

The Fab Four

Widely known as the Fab Four, the Beatles rocked the world for years and produced a countless amount of hits. “What would you do if I sang out a tune? Would you stand up and walk out on me?” In response to this lyric from their song “I Get High with a Little Help from My Friends,” to stand up and walk out on the Beatles was the last thing that audiences did. The group swept the world by storm and marked what is called the “British Invasion.” Their musical talent remains unmatched and girls would faint at the mere sight of the handsome boys. Despite the young lads’ undeniable talent, no one expected the band’s fame to last. The craze known as “Beatlemania” was predicted to be a short fad. Not even the Beatles themselves ever imagined the swarms of thousands of fans or instant popularity that hit them. Their privacy was invaded and their lives changed completely. They were no longer ordinary Liverpulian men but became the great Beatles.

When asked to write my first college research paper and scavenging for a topic, I began reading The Curious Researcher. Thanks to this book I chose my topic almost immediately. Right away, Ballenger states “I have been playing the guitar ever since the Beatles’ 1964 American tour. In those days, *everyone* had a guitar and played in a group (4).” The fact that the Curious Researcher’s author even referred to the Beatles made me think about how this group is enjoyed by a wide age range. It’s truly incredible how the Beatles can appeal to such a variety of people. I can listen to them with my entire family, including my elderly grandparents who don’t exactly share the same taste of music as me. That appeal to such a broad range of audiences will never cease to amaze me nor the originality of their countless number of amazing songs. These reasons aroused my curiosity and provoked me to want to discover what made this band so good. That the author mentioned how the Beatles influenced *everyone* to want to play the guitar

led me to contemplate that these boys must have been a major influence. I later discovered to say the Beatles were just a major influence puts it lightly.

In any good history told about the Sixties it can almost be assured that the Beatles will be mentioned. They were considered the soundtrack of the Sixties.

Looking closely at their songs gives us an insight into the Sixties and the lives of the Beatles, who have been examined frequently as celebrities, performers and businessmen but rarely as composers. Most of the early interviewers completely ignored the Beatles as songwriters. Even after turning out the splendidly-crafted *A Hard Day's Night*, the first album to consist of nothing but Lennon and McCartney songs, no one seemed interested in how they did it or where their ideas came from or how much of themselves they were revealing in the lyrics. Instead, to their increasing frustration, they had to put up with questions on the level of "Do you prefer filming or making records?" or "When is Paul getting married?" No wonder they turned their backs on touring midway through their recording career and restricted the access of journalists. It was only with the arrival of the more serious albums (*Revolver*, *Sgt. Pepper*) and the interest of the more serious press (*The Sunday Times*, *Rolling Stone*) that the Beatles began to be interviewed as artists capable of discussing the creative process. (Turner 10)

I couldn't believe how irrelevant the questions that the press asked really were until I watched the Fab Four DVD. It gave me a visual image of how their lives were back in the day. It was extremely frustrating that the press that was fortunate enough to have the rare opportunity to meet with

the Beatles would waste it by asking questions like “How long does it take to grow a magnificent mane like this?” or “How many times do you wash your hair in a week?” Instead of taking advantage of interviewing these songwriting magicians and finding out how they derived the ideas for their songs, they wasted their time asking complete stupidities. The pointless questions that they asked particularly irked me because one day I plan on becoming a journalist and if get the chance to meet with artists I will make sure my interviews avoid asking ignorant questions like some of the ones the press in the Sixties asked the Fab Four. I can’t blame the Beatles for getting irritated and finally shutting out the press. In their position I probably would have gotten fed up and done the same thing. I’m also not surprised that they put a halt to touring. Another obvious observation in the Fab Four DVD is that the audience, especially the obsessed females, were so caught up with screaming hysterically that they didn’t even listen and prevented everyone from hearing the group perform. What’s the point of performing your songs if no one can even hear them? Certainly the Beatles didn’t see a point which explains why they stopped touring.

You see what really made the Beatles so great was not their looks, fame or hairdos, but rather how they conjured their magic. The Beatles wrote their own songs and now I intend to find out how. Their music might have been magical but it didn’t appear in thin air like magic. My concentration will focus on how their magic was made. In other words, how the stages in the Beatles’ individual personal lives reflected on the music and songs they were making at that time. My intent is to discover who the men were behind the masks. To uncover who the Beatles really were and how this was apparent in the music they made from start to finish. To come up with this as my main topic was simple. All I had to do was ask myself, “If I was ever so lucky to have an opportunity to interview the Fab Four what would my questions primarily be based on?” My first priority would be to find out how this great band’s lives influenced and affected their music.

Sadly I will never have the chance to interview the Beatles so I plan on answering my main question through this paper. My aim consists of exploring their creative processes and how exactly they conjured their most magical tunes. We know that the Beatles' affected millions with their music so now it's time to narrow down what exactly influenced *their* music. Before I discuss their music it's necessary to acquire a background on how this legendary band began with a brief history.

The Beatles transitioned through a series of members and band names before finally finding their perfect chemistry. It wasn't until John asked Paul McCartney to join the group that the band had any chance of heading to stardom. The day John Lennon met Paul McCartney was the turning point for the group. It was also the beginning of a rivalry that would last for years. John immediately recognized Paul was excellent at the guitar. Despite his undeniable talent, Lennon was quite hesitant to invite Paul in the group. The reason for John's hesitation was because he was jealous of Paul and considered him a threat. Ironically both boys were intimidated by each other and desired what the other lacked. Ali and Cepican mention that the reason for John's hesitation was because "Lennon was torn between wanting to improve the group and his reluctance to share the limelight with someone not only good-looking but more musically adept than himself" (30). Later, McCartney admits to being intimidated by the elder Lennon and always admiring his carefree, rebellious nature. It wasn't until August of 1957 that John Lennon dropped his pride and finally invited Paul McCartney to join the Quarrymen as lead guitarist.

A little known fact is that the magical spark that made the Fab Four so fabulous was actually caused by the friction between John Lennon and Paul McCartney. Their songwriting chemistry was fueled by the pair's constant desire to beat the other. As soon as these two unbelievable talents united the band was bound to achieve success. Their coming together

marked two important things: a constant competition between the pair to always try to outdo the other's work and the beginning of the group beginning to write their own songs. The contrast between John and Paul is what resulted in their music becoming magnificent.

“When Paul wanted ‘beauty queen’ to rhyme with ‘just seventeen’ in ‘I saw her standing there’, John told him it was “crap” and thus saved a beat music classic. When writing ‘Getting Better’, John offered the line “couldn’t get much worse” and, for the similarly optimistic ‘We Can Work It Out’, it was he who added the contrasting middle eight that started ‘Life is very hard[...]’” (Turner 11)

It was John's pessimism in conjunction with Paul's more optimistic style that became the key to the Beatle's music becoming so good. When Paul looked on the bright side, John usually suspected the worst. Paul's songs were driven by his enthusiasm. On the other hand, to Lennon, each work was a piece of art inspired by his artistic talent. The boy's different backgrounds attributed to their different writing styles and attitudes.

Although he always denied allegations of being the so-called “leader of the Beatles”, everyone knew that John Lennon was the glue that held the band together. To John Lennon, the rules did not apply. At least if they did, he didn't listen to them anyways. He made his own rules and he also made his own band which turned out to be the one of the best things that ever happened. John was often criticized for being overly pessimistic and labeled as the weird or eccentric Beatle. By far he was definitely the most controversial. Yet it was this same pessimism along with his satiric humor that produced Lennon's ingenious song-writing skills. The reason for John's negativity can be traced back to his troubled past.

John Winston Lennon was born on the morning of October 9, 1940 in Liverpool, England. Only three months after his birth, his father, Fred Lennon, abandoned him and his mother. John

remembers as a baby his mom singing him to sleep with the tune “Please Please Me”. After the Beatle’s adapted John’s familiar nursery song it became a huge hit. A few months after Fred deserted the pair, Julia fell in love with a man named John Dykins. The predicament with Dykins is that he refused to take care of another’s man’s child. This forced Julia to choose between her son or the man she loved. Unfortunately for little John Lennon, Julia chose her love for John Dykins. Julia’s older sister, Mimi, and her husband, George, took the little boy under their wings by becoming his chief caretakers. Turner mentions that “Although John is often seen as the working-class Liverpulian, a perception encouraged by his song “Working Class Hero”, he really came from a middle-class background where the deprivations were emotional rather than material (11).” John was loved by his aunt but always felt deprived of his mother who would only occasionally visit him at his aunt’s house.

When John was only five, his father briefly entered his life and left just as abruptly as he came. His father’s appearance led to the only time that he would ever see his parents together. The reunion consisted of one gigantic argument. Finally, Fred Lennon asked John with whom he wanted to live. Initially, John chose his father but seeing his mother flee in tears, he then ran after her. John suppressed the memory of these events only to express the anguish he felt about his parent’s confrontation twenty-five years later in the song “Mother” that expressed his love for her. It resulted to be a wise decision that John chose to stick in Liverpool with his mother. Had John Lennon left with his father, the Beatles would never have come to exist.

Even after choosing his mother, John was sent back to live with his uncle and aunt. His aunt Mimi always kept the reality of why his mother couldn’t live with him a secret to avoid causing John pain. Mimi represented to John the strict guardian figure. Throughout his rebellious youth, Mimi’s rules just served as more of a reason for John to rebel. From around the age five, John Lennon began to express his artistic ability towards art and music. The first

instrument he learned to play was the harmonica. When high school rolled around his interest in music grew stronger and so did his rebelliousness.

During his teenage high school years, John finally started gaining a close relationship with his mother. Julia was supportive of John's rebellious stage, his band and best of all, his love for music. She knew how to play the guitar and she greatly impacted his music by helping him perfect his guitar skills. At the peak of their bond, Julia was hit by a police car and killed on impact. This greatly devastated John who fancied a cruel sense of humor as a source to let out his anguish. That night when the Quarrymen sung at local club, John's sarcastic humor worked overtime because he was overcompensating for all the pain he felt. Cepican and Ali explain that "John often said that whenever he was depressed, the memories of the emotional traumas he experienced as a child and teenager came back to haunt him (15)." Years later, John wrote a song called "Julia" that reflected on his mother and how much she had genuinely meant to him.

Paul was much more optimistic than John and this grew evident in his melodious harmonies. Unlike Lennon whose personality developed from the hardships he suffered as a young child, Paul was raised in a loving family and he didn't experience his first trauma until he was 14 and his mother died of breast cancer. Despite his mother's death, Paul's dad instilled in young McCartney the value of hard work and ambitions and encouraged a love for music.

"His own taste in music were passed on to his son and songs like "When I'm 64," "Your Mother Should Know," and "Honey Pie" were Paul's affectionate tributes to the pre-war music he knew his dad loved. It was Jim, his dad, who advised Paul to play the piano because he said it was people who played the piano that always got invited to the best parties (Cepican and Ali 11)

Both John and Paul's childhood experiences prevailed in their personalities as they grew into men. John and Paul shared the similarity that both boys' mothers had passed away but they were chiefly united by their love for music. In particular, the boys were intrigued by rock 'n' roll. Some major influences were Elvis, Buddy Holly and Little Richard. The influence of their rock inspirations became apparent in the first songs that Paul and John wrote together. Some of their written first hit songs included "Please, Please Me", "Love Me Do" and "Do You Want to Know a Secret?". During the early 1960s the Beatles switched their musical influences from American rock 'n' roll bands to becoming inspired by London-based bands. After going through a line of band members the band was finally established by 1962. The official Beatles became the two original, guitarist John Lennon and bassist Paul McCartney, additional guitarist George Harrison and the last to join the group was drummer Ringo Star.

George and Ringo are considered the more nonentity Beatles who didn't have as strong of impact on the group. Despite that they didn't write as many songs, George and Ringo pulled the group together and without them the band would not have been complete. Eventually both tried their luck at songwriting and came up with some hit songs. For instance, George wrote the hits "Here Comes the Sun", "Old Brown Shoe" and "While My Guitar Gently Weeps". If George and Ringo hadn't been Beatles the group wouldn't have achieved such success. It has been said that because they were considered the more quiet Beatles they brought a sense of balance to the group.

Once the group had recognized its permanent Beatles it was much easier to find their road to stardom. Despite many speculations that the group was bound to failure, making Brian Epstein their manager was the best decision they ever made. He made such a great manager to the boys because he and John believed with all their heart that the Beatles were bound to succeed. It's important to know that "From the moment that Brian became their manager, he instilled in the

boys a sense of pride that fed their already inflated egos. He regarded the boys as more than a local sensation and insisted that promoters treat them with the respect accorded to major pop stars. This boost of confidence is what chiefly surfaced the boy's to stardom (Cepican and Ali 99)." After becoming increasingly popular in England and playing for the Queen, the boy's manager saw fit to tackle America.

After many failures and disappointments, the Beatles finally made it to the big time and headed to the United States! The biggest year for the Beatles came in 1964 when they set out and conquered America. When they performed at the *Ed Sullivan Show* it launched what became known as the "British Invasion." The Beatles arrived at an opportune time when a grieving nation had just suffered the assassination of their President Kennedy and rock 'n' roll suffered a slump because it had lost its originality. The Fab Four swept the nation by surprise and their popularity grew instantaneously and eventually got out of hand. The Beatles experienced the transition to stardom almost overnight. It took a period of disbelief and some time for the Beatles to grow accustomed to their newfound fame. They had not even imagined such success in their wildest dreams.

At first, when the boys were most influenced by American rock 'n' roll music, they did many covers of their favorite songs. They were fans of the Motown sound and covered songs by artists such as Gerry Goffin and Carole King. Later Lennon complained that he was not a fan of doing covers and much preferred to write his own original songs.

"From fairly on, each song bore the distinctive signature of either John or Paul because although they were united in their love of American rock 'n' roll, they were much different in their approach to songwriting. Paul's songs were more melodic and optimistic while not giving a lot away about his passions or anxieties. John's song tended

to be more rhythmic, his outlook was pessimistic and, even before he'd heard of Bob Dylan, he was letting his feelings show (Turner 10)."

Soon the Beatles became known for being more than just a talented band. Paul and John were acclaimed as being the new age greatest musical composers. Even George Harrison was persuaded into song writing and became inspired by Paul and John's songwriting abilities. Cepican and Ali add the point that "Though Paul and George were two distinct personalities, John's influence on them was unmistakable. Their attraction to him developed into a strengthening of personal style and wit, an evolution of defense against his brashness. (82)" My concentration focuses more on McCartney and Lennon because they were the chief songwriters of the Beatles and, by far, invented the most hit songs.

A factor that attributed to their original music is that the relationship between their producer George Martin and the Beatles was unique. An important fact is that "For an up-and-coming group in the early Sixties, the idea of artistic freedom did not exist—the producer's word was law"(Cepican and Ali 118). Yet Martin gave the band artistic freedom and taught them how to express their ideas musically. He allowed the band to write and taught them how to produce their own songs so they could have a chance to prove themselves as songwriters. With Martin's help, proving themselves is a term put modestly towards the countless number of original songs the Beatles composed. "Beatles producer George Martin often said that McCartney usually began with music, Lennon with lyrics (Everett 11)". Martin also said "Paul would help John musically, because he had a greater understanding of the theory of music and harmony, and he would be able to make a thing more well-rounded. John tended to drive the car with a clutch rather; he'd just go from one gear to another (Everett 11)." Together the songwriting duet made their magic.

With their producer at their side, the Beatles' songwriting is roughly divided into three main periods. In the beginning, John admits that the group wrote songs with the sole intention of

selling records and paving their road to stardom. These songs did not give much of an insight about their feelings and were not very personal. Some examples of the songs that the Beatles wrote to get their foot in the door included “Love Me Do”, “I Call Her Name”, “I’ll Follow the Sun” and “The One After 909”. In 1963 to 1964 the Beatles began to write for other artists because they had written so many songs that they had material to spare. Turner informs us that “By the mid-Sixties, almost every song on the Beatles album would crop up as a single by another artist, some of them like ‘Michelle’ by the Overlanders, ‘Ob-La-Di Ob-La-Da’ by Marmalade and ‘Got To Get You Into My Life’ by Marmalade and the Rebel Rousers becoming major UK hits (14).” Now that Beatles had achieved fame and established themselves as serious songwriting artists, the group began to seek a deeper meaning out of life and attributed this to their songs.

The second songwriting stage began in 1964 and was set off with the influence of Bob Dylan who inspired Lennon with his songs and introduced the Beatles to their first drug, marijuana. During this new stage the Beatles began to reveal more of themselves in songs such as “I’m a Loser,” “You’ve Got to Hide Your Love Away,” and “Help!” Paul was affected differently than Lennon throughout this time period. He drew much of his inspiration from his rocky five-year relationship with girlfriend, actress Jane Asher. McCartney also developed his intellectual side by learning more about psychology, theatre, acting and of course, music.

After 1965 the Beatles redefined rock ‘n’ roll by challenging all the typical conventions. This was most apparent in their third and final drug-induced songwriting stage. This time period was influenced by eastern meditation and drugs such as marijuana and LSD. Turner states that “songs such as ‘Tomorrow Never Knows’, ‘She Said She Said’ and ‘Strawberry Fields Forever’ would never have been written without marijuana and LSD. Equally, George Harrison’s ‘Within Without You’ and the ‘Inner Light’ wouldn’t have been possible without the experience of India. (13)” At this time, all the Beatles struck controversy as being criticized for advocating drugs.

Their “drug stage” marked a new musical period in their life. They reached a point where they stopped writing songs with the intent of appealing to audiences and began writing whatever they liked, irrelevant as to how people would respond to it. Subsequently people liked some of their drug-related songs better than any of their other music because it was so original and inventive. It was unlike anything that was ever heard of before.

Before the Beatles came along Liverpool was labeled as lower class and stereotyped to the rest of London as “hicksville”. Initially the fact that the Beatles were from Liverpool is what made it so hard for people to take them seriously and give them a chance. “The “Mersey sound” (so named by journalists in 1963) was a fusion of American rhythm ‘n’ blues and an unsophisticated style of playing that made Liverpool groups easily distinguishable from other British bands.”(Cepican and Ali 85). After the Beatles succeeded they paved the way for many more Liverpoolian and English artists because now Liverpool had a new name—it was the city that gave birth to the legendary Beatles.

In the ten years that the band was together they impacted society worldwide and changed the face of rock ‘n’ roll music.

The most fruitful period was between 1965 and 1969 when the group recorded *Rubber Soul*, *Revolver*, *Sgt. Pepper’s Lonely Hearts Club Band*, the *Yellow Submarine* soundtrack, *Magical Mystery Tour*, *The Beatles* (The White Album), and *Abbey Road*. During this time, the Beatles challenged the conventions of pop songwriting, drawing on everything around them for inspiration instead of relying on lyrics that were derivative. (Turner 6)

Not only did the Beatles revolutionize music but they permanently changed the way people viewed Liverpool and the entire country of England. In their song “Revolution #9” the Beatles ask

the question “Do you want a revolution?” I can honestly say that their answer would be yes because if the Beatles wanted to start a revolution they definitely got one.

By far John Lennon was the most revolutionary and controversial of the Beatles. Often classified as the “weird Beatle” it was really the fact he was so weird that made his music so great. It was because John Lennon knew no limits that he ended up changing the world through his music. From his earliest days Lennon always showed sparks of rebelliousness and a desire to oppose societal norms. His defiance began with his witty sarcastic humor by constantly insulting the audience to constantly throwing jeers at his manager. As Lennon's fame reached new heights so did his creative intellect and desire to rebel. His rebellion only increased to higher levels. He caused mild controversy with his misinterpreted comment of comparing the Beatles to Jesus but this was nothing compared to the controversy he caused by marrying the woman that he loved, Yoko Ono. Yoko Ono was the inspiration for many of Lennon's best songs but she was also the main cause that led to the break up of the Beatles. The boys were already veering down different paths due to differences in opinions but Yoko Ono was the last straw. Once the quarrels began, the band started falling apart. Each Beatle had become an individual, not just a group, and was shifting towards different paths. Yoko Ono was the last straw to many, not just the Beatles. England was absolutely left appalled by John Lennon leaving his English wife to go marry his eccentric Asian lover.

The Beatles gave their last public appearance on January 30, 1969. In 1970 the band split up and went their separate ways. “Let It Be” was one of their last songs together as a band and was about their break up. There were many requests for the band to reunite but unfortunately this did not occur. It was not a surprise to many when John Lennon was shot and killed on December 8, 1980 outside his New York City home cutting the Fab Four down to only three. For as many Lennon fans that supported his sometimes classified as crazy ideas, there were also

many anti-Lennon supporters. While deciding if to write my paper on the Beatles I was prompted to make my final decision by watching the interview of reporter Barbra Walters with Lennon's assassin. Seeing this segment really stood out to me because I recall the assassin mentioning "I did not kill a man. I merely killed a legend. By killing him I was doing society a favor." Maybe John Lennon was a legend and is the magical spark that made their music legendary. After the assassination, Paul came out in the open about him and John's "clash of egos in the 1983 song "Here Today" in which he said that that they were both playing hard to get." (Cepican and Ali 32) Despite their breakup as a band and slight remorse Paul McCartney felt, he was overwhelmed with grief at the news of Lennon's death.

The Beatles won the Grammy Trustees Award in 1972 and the group was inducted into the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame in 1988. Regrettably yet another member, George Harrison, passed away in 2001 from cancer. With half of its members who already passed away, I realize reconciliation between the Beatles is impossible. Undoubtedly if the Beatles had stuck around for more years, I guarantee they would have had much more success and made many more songs. To the disappointment of many this did not turn out to be the case. Nonetheless, the Beatles left such an unforgettable impact with their music that their legacy still remains strong and may appear in many of our daily lives. Just the other day I went to the Florida State homecoming football game and during halftime the band paid a tribute honoring the Beatles by playing many of their songs. This was significant to me because it showed that even though it's been over 35 years since the Beatles broke up their legacy still prevails and remains strong today. I have sadly resigned myself that my turn to interview the Beatles will never happen but I am content to know deep inside and now more than ever that times might have changed but that definitely hasn't altered the quality or significance of the Beatles' music.

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