Music 222

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The Beatles and Their Influence

The decade of the 1960s in America saw an incredible growth in the music industry. Some of this growth is due to improvements in recording techniques, the quality of instruments used by recording artists and the methods they used, to name a few. While the producers, composers and artists that introduced those improvements are certainly crucial to the music produced, no one was as influential as Liverpool, England’s the Beatles: John Lennon, Paul McCartney, George Harrison and Ringo Starr. The massive influence these four friends had could never have been predicted until the moment they stepped off their plane in New York City, and were greeted by hundreds of screaming fans. This is owed to their versatile personal authenticity, which has an influence itself, even today.

The Beatles’ personal authenticity is noticeable in their attitudes towards their fans. At the end of a 1964 interview in London at Twickenham Film Studios, Ringo Starr commented that the interviewer was kneeling on the ground in front of them. “Why’re you still on your knees?” (Tyne Tees TV, personal interview, April 3, 1964). As funny as it may be to point out such an odd but obvious fact, it had no bearing on the conversation at hand. More of these behaviors are seen throughout the actual interview as well. Paul was told that he had been noted as the most intelligent one of the Beatles and asked if he thought it were true. He responded, “Uh, no. I’m not, no. Well, John’s written a book, you know, he must be more intelligent than me. You’ve got to be intelligent to write books!” (Tyne Tees TV, personal interview, April 3, 1964). Another Beatles fan questioned George by asking what kinds of activities Ringo and he do whilst John and Paul write songs. While it may be a truthful answer, he still genuinely responded saying, “Uh, we play marbles. Or ‘marples’.” (Tyne Tees TV, personal interview, April 3, 1964). Eventually their behaviors in a New York interview were brought to question when it was Ringo’s turn for the spot light. He was asked if he thought they were being childish, to which he replied saying, “Oh, oh not really. You know, we were just having a good laugh, and everyone seemed to enjoy it. So, we had a good time, you know, what’s the point in being serious all the time.” (Tyne Tees TV, personal interview, April 3, 1964). Songwriting is a very self-reflective hobby. An artist must look into themselves and truly express themselves to their audience. It lets their personal authenticity shine. It’s a very humbling and honest experience. The fans of the Beatles shouldn’t expect anything less of them in person because of this. Contemporary critics from the period agree as well, with Terry Eagleton from the Blackfriars journal saying, “The Beatles write most of their own songs, and thus express personal values directly” (Eagleton, 1964, p.176). The fact that the Beatles write most of their own songs, as opposed to other musicians of the era having their songs written for them by a composer or an arranger arranging their songs for them.

Just as in their own personal lives, the Beatles brought their personal authenticity into their song writing as well. A popular Beatles tune that exhibits these characteristics is their hit *Eleanor Rigby* (Lennon, McCartney, 1966) from their record *Revolver*. However, *Yesterday* (Lennon, McCartney, 1965) from their album *Help!* is more intriguing to critique. The sound produced throughout *Yesterday* (Lennon, McCartney, 1965), while minimal due to few instruments being used, is big enough to make an impact. The song’s introduction with sound in only one speaker is characteristic of recording during this time, but it reinforces the songs loneliness by that sound in the few introductory moments being a simple harmony played on guitar. The finger-picking style of guitar play, instead of using a plectrum/pick, gives the guitar a rawer timbre. The lack of drums in this song removes a sense of rhythmic energy, or momentum, yet again giving a lonely feeling. The introductory chords on guitar are very simple, slow and solemn sounding. A “low effort” vibe is felt through those chords, backing up its lonely sound and smooth melody. A final note for *Yesterday*, is the songs form which also ties into an underlying theme present in the song’s structure, a theme of regret. The repetition of the song’s chorus further enforces this theme by fabricating a constant reminisce caused by regret. Paul McCartney’s longing for that yesterday with his crooning vocals is very much felt, showcasing the emotion and effort put into the song.

The flame that is the Beatles’ influence has not died out yet, stretching to bands of today. One Direction, the young British pop band, in particular, has been the recipient of such an influence, drawing from the Beatles’ songs and appearances for inspiration. “...the young group reveals nothing more threatening than a clean, sharp, boy-next-door band...The Beatles that came to America wore matching suits and nice sweaters” (Haney-Claus, 2016., p.17-18). The matching attire of the Beatles presented them in a unifying and presentable light. One Direction turns this simple theme up to 11. “Following the blueprint laid out by the Beatles, One Direction used fashion and style to highlight characteristics of the band...each member’s clothing reflected the emphasized difference in their personality instead of wearing matching suits or sweaters like the Beatles were known for” (Haney-Claus, 2016, p.79). Still utilizing the overall theme of togetherness and unity, One Direction has each member’s dress reflect aspects of their personality, creating a diverse relationship between the band and their fanbase, “Much like how a feeling of identification contributed to the attraction of the Beatles, One Direction fans saw themselves in their idols” (Haney-Claus, 2016, p.90). Where the Beatles fans had more breathing room in choosing their favorite, One Direction fans are limited.

The Beatles’ impact on One Direction is not limited to appearances. Tones and themes in both of the bands’ songs are common as well. “Romantic songs typically address girls specifically, much in the way popularized by the Beatles, using ‘you' instead of a named love interest...The Beatles did this by using themes such as returning home to a loved one, writing them daily, and referring to love as powerful and ever lasting” (Haney-Claus, 2016, p.85). For an early Beatles, having a song about love, in any way, is second-nature. “One Direction commonly sings about love overcoming obstacles, love as finding one’s home, and romance incorporating sexual physicality. These topics are not revolutionary, but when they are presented by a non-threatening, sensitive source in a catchy, lighthearted style, these themes become accessible to teenage girls” (Haney-Claus. 2016, p.85-86). It is not smart for One Direction to have songs written on similar subjects as the Beatles, but clever. It is clever of them to at least attempt, though they succeeded, to capitalize on such a rich market, just as how the Beatles had triumphed in that market years ago.

The versatility and ever-lasting flame that is the personal authenticity of the Beatles continues to be of influence, even almost 50 years after the bands breakup. Not only is their influence in music still widely noticeable, but their own music still is as popular as it once was.

References

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