Chapter 1

Made in Rockdown

Paul McCartney and McCartney III

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In the Q&A provided with promo copies of Paul McCartney's debut solo album, *McCartney*, sent to DJs and critics in April 1970, he concisely described the "texture or feel" of the album as "Home. Family. Love." and additionally described his "break with the Beatles" because he had a "better time with [his] family."[1] Over fifty years later, in 2020, as promotion of *McCartney III*, an album released following similar recording circumstances as its namesake predecessor, Paul McCartney issued four compilation EPs on streaming services that carried that description as titles (with a "Holidays" EP added for the 2020 holiday season). Those descriptions structured Paul McCartney's career, represented by the copy inserted with his debut album and later by its two successor self-titled albums. The first, *McCartney*, was recorded at home when McCartney was newly married to Linda, with newborn Mary, and as "rest away from the Beatles." A decade later, *McCartney II* was recorded privately at home following the release of Wings' ultimate album *Back to the Egg* in April 1979 and released after McCartney returned home from his January 1980 arrest in Japan for drugs possession.[2] Fifty years into his solo career, *McCartney III* was recorded while in lockdown with now adult daughter Mary and her family during the COVID-19 pandemic. The themes of home, family, and love maintained productivity and continuity across that timespan, from recovery to experimentation to lockdown, and capped the entirety of McCartney's career. While none of the three *McCartney* albums were written or recorded with direct intention of release, each symbolized McCartney's impact and influence in the history of popular music, celebrating and demonstrating his status as an icon influencing and connecting countless musicians and fans.

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When *McCartney III* was announced to the surprise of fans and critics in October 2020, commentary immediately gravitated to the symbolism of the album with *McCartney II* in 1980 and *McCartney* in 1970. Unlike its predecessors, *McCartney III* did not arrive at a transitional point for McCartney, but as an effect of the worldwide efforts to reduce exposure to and prevent the spread of COVID-19. McCartney recorded the album during lockdown, after a planned European tour and the Glastonbury Festival in June 2020 were canceled. In a parallel to recording the album *McCartney*, he spent lockdown with his daughter Mary and her family, not unlike time spent isolated with wife Linda and newborn Mary in the fall of 1969. The differences grow dramatically with a self-imposed getaway from the tensions of the Beatles compared to a public health crisis lockdown. The account of his time in lockdown emerged extensively in the promotion of both *McCartney III* and its immediate follow-up, *McCartney III Imagined*, released in mid-2021. Like its predecessors, the album was recorded at McCartney's home studio in Sussex and with equipment utilized for both preceding "solo" records and technology more recently available—like his iPhone: the recording for *McCartney III* was "mostly built from live takes of Paul on vocals and guitar or piano, overdubbing his bass playing, drumming, etc. atop that foundation."[3]

Before lockdown changed his 2020 plans, McCartney and his compilation team put together a reissue for *Flaming Pie*, his 1997 album that followed *The Beatles Anthology*, as an installment in his Archive Collection series. As part of the process compiling that reissue, McCartney rediscovered an unreleased song recorded with George Martin in 1992, "When Winter Comes." Recorded in the same session that resulted in "Calico Skies" and "Great Day," two songs released on *Flaming Pie*, "When Winter Comes" retained its 1992 character and connections to Martin and Linda McCartney upon re-discovery. According to Spotify's Storyline feature, McCartney "[considered] the song too good to be released as a bonus track [for the Archive release]" and "decided to make a short film to accompany it. As Paul recorded the short introductory piece of music for the film, the world went into lockdown due to the COVID-19 pandemic."[4] For the short film, McCartney "crafted a new passage for the song" with "Winter Bird" as an introduction to "When Winter Comes" and then created the mostly instrumental track "Long Tailed Winter Bird" from the same passage. The latter opened *McCartney III* while the refreshed "When Winter Comes" closed the album. An early review of *McCartney III* by Beatles scholar Kenneth Womack applauded this placement of the song on the album: "While 'When Winter Comes' would have been at home during virtually any phase of his illustrious career, the song's inclusion at the tail end of *McCartney III* makes perfect sense: it's not only one of his most beautiful compositions, which is high praise indeed, but also an

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insightful realization of the ways in which the uncertainties of life and death are always, in spite of everything, roiling among us."[5] The re-discovery and inspiration heralded by "When Winter Comes" documents McCartney's icon status, with the song representing his career in microcosm and shepherding *McCartney III*'s relevance to his status and significance.

Under "Rockdown," McCartney's label for the COVID-19 lockdown, he completed, recorded, and produced unfinished tracks, iPhone demos, and the aforementioned "When Winter Comes." As his fans know too well, he never starts recording with any intention of putting a new album together, and "Rockdown" was no different—only the opportunity to focus solely on recording without a touring or performing schedule while additionally spending time with and sharing the output immediately with his family. The album reinforces and illustrates McCartney's work ethic as a musician and resembles other musicians recording and releasing new music because of worldwide lockdowns, such as Taylor Swift and her albums *folklore* and *evermore*. (This aspect was revealed more directly in the commentary that hypothesized and surrounded the explanations for the delay of the album from originally December 11 to December 18, with Capitol Records unexpectedly rushing to release and meet McCartney's wishes for the album *in* 2020, before McCartney admitted it was to accommodate Taylor Swift's *evermore*.[6]) As a result, *McCartney III* rekindled the 1970 Q&A citing home, family, and love, as the texture and feel of the new album for his much larger 2020 family and audience of fans and listeners. These themes are keys to Paul McCartney's status as a rock icon and his legacy in popular music and history, a perspective revealed and overshadowed by *McCartney III*. The album, the promotion, and the celebration of its existence with connections to *McCartney* and *McCartney II* reveled in and celebrated his long career as much as commemorated an unprecedented moment in our collective experiences.

As representation of Paul McCartney as a rock icon and with the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic in focus, promotion for *McCartney III* lacked traditional performances and appearances that linked McCartney to his history. The album was promoted as "made in Rockdown," a cute and silly marker for his recording process and the circumstances of the album's genesis in lockdown with home and family.[7] In an hour-long interview with British broadcaster Zane Lowe, promoting *McCartney III*, Paul McCartney discussed various details of his career and recording the three self-titled albums from 1970, 1980, and then 2020, including the support received from wife Linda in late 1969 to the productivity he enjoyed in the office space above his home studio in Sussex. With the video interview conducted in that office space, Lowe asked McCartney if that was where the album was written, based on the proximity to the recording studio. McCartney admitted:

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> . . . no, it was kind-of written all over the place really. What happened was, you know, with lockdown I had to kind of stay in one place, obviously. Because you lockdown—or rockdown as we call it . . .
>
> Lowe: I haven't heard that yet, I can't believe we haven't come up with that. Oh my god, he came through with a clanger at the end of the year, I love it!!!
>
> McCartney: You know, the thing is I was with my family with my daughter Mary and her kids. So that was very nice, but I had to do a little bit of film music, so I was able to come here, which is 20 minutes away from where I live, to do that bit of music ["Winter Bird"].[8]

Labeling *McCartney III* "made in Rockdown" embraced the links to its predecessors for a world wracked with the stress and struggle of lockdown and pandemic and emphasized the home recorded quality as a reflection and necessity unlike those prior self-titled albums. But, "Rockdown" offered more than any catchy phrase or quirky reflection of lockdown and pandemic, it reflected the sincerity of McCartney's lengthy career managing professional ambitions and personal desires through a singular lens. (The phrase "Made in Rockdown" appeared almost as a subtitle in marketing and album pressings.) As a result, *McCartney III* enjoyed wider immediate recognition than a "solo" album tied to home, family, and love.

A November 2020 cover interview with Taylor Swift in *Rolling Stone* shared the two musicians' respective processes recording "in Rockdown" and the relevance of home and family to both. Swift's album *folklore* was already the "bestselling album of 2020" and its release more notable as she announced it a day ahead of its drop in July 2020 (she duplicated the strategy with follow-up *evermore* unveiled only a day before it was released in December 2020). Swift's album sold 1.3 million copies in its first day of release and over two million copies in its first week and made her the best-selling female artist of 2020.[9] Interviewing each other, contributor Patrick Doyle highlighted that "the lockdown provided important family connections and a dynamic apparent between McCartney and Swift and his children."[10] His daughters Mary and Stella took the photos and styled the clothing in the pictures that accompanied the interview. These expanded connections, with McCartney's daughters effectively replacing Linda's role, and Taylor Swift as a fellow musician managing her own "solo" recordings meant *McCartney III* was not unique as an escape from the stress and struggle of lockdown and pandemic in addition to the emphasis of home and family apparent or necessitated with lockdown requirements. As a reflection of COVID-19 lockdown, *McCartney III* was one of many albums recorded in 2020 that spoke to our responses and experiences of managing the pandemic personally and societally. Yet, as a method of promotion, McCartney's pairing with Taylor Swift linked two inspirational iconic songwriters and musicians. Released a week after Swift's

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second 2020 album *evermore*, *McCartney III* sold over 100,000 copies and charted at number two in the *Billboard 200* with Swift at number one for the second week at the time and over 280,000 copies sold (in 2020).[11]

The production of *McCartney III* in reflection and in part reaction to lockdown belies the album's effect as culmination of Paul McCartney's iconic status and while not marking any form of conclusion. A genesis within a pandemic reflects his status and opportunity following a career spanning over sixty years as a recording artist and performing musician, and links to his experiences as a child born in World War II to parents and a society that persevered to the benefit of his generation and those that followed. McCartney revealed the strength of that wartime generation in his memory and its relevance to modern society in the first interview he provided for *McCartney III*:

> . . . I remembered that me parents . . . were in World War II; they survived; they survived the bombing, losing people left, right, and center; and yet they came out of it with an incredible spirit. . . . kids in Liverpool grew up . . . with this wartime spirit . . . it's good to draw on that; if they could do it, I can do it.[12]

Accordingly, McCartney's productivity recreated the resilience of his parents and enshrined the themes of home and family to the album, while not specifically articulated or performed within *McCartney III*. Though "made in Rockdown," *McCartney III* celebrated music as a force enriching our lives and collective experiences, linking us with home and family by an iconic musician whose career and legacy spans generations, and heightened by the impact of a global pandemic and our reliance on those crucial structures. And the album's legacy in McCartney's career is further heightened by this writer's perspective that much like it and its predecessors were recorded at home, *McCartney III* is equally enjoyed best in that place.

While the legacy of *McCartney III* will surpass its recording and release within the lockdown and impact of COVID-19, it is crucial to understand that it still utilized marketing tools adopted by McCartney and his team in recent years, most notably with *Egypt Station* in 2018. The press release for *McCartney III* reinforced how recent *Egypt Station* was: "Hard as it is to believe, it's only been two years since *Egypt Station* went #1—and it was only last year that Paul's Freshen Up tour played its last show before Covid hit pause on live music, a legendary blowout at Dodger Stadium in Los Angeles."[13] For fans, that excitement generated interest in the album and in the more than dozen editions released in different colors of vinyl, multiple CD, apparel, and gift bundles, and digital versions that included bonus tracks.[14] Some were quick to point out there was no reason to doubt a high charting album with so many options selling out to fans and collectors, and some commenters criticized and dismissed the album as irrelevant based on

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market saturation. It is hard to not sympathize with that criticism, particularly when thinking about the economic costs required to race and purchase multiple colored vinyl editions that offered no difference in sonic or musical output and only minute varieties in the packaging, artwork, and pictures included on the album sleeve. More important toward understanding the iconography created by the album was the excitement generated regardless of the excessive nature of countless editions. Fans clamored and compared owned versions in ways that reflected attending McCartney concerts. Ownership of the colored vinyl granted a method of capturing that sense of community from the number of concerts to the specific venue or date. The legacy offered was excitement and connections to McCartney as an iconic figure through marketing and product availability in unique formats when concerts or other events were impossible.

The album was primed for recovering critical dismissal of both *McCartney* and *II* when those albums were released: "neither of his DIY albums were well received at the time of release. . . . And now, at the start of a new decade once again, McCartney has put his lockdown to good use, writing, performing, recording and producing. . . . "[15] Central to the recovery of *McCartney* and *McCartney II* in the release of *McCartney III* was the connections held to McCartney's career prior to the pandemic, specifically the starting point with the song "When Winter Comes." In the first published interview about *McCartney III*, Matt Everitt from BBC 6 Music complimented the third album and its relevance for 2020 and McCartney's fans: *McCartney* regarded as the first indie album—a homemade lo-fi recording; *McCartney II* an influential avant-garde electronic album; [and] *McCartney III* recorded just for the joy of music.[16] The video for "When Winter Comes," released simultaneously with *McCartney III*, celebrated an idyllic family life and working on the farm, syncing precisely with the song's lyrical nostalgia, the now iconic imagery of McCartney's experiences in 1970 and again in 2020.

From the retrospective critical recovery, the home recorded aspect of *III* dominated the marketing—at once reflecting McCartney's career as well as subtlety marketing the productivity available from "home." The first streaming EP released to promote *McCartney III*, uncoincidentally titled *Home*, "[features] previously released songs that tie in with the themes of the new album" and

> [it was] no surprise that "home", a theme that was significant in Paul's early solo work such as *McCartney* and *RAM,* will appear again in his third self-titled solo record. The *Home* EP takes us back to basics with comforting yet uplifting songs, from the upbeat "Eat At Home" which makes you want to dance on your kitchen floor, to the soft and beautiful "Every Night" which will have you cozying up with a loved one.[17]

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Where the EPs could link *McCartney III* musically to those themes emphasized in this discussion, for *Egypt Station* in 2018, McCartney promoted that album with a surprise show at the Cavern Club and participating in the popular television program "Carpool Karaoke." Both effectively tied the albums to his career, but with *III* the promotion rooted the album directly with the music of his career and the themes core to the 1970 debut and 1980 sequel.

The third self-titled album enjoyed extensive commentary before its release and additionally created new critical consideration of its two predecessors. Similarities abounded in those reappraisals, primarily back to *McCartney* recorded in 1969 and early 1970: "He recorded it in secret, mostly at home, and when it came to releasing it, he did it a month before the Beatles put out their swan song, *Let It Be*."[18] No Beatles swan song followed *McCartney III*, but it would not be difficult to replace an album that seemed to mark the end of the 1960s with the end of a year engulfed by a global pandemic. (If 2020 proceeded according to plan, the revisited *Let It Be* film, titled *The Beatles: Get Back*, would have released and *McCartney III* may not existed.) The homemade quality of *McCartney* set the trajectory for Paul McCartney's post-Beatles career, expanded through successive album releases ranging from similar lo-fi and rough attributes to the variously polished albums made for touring and commercial sales since the 1970s (a stellar standout seemingly separated was 1971's *Ram*, released as a dual album with wife Linda). Part of McCartney's genius and success was rooted in his capacity for output, in the midst of a pandemic lockdown, or as therapy dealing with the Beatles' breakup:

> In the heart of the Beatles' breaking up, I just wanted to get back to basics. So, I thought right well I'll do my own album. I love making music so much I just didn't want to stop. I had to just do something new if for fun; it was music. This was purposefully to get things off my chest. This was gonna be total freedom. So pure.[19]

The pandemic heightened the impact of homemade recording in McCartney's legacy and draws important recognition for the abilities of any musician in recording and production.

McCartney has enjoyed a lengthy career as a solo musician, bandleader of Wings, and member of the Beatles, and 2020 marked his eighth decade as a recording artist.[20] As referenced so frequently in the interviews and reviews for *McCartney III*, the album was rooted in the necessity of productivity while grappling with change, new outlets, and crisis, but not as a method to wallow in the events that surrounded its production. In reviews for *McCartney III*, the comparisons to both *McCartney* and *McCartney II* were impossible to miss and framed the album solely within a trilogy of albums bent upon comparing

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the scenarios each of the self-titled albums represented for McCartney. As Chris Mercer and Paul Kaminski described in their *Take It Away* podcast discussion of *McCartney III* in McCartney's catalog:

> What is it that makes an album part of the *McCartney* series? And it's not the one-man band routine, because he does that on a lot of albums, including a lot of *Egypt Station* and *Chaos and Creation* and a bunch of albums he's the one-man band. It's really the stuck at home for a while that makes it a *McCartney* series album.[21]

When surveying the expansion of popular music into the 21st century, homespun albums have gained significant recognition. Take the timely comparisons available with the successes of Billie Eilish's debut album in 2019 or Taylor Swift's lockdown albums *folklore* and *evermore* that reinforced the viability of homespun creativity and recording. All iconic in their own right and reflective of separate and shared inspirations to record and experiment without any external pressures or expectations. These examples enjoyed commercial success and critical recognition: Eilish's and Swift's albums all debuted at number one in the *Billboard 200* top albums chart and each artist won multiple Grammy awards for their albums. While the links to McCartney or his influence may be tenuous, nevertheless, Eilish and Swift represented important recognition for the quality, reception, and success of homespun recordings. In connection, the legacy of *McCartney III* was born before any of its countless colored vinyl pressings. Beyond its natural and predictable relationship to *McCartney* and *McCartney II*, *III* followed recent homespun records and simultaneously captured his legacy. The album debuted at number 1 in the UK Albums Chart and at number 2 in the *Billboard 200* but that commercial success or fan praise did not inhibit equal parts critical praise and dismissal.

The *NME* review of *McCartney III* similarly remarked on its qualities that indicated the prominence of home for McCartney and his listeners: "like 2020 itself, a self-titled Paul McCartney is as much about liberation as isolation." The duality identified in the review links the album to lockdown, albeit through the album's closing track, "When Winter Comes." Reviewer Mark Beaumont identified the standout track as "pure isolationist empathy; a folksy farmer's lament about building fences to protect livestock, digging ditches to drain carrot patches and facing a stark, remote winter when 'food is scarce.'" The song was additionally the precise link for *McCartney III* to its predecessors: "originally written in the 90s, it finds Paul reminiscing about retreating to Scotland as the Beatles collapsed to make *McCartney*. If future archaeologists take this three-album series as a significant marker of his solo half-century, they'll conclude that Paul McCartney never stopped liberating."

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The assessment stretches the comparison of "liberation" in the context of the Beatles breakup and lockdowns to stave off a pandemic are vastly divergent, one representing personal healing, the latter reflecting societal tensions that exceeded individual survival.[22]

Reviewing *McCartney III* far more positively, Chris Deville in *Stereogum* attributed the recording of *McCartney* in 1969 and early 1970 as the making of a "quarantine album" in a similar fashion. Yet, Deville detached *III* from the environment of its recording and release to a degree, marking that unlike recent McCartney albums, such as *Egypt Station* in 2018 (which featured Autotune!), "he's not chasing trends this time." Nevertheless, he rooted *McCartney III* in its capacity of an album tied to McCartney's career, his extensive solo catalog, and the connections maintained with fans across multiple generations: "After nearly six decades of public life saturated with McCartney's music, the voice attached to those feelings (like being cooped up with a barrage of conflicting emotions for months and starting to freak out) will probably inspire recognition, too. *McCartney III*, then, feels like catching up with an old friend as he attempts to make sense of this strange new world."[23] In that respect, Paul McCartney himself was the trend, and in the aftermath of *McCartney III*, music and musicians demonstrated his icon status in two unique albums documenting an anniversary of his career.

To mark the impetus and effect of *McCartney III* as a result of the lockdowns in 2020 and its sense of celebrating the connections to *McCartney* and *McCartney II*, Paul McCartney issued a quick follow-up of reworked and covered versions of the album. The covers album, *McCartney III Imagined*, included remixed and interpretive takes on *McCartney III* by musicians ranging from his friends and peers to artists potentially newly introduced to McCartney and his fans and audience through the album. For *McCartney III Imagined*, McCartney partnered with "younger admirers" such as Beck, St. Vincent, Blood Orange, Anderson .Paak, Josh Homme, Khruangbin, Phoebe Bridgers, and Dominic Pike, in addition to stalwart British musicians like Damon Albarn of Blur and Gorillaz and Robert Del Naja of Massive Attack. In review for *The New York Times*, Jon Pareles noted McCartney's "enduring gifts—natural melody, succinctly surprising lyrics, sly chord progressions, tidy arrangements" as crucial components making the follow-up album a success due to the interpretations granted and demonstrated by the younger musicians:

> Phoebe Bridgers took on "Seize the Day," a manifesto of unironic good intentions: "I'm OK with a sunny day when the world deserves to be bright." She brings her own spirit of hushed discovery to the song, keeping McCartney's march tempo but toning down his electric guitars. She ends her version with church bells, like a blessing.[24]

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The effect reminded of McCartney's history of experimentation across his career, notably the instrumental version of *Ram* released as *Thrillington* in 1977. The connection to *Ram* and *Thrillington* documents McCartney's iconic status and the care he imbued *McCartney III* as an output of lockdown and freedom to finish recording songs to his design. Following the recording and release of *Ram* in 1971, McCartney paired with composer Richard Anthony Hewson in June 1971, and recorded an instrumental covers version of that album. Though shelved when Paul and Linda McCartney decided to form Wings that same summer, and not released for six years and then under the pseudonym Percy "Thrills" Thrillington, *Thrillington* articulated the care and freedom McCartney felt with *Ram* and its recording with new friends and musicians in 1970 and 1971. Upon release, *Ram* endured harsh criticism and rejection, and so McCartney redirected his energy and creativity toward further cultivation of the strength and enjoyment found while recording with Linda and musicians like Denny Seiwell, and they formed Wings in July 1971. *McCartney III Imagined*, as quickly put together as *Thrillington* followed *Ram,* emphasizes McCartney's iconic status both similarly and much further. The follow-up to *McCartney III* documented similar enjoyment recording in lockdown but cultivated musicians inspired and influenced by McCartney over the course of his career and their comparatively younger careers.

Though relatively safe in his work compiling the remixes reworked songs, and recordings by other artists on *McCartney III Imagined*, the album reflects an effort to reach fans and represent the legacy he holds in popular music, even if it is an active effort to lead how his legacy is shaped. Ignoring the name choice for *McCartney III Imagined* (with "Imagine" by John Lennon), the album further calls back to McCartney's work on the Fireman albums with Youth between the 1990s and 2008, or the 2004 remix album *Twin Freaks*, compiled with DJ Freelance Hellraiser, or more obscurely to remixed B-sides and dance-oriented tracks dating back into the late 1980s, and the previously discussed *Thrillington*. In every example, McCartney was heavily involved remixing and reworking his music to reflect trends or tastes in popular music in those eras. That was true of his processes recording multiple albums between *McCartney*, *McCartney II*, and *McCartney III.* Without any doubt, this further illustrates how McCartney has overtly instructed the commentary on his musicianship, work output, and interests. Reviewing *Ram* as a response to the criticism *McCartney* faced in 1970, or Wings' formation as response to the criticism *Ram* faced, the approach to *McCartney III* illustrates McCartney's capability to champion and market his work over fifty years later, between interviews cherishing the new album as part of an unintended trilogy or conducted with a younger icon like Taylor Swift, to producing an interpreted version of his own work by musicians he enjoyed. Easily labeled as heavy-handed in its effort to control the narrative, McCartney's

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commentary and active legacy affirms his iconic presence in popular music with and since the Beatles.

The release and promotion of *McCartney III* cultivated connections to his self-titled albums of 1970 and 1980, coincidentally marking the fiftieth and fortieth anniversaries of *McCartney* and *McCartney II,* respectively. Where the COVID-19 pandemic and lockdown otherwise eliminated any concert- or performancebased celebration of those anniversaries, with the fifty-year anniversary of *McCartney* simultaneously marking the length of his solo career, *McCartney III* (and then *McCartney III Imagined*) demonstrated his longevity and iconic impact. As a reflection of a fifty-year solo career, *McCartney III* was released at a point effectively midway between the anniversaries of both *McCartney* (1970) and *Ram* (1971). Both earned critical reappraisal and renown at that marker, but *Ram* enjoyed even greater recognition with a tribute album put together by original *Ram* drummer and collaborator Denny Seiwell and musician Fernando Perdomo. Together as producers, Seiwell and Perdomo recruited a number of musicians to recreate the spirit and songs of *Ram* in time to celebrate the fiftieth anniversary in May 2021. Over 100 musicians participated, including *Ram* collaborators, guitarist David Spinozza, and Marvin Stamm again performing Flugelhorn on "Uncle Albert/ Admiral Halsey." Spinozza and Stamm received top billing in the credits for the album while Seiwell's role included recreating his drumming parts from fifty years earlier! In interview with podcaster Sam While, Seiwell reflected how *Ram* became many folks' favorite album despite its negative reception in 1971. It was additionally Perdomo that convinced Seiwell to re-record the album in its entirety within lockdown. The process offered Seiwell an opportunity to revisit and rekindle his experiences fifty years earlier in addition to remarking how "spot on" McCartney's production was in 1971 and his perseverance in that era.[25] The tribute album *Ram On* demonstrated how iconic both McCartney and *Ram* were to musicians and fans as part of his lengthy career and in celebration of its fiftieth anniversary. Altogether, the release of *McCartney III*, *McCartney III Imagined*, the anniversaries of *McCartney*, *Ram*, and later in 2021, Wings' *Wild Life*, and the tribute in *Ram On* provided a busy year for McCartney fans and emphasized his status as an icon in rock music. Finally, *McCartney III* perfectly replicated both the do-it-yourself ethos of *McCartney* and the freewheeling, experimental, for himself, aspects of *Ram*.

McCartney's iconic status expanded immensely while the COVID-19 pandemic continued beyond lockdowns rescinded in late 2020 and early 2021. Ultimately, the year following *McCartney III* represented revelry of McCartney's status and output in addition to more materials that harkened to his output and position in popular music culture. In November 2021, two legacy inducing releases earned focus and praise toward McCartney's status

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and the connected impact he holds as a member of the Beatles: the nearly eight-hour documentary *The Beatles: Get Back*, helmed by director Peter Jackson about the January 1969 project to write, rehearse, and record a new set of songs for a live performance and film; and McCartney's book, *The Lyrics: 1956 to the Present*, edited with poet Paul Muldoon that included the lyrics and brief stories related to 165 songs written and co-written over eight decades. Both documented McCartney's creativity as a musician, songwriter, and performer, through different mediums, and demonstrated the sheer length of his career. In an interview with David Remnick for the *New Yorker* in October 2021, Remnick noted that the arrangement of *The Lyrics* "alphabetically . . . [defied] any obvious arc to McCartney's evolution, and . . . [dissuaded] the reader from thinking that matters peaked in the summer of 1969, with 'The End.'" The interview additionally highlighted McCartney's influence of other musicians, from collaborators like Elvis Costello, to the new connection enjoyed with Taylor Swift. She cited the "'seemingly effortless' quality of McCartney's work."[26] The release of *Get Back*, a film that Jackson and his production team compiled after restoring all the film and audio footage for the project shot by Michael Lindsay-Hogg in January 1969 and edited into the 1970 film *Let It Be*, earned significant praise for its depiction of the Beatles enjoying making music together, a notable revision to the supposedly negative attributes of the project. McCartney's presence and leadership in *Get Back* enjoyed significant attention as did the depiction of his writing "Get Back" while George Harrison and Ringo Starr looked on, initially bored to increasingly inspired with their Beatle bandmate.[27]

On McCartney's 78th birthday, in the middle of lockdown, renowned Beatle expert and longtime *Beatlefan* publisher Bill King commented that: "Paul's musical legacy is evident in a lot of the better pop-rock around today. Those who put emphasis on melody and harmony more often than not cite him as a prime influence. As for his own stuff, a lot of the Wings material holds up surprisingly well. I think it was better than it was given credit for at the time of its release, in part because no follow-up band was going to match The Beatles."[28] This is an icon. Paul McCartney remained relevant, significant, inspiring, and influential for longer than predicted when the Beatles and Beatlemania appeared, across a vast sea of time in which change was abundant. He was a Beatle, seemingly confined to the Beatles impact and influence in the 1960s, a musician and a Beatle for his entirety of this life and career, and he is a person, yearning—we suspect because his life otherwise tells us so—for an experience not unlike the average person with love, family, and a home at a central core. Paul McCartney's solo career is multifaceted and diverse, iconic in definition, ranging from breaking with the Beatles to experimenting in multiple styles of music and returning again and again to the style, success, and popularity of the Beatles. McCartney is nearly like a

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constant force and that is his iconic status and his legacy: he keeps working, making music, and entertaining old, new, and soon to be fans and listeners. Through McCartney we symbolically revisit the Beatles as a phenomenon, and with *McCartney III* we are transported to the themes of McCartney: home, family, and love. Or, in keeping with the playful nature of "Rockdown" used to describe recording the album: " . . . it [started] with the *Flaming Pie* reissue and ends with him and Taylor Swift being best friends."[29]

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