

Sheeple Chase
Episode 1 – “Episode 52: Dead Singer”

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**SFX: A TACKY, MYSTERY THEME, FULL OF SYNTH-Y
THERAMIN**

1. INT. TWO PRIVATE URBAN FLATS

CELIA and GEORGIE are recording remotely, badly. A dog occasionally boofs faintly on Georgie's end.

GEORGIE

(peppy)

**Hi there faithful sceptics and
welcome to another episode of
Sheeple Chase: the podcast that
gives a long hard look at the
dangerous, the dubious and the
downright dodgy. I'm true believer
Georgie Barker-**

CELIA

(a little awkward)

**-And I'm Celia Ripley and I don't
believe a word of it!**

GEORGIE

(laughing)

**So Celia, what weird and wonderful
conspiracy have you brought us
today?**

CELIA

(checking her notes)

**Have you ever looked at your
favourite celeb and suddenly felt like
you don't recognise them anymore?
Like their fame has changed them?
Well today, we're investigating
claims of three singers dying at their
peak and being replaced by doubles.**

GEORGIE

Ooh, are we doing Paul is Dead?

CELIA

**We're doing Paul is Dead, Avril Esta
Morta *and* Mia's Missing.**

GEORGIE

**Sounds like we're in for a treat after
this quick word from our sponsors...**

2. CLONELYHEARTS AD

SFX: short tacky jingle.

GEORGIE

**Here at Clonelyhearts we know that
sharing is caring and when we asked
100 gays to list their favourite thing
about being queer over 3% of them
said "Sharing clothes!"**

**So that's why they created
Clonelyhearts: the world's first queer
dating and wardrobe sharing app.**

**Just upload your measurements and
take their style quiz, and *they'll* pair
you with tens of potential matches
who share your dress size and your
dress *sense*!**

**Membership costs less than a new
outfit every month so can you afford
not to try it?**

***Clonelyhearts*: because the couple
that slays together, stays together.**

SFX: short tacky jingle ends.

3. PODCAST

CELIA

So, in the late 60s, a rumour started circulating that Paul McCartney had died in a car crash and was replaced by a lookalike named Billy Shears at the request of MI-5 Because, get this, they were afraid that, if fans found out Paul McCartney had died, the grief would lead to mass hysteria.

GEORGIE

They really thought this was a matter of national security?

CELIA

Don't forget Beatlemania was a global phenomenon by this point. Luckily for MI-5 though, the American label Capital Records had already held a Beatles lookalike competition and it's said that the winner, William Campbell Shears, became the replacement "Fake Paul" or "Faul" as he's known online.

GEORGIE

Wait, so the American record label held a competition in the US and just happened to get a scouse, singer-songwriter as the winner?

CELIA

No *but* the other Beatles allegedly taught him how to speak with a Liverpudlian accent, play bass left-handed and sing.

GEORGIE

Oooh! Do you think that's why there was such tension between him and Lennon? Because the fake Paul reminded him of his dead friend?

CELIA

I mean, I think it's all a load of bollocks, personally.

GEORGIE

You've got me curious, though... What's the evidence?

CELIA

"Evidence" is a strong word. No-one knows where the rumour of his death came from but it happened twice, in 1966 *and* 1967. Eventually the Beatles' press manager put out statements saying he was alive-

GEORGIE

(sarcastically)

Oh, well if a *press manager* says it then it must be true!

CELIA

Fair, but he was also obviously fine - walking around and singing and, well... alive. So that was that. Until, September 1969 when a student newspaper at Drake University in Iowa published an article saying he was dead and the other Beatles were leaving clues about it in their records.

GEORGIE

Oh that explains the famous lyric:
"We all live in a yellow

**submarine/Except for Paul who's
dead/He-Died-In-A-Car-Crash-In-
1966..."**

Georgie begins googling totally convincing evidence

CELIA

**Unfortunately, it seems the actual
clues were so cryptic they were
almost undetectable. At best,
Sergeant Pepper was the first album
released after the rumours and
people claimed the sleeve art
included "suspicious symbols" like a
flower wreath on the ground shaped
vaguely like a left-handed bass
guitar.**

GEORGIE

**I can kinda see it... if you squint and
turn it upside down.**

CELIA

**Anyway, people were saying
everything was a coded reference to
Paul's death: he's turned away from
the camera on the back cover, in
another photo, he's wearing a black
patch on his sleeve that says O.P.D-**

GEORGIE

(gasps)

For Other Paul Died!?

SFX: Spooky Theremin sting, it goes on a little too long.

CELIA

(laughs)

**Sure why not? On the Abbey Road
cover, he's barefoot, so *obviously*
that's a sign -**

GEORGIE

Obviously.

CELIA

-and on page 13 of the Magical Mystery Tour he's got his shoes off again-

GEORGIE

It's almost like people were obsessed with a famous guy's feet...

CELIA

-and in another photo, everyone else is wearing red corsages but he has a black one.

GEORGIE

Ok, that one is actually a bit weird...

CELIA

Then there's the alleged hidden backmasked messages in the songs themselves.

GEORGIE

Backmasking being when you play a record backwards and it's supposed to say something else?

CELIA

Exactly. Some people claim there's a bit in *I'm So Tired* where if you play it backwards it sounds like "Paul is dead man, miss him, miss him." And there's another from *Revolution Number 9* which apparently says "Turn me on, dead man".

GEORGIE

Weirdly sexual but okay.

CELIA

**What? You're not hot for dead,
barefoot Paul McCartney?**

GEORGIE

**No, and you'll be really proud of me,
because I'm actually very sceptical
of backmasking.**

CELIA

How come?

GEORGIE

**Well, playing records backwards
absolutely ruins them, right? So,
say, thousands of lowan students
are all playing their records
backwards to listen to secret
messages in their Beatles songs,
guess who has to now go and
replace their Beatles albums...It's all
a con by the labels to sell more
records!**

CELIA

(laughs)

**So, you don't believe this
conspiracy, but only because you
believe there's a different, more
profitable conspiracy behind it?**

GEORGIE

You've got to admit, it makes sense.

CELIA

**But then how do you explain Avril
Lavigne?**

GEORGIE

(sarcastically)

Don't you mean Melissa?

CELIA

Maybe! There is a theory floating around that Canadian singer-songwriter Avril Lavigne died in 2003 and was replaced by a lookalike named Melissa Vandella. At least if you believe the original source of a single Portuguese Blogspot from 2011.

GEORGIE

"Avril Esta Morta"

CELIA

That's the one. The claim got picked up by Brazilian media then spread among English speakers after a gossip journalist posted a viral thread about it in 2017. The blog suggests that just before the release of her second album, Avril's grandfather died, and her depression became so severe that she killed herself. Then, rather than make the death public and shelve the album, the record label convinced a decoy Avril they'd hired to completely take over her career.

GEORGIE

So *Let Go*, in 2002, that was Avril and then *Under My Skin* in 2004 and everything afterwards, that was Melissa? Not bad for a look-a-like...

CELIA

(doubtful noise)

The blog does claim you can hear the difference but the whole thing rests on two clips of her singing live:

one from 2002 and one from a few years afterwards.

GEORGIE
And do they sound different?

CELIA
I mean maybe? But it's just one clip/
Maybe she had laryngitis that day, or
her voice was strained from touring
for too long, or...

GEORGIE
Maybe she spent all day yelling at a
moose?

SFX: Moose sounds

Beat.

CELIA
What?

GEORGIE
She's Canadian. Moose live in
Canada. They're pretty scary.

CELIA
Okay then yeah, I think it's more
likely her voice was tired from yelling
at a moose than that she secretly
died and was replaced by a clone.

GEORGIE
Any other evidence?

CELIA
I mean there's a lot of song lyric stuff
and talking about how her style has
changed over time.

GEORGIE

But wasn't she 18 when she got big, though? You'd kind of expect her style to change.

CELIA

She was 17.

GEORGIE

Exactly, god when I was 17, I said I'd never move to London, get a tattoo or start a podcast, so you can't really-

CELIA

I didn't know you had a tattoo?

GEORGIE

(changing subject)

Mmmmm but what about this stuff about her face changing? That seems more convincing.

CELIA

You mean that plastic surgeon who claims her nose has changed shape? Because as every plastic surgeon knows, being replaced by a double is the only way that can happen.

GEORGIE

Alright but, what about her height? That used to be listed at 5'2 and now it's changed to 5'1 as though she's had height altering surgery...

CELIA

...or was measured wearing two different pairs of shoes...

GEORGIE

Okay fine but people have been finding new evidence and adding to the theory for years. Where does stuff like that come from, if the whole thing's just one big shitpost?

CELIA

Well, people started calling the fake Avril "Melissa" after a photo shoot where Avril Lavigne's holding her fist up and the word "Melissa" is written on it in felt tip. The idea was like, "oh, they've labelled her, so they don't lose track of who's who" but the photo's clearly from around 2010, when the original Avril Lavigne's supposed to have already been dead for 7 years!

GEORGIE

Maybe she was just proud of her name, telling everyone, "Hey, it's me, Melissa!"

CELIA

That's one interpretation but it doesn't explain the surname Vandella which seems to have just come from nowhere.

GEORGIE

Sounds like a cover up to me...

CELIA

Oh Georgie, "Why'd you have to go and make things so complicated?"

SFX: Buh-Dum-Tss

Beat.

CELIA
Sponsor time?

GEORGIE
Sponsor time.

4. PONG RELOADED AD

SFX: rhythmic beeping from the game Pong

GEORGIE
The Rolling Stones. The Godfather.
The Watergate Scandal.

Everyone loves a classic, but times
have changed and so have
videogames.

SFX: The beeping is now jazzed up a stupid amount with extra
elements and even a Wilhelm scream.

GEORGIE
That's why it's finally time for the all
new Pong Reloaded!, now fully
remastered for next gen consoles
generation, with cutting edge
graphics-

CELIA
(clearly reading script)
"It was incredible, I felt like I was
actually *in* Pong."

GEORGIE
New mechanics-

CELIA
(still reading)
"Don't forget to grab the paddle ups -
there's a fresh wave of zomballs on
the way!"

SFX: Zombie's Rarr

GEORGIE

And a story mode that critics are calling "the greatest tragedy of our times"-

CELIA

(flat)

It's truly the Romeo and Juliet of table-tennis simulators.

GEORGIE

Pong! Reloaded: available now for console and PC.

SFX: shotgun reload followed by Pong beep.

5. PODCAST

CELIA

So do you want to introduce Mia's Missing, since I know how much you've wanted to talk about it?

GEORGIE

Oooh Yes!

(spooky voice)

It's 2018 and the Riot Grrrl revival is in full swing, baggy jeans, bikinis and basslines everywhere. And nobody's jeans were baggier nor their lines bassier than *The Manic Pixie Scream Girls*. Their cover of Dolly Parton's 9-5 goes viral and they sign with Revolution Records.

CELIA

Their debut, *Nowhere and Everywhere*, went to number 3 in the UK, and I think number 6 in the US?

GEORGIE

Yeah, they were huge for an alternative act but then as they start promoting their second album, things get... weird.

SFX: return of the excessive spooky sting

CELIA

It wasn't that weird.

GEORGIE

Oh it was weird. Everywhere they went, people would just...not recognise Mia Hill. There's videos of people who'd definitely met her before clearly having to be told who she is at awards ceremonies and stuff.

CELIA

She dyed her hair and a couple of people didn't recognise her at first. That's not sinister!

GEORGIE

And what about all those websites where they captioned band photos but left her name off?

CELIA

Yeah I looked into it and it seems there's only actually two times it happened and one of them was the Daily Mail so...

GEORGIE

Really? It felt like there were loads...

CELIA

People talk about it like there were loads but it's always just those two

misprints. Either way it's still enough for people to start sharing the theory that the original Mia Hill had died and been replaced by a lookalike.

GEORGIE

There was so much song lyric analysis... I remember being very convinced by *Six Feet Down*: "So bury me deep/If it helps you sleep/You've tried to replace me/But you can still taste me." And then there's the fact that you can't really hear Mia on any of the tracks.

CELIA

Yeah, but nothing that can't be explained by bad production.

GEORGIE

It is a bit too coincidental, though - The not being recognised, being left out of articles, the barely audible sound - it's all happening at the same time, and it's only happening to Mia.

CELIA

Well, the first reference to her rumoured death is this interview in the *Liverpool Echo* with a cleaner at one of the hotels the Manic Pixie Scream Girls stayed in for a tour, and it was basically just gossip about the state of one of the rooms when they left. Apparently, it "looked like the site of a cage match" and the bathroom "smelled like someone had died in it." Which seems to be enough to set all of this off.

GEORGIE

You know “Mia's Missing” was trending on TikTok for a while?

CELIA

Yeah, most of the comments were saying things like "this is really far-fetched" or "this person's an obvious troll" but there was a petition for a government inquiry into why the police weren't investigating Mia Hill's “murder”.

GEORGIE

Yeah, I never signed that petition.

CELIA

It was ridiculous!

GEORGIE

Yeah, cause either they're not investigating because they don't think she's been murdered which, like, fair enough. Or they're not investigating because whoever did it is influencing the police and so is definitely powerful enough to shut down an inquiry. Either way it's pointless.

CELIA

Right... I mean I *suppose* those are both options... although I think one's a lot more likely than the other...

GEORGIE

So who do you think did it?

CELIA

Well, nobody. I don't think she was murdered.

GEORGIE

Sure, but if she was murdered, who's your suspect?

CELIA

So, for any listeners who don't know, people can't decide if it was an obsessed fan who broke into her room, the band's manager, Callie Jones, or one of her band mates. If I *had* to pick, I guess the band mate theory is the least ridiculous...

GEORGIE

Nope. It was the manager. She had access to the room, knew Mia's schedule and Callie was always hovering around fake Mia when the rumours started. She probably found the lookalike, trained her up and was keeping an eye on her.

CELIA

But there are a lot of people that would need to be in on it: the rest of the band, the manager, the producers, friends and family, everyone involved in training the replacement... it would be a whole production.

GEORGIE

Right, but this is the entertainment industry, putting on productions is literally their job!

CELIA

I guess that's true. Well either way, that's us done on the Doppelgänger suite. So, what do you think? Are

you convinced by any of these theories?

GEORGIE

Hmm...definitely not the Avril Lavigne one. I don't think Paul McCartney is dead, but I think the record companies have stoked it because so many of the clues can only be found if you buy more records. As for 'Mia's Missing...' I was convinced by it at the time as she really did seem different but it sounds like I've built it up in my memory to more than it was, so maybe not.

I think the real conspiracy is the music industry in general. How about you? Do you believe there's a crisis of imposter celebrities?

CELIA

Unsurprisingly, I don't, no.

GEORGIE

Then I guess that closes the case of the celeb swappers, conclusion: Singers fine, music industry sketchy.

CELIA

Sounds about right...

GEORGIE

Well thank you for bringing those three weird and wonderful conspiracies, Celia - they really... struck a chord!

SFX: ba-dum-tss

CELIA sighs.

GEORGIE

So, any big plans for the weekend?

CELIA

Nothing much. You?

GEORGIE

(genuinely excited)

I'm taking Captain Barker for another haircut! They give her a little bandana at the end and everything! And dog-cologne!

CELIA

**...I'm sure she'll look very dashing.
But I think you need to get out more.**

GEORGIE

You can talk! Anyway, join us next week for another episode and in the meantime, you can rate and review us on all your favourite podcast apps and remember: if you're a band manager, it never hurts to keep a few lookalike agencies on speed dial!

SFX: tacky theme tune.

ANNOUNCER

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Sheeple Chase was created by Sasha Sienna, directed by April Sumner, and based on the works of

Jonathan Sims and Alexander J Newall.

This episode was written by Sasha Sienna and edited with additional materials by Jonathan Sims and Alexander J Newall, with audio edits by Nico Vettese, mastering by Meg McKellar, and music by Nico Vettese.

It featured Sasha Sienna as Georgie Barker and Lowri Ann Davies as Celia Ripley.

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