

# Dreaming of a White Album

Fifty years old and better than ever.

## Music

Tony Davis



Richard Lush was a 20-year-old tape operator at Abbey Road Studios in 1968 when he worked on 10 Beatles songs, nine of which ended up on *The Beatles*, popularly known as the White Album for its near blank cover. The now-Sydney resident tells us the only reason we have such an impressive Super Deluxe version to celebrate the 50th anniversary of perhaps the most famous double album ever, is down to the quality of the original.

He's not talking about the songs. Lush says the Emitape, the recording medium which the record company EMI

manufactured in-house, has survived until today, while American master tapes all fell apart by the 1970s.

"You couldn't play the Beach Boys' *Pet Sounds* master tapes because they have all disintegrated. But the Emitape, you put it on and it sounds just like it did 50 years ago," he says. "There's a man who should have been knighted somewhere there."

The stability of the tapes means that they can be returned to with each improvement in digitisation, thereby better capturing the warmth of the original performances.

Giles Martin, son of original album producer George Martin, has produced the reworked version, ensuring that mixing desks and compressors from the period were used to preserve the original soundscape. The Super Deluxe runs to six

CDs and a Blu-Ray, with a book, posters and more. It includes various versions of the original album plus out-takes and, at last, clear and complete versions of the much-bootlegged "Escher" demos.

These are run-throughs of songs proposed for the album, recorded by the four at George Harrison's house after their return from being cosmically enlightened in India.

The White Album was the first on which The Beatles used eight-track recording. Lush says having eight separated tracks gives more control for a remastered version. Therefore, you might think he'd be excited by the remixed stereo and first-ever surround sound versions.

"I'm a bit of a mono man myself," he says. His argument is that for most Beatles tracks



### Need to know

The Beatles (*White Album*) Super Deluxe Edition

About \$279.

Lower-cost 3-disc and vinyl versions also available.

the mono is the one in which all four Beatles, producer George Martin, engineer Geoff Emerick and in some cases, Lush himself, agreed on as the preferred mix. "That was [then] set in stone... it was a moment in time."

Lush says there is "a whole can of worms" with remixing and remastering. "Once you start making it all really clean and everything, you hear things that were on there that maybe you couldn't have heard originally, but the original mix has a little bit of magic."

Lush accepts that "the best version" of any music is in the ear of the beholder.

The good news for mono-philes is that the original one-channel mix – quite different to the original stereo, or the remixed stereo version – is included on the Blu-Ray version, and at a much higher sampling rate than ever before.

Most spectacular of all is the surround sound, which puts the listener right in the centre of the band. It's a completely new way of hearing the album's 30 wildly varying tracks. It will be too radical for some, but consider it a director's cut. Or, in this case, a son of the director's cut. **ES**