

"Back in the U.S.S.R."

The Beatles

The popular conception of who did what in the Beatles is that George Harrison played every solo, Paul McCartney played bass, John Lennon was the designated rhythm guitarist, and Ringo Starr (after Pete Best's departure) played drums on every Beatles track. On the contrary, the Beatles often switched roles in the studio, and "Back in the U.S.S.R." is no exception.

In fact, at the time of recording, Starr was nowhere to be found. Leaving in a huff, he had temporarily quit the group—albeit for a short time. On the basic tracks, McCartney played drums, Harrison played rhythm guitar, and Lennon played bass. From there it was overdubs until finished, with Macca splitting lead guitar chores with Harrison. Written (chiefly by Paul McCartney) as a nod to both Chuck Berry and the Beach Boys, "Back in the U.S.S.R." serves as the album opener for 1968's self-titled disc, better known as the "White Album."

THE RHYTHM PARTS

On virtually any Beatles recording, there are subtle things that will pop out at you on repeated listenings. Such is the case when picking through the rhythm guitar parts in "Back in the U.S.S.R." First off, there's the deceptively simplistic, Chuck-Berry style boogie riffing from Gtr. 2 in the verse sections. What at first sounds like a common root/5th-root/6th blues comp turns out to be a crafty, chord-enhanced variation on that foundation. It helps to view the part as being made up of broken pieces of larger chord voicings. **Fig. 1** reveals the full harmony of the combined parts in measures 1–2 and 5–6 of the verse sections.

FIG. 1

FIG. 1 shows the full harmony of the combined parts in measures 1–2 and 5–6 of the verse sections. The chords are A7, A13, D7, and D13. The TAB shows the fret numbers for strings T, A, and B.

Among the other choice moments to watch for are the "add9" voicings in the tag section of the second chorus, the chromatic climbs just before and during the bridge, descension in the latter part of the bridge, and the triadic-trio turnarounds (D7–D#7–E7) at the end of the first chorus.

RIFFS AND FILLS

The crafty riffs and fills in the Beatles repertoire are timeless and thus consistently referenced as a source of inspiration for inventive guitarists and musicians. Take, for instance, the trill-infused melodic riff of the chorus. Played by Gtr.1, it's a cool little slice of Beatles-style blues if ever there was one. But the hidden jewel buried in the mix is the lower-octave harmony part played by Gtr.3 and shown in **Fig. 2**. Another influential moment occurs in the final verse, where Gtr.1 performs a cycled, oblique bend throughout the entire section. And then there's the solo itself. Whether played by McCartney or by Harrison (though probably the former), it's a classic Beatles middle eight—melodic, rhythmic, and as memorable as the song itself.

FIG. 2

FIG. 2 shows the lower-octave harmony part played by Gtr.3. The chords are A7 and C7. The TAB shows the fret numbers for strings T, A, and B. Fret-hand fingering is provided below the TAB.

DIAL TONE

What They Used: All the guitars in the recording are on the beefy side: fat and slightly distorted. By this time, the Beatles had moved on from Gretsch, Rickenbacker, and Vox gear, and were gravitating toward Epiphone, Fender, and Gibson guitars, powered by Fender amplifiers. There are varying accounts, but the guitar sounds on the recording are likely the product of Epiphone Casino guitars plugged into cranked Fender Twin Reverb amps.

How to Get the Sound: Use the bridge pickup (humbucking or P-90) of a solidbody or semi-hollowbody electric guitar. Plug into a tube-powered Fender combo amp and crank all the settings except for the bass control. If angry neighbors come marching to your door, try using an overdrive pedal such as the Ibanez Tube Screamer or Boss Super Overdrive to simulate the sound of a loud amp.



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Back in the U.S.S.R.

Words and Music by John Lennon and Paul McCartney
from The Beatles - (White Album)

Intro
Moderately fast ♩ = 145

7 sec. (Jet landing noise)

NC. (E5) E7

Gtr. 1 (dist.)

mf

TAB

7 sec. Gtr. 2 (dist.)

mf slight P.M.

TAB

Verse

3rd time, Gtr. 1: w/ Fill 1
*A7 D7

Gtr. 1 tacet

Paul McCartney: Oh _____

1. Flew in from Mi - am - i Beach, B. O. A. C., _____ did -
2. Been a - way so long I hard - ly knew the place, _____ Gee, _____
_____ me 'round the snow peaked moun - tains way down south, _____ take _____

Gtr. 2

Rhy. Fig. 1

slight P.M. slight P.M.

TAB

*Chord symbols reflect basic harmony.

Fill 1

Gtr. 1

8va

Play 7 times

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C D7 A7

n't get to bed last night. On the way the pa - per bag was
 it's good to be back home. Leave it 'til to - mor - row to un -
 me to your dad - dy's farm. Let me hear your bal - a - lai - kas

slight P.M.

D7 C D7

on my knee, man, I had a dread - ful flight. } I'm back in the U. S. S. R.,
 pack my case. Hon - ey, dis - con - nect the phone. }
 ring - ing out. Come and keep your com - rade warm. }

End Rhy. Fig. 1

slight P.M.

Chorus A7 C7 D7

you don't know how luck - y you are, boy,

Gtr. 1 Riff A End Riff A

Gtr. 2 Rhy. Fig. 2 End Rhy. Fig. 2

slight P.M.

Gtr. 3 Riff A1 End Riff A1

(cont. on upper staff)

Bridge

A7

B5 C5 C#5 D7

Well, the U - kraine girls real-ly knock me out. — they

(Da, da, da. Da, da. Da, da. Da, da.
(Oo. —

Gtr. 1

Guitar 1 staff with chord diagrams: 3 4 5, 3 4 5, 3 4 5

Gtr. 2

Guitar 2 staff with fretboard diagrams and "slight P.M." markings

To Coda 1

A7

D7

C#7

C7

B7

leave the _ west be - hind. — And Mos - cow girls make me sing and shout — that

Da, da. Da, da, da. da. da, da. Da, da. Da, da.

Guitar 1 staff with chord diagrams: 7 9, 7 9, 3 4 5, 3 4 5

Guitar 2 staff with fretboard diagrams and "slight P.M." markings

⊕ Coda 2

Outro

Lead Voc.: w/ ad lib. shouts

A7

Hey, I'm _back!

(Oo.)

Gtr. 1

p

Gtr. 2

slight P.M. --- *sim.*

Gtr. 3

(Jet noise) 4 sec.

4 sec.

slight P.M. ---

4 sec.

4 sec.