

## A Closer Look: “Mother Nature’s Son” 9 August 1968

**PAUL WROTE “MOTHER NATURE’S SON” WHILE** visiting his father in Liverpool, though it had reportedly been inspired by one of Maharishi’s lectures in India. The song was recorded in just two sessions, and – with the exception of a brass overdub – Paul played all of the instruments, making it one of the album’s few true solo recordings.

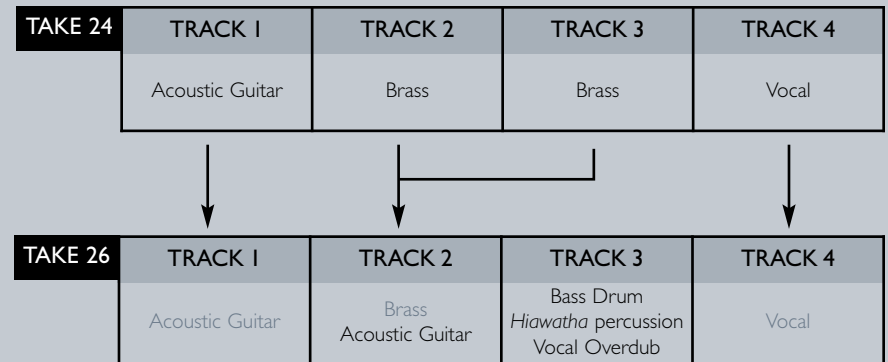
Work began on 9 August with 25 takes of acoustic guitar and vocal. Take 24 was deemed best, but no more work was done until 20 August. It was on that day that the song received its brass overdub. Two months prior, John Lennon had suggested that “a little bit of brass band” be added to Paul’s “Blackbird” [see pg 484]. Paul, however, instantly considered John’s suggestion a perfect addition to “Mother Nature’s Son” instead, and the idea stuck. George Martin’s arrangement for two trumpets and two trombones was recorded to Tracks 2 and 3. A reduction mix was then made into Take 26 by combining the two brass tracks into one track. Paul overdubbed bass drum on the free track of Take 26. During the last third of the song, he decided he wanted the drum to have a more distant sound. Technical Engineer Alan Brown recalls Paul setting up his drums in the hallway with mics at the other end, but Ken Scott remembers the arrangement that made it onto the final recording: “Paul decided he wanted a distant sound. Right at the end of Abbey Road studios there was this staircase that went from basement all the way up to the top. He went down to the bottom and hit a bass drum, but the mic was at our level so it would be like two stories higher. He just wanted the reverb and everything from all of that.” (The stairwell bass drum enters at 1:54 and has been incorrectly identified as timpani in the past.)

This wasn’t the only noteworthy percussion overdub to the song, though. Tape Op John Smith recalls that, at one point, Paul was listening to playback of the song while holding a copy of Henry Wadsworth Longfellow’s *The Song Of Hiawatha* in his lap. Paul began tapping along on the cover and decided that the sound of the book, in fact, would make a nice addition.

Ken Scott then carefully positioned a microphone over Longfellow’s epic poem and recorded Paul tapping out a rhythm on the book’s hardcover. (The tapping enters almost exactly one minute into the song.) At the very end of the song, Paul double-tracked his vocal on this same track. He also overdubbed another guitar performance on the brass track toward the end of the song. The song was complete.

John Smith found himself particularly moved by the song: “I’ll never forget that session. It was just like, ‘God this is incredible! He’s just written this song, and there isn’t anybody in London who could have written that song, and we’re going home having listened to something – having *participated* in something – that was extraordinary. And I remember thinking, ‘Nobody knows except us; there’s only three people that know! But they’re all gonna find out...’” ■

The recording process resembled the following:



phaser box [see pg 310] which did see some use on “*The White Album*” sessions, though exactly which tracks it was used on is unknown. Alan Parsons recalls that the effect produced by the box simply wasn’t pronounced enough to make it very effective. The box may have been responsible for the very subtle phasing heard on the acoustic guitar during the opening of “Cry Baby Cry”.

### Half-Speed Recording

The only known occurrence of half-speed recording during 1968 was the honky-tonk piano heard in “Rocky Raccoon”. The part was played at half-speed by George Martin on the Challen “jangle box” piano (with the jangles in place). When returned to proper speed, the notes became even more percussive, sounding more like a proper tack piano.

### Frequency Control / Varispeed

The use of Frequency Control while recording would virtually disappear in 1968. The most noticeable use of it was on a section of the backing vocals of “Ob-La-Di, Ob-La-Da”. This can best be heard at 1:10 into the song. The vocals were recorded at roughly 42 cycles/sec, resulting in a rise of nearly three semitones. One of the biggest reasons for the lack of varispeed recording was the fact that the 3M eight-

track machine *had* no varispeed capability. It would eventually receive modifications that allowed this, but the machine the Beatles were using was unmodified; varispeed simply wasn’t an option.

### Backward Audio

Aside from portions of John’s “Revolution 9”, there would be no uses of backward audio on any of the group’s released tracks this year. George Harrison did attempt a backward guitar solo during an early version of “While My Guitar Gently Weeps”, but it was quickly abandoned. “Not Guilty” (intended for “*The White Album*” but unreleased until *Anthology*) had a brief usage of reverse echo chamber during the beginning of the guitar solo. The effect would make no more appearances on Beatles recordings.

### Tape Loops

Obviously, “Revolution 9” represented the most elaborate use of loops ever on a Beatles track. John Lennon reportedly had men stationed at various tape machines throughout Abbey Road during the creation of this song. John was also responsible for the loop of pigs grunting that can be heard at the end of “Piggies”. He had also compiled a sequence of loops to be incorporated into “Glass Onion”, though ultimately these went unused.