

THE ESSENTIAL

The Beatles Solo Albums

Theirs was a difficult act to follow, but how did John, Paul, George and Ringo do with the challenge of going it alone? Let **Steve Harnell** be the judge of that

No musicians have ever been presented with a more daunting challenge. What exactly do you do for an encore after being part of the most important and influential pop cultural phenomenon of all time? Over the course of the last 50 years since The Beatles split up in such bitter fashion, the individual parts of the four-headed behemoth that was John, Paul, George and Ringo have served up an extraordinarily diverse collection of solo albums.

In fact, even before the band parted ways, both John and George had begun to fully embrace avant-garde experimentalist music, while Paul has gone on to assemble a singularly individualistic back catalogue that has taken in a classical symphony as well as ambient and electronica, alongside his trademark melodic pop songcraft. Only Ringo – at the peak of his partying powers arguably the most well-connected man in rock, with a bulging address book of A-list collaborators – clung resolutely to a more traditional path, that has frequently referenced the musical styles of his former band.

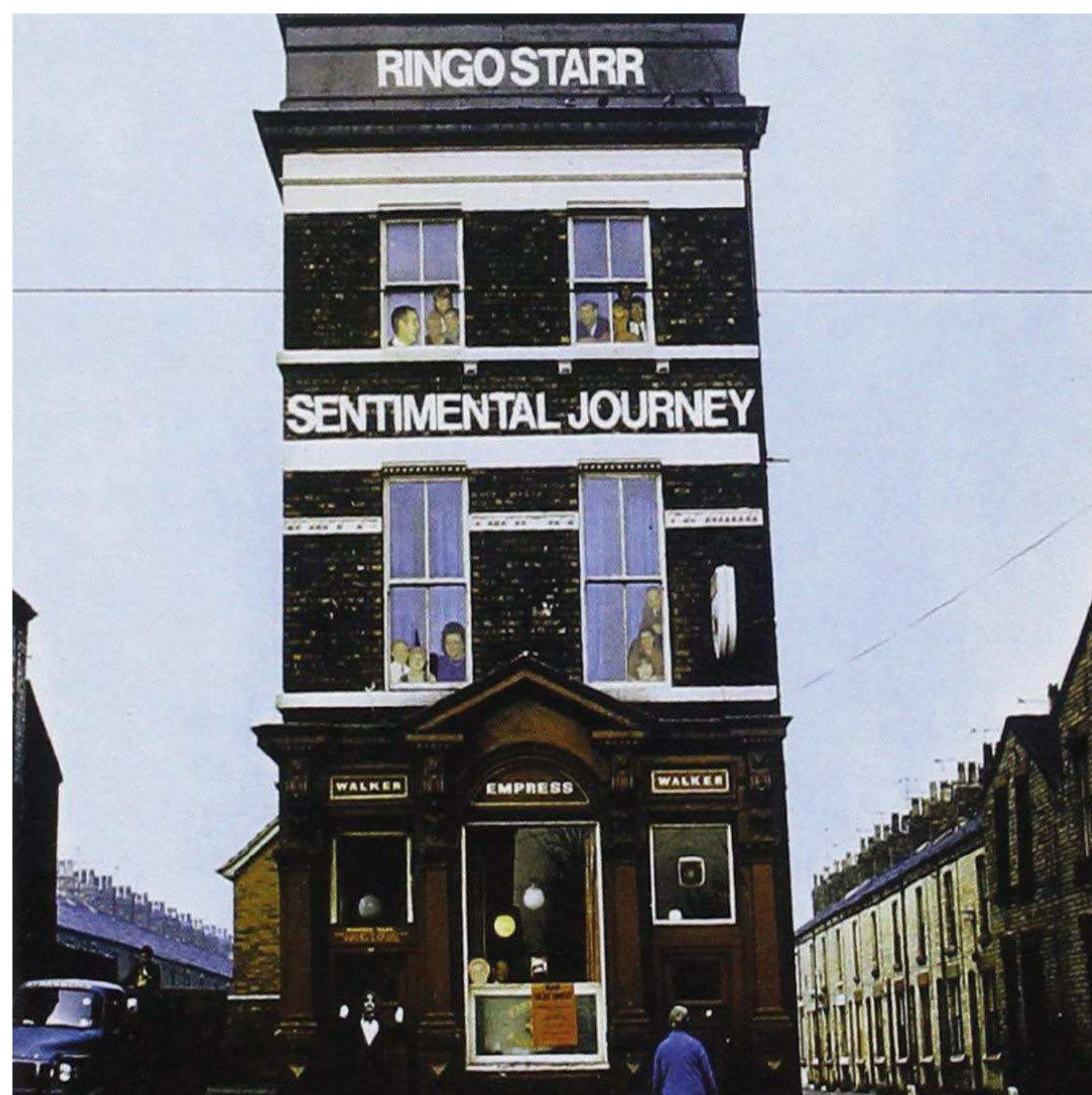
While they rarely put a foot wrong as Beatles, the wavering quality of the Fab Four's solo efforts has seen the quartet come under fire for failing to live up to their reputations as the pre-eminent pop and rock force of their age.

But while only the most rabid of Beatles fans could argue the case for some of their weaker efforts (*Press To Play* anyone?), we have comfortably drawn up a Top 20 of superb solo records by former Beatles that you need to add to your collection. From soul-bearing art-rock to OTT Phil Spector Wall Of Sound extravaganzas and endearing country covers, it's all here...

BEATLES SOLO ALBUMS

68

THE ESSENTIAL



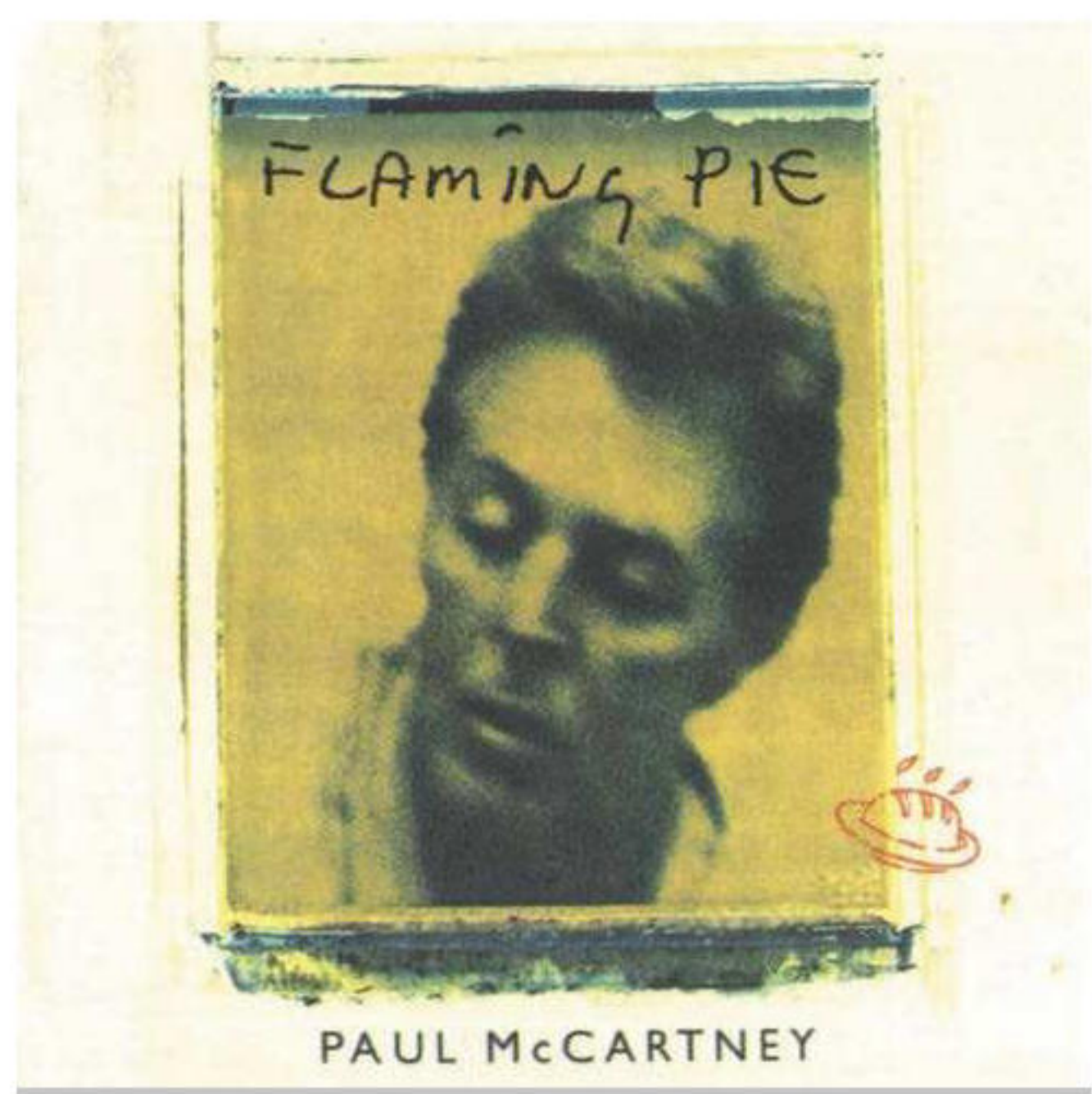
20 RINGO STARR SENTIMENTAL JOURNEY APPLE 1970

Country fan Ringo dabbled in the genre during his Beatles tenure, but his second solo album was wholly Americana in focus. Recorded in just three days in Nashville and engineered by Elvis guitar hero Scotty Moore, this is full of Starr's trademark easy-going charm – Ringo's own *Nashville Skyline*.
FIRST £13 LATEST £30



19 RINGO STARR TIME TAKES TIME PRIVATE MUSIC 1992

Ringo handed over the reins of his first studio album in nine years to four producers: Jeff Lynne, Don Was, Phil Ramone and Peter Asher. Opener *Weight Of The World* is outrageously Beatles-esque, while Lynne brings the same kind of Fabs-apeing thud to *Don't Go Where The Road Don't Go*.
FIRST £42 LATEST £21



18 PAUL MCCARTNEY

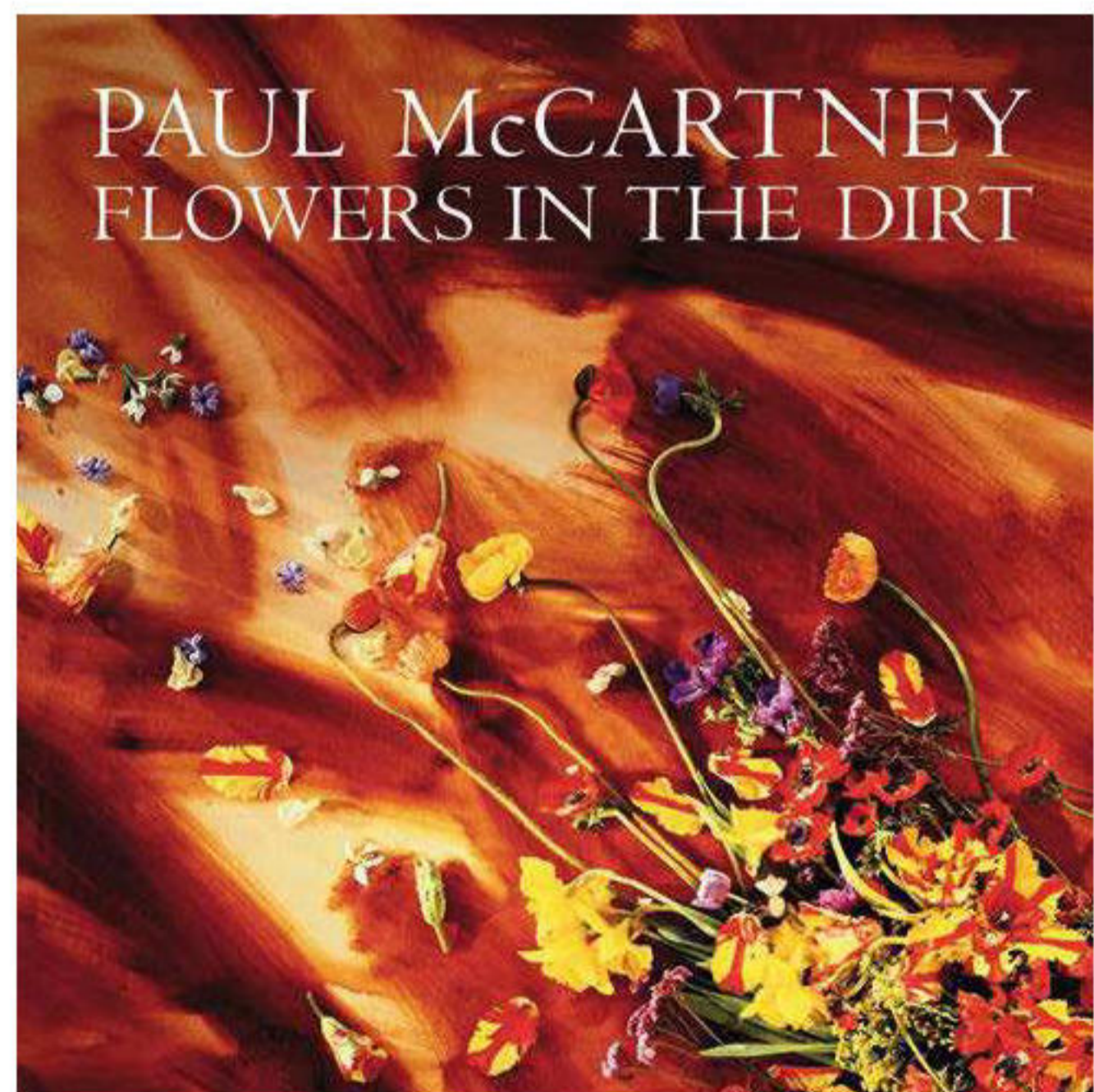
FLAMING PIE

PARLOPHONE 1997

After immersing himself in the *Anthology* project, Macca upped his game for this mid-90s high point. Finally unafraid to compete with his 60s masterpieces, subtle nods to The Beatles are here, there and everywhere, especially the *Blackbird*-style fingerpicking of the heartrending *Little Willow* and *Calico Skies*. The rocking title track refers knowingly to The Beatles' apocryphal genesis story, while *The Song We Were Singing* nods to the Lennon/McCartney songwriting sessions at John's Forthlin Road home.

FIRST £42

LATEST £21



17 PAUL MCCARTNEY

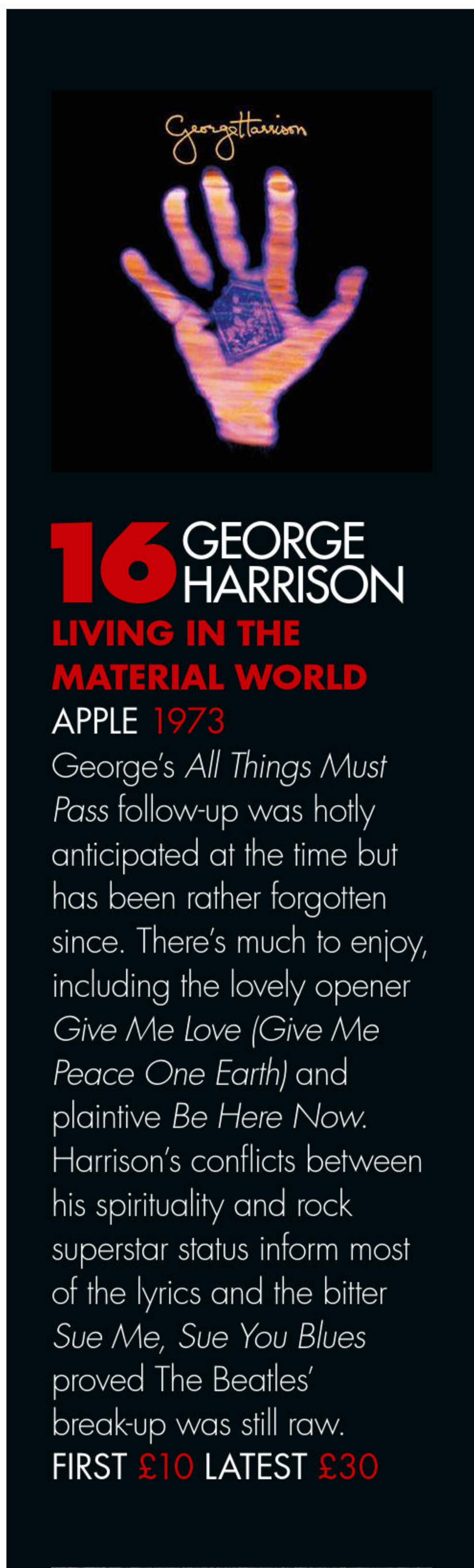
FLOWERS IN THE DIRT

PARLOPHONE 1989

An Elvis Costello-Paul McCartney songwriting partnership was a lip-smacking prospect, but could Costello add the same bite to Macca's songs that Lennon once did? After working on a batch of demos, only a third of the final LP featured Costello. A missed opportunity, as the nine Elvis-Macca demos on the Special Edition prove this could have been truly superb.

FIRST £9

LATEST £31



16 GEORGE HARRISON

LIVING IN THE MATERIAL WORLD

APPLE 1973

George's *All Things Must Pass* follow-up was hotly anticipated at the time but has been rather forgotten since. There's much to enjoy, including the lovely opener *Give Me Love (Give Me Peace One Earth)* and plaintive *Be Here Now*. Harrison's conflicts between his spirituality and rock superstar status inform most of the lyrics and the bitter *Sue Me, Sue You Blues* proved The Beatles' break-up was still raw.

FIRST £10 LATEST £30



15 JOHN LENNON

ROCK 'N' ROLL

APPLE 1975

Stolen master tapes, threats of lawsuits and a gun-toting Phil Spector – how does Lennon's good-natured covers album sound so relaxed? The core of John's *Walls And Bridges* band, plus a host of other session dudes, knock out these evocative refits of 50s classics. After Spector got kicked off the project, arrangements were reined in, but the full-sounding recordings have a distinctly expansive mid-70s feel.

FIRST £4

LATEST £21



14 RINGO STARR

GOODNIGHT VIENNA APPLE 1973

Although less focused than its eponymous predecessor, Starr's everyman charm wins through here on another star-studded collection. The Lennon-penned rocking title track stands out, as does the New Orleans swing of Allen Toussaint's *Occapella*.

FIRST £5 LATEST £10



13 PAUL MCCARTNEY

TUG OF WAR

PARLOPHONE 1982

Reunited with George Martin, *Tug Of War* was heralded as a return to form for McCartney. Sessions were halted when Paul heard of John Lennon's murder, and his heartfelt tribute *Here Today* is goosebump-inducing.

FIRST £4 LATEST £19





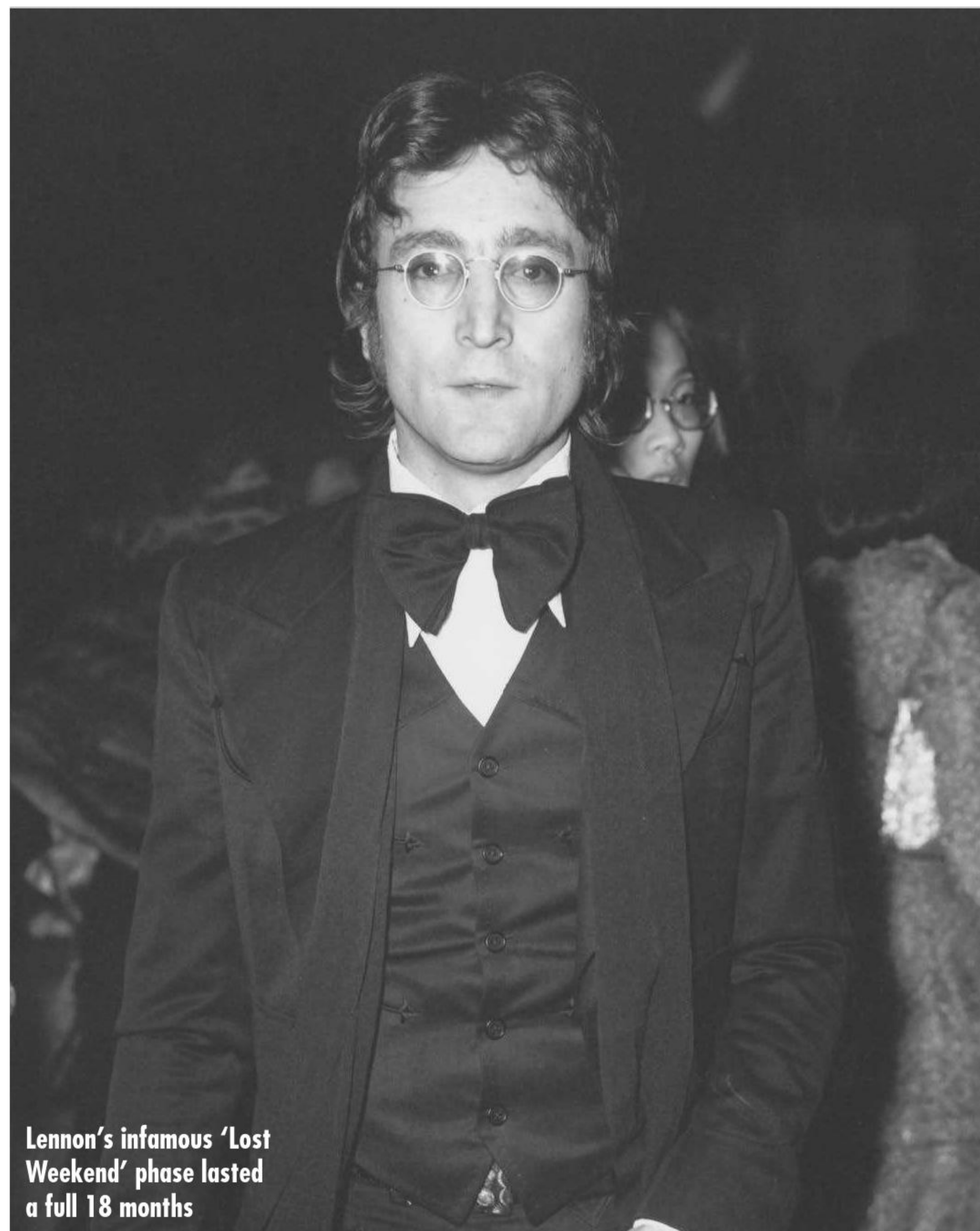
12 JOHN LENNON
MIND GAMES APPLE 1973

After the politically charged *Some Time In New York City*, Lennon ditched the activism for a straightforward song collection. *Bring On The Lucie (Freeda People)* is a finely honed slice of political positivism and *Out Of The Blue* is one of his best ballads in years. **FIRST £7 LATEST £17**



11 PAUL MCCARTNEY
CHAOS AND CREATION IN THE BACK YARD
PARLOPHONE 2005

The tantalising prospect of Radiohead producer Nigel Godrich pushing Macca to the limit bore fruit. Paul's signature style shines through on perky rocker *Fine Time*, ballad *Jenny Wren* and twee *English Tea*. The bittersweet *Too Much Rain* is textbook Macca defiance. **FIRST £45 LATEST £21**

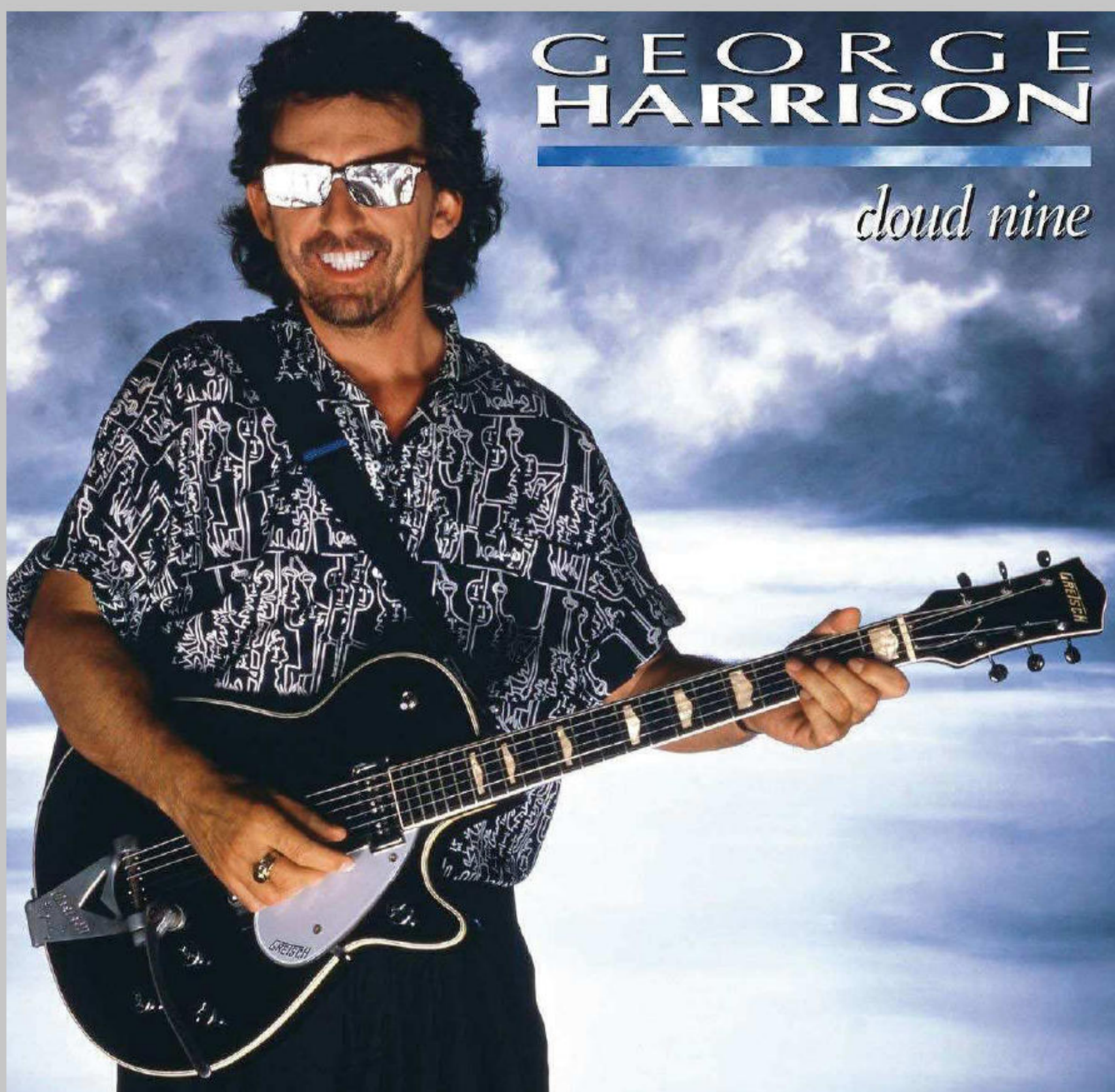


Lennon's infamous 'Lost Weekend' phase lasted a full 18 months



10 JOHN LENNON
WALLS AND BRIDGES APPLE 1974

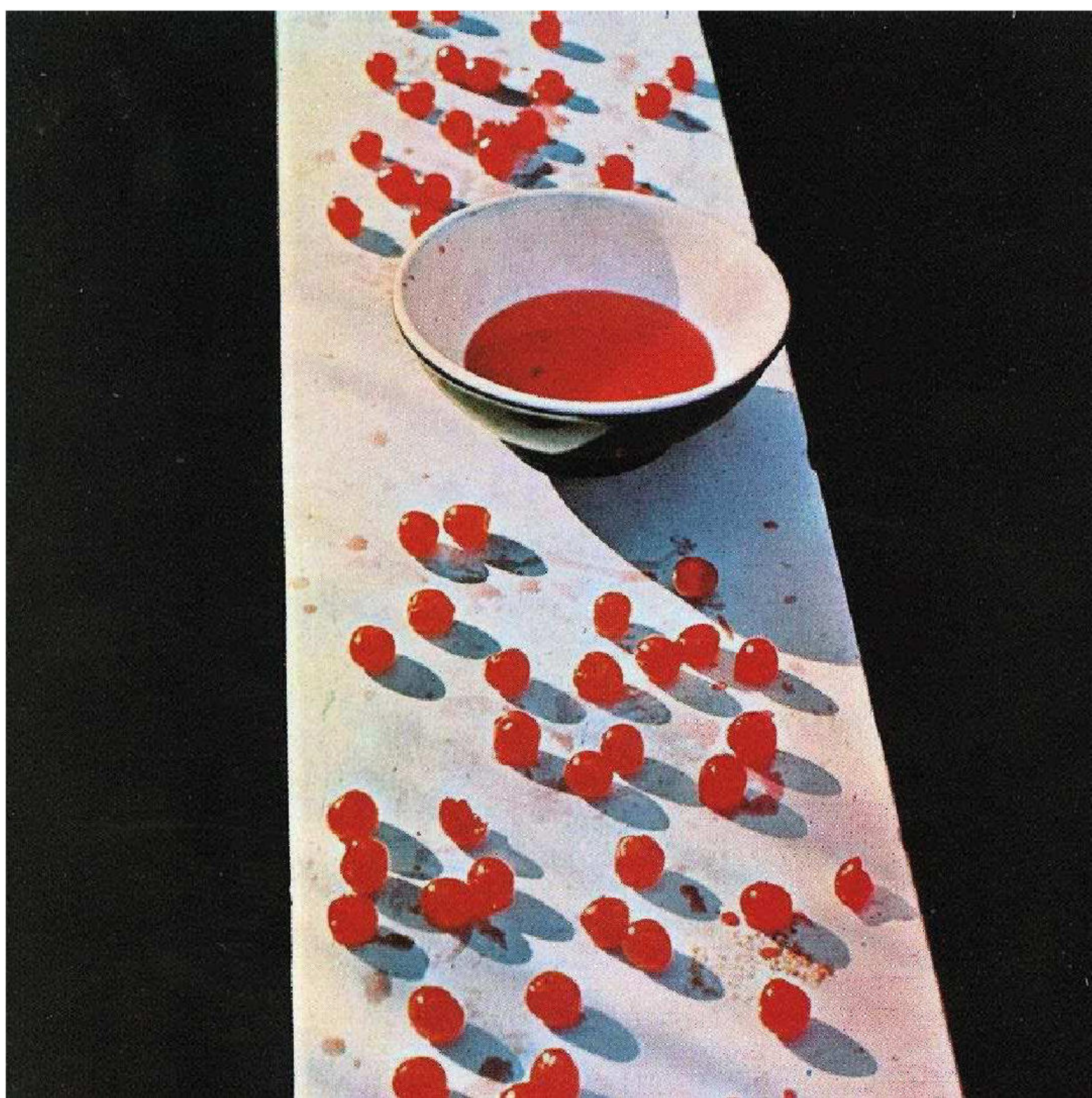
Cut during doing his 18-month 'Lost Weekend' while separated from Yoko, Lennon's lifestyle may have gone off the rails, but he's pretty focused here. Headline tracks are Elton John collaboration *Whatever Gets You Through The Night* and the beatific *#9 Dream*. John ups the pace for the urgent funk rock of *What You Got*. *Steel And Glass* recycles the riff from *How Do You Sleep?*, though this time his target is switched from Macca to Beatles manager Allen Klein. **FIRST £10 LATEST £21**



9 **GEORGE HARRISON**
CLOUD NINE DARK HORSE 1987

As a seasoned hitmaker, producer Jeff Lynne was the go-to late-80s guy for Beatle-inflected AOR. George's return after a five-year lay-off was a welcome surprise and this polished studio effort was a platinum-selling global smash.

FIRST £6 LATEST £23



8 **PAUL MCCARTNEY**
MCCARTNEY APPLE 1970

After The Beatles' split left McCartney severely depressed, his first step as a solo artist put as much distance between himself and his former band as possible. Macca gives the middle finger to those desperate for a 'statement album' and delivers his best-ever solo cut, *Maybe I'm Amazed*.

FIRST £12 LATEST £19

John Lennon

Double Fantasy

Yoko Ono



7 **JOHN LENNON**
DOUBLE FANTASY GEFEN 1980

When this was released, it was met with a collective shrug, but after Lennon's tragic murder, it was lauded as a career-best effort. Alternating between John and Yoko songs, John turns in precision-tooled pop while Yoko presents spiky art-rock. Lennon reins in his experimental side to provide conservative yet highly melodic cuts such as the tongue-in-cheek Elvis homage *(Just Like) Starting Over*. *Beautiful Boy* and *Woman* found him unafraid to embrace schmaltz.

FIRST £4 LATEST £18



6 **RINGO STARR**
RINGO

APPLE 1973

Ringo's first proper rock solo album is notable for many reasons, not least the fact that all three Beatle bandmates appear, as well as four fifths of The Band, plus Marc Bolan. Lennon gets the ball rolling with tongue-in-cheek opener *I'm The Greatest*, while Starr's co-write with George Harrison on *Photograph* is a charming singalong. McCartney weighs in with the whimsical *Six O'Clock* on Starr's best solo outing.

FIRST £4 LATEST £26

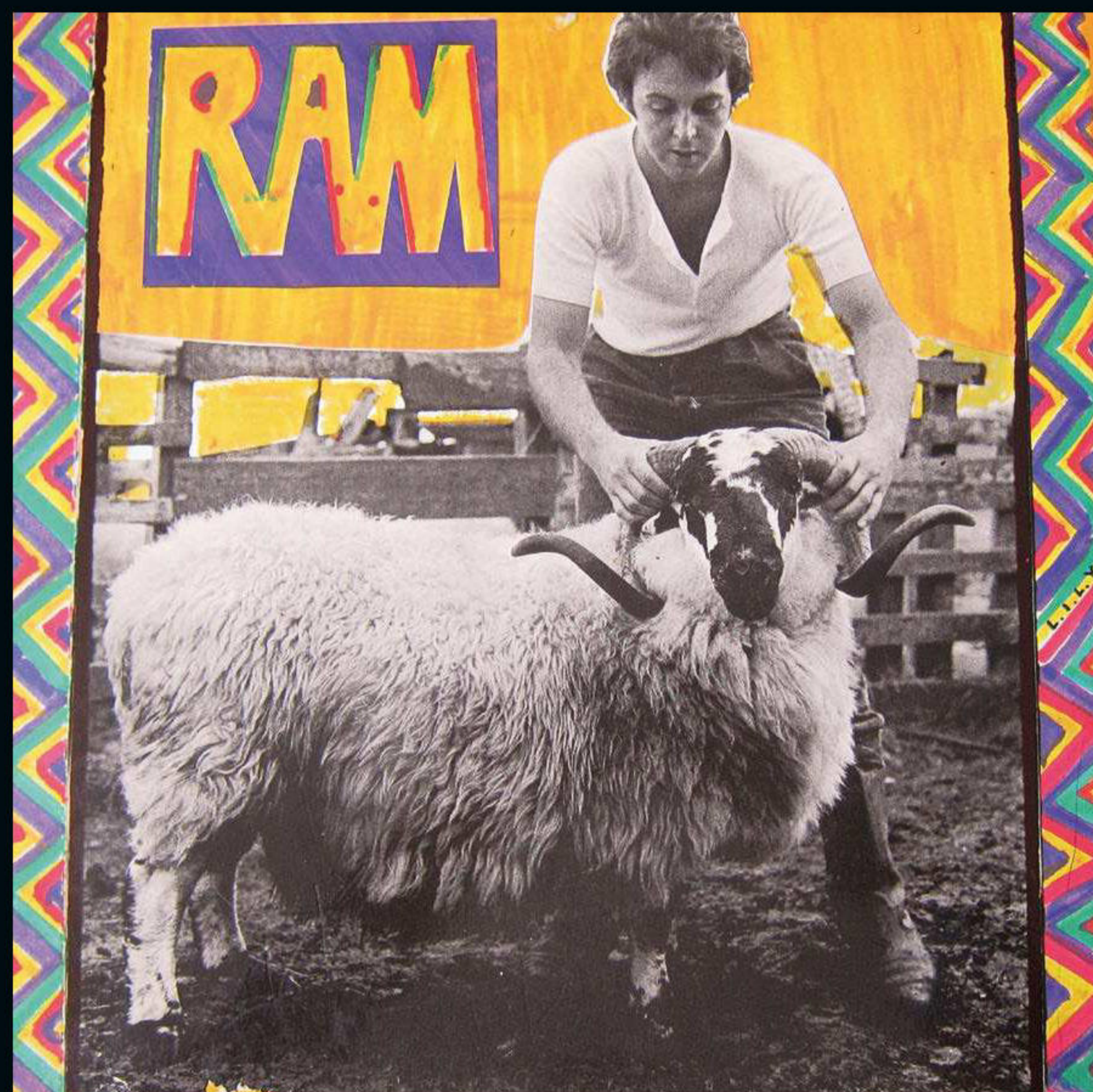


Linda and Paul Mc on a quick break away from their rural idyll



4 PAUL MCCARTNEY AND WINGS BAND ON THE RUN APPLE 1973

A loose concept album about a fictitious band. Sounds familiar? If this didn't quite scale the giddy heights of *Sgt. Pepper* it did resurrect McCartney's critical standing. Macca's habit of compiling unfinished snippets into multi-part songs works seamlessly on the title track and Alan Partridge favourite *Jet* soars above its elusive lyrics. **FIRST £8 LATEST £22**



5 PAUL MCCARTNEY RAM APPLE 1971

How times have changed. Upon its release, critics carped that Macca had lost the plot, now *Ram* is considered a rough-hewn classic. Although this is now seen as a paean to domestic bliss, niggles with his former bandmates (mostly Lennon, naturally) arise through veiled asides. *Ram*'s centrepiece is the somewhat schizophrenic *Uncle Albert/Admiral Halsey* medley. As he sings on *Monkberry Moon Delight*: "Catch up, cats and kittens. Don't get left behind!" Many did... **FIRST £15 LATEST £22**

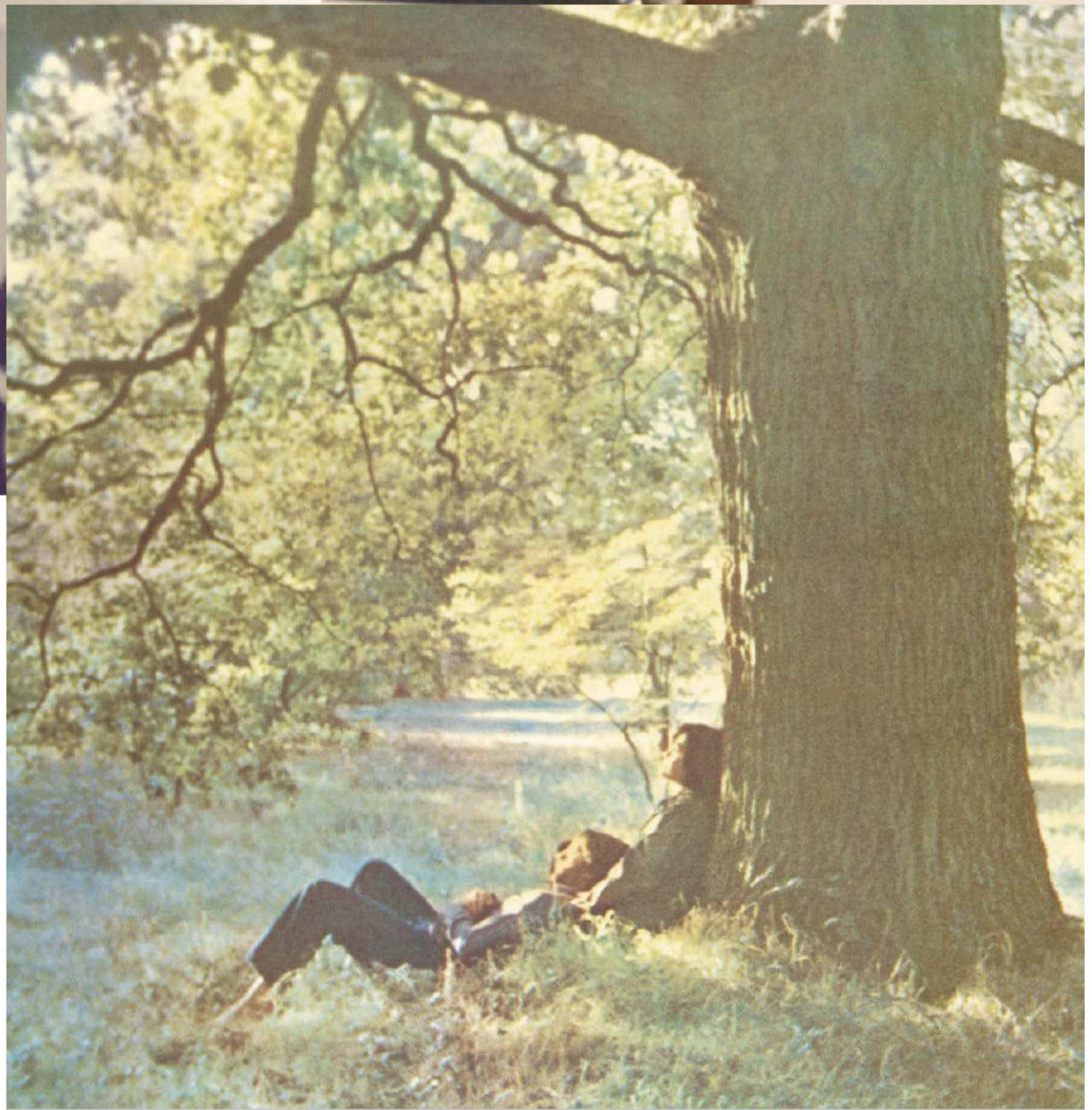


3 JOHN LENNON IMAGINE APPLE 1971

The title track is John's towering solo statement, but elsewhere he marshals his pain and turmoil into surprisingly accessible material, with the self-lacerating *Crippled Inside* and *Jealous Guy* nestling alongside the pretty *Oh My Love* and country waltz of *Oh Yoko!* **FIRST £11 LATEST £22**



Lennon's finest post-Beatles work was hewn out of his primal scream therapy



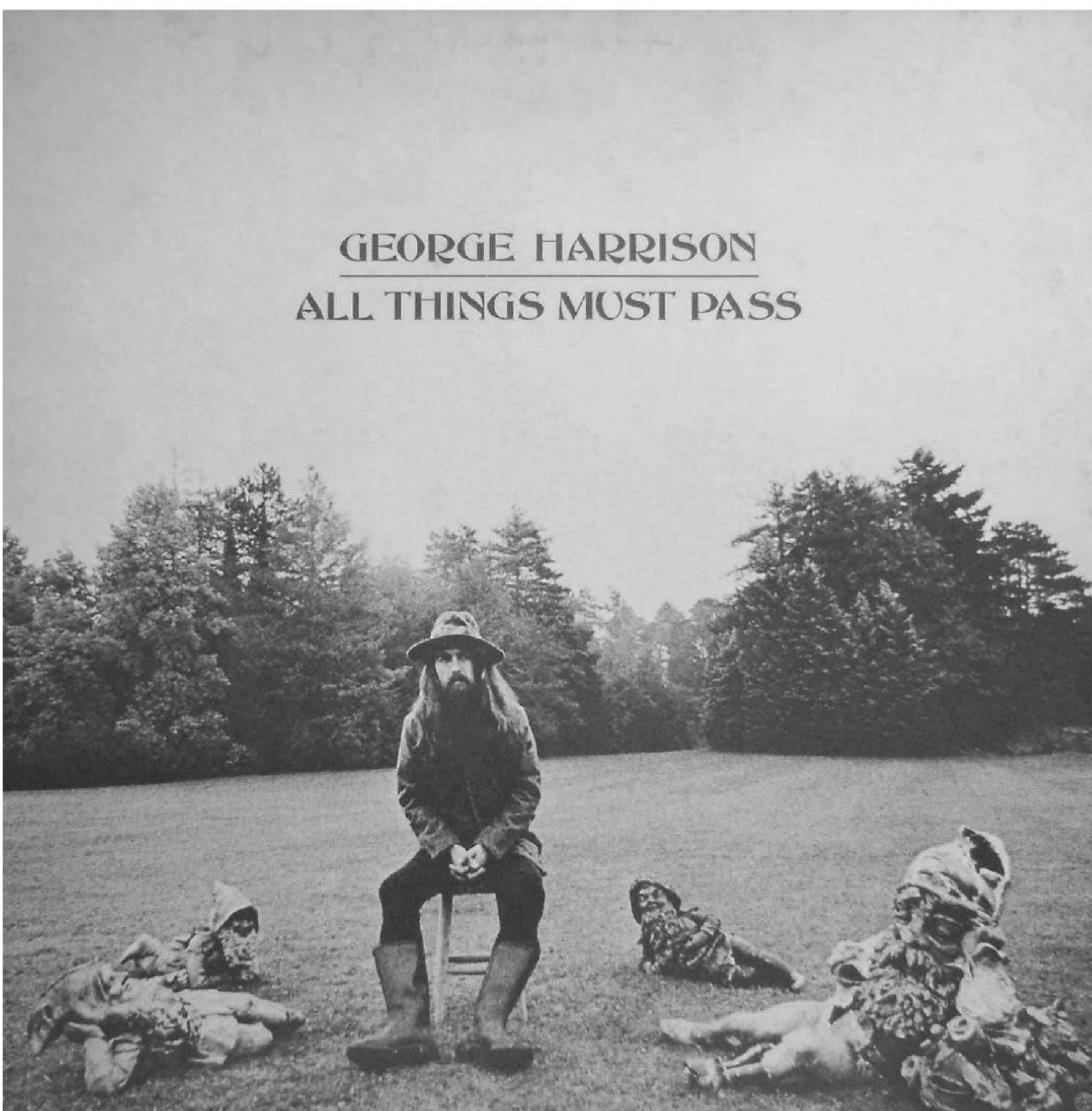
1 JOHN LENNON JOHN LENNON/PLASTIC ONO BAND

APPLE 1970

The clanging funeral bells that introduce this suggest we're in uncharted territory – this is one of the bravest records ever released by a major league rock star. Inspired by his primal scream therapy to kick heroin, Lennon's howls of pain are breathtaking. Stark, clanging arrangements frame these simple, but devastating songs. The pain of his childhood is laid bare on *Mother* and *My Mummy's Dead*, while John's rejection of hero worship and idolatry is expressed on *I Found Out*. *Isolation* and *Look At Me* are beatific ballads, the latter fingerpicked effort written on Lennon's Rishikesh sojourn with his former band. "I don't believe in Beatles, I just believe in me," he sings on list song *God*. "The dream is over".

It certainly was. And Lennon buried it here.

FIRST £20 LATEST £18



2 GEORGE HARRISON ALL THINGS MUST PASS

2 GEORGE HARRISON ALL THINGS MUST PASS APPLE 1970

Where the Harrison levee breaks. All those years of playing second fiddle to the Lennon-McCartney songwriting axis led to an expansive backlog, a triple album in fact. Phil Spector adds his Wall Of Sound to *Isn't It A Pity* and bouncy *What Is Life*, while *If Not For You* is a top-drawer Dylan cover.

FIRST £42 LATEST £65