



Friday, 23 June 1961
Friedrich Ebert Halle
Hamburg, Germany

Point of truth: John never expected anyone to be anything other than self-serving.

That's why Bert Kaempfert worried him. The man didn't need The Beatles or even Tony Sheridan. He was already a millionaire.

Kaempfert's "Wonderland By Night" had just recently made it to Number One on the American music charts. Mimi's boarders had it endlessly on the record player. It was all over the airwaves these days – the handsome German composer-orchestra leader was legitimately famous in his own right.

So what's he want with us, then? John watched the rain-washed streets flying by outside the taxi window. What's he want with a bunch of Liverpool scruffs...or even a somewhat well known rock'n'roller like Sheridan? What've we got to offer that he couldn't get on his own – just by writin' another movie theme or composin' another soulful love ballad, what have you?

John rubbed a finger across one bushy eyebrow and shook his head, trying to keep his eyes open.

It was 8 a.m., and he was nattered. They all were. For the last eighty-eight days in Hamburg, The Beatles had performed without a single day off, without a single full night's sleep. John had done the calculations. By the time that The Beatles planned to depart Germany on 2 July, they would've played over 503 hours on The Top Ten Stage, not counting practise sessions. It was crushing.

Paul, seated next to him, had nodded off, and George, by the window, was fidgeting – fighting sleep. Pete and Tony were in the second taxi just behind them, but John was sure that for them the scenario was the same. None of them had had more than two hours' rest the previous evening.

Why would Kaempfert want to record Sheridan? John sat up again, shaking his head and clearing his throat. And why would Sheridan ask us in as his back-up band, as it were? Have we become as good as all that, and I haven't noticed?

It was all...unexpected. Kaempfert had even alluded to the possibility of signing them to a one-year recording contract if things went well today. John shook his head again. *Too fuggin' good to be true.*

The tick of the blinker and the crunch of taxi wheels plowing through gravel roused Paul. He stretched and leaned forward as the vehicle rolled up the circular driveway of an unimaginative, red-orange brick building with concrete keystones over the windows.

"*This* isn't a recordin' studio." John rolled the window down and took a second look.

"It's...a school, isn't it?" Paul yawned.

"A school," John sneered.

"I thought we'd done with all that – schools," George droned.

The taxi paused, and Tony jogged up from the rear with Pete close on his heels. Studying a small, torn slip of paper, he rapped on their window. "Perhaps there's some error," he mumbled, glancing in confusion at the building. "But...no...no, the address is correct, all right. Friedrich Ebvert Halle. This is it."

"It's an infant's school, Sheridan." John chewed gum obnoxiously and stared at Tony.

"It's a school, y'know," Paul echoed.

The taxi driver turned to eye them impatiently. His fare had ended, and he was eager to move on. He held out his hand indicatively and nodded towards the door.

"C'mon," Pete waved John out. "We might as well go in and have a look-see, right?" He scratched his neck. "I mean, if the famous Bert Kaempfert said to meet him here, then like as not, we can take him at his word, right?"

"And what word's that, son?" John edged out of the vehicle.

"School," Paul teased. "It must be 'school.'" He brushed himself off as if he'd been traveling in an open buggy over dusty roads.

"Right," George nodded, tumbling out as well. "That *would* be most the appropriate adjective, I believe."

"Noun," John corrected, looking down his nose. "Person, place, or thingy, son – noun. Where were you the day they gave out grammar?"

"Maybe I was with your girlfriend," George teased.

John flipped him a backhanded V.

"Ee-nough! C'mon," Tony impatiently motioned them towards the entrance. Beatle banter at any o'clock was always exclusive and hence eventually irritating, but this early in the morning, the Liverpoolian wordplay was flat annoying.

"We'd just like to know somethin' once and for all, Sheridan," John said as Pete removed his gear from the rear taxi and slammed the boot shut. "Why is it that a man like Bert Kaempfert's after recordin' us, anyway? Tell us that, if y'don't mind."

“I know that!” George grinned. “It’s because we’re the fabulous Beatles, that’s why,”

“*Beat Brothers!* Beat Brothers!” Tony corrected. It was the name Kaempfert had suggested they use when functioning as Sheridan’s back-up group.

“I’ll do what I want with me brothers – ta just the same,” John muttered, picking up his guitar case and amp.

“Beat Brothers – it sounds rather nasty, doesn’t it?” George grimaced, collecting his gear as well.

“Yeah?” Tony fired back, “Well, if y’ask me, it’s a helluva lot better than bein’ called The Peedles all over bloody Germany!” The phonetics of the word ‘Beatles’ had never worked well in translation. The connotations were awful, and German fans had enjoyed many a joke at the band’s expense.

“I dunno,” Paul grinned, moving towards the door, “Peedles isn’t all that bad. I’ve heard John called worse on a good day...by his dear ole Auntie Mim.”

“Good morning! Good morning, everyone!” Thirty-seven year old Bert Kaempfert strolled out to greet them. Tall and broad-shouldered, with a high, wide brow, a thick shock of light hair, and a crinkle-eyed smile, he offered Tony a handshake and nodded warmly to the rest. In a cream silk shirt, striped tie, and elegant pleated-front trousers, he smiled and looked them each in the eye, as if he were genuinely thrilled to see them.

The “Beat Brothers” shuffled around, muttering small talk – trying to make polite conversation with their cords, amps, and guitars still in hand. Tony delivered the “thank yous” for the group and politely inquired after Alfred Schacht, a mutual acquaintance of his and Kaempfert’s at Aberbach Music Publishing. John, who always listened intently when successful people talked, immediately made the connection between Kaempfert and the director at Sheridan’s publishing organization.

So, that’s it, he finally understood. It’s this Schacht who’s inadvertently gotten us the gig. He must’ve recommended Sheridan, and Sheridan must’ve recommended us. Right place, right time. All kismet. Or guidance. Who knows?

The others – their equipment growing heavier and heavier – were quickly losing interest in the conversation. Pete finally rested his drum kit gently in the gravel, and Paul set down his Alpico.

“Oh – so sorry...” Kaempfert noticed. “Where are my manners? Please...please come inside.” He gestured towards the door. “Shouldn’t be wasting minutes, anyway...I know you’re all slated to return home by the end of next week...far too little leeway for correcting or reworking anything we do today...”

It was the cue they’d been waiting for. John followed Kaempfert and Sheridan into what appeared to be an auditorium, and the others quickly

stacked up behind him, eager to set eyes on the studio hidden behind the walls of this grammar school façade.

But what they found inside was an ordinary school assembly hall, a regulation room with rows of folding wooden seats featuring faded and stained green cushions. An elevated stage, begging any exact description, sat empty between two thick panels of heavy maroon drapes. Nowhere was there a sign of a recording studio. It was just a school auditorium, plain and simple.

“Gentlemen,” Kaempfert smiled, undismayed, “follow me, please.”

He led them up and across the stage and into the wings where a board of red lights blinked at regular intervals and archaic machines hummed monotonously.

“Must be some relic from the British army occupation,” John whispered in Tony’s ear.

“Shhh!” the singer cautioned.

“A radio bunker of some sort,” John tried again.

“Shhh!” Tony warned. He elbowed John in the ribs.

“Is this it, then?” George asked, dumbfounded. None of them could believe the primitive conditions.

“Yes,” Kaempfert smiled at the boy. “This is where we’ll make the record that will change the world!”

They all chuckled – The Beatles, half-heartedly.

The sure-to-be-fantastic Kaempfert studio they’d all fantasized about huddled before them – a mess of wires and antiquated equipment shoved into the wings of the old school stage. It twinkled and buzzed and appeared to be alive, but the contraption was far from state-of-the-art.

“I think the train station had it all over this,” John mumbled to Paul.

“At least it’s quiet this time,” George whispered.

“I told you we were destined for the stage,” Paul said out of the side of his mouth.

“We’ll begin in twenty minutes,” Kaempfert announced, “...as soon as the technicians arrive and settle in.”

Tony nodded, with a tenuous, quivering smile plastered across his face – a smile that tried to hide the disappointment and skepticism they were all feeling.

They’d all been so thrilled on the way over, so sure that the recording Kaempfert planned to make of “My Bonnie Lies Over the Ocean” would propel them to fame. Tony especially had counted on the session to be the hallmark event that secured his future. Now, standing in the wings and watching The Beat Brothers take the stage, he wasn’t so sure. It was hard to believe that anything worthwhile would ever emerge from this makeshift collection of lights and dials. Things weren’t going according to plan.

“Great studio, Sheridan.” John caught Tony’s eye as Kaempfert exited. “It’s an infant’s school, y’know.”

“Yeah, so you’ve said,” Tony hissed, “and your support’s been duly noted.”

“Right,” Paul winked. “We’re known for our dual notes, aren’t we, lads?” Paul hit a high note and George supplied low harmony.

And the banter went on. The Beat Brothers chattered their way through the entire set-up. They laughed at the limited technology, and they upbraided Tony – trying to rattle his cage.

Ah, never mind them, the experienced performer tried to tell himself. It’s not that bad here, really. And no matter where it’s made, this record’ll top the charts.

Yeah, that’s right...top the charts! The Beatles can laugh all they want, but in truth... the only questionable part of this whole production’s them, as I see it.

But okay then. Once Kaempfert puts their vocals in the background and their names in fine print, no one’ll ever think of them again, will they? I’ll score a hit with this, and then it’s on to greater horizons. And the lads from Liverpool? They’ll be back in Scouseland...back to the semi-obscurity from whence they came!

Tony Sheridan and The Beat Brothers cut the record in only three takes. In fact, the recording went so well that Kaempfert graciously allowed The Beatles to cut several songs of their own. They chose “Cry for a Shadow” (the Lennon-Harrison instrumental) and “Ain’t She Sweet” (John’s lead vocal). However, the all-Beatles record was not destined to matter half as much as “My Bonnie Lies Over the Ocean” in which the only distinguishable Beatles’ voice is Paul’s...offering up a “whoop” in the background.