

I N D U C T E E S





The Beatles

HISTORICALLY SPEAKING, THE BIRTH OF THE BEATLES HAS BEEN traced time and again to Saturday afternoon, July 6th, 1957, at the St. Peter's parish garden fete in Woolton, a Liverpool suburb. Seventeen-year-old John Lennon was performing there with a group of school chums who called themselves the Quarrymen. They were a product of the skiffle craze – a fad inspired by the primitive washboard-band sound of Lonnie Donegan's hit "Rock Island Line" – but they displayed a pronounced rock and roll bent. Watching the Quarrymen was fifteen-year-old guitarist Paul McCartney, who was introduced to the band afterward. What broke the ice between the more mature Lennon and the cocky McCartney was their mutual enthusiasm for an Eddie Cochran song. As Paul told biographer Hunter Davies, "I showed them how to play 'Twenty Flight Rock' and told them all the words. . . . I remember this beery old man [John Lennon] getting nearer and breathing down me neck as I was playing. 'What's this old drunk doing?' I thought. Then he said 'Twenty Flight Rock' was one of his favorites. So I knew he was a connoisseur."

Musically speaking, however, the Beatles' origins should probably be traced back to the day in 1954 when Elvis Presley first stepped into Sun Studios. It was Elvis who inspired Lennon, and youth throughout the U.K., with his pioneering fusion of country and R&B. As Lennon's aunt Mimi Stanley recalled to Philip Norman, the author of *Shout*, after Lennon heard "Heartbreak Hotel" in 1956, "I never got a minute's peace. It was Elvis Presley, Elvis Presley, Elvis Presley. In the end I said, 'Elvis Presley's all very well, John, but I don't want him for breakfast, dinner and tea.'" Indoors, John studied Presley's records. Outdoors, he observed Liverpool's street toughs dressed in the Teddy-boy vogue – pompadoured red hair and tight jeans – sporting an attitude that suggested style could be the currency where money was scarce. And the sound of that style was rock and roll.

For McCartney rock and roll meant, on the one hand, Little Richard and his rollicking, uninhibited approach. On the other hand it meant the Everly Brothers and their gentler, country-inflected harmonies. (McCartney once tried to get his brother Mike to form an Everlys-style duo with him.) Given Lennon and McCartney's teenage enthusiasm for American music, it seems fitting that the Beatles would skyrocket to international stardom and trigger a worldwide youthquake once they set foot in the United States.

The journey that resulted in the Beatles' triumphant arrival at Kennedy Airport on February 7th, 1964 – where a mob of unprecedented proportion launched what would become known as Beatlemania – began in Liverpool in 1958. Apart from regulars Lennon and McCartney, the band had a fluctuating membership and assorted names, including Johnny and the Moondogs and the Silver Beatles. Lennon, McCartney and company had abandoned skiffle for straightforward rock and roll, which they performed, often for no pay, in local coffee shops, strip joints and dance halls. The group was generally a five-piece. George Harrison, a serious student of the guitar and a Quarrymen follower, was absorbed into the group because he knew how to play; art student Stu Sutcliffe, the bassist while McCartney was still on guitar, owed his membership to his resemblance to James Dean, whom Lennon dug.

The band didn't have a steady drummer until 1960, when handsome Teddy boy Pete Best joined them. Soon after, they were lured to Hamburg, Germany, hungry for any break, and the wilds of the Reeperbahn district. Looking for a permanent name, Sutcliffe suggested "the Beetles," after Buddy Holly's Crickets, and Lennon amended "Beet" to "Beat." The choice was an appropriate one because it was Holly's work that had inspired Lennon and McCartney to write their own songs.

In the rough-and-tumble Hamburg bar scene, the Beatles relied on musical and chemical energy to make it through nightly marathon sets. They began to attract upscale German beatniks – called Exis after their embrace of existentialism – as well as the Reeperbahn riffraff. It was their training in seedy Hamburg basements that made the difference upon their return to Liverpool. There they became the toast of *Mersey Beat*, a fanzine published by another of Lennon's art-school mates, Bill Harry. Lennon himself contributed an "explanation" of the

group to the paper: "Many people ask what are Beatles? Why, Beatles? Ugh, Beatles, how did the name arrive? So we will tell you. It came in a vision – a man appeared on a flaming pie and said unto them, 'From this day on you are Beatles.' 'Thank you, Mister Man,' they said, thanking him."

The Beatles also caught the eye of influential locals like the DJ Bob Wooler, who convinced Ray McFall, owner of the Cavern Club, to book the combo. In July 1961 the Beatles, reduced to a four-piece when Sutcliffe returned to Hamburg to paint and be with his girlfriend, commenced their legendary lunch-time sessions at the Cavern. That's where a curious Brian Epstein, a record merchant and entrepreneur from an affluent Liverpool family, caught up with the group – and was instantly smitten. Epstein was simply being thorough when he entered the dank, overheated cellar; a regular customer at his shop had requested a 45 of "My Bonnie" by a band called the Beatles, which Epstein had never heard of. (Actually, the Beatles were only backing up singer Tony Sheridan on the song.) Here was his chance. Epstein came away with a little more than he had bargained for: he had become the Beatles' manager, officially signing a contract on December 13th, 1961.

Epstein actively pursued a record deal for the Beatles. He transformed the group's image from scruffy (battered black leather) to dapper (matching gray business suits), but he left the music intact. The trademark Beatles haircuts had preceded Epstein; they were a byproduct of Lennon and McCartney's trip, after the summer at the Cavern, to Paris. There they had bummed around Montmartre, playing the part of struggling artists. They returned to London with the infamous "French cut."

At Epstein's urging, Decca Records auditioned the Beatles in January 1962. A&R man Mike Smith was impressed, but he was in a position where he could sign only one band: he had just auditioned two, both of which he liked. He decided to go after a London-based group, Brian Poole and the Tremeloes. Rebuffed, Epstein declared that the Beatles would one day be bigger than Elvis. Most record execs laughed. Guitar combos were on the way out, they said; solo singers were coming back in.

In April, George Martin of EMI-Parlophone granted the Beatles an audition. "There might just be something there," Martin thought, and he offered them a deal that summer. At that time, Ringo Starr, a well-regarded drummer with Rory Storm and the Hurricanes, was brought in to replace Pete Best, whose loyal fans rioted upon hearing news of his dismissal. Although the Beatles' first single, "Love Me Do" backed with "P.S. I Love You," made only a brief Top Twenty appearance, by the beginning of 1963 the group was on its way, with the release of "Please Please Me," to winning over the U.K.

In 1963 the Beatles decisively conquered England. They were charming, mischievous, bright and spontaneous. They offered disarmingly simple rock and roll that relied on unfettered spirit as much as craft. Their first LP, *Please Please Me*, went to Number One in three weeks; "I Want to Hold Your Hand" sold a million copies in three days. By the end of the year the London *Sunday Times* music critic Richard Buckle declared Lennon and McCartney "the greatest composers since Beethoven."

Until then, America had not been impressed. Capitol Records, EMI's American division, allowed both "Please Please Me" and "She Loves You" to be licensed to the smaller labels Vee Jay and Swan. By December, though, Capitol, hounded by Epstein and haunted by the Beatles' British success, pushed up the release of "I Want to Hold Your Hand" to the day after Christmas. Five weeks later it was Number One.

The Beatles arrived in New York City in February 1964 amid a merchandising whirlwind. They were heralded by *The New York Times* and even *The New Yorker*. It became instantly clear that these overnight stars were not

John Lennon, born October 9th, 1940, Liverpool, England; died December 8th, 1980, New York City.

Paul McCartney, born June 18th, 1942, Liverpool, England.

George Harrison, born February 25th, 1943, Liverpool, England.

Ringo Starr (Richard) Starkey Jr., born July 7th, 1940, Liverpool, England.



mere teen-mag fodder. They were clever, as the press corps quickly discovered, and they had strong personalities and opinions. And while America was digesting year-old material, the group was already starting to push back the boundaries of what pop could sound like.

Bob Dylan understood what was happening. "They were doing things nobody was doing," he has remarked. "Their chords were outrageous, just outrageous, and their harmonies made it all valid. . . . Everybody else thought they were for the teenyboppers, that they were gonna pass right away. But it was obvious to me that they had staying power. I knew they were pointing the direction where music had to go." Dylan himself soon picked up an electric guitar.

The Beatles grew as musicians and as stars when they should have started to become obsolete. In the summer of 1964 their ability to win over skeptics was underscored by the reception the establishment press accorded *A Hard Day's Night*, a film in which Ringo in particular demonstrated an affinity for acting. "This is going to surprise you," the critic Bosley Crowther warned his readers in *The New York Times*. "It may knock you right out of your chair – but the new film with those incredible chaps, the Beatles, is a whale of a comedy. . . . I wouldn't have believed it either if I hadn't seen it with my own astonished eyes."

The Beatles' legacy as a concert attraction in this period is distinguished primarily by the staggering prices they could command and the size of the arenas they could fill – Shea Stadium being the most obvious example – at a time when rock and roll was not presented on such a scale. Because of poor acoustics, inadequate equipment, the circuslike atmosphere and the sheer exhaustion of performing live, the Beatles turned their back on the stage after their American tour in the summer of 1966. By then they had already indicated that they were outgrowing even concert halls.

Rubber Soul, released in '65, and *Revolver*, released the following year, couldn't be re-created live by the quartet alone. Discussing *Revolver*, McCartney has remarked, "These are sounds that nobody else had done yet. . . . I mean nobody . . . ever." The Beatles were making albums, not just long-playing records to showcase a couple of hits; they approached pop music as pop art – which meant the old standards for popular music were rendered null and void. The record industry had to face artists with careers, not just hits; radio had to consider albums on which each song was given equal weight; the audience had to face the challenge of a rock and roll that had become musically expansive, lyrically sophisticated and difficult to pigeonhole.

Though the Beatles were influenced by Dylan, the Byrds, the San Francisco groups, even the Beach Boys, they gave away as much as they received. It was as if an invisible line of communication had been stretched across the Atlantic, allowing the most daring of artists to react as one to the musical and social turbulence that surrounded them. The Beatles, though, were always at the center of the experimentation.

The reaction, in the summer of '87, to the twentieth anniversary of *Sgt. Pep-*

per's Lonely Hearts Club Band is a measure of the extent to which the Beatles' saga merged with the retelling of pop cultural history. *Sgt. Pepper* was recalled not merely as the Beatles' creative apotheosis and as a watershed for rock but as a symbol, even the catalyst, for the Summer of Love. People could remember where they were when they first heard it, how they felt, what drug they were taking, the ways in which the music changed them. The album's success had confounded conventional pop wisdom: the Beatles had withdrawn from the public and become more popular than ever. *Sgt. Pepper* melded elements of four distinct personalities – Lennon's acid-tinged stream of consciousness, McCartney's music-hall melodies, Ringo's pub-mate amiability, George's icy mysticism – into a singularly audacious work. With George Martin's savvy production, the group stretched studio technology to its limits.

Yet something had ended for the Beatles. As the Summer of Love drew to a close, Brian Epstein was found dead in his London town house and the Beatles were finally on their own. Paul organized the *Magical Mystery Tour*, a TV special conceived as a cross between a British holiday excursion and a few days on the bus with the Merry Pranksters; George penned some subversively psychedelic tunes for the film *Yellow Submarine*. Near the end of 1967 the Beatles opened up the short-lived Apple Boutique and in January of 1968 formed a company called Apple Corps Ltd. – an attempt, as John put it, to see "if we can get artistic freedom within a business structure." This flamboyant enterprise quickly became the stuff of legend on staid Saville Row. The more serious business at hand, however, was the release in November 1968 of *The Beatles*, a double-album package better known as the White Album. It was raw and sprawling, a highly personal, often oblique document of the Beatles' dissolution. It was also a revelation in terms of George's growing songwriting prowess.

The Beatles were leading increasingly separate lives. John globe-trotted with Yoko Ono in pursuit of world peace; Paul retreated to his farm with his new wife, Linda; Ringo parlayed his ingenuous charm into a series of film roles; George delved into the music and philosophy of India. *Let It Be*, recorded in 1969, was intended to reunite the Beatles by recalling the spirit that first brought them together. But the project was temporarily shelved, and the more polished *Abbey Road*, recorded later, preceded it into the marketplace. When *Let It Be* finally reached the public, this attempt to look back fondly had become a farewell. On April 10th, 1970, Paul McCartney announced his departure from the Beatles, and the group quietly came to an end.

When John Lennon recorded his solo album *Plastic Ono Band* later that year, he declared, in a bid to restore the Beatles to human size, "The dream is over." When John was shot down outside his apartment building in New York City in 1980, the world mourned the man and celebrated his music. The magnitude of the response to his death suggested that the dream he spoke of was something countless people shared, something they had all imagined together. And it is something that comes to life every time they hear a Beatles song. ■

THE STAR CLUB STORY

By Siegfried Loch

WEST GERMANY AT THE start of the Sixties: *Das Wirtschaftswunder* was in full swing, and the war babies were bored with the music of their parents. The West German pop-music market was totally dominated by German-language recordings. Even international hits could succeed only in German versions; such artists as Paul Anka and Connie Francis had hits with German re-recordings of their songs. The rock and roll of the Fifties in its original form was obtainable only in specialty record stores that carried imported discs. In 1958, Bill Haley and His Comets had embarked on a tour of West Germany, but the Berlin Sportpalast was trashed by hooligans at one show. The incident was used by officials as an excuse to ban American rock and roll from the concert halls and from the government-controlled radio stations. But kids found an alternative by listening to the BFN and the AFN, the British Forces Network and the American Forces Network, which beamed the beat of the new international music.

Hamburg was the biggest seaport in Europe, and its red-light district, the Reeperbahn, was Europe's sin city. It was in 1960 that the Reeperbahn started to attract young English musicians, most of whom came from Liverpool. Tony Sheridan and Howie Casey, two young English rock and rollers, first appeared in Hamburg in a small club called the Kaiserkeller. Soon two other small striptease joints, Studio X and the Indra Club, were converted into rock and roll clubs. It was on August 17th, 1960, at the Indra Club, that the five Beatles — Paul McCartney, John Lennon, George Harrison, Pete Best and Stu Sutcliffe — played Hamburg for the first time. But Tony Sheridan had already established himself as the king of the strip, and he was the first musician on the scene to get a recording contract.

Sheridan was probably also the first man who saw the Beatles' potential. The next time the Beatles came to Hamburg — to play at the Top Ten Club — Sheridan invited them to be his backing group for his first recording session for Polydor, in May 1961. They recorded more than a dozen songs, including "Ain't She Sweet" and "My Bonnie."

By now, Hamburg was ready for something bigger. The music needed more space to expand. At this time, Manfred Weissleder came into the picture. The former electrician had the idea of changing the Reeperbahn into a family amusement quarter (a mission at which he ultimately failed). He happened to like American rock and roll; he therefore liked the English musicians playing the Hamburg clubs, because, without exception, they copied their American heroes. Weissleder bought the old Stern Kino ("Star Cinema"), a movie theater next to a church in the heart of the Reeperbahn district, and turned it into a music hall. The place had a capacity of 1200, a proper stage, good lighting — in short, it was far superior to the clubs most young rock musicians were used to.



In March 1962 the city of Hamburg was plastered with posters announcing that the Star Club would open on Friday, April 13th. On opening night the kids lined up for half a mile to see six bands, including the Beatles.

The Beatles had been in England, but Stu Sutcliffe had decided to stay in Hamburg with his German girlfriend, Astrid Kirchherr, and study art at the local university. He died of a brain hemorrhage the day before the group returned to Hamburg. Despite their sadness, the Beatles gave one of their best performances yet. The band played the club four times a night for a period of six weeks. It was during this period that Brian Epstein, upon returning to London, sent the band a telegram: "Congratulations boys, EMI request recording session. Please rehearse new material."

It was also at this time that the Beatles played some of their original material for the very first time in public. The rest is history. In August, drummer Pete Best was fired, and Ringo Starr joined the group. On September 11th, George Martin produced the Beatles' first single, "Love Me Do," backed with "P.S. I Love You," which was released on October 5th in the U.K. on the Parlophone label.

When the Beatles returned to Hamburg on November 1st, they had completely changed their image. Their dirty, scruffy jeans and leather jackets were replaced by neat suits, ties and white shirts. But their performances were as abandoned as before.

The Beatles' third and final Star Club engagement was the last two weeks of 1962. The Star Club had become a Mecca for young English bands, a place where they could work under professional conditions in front of enthusiastic audiences. Performers like the Searchers, Gerry and the Pacemakers, the Swinging Blue Jeans, Ian and the Zodiacs, Alvin Lee, Alex Harvey and the Undertakers learned their trade by playing in Hamburg.

The Star Club also booked the stars who had inspired those musicians. Gene Vincent appeared at the club in May 1962, backed by the Outlaws, whose guitarist was Ritchie Blackmore. Bill Haley, Little Richard, the Everly Brothers, Bo Diddley, Brenda Lee, Chubby Checker and Fats Domino followed. To celebrate the first anniversary of the club, Weissleder booked Ray Charles. He allowed only a few hundred of the club's regulars into the show, which he considered the greatest night in the history of the Star Club, next to the opening night. In a year, the club had become a must for rock stars visiting Europe; it would soon be the most famous rock and roll club in Europe.

Soon after the club opened, I was able to convince both Manfred Weissleder and Philips Records that live recordings should be made at the Star Club. The first recording released as an album was called *Twist at the Star Club*; it fea-



tured Tony Sheridan, the Searchers, the Rattles (Germany's most popular rock and roll band) and Jerry Lee Lewis with the Nashville Teens. Some critics have called it one of the best live rock and roll albums of all time.

In 1964, Star Club Records was launched as a label with releases by many of the Star Club house bands, including the Rattles, Lee Curtis, the Liverbirds, Ian and the Zodiacs and Kingsize Taylor and the Dominoes.

It was a constant struggle to keep the club open, because the more popular it became, the more city officials used every trick in the book to close it down. Moreover, by 1964 many of the early English rock and roll bands had become international superstars, and the limited capacity of the place didn't allow the management to be competitive with other concert promoters, who were by now able to present bands in community concert halls. Nonetheless, the club continued to attract new English groups on the edge of stardom, including the Spencer Davis Group, the Walker Brothers, the Animals, the Small Faces, Manfred Mann, the Nice and Yes. Mike Harrison and Mike Kellie spent a long time in Hamburg as part of the VIPs and returned to the Star Club as Spooky Tooth, giving some brilliant performances.

In 1967, Manfred Weissleder left the Star Club in the hands of a former manager. This was the beginning of a slow death. The old spirit returned only occasionally. Both Jimi Hendrix and Cream played the club a number of times before they reached international stardom.

On December 31st, 1969, the Star Club presented its last rock concert. It became a striptease joint, like the rest of the neighboring establishments. The building had been empty for four years when it finally burned down in 1983. The church next door is still open, waiting to save the occasional sinful soul. ■



English rock and roller Johnny Kidd



Little Richard in performance at the Star Club in 1962



The Star Club became a Mecca for young English bands, a place where they could work under professional conditions in front of enthusiastic audiences.



The Searchers played the Star Club after the success there of their fellow Liverpudlians the Beatles.



Jerry Lee Lewis



Tony Sheridan on the cover of 'The Star-Club News,' August 1965