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THE BLOG



Bill Maher, Frank Luntz, and the Limitations of Reframing Reality

At the moment, everyone is giving advice to the Democrats about how to beat the Republican spinmeisters. Even Republican spinmeisters. On the latest *Real Time with Bill Maher*, it was GOP language guru Frank Luntz dishing out advice to me and anyone else who would listen. Frank is the supreme reality reframer who took the estate tax and turned it into the "death tax," and turned drilling for oil in a wildlife preserve into "responsible energy exploration." It is Frank's contention that Democrats keep losing presidential races they should win because they are too critical and too angry. But is it surprising that watching your country led into a disastrous war with all the attendant damage to national security provokes anger in sentient beings?

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Sir Paul: Save Abbey Road

Tim Riley

05.14.2007

As one of the wealthiest men in show-business, use your influence and wealth to block the pirates and preserve EMI, either by purchasing a controlling interest or aligning yourself with investors most likely to reinvest in EMI's future.

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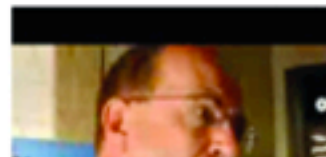
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**TIM RILEY**[Bio](#)[BLOGGERS INDEX](#)[RSS](#)**Sir Paul: Save Abbey Road (19 comments)**

05.14.2007

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In 1897, a German-American inventor named Emile Berliner, inventor of the gramophone method of recording, founded the Gramophone Company in London. Five years later, Enrico Caruso recorded 10 songs for Berliner, transforming his company into a dominant force in the recording industry. In March 1931, Gramophone merged with the Columbia Graphophone [sic] Company to create Electric and Musical Industries Ltd, soon to be known as EMI.

In November of that year, the company opened its flagship studios at 3 Abbey Road in St. John's Wood, North London. The inconspicuous Georgian townhouse featured three state-of-the-art studios -- Studio 1, a huge airplane hanger for orchestras and marching bands; Studio 2 for smaller bands, Scottish pipes, chamber orchestras and radio dramas; and Studio 3, the smallest, for pianists, chamber music, and vocalists. At the same time, EMI built a separate site for developing and testing equipment in Hayes, Middlesex.

In recent days, the press has been swarming with [takeover rumors](#) regarding EMI's future, the latest gust in a storm of digital change. Executive management has recently been reshuffled. On May 4, the morning after you picked up your "Classical Album of the Year" Brit Award, the UK Grammys, for your oratorio "Ecce Cor Meum" (Behold My Heart), the international business press reported that EMI is bracing for a takeover battle with a consortium of investors that has [offered £3 billion](#) (\$5.98 billion). By the end of the month, this fabled 100-year old music industry pioneer could be in the hands of Wall Street sharks -- and their global equivalents -- looking for the next big flip.

Please don't let this happen. As one of the wealthiest men in show-business, use your influence and wealth to block the pirates and preserve EMI, either by purchasing a controlling interest or aligning yourself with investors most likely to reinvest in EMI's future.

From the beginning, EMI charted parallel paths, one in music recording, the other -- following Berliner's lead -- in advancing the science of audio technology. EMI's Hayes lab brought out such major inventions as the world's first system for recording and playing stereo sound, the moving-coil microphone, and the electrical television (making the BBC the first station in the world to broadcast public television). Other ground-breaking inventions included the earliest radar and MRI prototypes. In the 45 years since your first Abbey Road session on the 6th of June 1962, as you know better than anyone, EMI repeatedly reinvented the recording process, whether through tweaking their Studer and 3M brand 4- and 8-track tape machines or perfecting the process for transferring master tapes to vinyl. Many of these advances were developed to answer the demands of visionary artists such as yourself: In response to complaints from John Lennon about tediously "double-tracking" his voice to add texture, engineer Ken Townshend fused a slightly delayed copy of the same vocal take alongside the original, creating a hack called Automatic Double Tracking (ADT), now standard. Others, like Chris Thomas and Ken Scott, recorded Lennon lying flat on his back and twisted piano sound through ingenious filters for tantalizing effects on The White Album and Abbey Road. Engineers the world over labor in vain to achieve similar effects on today's "advanced" digital equipment.

Luminaries like Sir Malcolm Sargent, Arturo Toscanini, Sir Adrian Boult, Otto Klemperer and Artur Rubinstein all made music in Abbey Road's famous studios; so did pop acts ranging from the Animals and the Yardbirds, Cliff Richard, Pink Floyd, and Radiohead back through Judy Garland, Dean Martin and Glenn Miller, who made his last recording there in 1944 before disappearing over the English Channel. In 1955, EMI entered the American market by purchasing Capitol Records, founded by songwriter Johnny Mercer, and added Les Paul, Peggy Lee, Nat King Cole, Frank Sinatra, and later the Beach Boys and Blondie, to its roster. But EMI's biggest business coup came when George Martin, a young A&R man known primarily for producing Peter Sellers comedy records, signed your Beatles to an

exclusive recording contract in 1962. Since then, the artists visiting the Abbey Road studios have included Robbie Williams, Elliott Smith, U2, Iron Maiden, Kanye West, Green Day, Everclear, the Decemberists and Coldplay, to name a few.

Like the other music industry giants, EMI has watched its business stagger in response to the digital download tsunami. Young music fans -- the industry's base -- now consume music almost exclusively in digital form online. Since January 1st of this year, the company's stock has dropped 7.1 percent overall; the recording division lost 15 percent. So why all the private equity interest? Like most music fans, these investors know that EMI is sitting on rock's mother lode: exquisite remasters of the entire Beatles catalog, first showcased on last year's Cirque du Soleil LOVE soundtrack. When these editions make their long-delayed debut on downloading sites such as iTunes and Rhapsody, the digital age will reach a defining moment. Taking yet another revolutionary step, and alone among its major competitors, EMI has announced that it will drop copy-protection encryption (DRM) from its releases once Beatles recordings go digital. You've just hinted to *Billboard* magazine that this could happen as soon as this coming fall. The value of the publishing division, the branch of EMI that collects royalties on these recordings, promises to explode.

This uncertainty about EMI's future presents you, Sir Paul, with an unprecedented opportunity: to reclaim control of the Beatles' recording catalog and save EMI from the corporate raiders. In one swoop you could not only acquire a stake in EMI's legacy but help preserve it for future generations of music lovers. So while Sony/BMG, Universal, and Warners sue their customers, you could help renew EMI's commitment to recording and distributing some of rock's greatest music, captured with unsurpassed elegance and fidelity, through the most convenient, appealing, and portable format(s) available. Let the other dinosaurs squabble over yesterday's business models. EMI could establish the new digital standard the way it ushered in the electrical era: by drawing on its artistic commitment to let creativity steer audio excellence.

EMI's public face has always been that of a top-shelf recording firm, but its technicians were behind the ingenuity and craftsmanship that made much of that great music-making clear and compelling to the rest of the world. It would be a massive loss to us all, your past and future fans, the kids of today and the musicians of tomorrow, if EMI were to be broken up and sold for parts. Great artists create memorable works that express our history and communicate our aspirations. Sometimes great institutions, great companies, help make that possible. EMI is one of those companies.

NPR COMMENTATOR TIM RILEY IS THE AUTHOR OF *TELL ME WHY: A BEATLES COMMENTARY*, AND EDITOR OF THE [RILEYROCKINDEX.COM](http://rileyrockindex.com) ONLINE. HIS *NORTON ANTHOLOGY OF ROCK CRITICISM* WILL APPEAR NEXT YEAR, AND HE'S WORKING ON *JOHN ONO LENNON: A BIOGRAPHY*.

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Comments :

Does Paul McCartney tell you what to do with your money?

By: PerryWhite on May 14, 2007 at 04:33pm

Flag: [[abusive](#)]

Went to Abbey Road as a tourist in 91. About 50 people an hour were still going there to gawk, write on the wall, and of course have their picture taken crossing the road. It is a shrine.

By: Michael7843853 on May 14, 2007 at 05:11pm

Flag: [[abusive](#)]

At the end of the day Abbey Road is just a building and some recording equipment. Abbey Road is a good studio, but it was the performers who made Abbey Road's reputation, not the other way around. Being a state-of-the-art facility merely made it easier for the Beatles, Pink Floyd, and countless others to get to

where they were going faster.

With the advent of computer based recording, the recording studio business has changed. The computer on which I write these words is also the machine on which I create and record music at home. The romantic notion that Mr. Riley has of recording studios bears little reality to the way music is created and produced today. Many songs today are done mostly inside a computer with an actual recording studio like Abbey Road being the end part of the process.

My preference would be for Abbey Road to go operating, since it is by any measure a pretty good studio but lets not get overdramatic and overstate the case.

By: gipsytim on May 14, 2007 at 06:26pm

Flag: [abusive]

As a former Londoner, one who lived there in the "swinging sixties", I would be sad if "Abbey Road" were to disappear.

But so much of what we used to love and cherish is being made to disappear. It's a "coup monte", a way to make the past go away and be replaced with new shiny crap that kids won't have affinity with. A fascist tactic.

By: Bernique on May 14, 2007 at 09:38pm

Flag: [abusive]

I am also a recording enthusiast with my own studio and am also a huge Beatles fanatic. I am fascinated by what they were able to accomplish with a 4 track recorder and some really fine mics. Digital is great and I too am writing on the same computer I record on. However, the trends I see now are definitely retro in that everyone is trying to duplicate the sounds of the old equipment. EMI at Abby Road is more useful as a museum rather than a working studio. It's like owning a great race horse. At some point you need to let it retire and hope it is able to have some offspring with the same qualities.

I think it would be great to use it as an educational facility for young people to go back and study some of the old methods. It should be preserved and protected. I agree with that but as to whether it is Paul's responsibility to preserve it I can't say. It would be nice but I doubt it is a high priority for him. Certainly the room where they recorded most of their material should be a shrine where other musicians go to worship.

The Beatles were the single greatest musical act of the 20th Century and hands down the greatest song writers of all time. I laugh when people try to compare the Rolling Stones or any body else to the Beatles.

By: BeerHolder on May 14, 2007 at 11:40pm

Flag: [abusive]

Does Paul McCartney tell you what to do with your money?

By: PerryWhite on May 14, 2007 at 04:33pm

Flag: [abusive]

Actually he told me to invest in Michael Jackson's songs.

By: BeerHolder on May 15, 2007 at 12:21am

Flag: [abusive]

Okay, okay, long as we're giving the Beatle Knight our wish list, Ahem, Sir Paul, please establish a dummy corporation behind which you can hide and BUY BACK THE CATALOG FROM CREEPY JACKO!!!

Everytime I hear a classic from "Revolver" being re-recorded by a bunch of wussy wannabes to hawk tampons or time shares, a little bit of my sweet memories of youth withers and dies. Somehow I don't think either you or your Estate would let that kind of tawdry schmaltz hit the airwaves, notwithstanding some of your most recent studio efforts. Save the Catalog Sir Paul - and the Studio.

By: lostnacfgop on May 15, 2007 at 12:23am

Flag: [abusive]

PerryWhite is right - why don't you baby boomers put your money where your mouth is and finance your own nostalgia projects? The fascination with your cultural relics is only going to increase as you all get another year older, and another year closer to the grave, so start throwing your money around now.

McCartney? He could buy Abbey Road and pave it in platinum if he wanted, he's just that rich. He hasn't, which should give you some idea that he doesn't want to or see a need to.

By: netparrot on May 15, 2007 at 06:00am

Flag: [abusive]

Sorry--this has absolutely nothing to do with the topic, but I've always wanted to thank Riley for his Beatles book, the best analysis of the music I've ever read. So, here goes: thanks Tim!

By: 3fingerbrown on May 15, 2007 at 07:40am

Flag: [abusive]

I hope EMI is kept together. It is more than Abbey Road Studios, though I hope that stays. No matter what the medium or format music sounds best when it is recorded in an acoustically excellent space.

To those who do it all internally, you will never get that sound from a plugin or hardware reverb. Good music needs good mics and a good space to come to life. This is especially true when recording digital stuff.

By: drblack on May 15, 2007 at 07:47am

Flag: [abusive]

a very worthwhile idea, if for no other reason than to serve as a reminder of how the onset of digital recording killed rock and roll...

By: mark50 on May 15, 2007 at 08:40am

Flag: [abusive]

If all of this history occurred there, why not make it (Abbey Road, that is) a museum? Just say the word...

By: aramingo on May 15, 2007 at 09:34am

Flag: [abusive]

When people make a lot of money it's almost always an interesting series of achievements, but there is also almost always an irony that accompanies this - people tend to die before they actually put all of the money to use doing something that will somehow benefit all the people from whom that money originated.

What is the point of becoming very wealthy if you don't SPEND virtually all of the money before you cease to exist? It makes NO SENSE to fail to spend it, or to make arrangements to have it spent.

Give your kids and friends five or ten million each, sure, but when you have 100, 1000 or 10,000 times this much, then what, exactly, do you think is so intelligent about leaving the spending of that money to others who will certainly NOT spend it to do things with it that you could have?

Paul McCartney has a lot of my money, so do many musicians. I'd like to think that it bought them something other than a bottle of booze or a lamp on a table in a room in a mansion that they never even use. Put that money to use, Paul. Use it to give some scholarships to music engineers. Music isn't just played - it's engineered. That was one of the big lessons of The Beatles and Abbey Road.

By: Reporter on May 15, 2007 at 09:54am

Flag: [abusive]

Why should just Sir Paul be responsible for saving Abbey Road? The list of names that were given have as much or more money than Sir Paul. Remember, he has a divorce pending and I'm sure her heart isn't bleeding to see EMI survive.

By: Ritameter on May 15, 2007 at 11:19am

Flag: [abusive]

Why should just Sir Paul be responsible for saving Abbey Road?

By: Ritameter

Ringo, Rita the meter maid would like you to send money to help Boogaloo buy EMI.

And all you other musicians and artists who recorded there - pony up.

By: Reporter on May 15, 2007 at 02:16pm

Flag: [abusive]

I agree with Johnny Rotten's take on his old label EMI- F+++ 'em!

By: citizenofmars on May 15, 2007 at 05:10pm

Flag: [abusive]

Digital downloading is the now. Why fight against it? It's best to just "go with the flow". I agree that Abbey Road Studios should be kept alive as a place where fans can go to see where the magic was made by those fabulous four and others but I don't agree that Paul should singlehandedly save EMI. After all, he dumped them for Starbucks, right? He must have had a reason. Paul's always been a pretty smart businessman so I think he knows what he's doing.

By: inmyownwrite on May 16, 2007 at 06:18am

Flag: [abusive]

I doubt Paul is in the position to flip the bill for the company, that has shown him very little respect over the last decade. However, Im sure he would like to see Abbey Rd. stay the same. Maybe as the new Hear Music studio? But every single Macca "divorce settlement" spun in the press involve his Cavendish property,going to Heather and if they are in anyway true, maybe thats the sign that he has moved on.

By: carrythatweight on May 16, 2007 at 08:40am

Flag: [abusive]

At the end of the day, AR is a business as is EMI. AR's history is a very special one but it's down to the people, past and present who have made AR so unique. It's past is in the bricks and mortar (as R. Waters told me once).

I directed the "Abbey Road Story" TV special and worked with AR and EMI for 6 years in London...(now living in the Caribbean) and I can tell you that AR is a tough building to maintain, a tough infrastructure to re-build studios in. However, I believe that the studios should be kept running as it is a very special place...but it has SO MUCH more to do with others than the Beatles or Macca. AR has been around for well over 70 years...the Beatles did less than 5 at AR. AR is about history not one band or one man. Having said that, AR is a business and should be treated as such. But good business would dictate that AR should remain, if for nothing else it's brand. It's brand value is worth far more than the equipment that sits in it or the land it sits on. EMI understands branding and I have to believe that any business that buys EMI's stable of assets know's it as well.

Enough of this, time to head to the beach!

Meade

By: abbeyroadstory on May 16, 2007 at 02:00pm

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