



A.



B.



C.



D.

Drum Booths

One element contributing to the Beatles' drum sound was the use of a three-sided *drum booth*, formed by a set of large screens placed around Ringo's kit. "We never had a 'dedicated' drum booth," says Brian Gibson. "They were always assembled from separate screens as required, but we never attempted total isolation." Recording in the fairly reverberant Studio Two without even a partial booth would have allowed Ringo's drums to echo a bit too much, resulting in significant "room sound", which could then be picked up by other microphones. The use of the booth helped contain and focus the sound, creating a tighter drum sound in the process and reducing excessive leakage into non-drum microphones. It should be noted that the Beatles (and most other pop groups at Abbey Road) used a drum booth for all known recordings.

There were three distinct types of booths available for use on Beatles' sessions:

A. The most common design was one created by arranging three free-standing hessian-covered screens in the typical Abbey Road tri-fold drum booth configuration. Some of these screens had small viewing windows cut into them, and others did not. This style of booth was extremely common on all sessions from 1962 until late 1966. However, it remained in frequent use in Studio Three for the remainder of the group's career.

B. A second booth design stood over ten feet tall and featured the same perforated surface found on the large swing-out screens in Studio Two. Introduced in 1961, this tall screen was also a tri-fold design, but unlike the rather makeshift hessian-covered arrangement, it had brackets which locked the panels together. The brackets were removable so that the screen could be assembled and disassembled inside the studio, otherwise – given its substantial size – it would not have fit through the studio door. Since the panels were held together by the brackets, their angles were locked in place and could not be adjusted. "It was not a very useful piece of equipment, really," says Gibson. "It stood a long way off the ground due to the large castors, and didn't really provide a great deal of sound isolation. It was also ridiculously tall and pretty heavy. I remember it took a fair amount of effort to get it moving and was best done with two people, since it was hard to control. It would be one of the first things to put in place when the studio was being laid out." This style of booth was used for several early Beatles sessions, including the recording of "From Me to You" in 1963. Screens of this style were most commonly found in Studio One, and a slightly larger version appeared quite visibly behind the Beatles during the 1967 televised performance of "All You Need Is Love".

C. In late 1966, a third booth design was introduced. Like the smaller bass screens that arrived at the same time, the new booth was built on a white painted wood frame, with panels covered in grey fabric. In actuality, it was not a drum booth at all, but rather one half of a larger vocal isolation booth. It consisted of a wide rear panel and two short side panels that projected forward at right angles. The side panels were actually *too* short, and two free-standing hessian-covered panels were typically placed one on either side of the booth to extend the sides. Perhaps most importantly, the newer booth had a roof across the top, which served to further contain the sound of Ringo's drums. This drum booth arrangement was used for virtually every Beatles session held in Studio Two from late 1966 onward. Its introduction coincided with the beginning of a period during which Geoff Emerick was intent on recording the drums more separately and distinctly, and this relatively "closed in" booth helped contribute to that drum sound.

Vocal Booth

As mentioned above, the white and grey drum booth was actually one half of a "detachable" vocal isolation booth, often referred to as a "vocal hut" by Abbey Road engineers. When joined together, the two halves formed a self-contained, stand-alone, 8 foot square booth on wheels (**D**). The use of the vocal booth on Beatles records was virtually non-existent in the group's earlier days, as Norman Smith rejected the very idea; he believed that singers responded better to the excitement generated on the studio floor. Indeed, virtually every vocal session that was photographed shows the Beatles out in the room. This method of working made sense for more than one reason, as the acoustics of Studio Two imparted a distinctive, pleasing quality to vocals, one that contributed greatly to the sound of the group's recordings. However, the practice of using the booth became more common after Norman Smith's departure. "The Beatles did use it," remembers Brian Gibson. "If the band was banging away, with drums bass and rhythm guitar, and, say, John wanted acoustic guitar, he would go in the booth and mic the guitar and not get as much spill from the band." Generally speaking, however, the booth was not typically used for recording vocals. "For most bands, it was unusual to use the hut for any actual 'vocal' sessions," says Alan Parsons. "It was only used for live vocals with band playing, or for live acoustic guitar." The Beatles did occasionally use it for vocals, and one series of photos shows George, John and Paul together in the crowded booth, recording vocals for the *Sgt. Pepper* album in February 1967. ■