunty stroll through Pepperland discussing The Beatles and solo Beatle albums with a potpourri of delicious guests". Each episode involves a "deep dive" into what a specific album means to that episode's guest – trust me, it's a lot more enjoyable than that description suggests! Most of the time the discussion brings out interesting anecdotes and recollections and there's a genuine warmth between the presenter and the guest – and the music's not too shabby either! – but occasionally the guest seems overly opinionated and so far up a certain part of their own anatomy that it's a wonder they can actually hear the album from there...

Anyway, last week I was listening to a respected and widely acknowledged Beatles "expert" discussing the 1968 album *The Beatles* – more commonly known as the *White Album* – and he was so negative about almost every track that, quite early in the podcast, I was wondering why he had chosen that album to talk about and why, indeed, he professed to be a Beatles fan when he clearly disliked so much of what they'd created. Now, like many things in life, music is purely subjective and not everyone likes or appreciates the same things, but I think it's reasonable to assume that if you're



a fan of an artist or group then the reason you're a fan is because you like their music, or am I being too simplistic? I don't think so. But this guy took issue with lyrics, production and mix, singing, guitar playing and drumming, inspiration behind songs, meaning of songs – without another listen (which I can't bring myself to do!) I'd be hard pressed to find something he actually praised! Yet he's a fan? An expert? He's written books and columns, and regularly gets invited to pontificate on the life, times, and works of The Beatles, and presumably has made a good living out of being afforded his "expert" status, and yet...

Now, as I've already stated, music is subjective, and he is absolutely entitled to his opinions and, although those opinions on this particular album are diametrically opposed to mine, I have no problem with him holding those opinions. What I do take issue with is him professing to be a fan and an expert when his views are so out of sync with what I understand to be the general view. Incidentally, the *White Album* has sold, worldwide, something in the region of 24 million copies – the real fans have spoken!

So, where is this outpouring of Beatlemania leading me, I hear you ask? You'll not be surprised to learn that all roads eventually lead back to our independence campaign! One of my pet hates – I may have mentioned this before? – is people who profess to be independence supporters but **only** if we end up in/out of the EU, in/out of EFTA, have our own currency/share the pound sterling, are a republic/monarchy, etc. In other words, they're great fans of the Indy band but only if the words are different, the production is different, the guitar playing is different, and the songs mean something different. In the podcast I've ranted about above, would the "expert" have preferred that The Beatles had never made the *White Album*? Or, since he is neither a lyricist, composer, singer, musician, or producer, would "his" version of the album have sold more than 24 million copies? We don't have the luxury of a parallel universe to test that theory, but I suspect not. In my humble opinion, if The Beatles hadn't made the *White Album* exactly as they did then we wouldn't have had the pleasure of experiencing all of the wonderful music they went on to produce afterwards. Similarly, unless or until Scotland regains its independence there is absolutely no chance of us going on to be the country we deserve to live in. One of my friends refers to this as a "first-principles" argument – there is no point in adopting immovable positions on EU, currency, monarchy, or anything else that comes after independence as the "first principle" is surely to regain independence. Then we'll have the power to change everything.

So, just as last month, we're still in this waiting period – waiting for the SNP Conference and waiting for the Rutherglen and Hamilton West by-election. After both of those events we should have a clearer idea of our immediate next steps, but our first-principle priority will not change – to regain independence. Factional differences and inter-movement sniping must be put to one side and a united approach supported by everyone – and we need that united approach to have visible leadership. Who's it going to be?

And finally...! When our esteemed editor decided back in late 2019 that *iScot Magazine* needed a wee refresh he came up with an idea inspired by... the *White Album*! During a high-powered production meeting – well, a few texts followed by a phone call in which technical editorial words "tube" and "eejit" were liberally used! – oor Ken indicated that he had always loved the simplicity of the album cover and thought it would work really well with

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the new masthead logo he'd been working on. His only concern was getting the correct shade of "white" as he was having difficulty tracking it down. When I pointed out to him that, in this context at least, white really did mean what it said on the tin and, indeed, that was exactly how the album had acquired its colloquial description, he just wasn't having it. He said something along the lines of, "But it's no white white, it's kinda a pearlescent, yellowy white". At this point I began to think I was missing something, so I went and dug out my copy – unsurprisingly, it's white! Ken was unmoved, "I'm looking at my copy here and it's no white!" After a bit more toing and froing it became obvious that as his treasured copy had been exposed to air and sunlight since 1968 it had indeed acquired a hue that wisnae "white white" but – and this was where the "tube" and "eejit" descriptions entered the fray – the minimalist perfection that he was seeking for the cover of your award-winning *iScot Magazine* required it to be... white!

So, my point is that we all see things differently, we all look at issues through our own lens. But there's no point in arguing incessantly about a whiter-than-white shade of independence when the first principle has to be to re-establish ourselves as a normal independent country first. Once we've done that then we can create whatever shade of society that we, the sovereign Scots, decide on collectively and democratically. Independence is normal so let's all come together and get that done – no ifs, no buts, no maybes! And that concludes our jaunty stroll for this month, from the *White Album* to the *iScot* rebranding while we wait for clarity on our next steps. There's a lot of thought goes into the production of this magazine folks...