

The British Invasion

By 1964, most American rock fans had all but forgotten the strong backbeat of rockabilly and blues based styles of the 1950's. Teen-idol pop and songs about puppy love were the predominant styles heard in the early 60's. Even Elvis had turned to a more smooth, less rebellious style. The assassination of President Kennedy, in 1963, left Americans with a desire for something that wasn't present in the current styles. The sound that filled the void came from Britain.

Britain had many different styles, like America. London was the musical hub and **Mods** and **Rockers** were the culture that groups catered to. This young audience preferred rockabilly and the older rock styles that had sprung from rockabilly. But, Blues and R&B were also appreciated. Rock groups from Manchester and Liverpool weren't as closely connected to the London subculture and their preferences. They tended toward a style of music that was more simple and folk-based, called **skiffle**, and later rock styles like that of Buddy Holly. The sound of groups from Manchester and Liverpool was referred to as *Mersey beat*, after the name of the river that runs through Liverpool and near Manchester.

Skiffle

Skiffle was a very simple style of British folk music that developed out of a combination of American folk music and New Orleans Jazz. Skiffle used simple chords and only required a guitar and sometimes a homemade bass and strumming on a washboard. Its simplicity and rhythmic fun made it popular among British young people.

Play Lonnie Donnegan---Does Your Chewing Gum Lose Its Flavor

This piece was released in Britain in 1958 and in the US in 1961. It made the top 10 on US charts. Donnegan became known as Britain's Skiffle King.

The Beatles

In Liverpool in March 1957, John Lennon acquired his first guitar and formed a skiffle group called the Quarry Men---named for his high school, Quarry Bank High School. That July, he met Paul McCartney at a church picnic and soon invited him to perform with them. The Quarry Men changed their name to Johnny and the Moondogs and invited George Harrison to join them. All three played the guitar and sang. This was sufficient for skiffle, but they needed a bass and drums in order to perform the rock styles that most interested them. Stu Sutcliffe joined them as a bass player and Tommy Moore became their drummer. They changed their name again to the *Silver Beatles* and finally to the *Beatles* by 1960. Also by 1960, they had a new drummer, Pete Best. They had become good enough to perform in clubs in Hamburg, Germany. Their repertoire consisted mainly of covers of American artists.

After returning to Liverpool, they played at the Cavern Club. Brian Epstein went to the club to hear the Beatles and was sufficiently impressed that he offered to manage them. He was wealthy and was interested in a new, more creative job. The Beatles agreed and signed on with Epstein. One of the first demands he made was that the Beatles clean up their act and appear less rebellious by cutting their hair and wearing matching suits rather than leather jackets.

Epstein arranged a recording contract with EMI, with George Martin working as producer. Martin had no experience with rock, but he had produced light classical records and some comedy. As a result, he included string quartets and other classical instrumentation in some recordings. His work in comedy led him to use *musique concrete* sound effects into some recordings---*Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band* being one.

Martin told the Beatles before their first recording session that Best would not be good enough for their recordings. Pete Best was replaced by Richard Starkey, a.k.a. Ringo Starr.

The Beatles' popularity in Britain was growing, but EMI's American label, Capitol, had little interest in them, saying that their music didn't appeal to American tastes. In 1964, Capitol reluctantly released *Meet the Beatles*. The single, *I Want to Hold Your Hand*, was an immediate hit in the USA. By the time the Beatles arrived on tour, in February of 1964, fans followed them everywhere. They performed on *The Ed Sullivan Show*, taking them into homes across the country. Beatlemania had begun, opening the way for other British groups to take America by storm. This was the beginning of The British Invasion.

Listen to the Beatles---I Want to hold Your Hand

Unlike many groups, the Beatles grew as they recorded successive albums. They began by playing covers of Chuck Berry, Little Richard, and others. Lennon and McCartney did most of the writing for the Beatles with their most popular early hits being *She Loves You* and *I Want to Hold Your Hand*. Over time, they wrote more poetic lyrics and used acoustic guitar more frequently. They had been influenced by Bob Dylan and his folk style. They also experimented in the studio, using feedback in some 1964 recordings.

George Harrison had an interest in Indian culture and learned to play the *sitar*, adding new color to their recordings. The songs at this point also began to take on new meanings. Lennon's *Norwegian Wood* (This Bird Has Flown) was a story about an affair he had. In *Run for Your Life* Lennon spoke of the commitment he expected from a lover. They were still singing about love, but it was much broader in scope. The changes in music can easily be heard in *Norwegian Wood*, recorded just one year after *I Want to Hold Your Hand*.

Listen to the Beatles---Norwegian Wood

In 1966, albums produced by the Beatles contained songs searching for the meaning of life---*Nowhere Man* and *Eleanor Rigby*. *Taxman* criticized the government's control over a person's pocketbook. They had become tired of touring and their music was sufficiently complicated that they quit touring. In August of 1966, the Beatles performed their last concert together in San Francisco and began to concentrate more on their recordings.

Possibly one of the great masterpieces in rock music was recorded in 1967, *Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band*. This took *Pet Sounds*, recorded a year earlier by the Beach Boys, further. Rather than grouping songs with lyrical relationships, the Beatles made EVERY song on this album part of a whole, a concert in a circus-like atmosphere complete with audience noises and whirling circus organ sounds. The lyrics to *Being for the Benefit of Mr. Kite!* came directly from a poster advertising a circus. For this piece, Martin cut up a tape recording of a steam calliope and spliced them together for a background that might be heard at a circus. In addition, some animal noises were put at the end of *Good Morning, Good Morning* to recall the sound of a barking dog at the end of *Pet Sounds*.

Listen to the Beatles---Being for the Benefit of Mr. Kite!

Listen to the Beatles---A Day in the Life

A Day in the Life demonstrates some of the growth of the Beatles.

The Beatles attempted to expand their awareness of the world and human relationships through transcendental meditation and experiments with drugs. As they did this, they began to grow apart. Their manager, Brian Epstein, who was instrumental in keeping the Beatles unified, died of an overdose in 1967. They continued to record, but the unity began to splinter. As a result, recordings after *Sgt. Pepper* began to suffer as each member began to explore different things. The Beatles' album in 1968, *The Beatles* (a.k.a. *The White Album*), demonstrated the individuality of the group. Lennon had Yoko Ono add vocal sound effects, Harrison had Eric Clapton play lead guitar on one piece. McCartney parodied the Beach Boys in *Back in the USSR*.

Listen to the Beatles---Back in the USSR

McCartney also borrowed from Bob Dylan's acoustic folk style. Lennon experimented with tape loops in *Revolution 9*.

Listen to the Beatles---Revolution 9

Revolution 9 also demonstrates further use of *music concrete*. In 1968, Lennon divorced his wife, and mother of their son, Julian, and began his relationship with Yoko Ono. The two released their own album, *Two Virgins* at about the same time that the *White Album* was released.

The last album produced by the Beatles was *Abbey Road* (1969). Side one contained a variety of unrelated songs, but side two contained the theme of the group's impending break-up. Following are some of the songs and problems addressed.

She Came in through the Bathroom Window---crazed female fans

You Never Give Me Your Money---lawsuits members had against each other

Carry That Weight---McCartney's feelings that the weight of keeping the group together was too much for him to handle

Carry That Weight included a reprise of *You Never Give Me Your Money*, reminding everyone of the legal battles and the weight McCartney felt. This illustrated the use of the classical idea of *idée fixe* where a particular theme is repeated to remind the listener of a particular character or mood.

Abbey Road closed with *The End*, in which McCartney, Harrison, and Lennon each took turns playing guitar solos and Ringo played a drum solo. This was followed by silence and a short song about the Queen of England.

***Listen to the Beatles---You Never Give Me Your Money
Golden Slumbers/Carry That Weight/The End/He Majesty***

After making this recording, the Beatles were finished as a group. Each of the Beatles pursued his own career after the group's break-up. John Lennon and Yoko Ono married and worked together on various projects. In 1975, Lennon returned to his musical roots and recorded an album of covers of hits by 50's American artists. In December of 1980, Lennon, who stood for peace, was murdered by a "fan" outside his New York apartment.

Paul McCartney married Linda, an American. They made their home in Britain. He made a solo album and then they made *Ram* together. He then formed the group, *Wings*, which was highly successful during the 70's. He also organized benefits to help raise money for the people of Cambodia. In 1981, Wings broke up after McCartney became reluctant to tour after receiving threats after Lennon's murder. The McCartneys continued to record and Paul launched his new band on a world tour in 1993. He also worked on a classical work, *Liverpool Oratorio*. In more recent years, Linda died after a struggle with breast cancer and his second wife gave birth to a child in the past few weeks.

George Harrison has been active in film and played together with Ringo Starr on some recording projects. The three living Beatles finally dropped their feuds and regrouped to record two new Beatles songs, *Free as a Bird* and *Real Love*. These were released with rare tracks and various outtakes volumes titled *Beatles Anthology 1* (1995), *2* (1996), and *3* (1996). The new songs were recorded by all four Beatles by using tapes made by John Lennon as the basis of the work.

Other Mersey Groups

Like the Beatles, most of the Mersey groups relied heavily on lead guitar, rhythm guitar, and bass, along with drums, for their instrumentation. They followed the standard set by Buddy Holly and other rockabilly groups. Most used amplified bass guitar rather than the upright bass. Some groups, such as Gerry and the Pacemakers, included orchestral string sections.

While there were several Mersey groups, none could match the Beatles in terms of popularity. But, a few did become popular in America. Two that were popular for a few years were *The Hollies* and *Herman's Hermits*.

The Hollies were formed by Allan Clarke and Graham Nash (of CSNY). Their music didn't hit America until 1966 when their hit, *Bus Stop*, was released here. They were popular enough to remain active through much of the 70's. Nash left the group in 1968 when the group refused to record his *Marrakesh Express*. He joined with Crosby and Stills and that song was an early hit for that group. The Hollies recorded *Buddy Holly* in 1980 to commemorate what would have been Buddy Holly's 40th birthday.

Listen to The Hollies---Bus Stop

The most commercially successful group from Manchester was Herman's Hermits. They had a number of hit singles in America between 1965 and 1967. Their music appealed to an audience younger than that of the Beatles. They relied heavily on guitars and drums. Their "boy next door" image was not unlike that of Buddy Holly, except that Holly's music had a more serious tone to it.

Listen to Herman's Hermits---Henry the Eighth

Rock in London

The youth subculture in London known as the Mods (Modernists) had short hair, wore trendy suits, rode motor scooters, and used amphetamines. Groups from London during the mid-60's with Mod followings included the *Who* and the *Kinks*.

The Kinks

The group from London that cared the least about invading America was the Kinks. When they toured the USA, they expressed their dislike for the customs and lifestyles they saw. They returned to Britain and wrote about their experiences. They later recorded an entire album full of their complaints about America, *Everybody's in Showbiz* (1972). Like most other bands of the British Invasion, the Kinks began by recording covers from 50's rock hits.

Listen to Little Richard---Long Tall Sally(1956)

Listen to the Kinks---Long Tall Sally (1964)

Ray Davies realized that, to establish and maintain their career, they needed to write and record their own material and develop a distinctive sound. This began by slitting the their amplifier speaker to get the distortion known as *fuzztone*. The popularity of this sound resulted in fuzz boxes being sold so that musicians didn't have to slit their speakers, but could have fuzztone when they wished to have it. The hit that made this technique popular was *You Really Got Me* (1964).

Listen to the Kinks---You Really Got Me

When most rock singers were singing of love, Davies and the Kinks were singing about *Tired of Waiting for You*, wanting a girlfriend to *Set Me Free*, and asking women *Who'll be the Next in Line*.

By late 1965, the Kinks began to comment cynically on other peoples' lifestyles and values. They were even cynical of some of their fans. Most songs had deeper meanings than the obvious ones. By the late 60's theme albums were a significant part of their output. In 1970, the group's album *Lola Versus Powerman and the Moneygoround, Part One*, addressed problems stars face in their careers.

The Kinks have continued to tour and record, with an album released in Britain as late as 1995.

The Who

The Who came to rock from jazz backgrounds. Pete Townshend (banjo) and John Entwistle (trumpet) formed a *trad jazz* band (New Orleans or Chicago styled Dixieland) called the Scorpions in 1959. Townshend parents were musicians and had taught him the basics of music and notation. Townshend taught himself a number of instruments, including the guitar. Entwistle set aside the guitar and began playing the bass when Townshend began playing the guitar. Entwistle and Townshend hooked up with Roger Daltrey and the Detours. They covered American groups and performed in several different styles, including jazz, Motown, and other American styles. By 1963, they changed their name to the Who. It was also at this time that Keith Moon joined the group as the drummer. Moon had been playing for a British surf group and was allowed to sit in with the Who. He played with such energy that he broke the bass drum pedal. The Who were impressed by this energy and added him to the group.

The Who hired Pete Meaden as their manager. Meaden had them cut their hair and dress in trendy suits to appeal to the Mods. They changed their name to High Numbers. Their early releases were not well received. Their stage performances were improving with Townshend, Daltrey, and Moon each competing for the audience's attention. Out of fear that the name, High Numbers, would soon become dated, the group returned to their name, the Who. The release in 1965 that was very popular was *My Generation*.

Listen to the Who---My Generation

The Who were not known to many in the US until their performance at the Monterey Pop Festival in 1967. By this time, their attention grabbing stunts included the destruction of amplifiers, guitars, microphones, and drums. While all the destruction was going on, Enwistle would continue playing as long as possible. He developed a technique of playing the bass that allowed the bass line to also double as lead.

In 1969 the Who produced a rock opera about a boy who turned deaf, dumb, and blind after being traumatized by his violent home life. His talent for playing pinball eventually brought about a miraculous healing and return to the world of sight and sound. *Tommy* was an artistic and commercial breakthrough. The opera became known worldwide through the 1975 film. A Broadway version was produced in 1993. *Tommy* was seldom performed in its entirety even though it was hailed as a powerful stage piece.

Listen to the Who---Pinball Wizard

The members of the Who seldom got along well socially and worked best only when they had plenty of time away from each other between tours and recording projects. Keith Moon had the greatest difficulty dealing with life and died of an overdose in 1978.

While the group overcame the loss of Moon, their enthusiasm for touring was lost when 11 concertgoers were trampled to death at a concert in Cincinnati in 1979. The promoters sold single ticket prices for stadium seating and the concertgoers were trampled during the mad rush for the best view of the stage. In 1982 the group recorded its final album, *It's Hard* and went on its last tour. Individual members continued to work on projects and the group came together in 1990 for a reunion tour of America which included performances of *Tommy* in New York and Los Angeles.