

## **Garage Bands, Bubblegum, and Power Pop**

When the British groups came to America in the 1960's, for the most part, they were simply recreating the music of Chuck Berry, Little Richard, and others who started the rock and roll style. Because they were self-contained groups, their sound was much different from the studio-blended, wall of sound productions that American audiences had become accustomed to hearing. The British groups blew the American pop sound off the charts and paved the way for other styles to develop in America, including garage bands, blues groups, and folk-rock groups playing non-pop rock to become national successes.

### **Garage Bands**

Garage bands were so named because most of the bands were made up of untrained musicians who practiced in their garages, producing a raw, unrefined sound. Since most of the groups were made of young people with underdeveloped musical skills, they often covered music by other groups. But, on occasion, they would come up with something original. The idea that anybody who could afford an instrument could be in a band was so appealing that by 1965 garage bands were entertaining (or disturbing) communities across the nation. The most successful songs were those that could be copied by groups performing at junior high and high school dances. The lyrics tended to be very simple and were about fast cars, girls, and partying. Some songs dealt with meaningful topics but songs with any hint of sophistication in the music or message were immediately removed from the garage band category. Note this song containing an anti-drug message.

#### ***Listen to Paul Revere and the Raiders---Kicks*** (v.1:1)

Eventually, messages of rebellion became part of the sound that led to the punk of the 70's.

One of the most simple and influential of the early garage band songs was *Louie, Louie*. It was written and recorded in 1956 by Richard Berry, but it was the recording by the Kingsmen in 1963 that made the piece famous. It was successful because it had all the elements necessary. It was simple and repetitive. The singer for the Kingsmen sang the song in a way that gave it an air of promiscuity. In fact, there was a belief that the song was too risqué, causing it to be banned in some communities.

#### ***Listen to Jan and Dean---Louie, Louie*** (v.1:2)

#### ***Listen to the Kingsmen---Louie, Louie*** (v. 1:3)

The Kingsmen had a few other hit recordings, but broke up in 1967.

Because so many of the garage bands were untrained in music and inexperienced as writers, it was common for them to have one lucky hit and then fade into obscurity. One band that was able to last for a while was Paul Revere and the Raiders. They were fighting British bands for the attention of the fans and wore pseudo-Revolutionary war

costumes. The keyboard player for the group was Paul Revere. They had many top 40 hits, even into the 70's.

***Listen to Paul Revere and the Raiders---Indian Reservation*** (Columbia's all-time best selling single) (v.1:4)

***Listen to Paul Revere and the Raiders---Hungry*** (v.1:5)

Some garage bands lasted into the 70's, but the style was dying out by the late 60's as styles such as Bubblegum became popular with young fans.

### **Bubblegum**

The Beatles had become idols to many young American teens. As those teens matured, so did the music of the Beatles, dealing with more mature themes in a more musically sophisticated way. As the Beatles and their audiences matured, a void was felt in the younger audiences. To fill this void, record producers formed The Monkees. The Monkees were a group of musicians/actors who answered an ad about the formation of the group. Michael Nesmith and Peter Tork were musicians before joining the Monkees, but Davey Jones and Mickey Dolenz were actors who learned to sing and play an instrument while with the group. The group starred in a TV series given the same name as the group. At first the group's producers wouldn't allow any of the Monkees to play on their recordings, but, with the popularity of the TV series, the need for live performances became clear. So, they eventually worked together as musicians in addition to performing on the TV show.

In the late 80's, MTV reran the TV show and the group regained some popularity. Jones, Dolenz, and Tork capitalized on the new popularity and did some more recording and performing, but Nesmith did not rejoin the group. He did agree to perform with the trio at least once in 1987. The original quartet regrouped in 1996.

***Listen to The Monkees---Last Train to Clarksville*** (v.1:10)

The success of The Monkees made it clear that there was a significant audience of pre-teens that had money to spend on records and that they should not be ignored. The style called *bubblegum* resulted. Early examples of bubblegum were recorded under the names of Ohio Express, the 1910 Fruitgum Company, and others. None of these groups existed outside the recording studio. This didn't matter. Their audience wasn't old enough to drive to concerts and they couldn't stay out that late, even if they could go.

Of the many bubblegum recordings that made the charts in the late 60's and early 70's, one piece that represents the style was *Sugar, Sugar* by the Archies.

***Listen to the Archies---Sugar, Sugar*** (1969) (v.1:13)

Like the other bubblegum groups, the Archies were a studio group. It was made up in the Brill building by Jeff Barry and was named after the comic strip, Archie. The cartoon by the same name was backed up by a soundtrack by the group.

Because it was marketed to a limited audience and because of its lack of sophistication, bubblegum had a short life, giving way to other musical styles.

### **Power Pop**

Beyond the formation of The Monkees, the influence of the Beatles was widespread. There were many groups that tried to sound like the Beatles, using the 12 string guitar and group vocals. The Beatles had a clear influence on groups like the Byrds and they were imitated by other San Francisco based groups, like Beau-Brummels. One style that emerged from the many different bands that imitated the Beatles was power pop. The style was called pop because it used well-crafted, memorable melodies with clever lyrics, like early songs of the Beatles. Power pop also used catchy sounding group harmonies like that of the Beach Boys. The power part of the name was added because the groups were often backed by the distorted sounds and guitar riffs used by British groups like the Kinks and the Who.

The Memphis-based group, Big Star, made records that greatly influenced the power pop style, but they never had the commercial success of other power pop groups. One example of power pop by Big Star, *September Gurls* (1974), was backed by an electric 12-string guitar and included lyrics about love, insecurity, and sensitivity. The piece was covered by the Bangles in 1985 and the piece drew greater attention at that time than it did when produced by Big Star.

***Listen to Big Star---September Gurls*** (v.1:14)

The Raspberries were a 70's power pop group that was very successful. They aimed at a younger audience with a first album that had a scratch and sniff sticker on the cover. Their biggest hit was *Go All the Way*. The group broke up in 1974.

***Listen to the Raspberries---Go All the Way*** (v.1:15)

Power pop continued beyond Big Star and the Raspberries, but few achieved commercial success. The Knack, with their big hit, *My Sharona* (1979), had a power pop influenced new wave sound and style.

***Listen to The Knack---My Sharona*** (v.1:17)