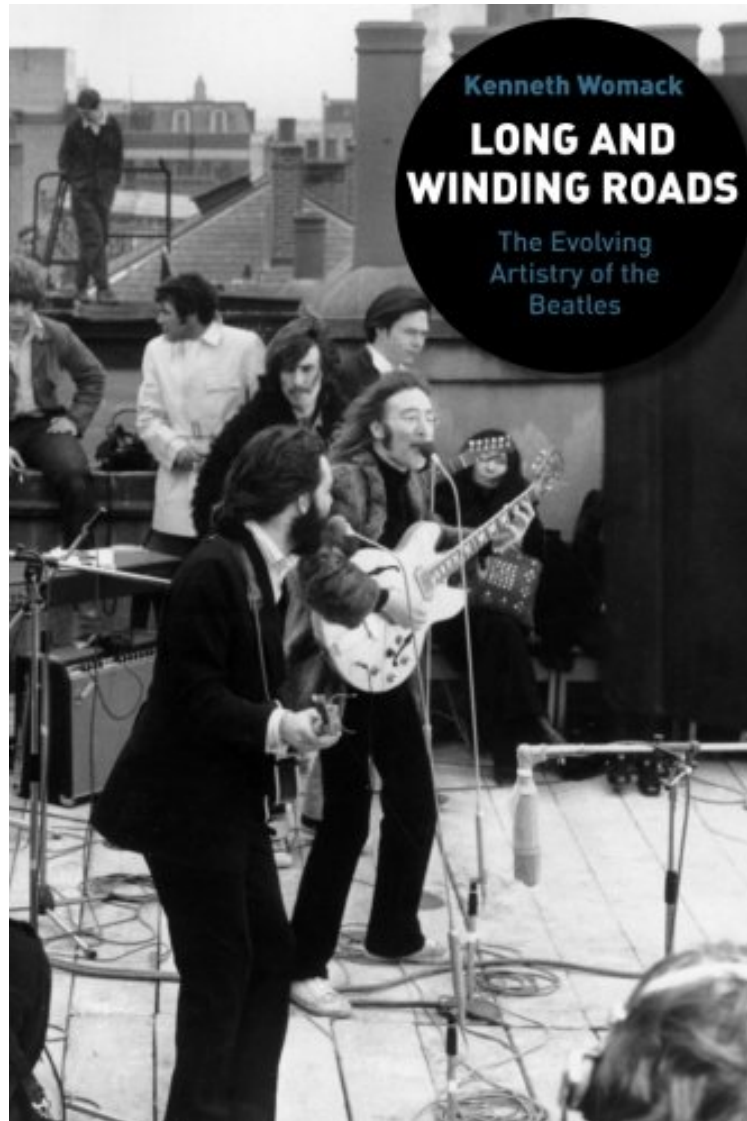


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Long and Winding Roads: The Evolving Artistry of the Beatles

Kenneth Womack

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Kenneth Womack : Long and Winding Roads: The Evolving Artistry of the Beatles before purchasing it in order to gauge whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Long and Winding Roads: The Evolving Artistry of the Beatles:

19 of 20 people found the following review helpful. An Essential Book About The Beatles By Jay Murphy As a somewhat obsessive fan of the Fab Four, I've read dozens of books about them. Books about their public personas and private lives, about how some of their songs came to be written and experiences they shared as a group of young men

in one of the most exciting periods of rock history. But aside from George Martin's slim journal about the making of the "Sgt. Pepper's" album, I'd never read one about their 'evolving artistry' as author Kenneth Womack succinctly puts it. The focus of this book is clearly that- from song structure and content to gaining more artistic control of how the songs were sequenced on their later albums and the cover artwork that accompanied them as well as which directions their music would take. Copiously footnoted and lovingly detailed, "Long and Winding Roads" is a must-have for longtime fans and folks that are just discovering the magic of the Beatles' music.¹⁴ of 16 people found the following review helpful. A wish for more focus on the music itself, and less on the lyrics

By ABQChrisI wanted to love this book; I might have approached it with unfair expectations, but one is led to believe that Womack shares some original insights on the Beatles' music. The book is merely a cursory overview of the Beatles' backgrounds (again?), private lives (again?), and recorded output, with a couple of long detours to discuss the band's image; it's not nearly as in-depth or freshly perceptive as its press indicates. On the positive side, there's certainly one aspect of the narrative that's highly praiseworthy, even if it's not directly related to the music -- so I'll mention that after first elaborating on my disappointment with the book's failure to fulfill the promise of the subtitle. Womack's curious tendency is to focus on the romantic psychology behind the lyrics, which always seems to be quite a stretch, as the words meant nothing to the Beatles themselves during the first half of their recording career (apart from the words' strictly phonetic functions in melodic delivery). This arbitrary exercise is especially overreaching throughout the first two-thirds of the book, considering the superficial boy-meets-girl nature of the first few albums' lyrics. As the Beatles' inventiveness and culture-altering imaginations were so effective due to melodic, harmonic and stylistic innovations and convention-breaking, and certainly not their lyrics, it would be much more interesting to read about any musical insights that might have rewarded the author's close listening, rather than the over-analytical lyrical guesses. Further, there are several errors sprinkled throughout, both factual and lyrical; they're small, but they add up over the course of the volume to make the reader wonder why there's yet another Beatles book if, rather than adding a new perspective of any kind, it merely muddies the literary knowledge base with misconceptions, however slight; do we, in other words, really need another condensed Beatles-history book? Examples of my admittedly pedantic nitpicking include: It was in the control room, and not Studio 2 itself, where George Martin lectured the Beatles, and heard George Harrison's well-known joke about not liking Martin's tie; it's not only Paul who vocally duets with John during "Money"; the hyperactive "Please, Mister Postman" is certainly not "lifeless"; the Beatles played more than just "All My Loving" during their first Ed Sullivan appearance; the line in "I'm Happy Just to Dance with You" is not the nonsensical "Well, it's only try and understand," but rather, "If it's funny, try and understand"; John and Paul don't both sing the lead vocal in "You're Going to Lose That Girl" -- it's only John, double-tracked; there's not a "lone piano note" after the guitar solos in "The End," but a full piano chord; etc. Finally, the numerous footnotes are highly distracting. This sort of thing is obviously expected in a textbook or an exhaustive exegesis, but not packed together so closely throughout the main text in such a fleeting narrative. As each footnote requires the reader to turn to the end of the current chapter, I can't help but wonder why the extra prose wasn't simply incorporated into the main -- or printed at the bottom of each page. That's a minor complaint, of course, but it does break up the reading experience quite frequently. This is all not to mention the numerous grammatical errors, which are curious, considering that Womack is an English professor. One can perhaps blame the book's editor(s). Where the author shines, however, is in his formidably acute grasp of media-fueled mythologies, the ability of an iconic performer to find commercial success due to the repetition of facile images and messages, and the ways in which the young listeners of the sixties identified with the Beatles myth. Womack's knowledge of the history of popular culture is vast, especially regarding the quick usurping of the new "teen music" by cynical corporations in the late '50s and early '60s. Frankly, his insight is astonishing. So the book's worth reading if you happen to be interested in media-propagated mythologies, and how the marketing world responded to the Beatles' previously unheard-of level of media success and social influence; but again, the subtitle indicates that the music will be the narrative priority. (In all fairness, perhaps the subtitle and book descriptions were impressed upon Womack by the publisher.) What does come through consistently, however, is Womack's genuine love for the Beatles' music. I might disagree with the particularly over-analytical manner in which he attempts to dig tributaries from the music's joys into the rest of life's elusively defined waters, especially given his top-heavy focus on the lyrics, but you might not -- for you'll find here none of the aloof, irrelevant "cooler than thou" cynicism that most self-styled "critics" are guilty of. In terms of the creative processes behind the music itself, recommended instead are *Many Years from Now* by Barry Miles, *The Complete Beatles Recording Sessions* by Mark Lewisohn (in spite of its own errors, it's at least interesting), and the group's own *Anthology* book. If you're really in the mood for besides-the-point musical trainspotting vis-a-vis the Beatles, a couple of much more insightful -- or at least more thought-provoking -- books are *Tell Me Why* by Tim Riley and the *Cambridge Companion to [sic] the Beatles*. Absolutely to be avoided is the largely negative and subjectively critical *Revolution in the Head* by Ian MacDonald, the wholly sensationalistic *The Love You Make* by Peter Brown, and the simply fabricated *Here, There and Everywhere* by Geoff Emerick.

1 of 2 people found the following review helpful. Best Beatles bio around

By Jeff Walker If you're going to read only one Beatles bio, I recommend that this be it. Why? Because author Kenneth Womack focuses on what was most important in the Beatles' career--their music. It always amazes me how little attention most Beatles biographers pay to the actual songs.

Without them we wouldn't be reading any Beatles bios at all. For me, the best part of the book is the unique treatment he extends to the 'Get Back' sessions that became represented by the 'Let It Be' album and film. He is the only music writer I've encountered who gives these sessions two big 'thumbs up'. Unaccountably though, at the very end of the book he harkens back to their rooftop concert and says that there they "make one last play for greatness after a month of soul-destroying misery." He does rightly characterize the concert as "a final, breathtaking performance for the ages," but the tarring of the sessions before and after as a soul-destroying misery is absolutely false, as the bulk of his account attests to. (Only one book fully credits the Beatles for the magnificent music they made and recorded that January, only to have it so inadequately distilled on the 'Let It Be' album.) Womack's other sin re. these sessions is to praise--yes, actually praise!--the grotesquely-Spectorized version of 'The Long and Winding Road' that emerged, appropriately enough, on April 1, 1970. You have to look elsewhere for how a definitive version of this would-be masterpiece can be restored by combining the two best recordings available. There are other mistakes in the book as well, such as Womack's perpetuation of the Allan Williams canard that Stu Sutcliffe was kicked in the head after a show at Litherland Hall and that this caused his death. But they're hardly worth mentioning. Far more important is that Womack has given fans a well-written medium-length biography that tells the Beatles' story with their songs front and centre rather than on a back burner.

In *Long and Winding Roads: The Evolving Artistry of the Beatles*, Kenneth Womack brings the band's story vividly to life--from their salad days as a Liverpool Skiffle group and their apprenticeship in the nightclubs and mean streets of Hamburg through their early triumphs at the legendary Cavern Club and the massive onslaught of Beatlemania itself. By mapping the group's development as an artistic fusion, Womack traces the Beatles' creative arc from their first, primitive recordings through *Abbey Road* and the twilight of their career. In order to communicate the nature and power of the band's remarkable achievement, Womack examines the Beatles' body of work as an evolving art object. He investigates the origins and creation of the group's compositions, as well as the songwriting and recording practices that brought them to fruition. Womack's analysis of the Beatles' albums transports readers on a journey through the Beatles' heyday as recording artists between 1962 and 1969, when the band enjoyed a staggering musical and lyrical leap that took them from their first album *Please Please Me*, which they recorded in the space of a single day, to Sgt. Pepper's *Lonely Hearts Club Band*, the *White Album*, and *Abbey Road*--albums that collectively required literally thousands of hours to produce. In addition to considering the band's increasing self-consciousness about the overall production, design, and presentation of their art, Womack explores the Beatles' albums as a collection of musical and lyrical impressions that finds them working towards a sense of aesthetic unity. In *Long and Winding Roads*, Womack reveals the ways in which the Beatles gave life to a musical synthesis that would change the world.

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