

## The History Of The Traveling Wilburys

The birth of the Traveling Wilburys was a happy accident. Warner Bros. Records' International Department had asked that George Harrison come up with a B-side for "This Is Love," a single from his *Cloud Nine* album. At the time it was customary to couple an A-side with a never-before-heard track, giving the single extra sales value.

This was mid-1988. *Cloud Nine* was just out. George, along with cowriter Jeff Lynne and their friends Bob Dylan, Tom Petty, and Roy Orbison, had been hanging out in Dylan's studio. I suppose George figured that as long as his pals were on hand, why not use them to knock off this flipside?

A couple of days later George came by my office to play the new "B-side." We went next door to A&R head Lenny Waronker's office so he could hear it too. George played us "Handle With Care." Our reaction was immediate. This was a song we knew could not be wasted on some B-side. Roy Orbison's vocal was tremendous. I really loved the beautiful guitar figure that George played. The guys had really nailed it. Lenny and I stumbled over each others' words, asking, "Can't we somehow turn this into an album?" (I also had a suspicion that perhaps George had been hungering for another band experience.)

We urged him on. George felt the spontaneity of it, felt its driving force. He always had great instincts. Being as smart as he was he had a remarkable ability to pull people together. Think about *The Concert For Bangladesh* — only George Harrison could have made that happen.

Once the idea of a full, collaborative album was in front of us, George took over. The five frontmen (Harrison, Lynne, Petty, Dylan, and Orbison) decided not to use their own names. George and Jeff had been calling studio equipment (limiters, equalizers) "wilburys." So first they named their fivesome The Trembling Wilburys. Jeff suggested "Traveling" instead. Everyone agreed.

The group was born: five guys with star stature in their own rights, but it was George who created this Wilbury environment where five stars could enjoy an ego-free collaboration. Everybody sang, everybody wrote, everybody produced — and had great fun doing so.

You can hear George's humility and good nature reflected in the Wilburys and their music. To my thinking, this was a perfect collaboration. All five were good friends who admired and respected one another. Roy Orbison was somebody they all idolized. Of course, they revered Bob Dylan too. But Bob was closer to being their contemporary, so it was Roy who gave the project that special glow from rock 'n' roll's early formative years.

Reflecting on all this, I recall a few years before when my wife Evelyn and I had been in London. George had invited us to his house, Friar Park, to celebrate Evelyn's birthday. Roy was a houseguest there at the time, so perhaps this could have been an early hint leading to the Wilburys. So, too, might it have been the time Tom, George, and Jeff (Bob wasn't able to make it, as he'd just injured his hand) came to dinner at our house a year or so before "Handle With Care." For us, Tom had played a new song, as yet unrecorded, called "Free Fallin'," backed by his two future Wilbury mates. Lenny and I loved the song so much we asked Tom and the guys to do it at least three times that evening.

Perhaps even then they all were Wilburys. They just didn't know their last name yet.

With the huge international success — over five million copies sold — of *Traveling Wilburys, Volume 1*, a follow-up was inevitable. George, being George, titled the second album *The Traveling Wilburys, Volume 3*. Sadly, by this time Roy had died, but there was still great excitement when we visited the Wilburys, recording in the Wallace Neff-designed house at the top of Coldwater Canyon. Being with those guys, in that setting — truly memorable.

I'm glad that a song that had once been destined for semiobscurity as a B-side became the catalyst for something so lasting and joyful. Rolling Stone magazine named *Traveling Wilburys, Volume 1* one of the 100 Best Albums of All Time.

—Mo Ostin  
Chairman Emeritus  
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