

BEHIND THE CLASSICS



Roy Orbison, Jeff Lynne, Bob Dylan, George Harrison, Tom Petty

WRITTEN BY: BOB DYLAN, GEORGE HARRISON, JEFF LYNNE, ROY ORBISON, TOM PETTY

RECORDED: LUCKY STUDIOS, MALIBU, CALIF, WESTLAKE AUDIO, LOS ANGELES, APRIL 1988

PRODUCED BY: GEORGE HARRISON AND JEFF LYNNE

BOB DYLAN: GUITAR, VOCALS, HARMONICA

GEORGE HARRISON: GUITAR, VOCALS

JEFF LYNNE: GUITAR, VOCALS, BASS, DRUMS, COWBELL

ROY ORBISON: GUITAR, VOCALS

TOM PETTY: GUITAR, VOCALS

IAN WALLACE: TOM-TOMS

FROM THE ALBUM: VOLUME 1 (1988)



“Handle With Care”

THE TRAVELING WILBURYS

While George Harrison and co-producer Jeff Lynne were at work on the former's 1987 album *Cloud Nine*, the two began playfully referring to the little glitches that occurred during recording as “trembling wilburys.” The running joke eventually metamorphosed into the notion of an all-star band called the Traveling Wilburys. The more Harrison chuckled, the more serious the idea became—17 years after the breakup of his previous group, the Beatles, he was ready to be part of a team again. “At the end of the day, we’d be listening back, and he’d say, ‘Oh, I wish we could have a group,’” Lynne recalled.

Harrison was in Los Angeles the following year when his record label asked for an extra track to include on the 12” edition of his upcoming single “This Is Love.” Thinking of fellow Beatle John Lennon’s “Instant Karma!”, written and recorded in one day, Harrison resolved to come up with something new quickly. He went out to dinner that evening with Lynne and mutual friend Roy Orbison, who offered to help. They agreed, and Harrison suggested they use “Bob’s” home studio. “It turned out to be Bob Dylan,” Orbison

noted. Harrison picked up his guitar from pal Tom Petty’s house, and invited Petty (who had also been working with Lynne and Orbison) to come along.

The assembled rock superpowers (plus Lynne’s engineer, Bill Bottrell) turned up on Dylan’s doorstep in the Point Dume section of Malibu. Harrison had only intended to ask for help writing, but couldn’t imagine letting the voices at his disposal go unheard. He and Lynne sat on the grass outside the house and worked up a section for Orbison to sing, and tasked Dylan and Petty with formulating a bridge. They cut a basic track, all five men playing acoustic guitars to a drum machine. Then Harrison challenged his friends: “Give us some lyrics, you famous lyricists!” “What’s it called?” Dylan asked Harrison, who spied a phrase on an Ampex two-reel tape box. “Handle With Care,” he replied.

The quintet filled out the lyric over a barbecued chicken dinner in the garden, each one tossing out phrases for consideration. “It took a lot of guts to say a line,” Petty said. “Especially in that company.” The group’s vocals, as well as Lynne’s drums and bass, were recorded that evening on a 2-inch, 24-track ACES tape machine and console

sold to Dylan by Dave Stewart. “We didn’t have anything but the five of us,” Petty said. “You’d see us all digging through boxes to find a cable.” At one point Harrison turned to Lynne and declared, “Hey, Jeff, this is it: the Traveling Wilburys.”

Overdubs were added the next day at a professional studio, including Harrison’s slide-guitar lead (on a Fender Stratocaster) and tomtom flourishes by Ian Wallace. Harrison played the completed track for executives at his label, who eagerly suggested that the group make a full album. He excitedly talked the rest into doing just that. “I was saying to them, ‘Look, the only thing to do is, do another nine of these tunes,’” Harrison said. “And then we got the Wilburys.” Over the next few weeks the band’s debut, *Volume 1*, took shape. “Handle With Care” was a hit upon its release as a single in October, helping to propel the album to double-platinum status. “It happened completely by magic, just by circumstance,” said Harrison, who died in 2001; Orbison passed away in 1988, just weeks after the release of *Volume 1*. “Maybe there was a full moon that night or something like that. It was quite a magical little thing, really.”

—Chris Neal