Bradley Heath

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Professor McEvoy

Ladies and Gentlemen...The Beatles:The History and Influence of The Beatles in the United States

Beatlemania took storm in the United States after 73 million viewers tuned in to watch a riveting performance of “I Want To Hold Your Hand” on *The Ed Sullivan Show* (Evans 5). Eventually, they outsold the most successful American bands during the 1960s; ultimately reining in a new era of British music that was adored by American fans. Pop culture historians claim that young people wanted to relax and have a change of scenery after JFK was assassinated. (Schloss 111). The Beatles modeled their band after Buddy Holly and the crickets; they also really looked up to Chuck Berry, Little Richard, and Carl Perkins (15). Beginning from the oldest member to the youngest, they were Richard Starkey Jr. or “Ringo”, John Lennon, James Paul McCartney, and George Harrison; all four members of the Beatles grew up in Liverpool during an era of war and strife, which shaped their early lives and ultimately influenced their songs.

Richard Starkey Jr. was born on July 7th, 1940 to a poor working-class family. He described it, “We’ve always been just ordinary, poor working class on both sides of the family”(Davies 141). His parents ended up separating by the time he was three years old, however, there was no major drama between them. His childhood was also plagued with frequent hospital visits due to appendicitis. When he was six years old, he had two operations that caused him to be in and out of the hospital for over a year (143). As a child, he showed no musical interest whatsoever; his grandfather gave him a deposit for a set of drums and that changed everything (149).

John Lennon was the second oldest member of the Beatles; he was born on October 9th, 1940 during a heavy air raid. (Davies 6). John’s Aunt Mimi was never a fan of his father. He was a steward on a ship and therefore was not present often. She later explained, “He was handsome, I’ll admit. Some people said he had the perfect profile. But we knew he would be no use to anyone.”(6). As soon as Julia, John’s mother found out she was pregnant, Fred went out to sea and never returned”(6). In result of his father deserting his family, John’s Aunt Mimi eventually took him in and raised him. John later recalled, “She was very good to me, she must have been very worried about the conditions I was brought in.” His Aunt Mimi didn’t give much room for slack when it came to discipline; she was strict, but caring (9).

James Paul McCartney was in stark contrast to John and Ringo. He was born in a private ward of Liverpool Hospital being the only Beatle born in “such luxury”(Davies 22). Paul came from a normal working class family, they were not rich, but his mother was a former nun, so she received special treatment from the hospital. Working was a virtue in Paul’s family; his dad left school and found a job in the cotton field (22). Paul also has a brother named Michael, and they were polar opposites. Michael “always stuck his neck out” and Paul avoided trouble (24). Paul was an intelligent student, he could have gone to college, but because his father wanted him to, he was not interested. It was a typical mindset of a teenager in the 60s-rebellious. In school, Paul was a mischievous child; he drew naked women often. He later recalled his younger days by saying, “All I wanted was women, money, and clothes, I used to do a bit of stealing, things like ciggies. We’d go to empty shops, when the man was in the house part at the back and take some before he came in” (25). He practically had zero interest in music besides a few piano lessons, but then he bought a guitar when he was 14 (30). Compared to John and Ringo he had an easier life when it came to familial issues, but he still chose to be somewhat of a delinquent.

George Harrison, born on Feb 25, 1943, was the youngest Beatle. His family was the largest of all of the Beatles, with an average childhood. There were no real traumatic events, unlike John or Richard. Growing up he was always independent (Davies 37). His biggest beliefs growing up revolved around individualism and anti-authority (40). George detailed, “(...) They’re all trying to transfigure you from the pure way of thought as a child, forcing their illusions on you. All those things annoyed me. I was just trying to be myself (...)” (39). His view of life intertwined with the generational sense of identity that was being formed in the United States

In order to analyze the Beatles’ unique sound, it is pertinent to discuss the structure and style of “I Want To Hold Your Hand,” the song that earned them a cult following in the United States. The song follows the basic pattern of “AABA,” however it is unique in a variety of different ways. For instance, the introduction begins midway through the measure, with emphasis on the eighth note (Rybaczewski 10). Although this could be considered confusing for the listener, crowds often roared at the sound of this ambiguous riff. In the first section, Paul and John sing in unison until the word “hand,” is sung, for which they then harmonize in a pitch that is much higher than before (Rybaczewski 12). This sharp contrast in pitch could be considered particularly alarming for the listener, however, fans grew to appreciate the bands’ unusual yet compelling sound (12). The third section, or the bridge, contains the same compelling and spirit lifting riff that the introduction has, however, it secondhand to John and Paul’s duet. Such as it did in the prior sections, their duet transforms into a higher pitched harmony with the repeated phrase, “I can’t hide.” For years many people mistook this phrase for “I get high” (Rybaczewski 13). Consequently, honoring critics’ claims that the Beatles did not articulate well in their music. Finally, the fourth and final section of the song, as expected, mimics the first two sections; for the last few bars, the title of the song is repeated four times until a cadence is reached (13).

In the *New York Times* article “Musicology,” Frank Strongin rips into the Beatles by saying only teenagers liked them, their music was simple and difficult to understand. He went on to say, “The Beatles' vocal quality can be described as hoarsely incoherent with the minimal enunciation necessary to communicate the schematic texts” In the course of 50 years this writer has underestimated their legacy. Young people still listen to the Beatles and the older generations are still enjoying them too.

Listeners in the 55+ crowd -- people who can remember when the Beatles were around -- stream "Rock and Roll Music" the most. Odd that those who were around during Beatlemania would favor a song the group didn't even write (Lynch 7).

Comparing the Beatles to a modern band like the Arctic Monkeys, there are some striking similarities as well as stark differences. First, they are both UK based bands that were formed while their members were young adults. Some of their albums and songs went deeper than just a catchy tune. The Arctic Monkeys album “Tranquility” talks about loneliness, which is similar to the Beatles’ song “Eleanor Rigby”(Brown 8). The Arctic Monkeys, however, have more of a punk side than the Beatles had. The Beatles were a change from the normal rough band unlike the Arctic Monkeys.

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