

Beatles history

The British group The Beatles is justly considered to be not only an outstanding rock phenomenon, but also a phenomenon in terms of modern music in general.. The unique friendship of the four talented individuals - John Lennon, Paul McCartney, George Harrison and Ringo Starr - became the creative driving force, thanks to which rock ceased to act as "opposition" to the culture but became, to some extent, part of this culture. It cannot be denied that the Beatles' creativity and everything they did, earning them the title "classical artists of the 20th century", opened many doors, largely predetermining the course rock took, not only in the 1960s but in subsequent decades too. "Superlative" terms (the greatest, the most popular, the best-selling, etc) and terms suggesting "pioneers" (the first conceptual album, experiments involving a "cross-over" of styles, innovative arrangements, discoveries in respect of instruments, sound-recording technology, etc.) are used in all encyclopaedias and reference books on The Beatles. But all these achievements wouldn't have been nearly so significant if the group's creativity hadn't resonated with the time or hadn't reflected the aspirations and mood of the listening masses. The Beatles represent not only a musical phenomenon but a social one too. The wave of "Beatlemania" they generated was the first example in history of such mass adoration and worship of idols. A host of books, research, scientific studies and popular articles is devoted to the Beatles, musicologists "break down" their music, philologists write entire dissertations on their lyrics, but despite all this no one has succeeded in completely uncovering the essence of this astonishing phenomenon, and it has proved equally impossible to put into words their, at times, very artless melodies. This is even harder to do within the confines of an article in which we are attempting to limit ourselves to a dry account of the facts only.

The history of the Beatles began roughly five years before the group had its first hit singles. The young guitarist, John Lennon, whose idols were the rock-and-roll performers of the '50s, formed the group The Quarrymen while studying at college. In around 1957, the guitarist Paul McCartney joined this group, and soon afterwards, in 1958, his friend George Harrison, also a guitarist, joined too. In 1960, the group's name was changed to the Silver Beatles, and later the first word was dropped and the second letter "e" of the second word was replaced with an "a", and the group became known simply as the Beatles. Stuart Sutcliffe, a friend of Lennon from art college, played the bass guitar, and Pete Best was brought in to play the drums. The group was invited to play in Germany and was sent on its first foreign tours to Hamburg.

Here, they played endless, exhausting performances in clubs, but, at the same time, they gained lots of experience playing concerts to which they gave their all, performing their repertoire (which included not just a host of standard rock-and-roll numbers but also an even larger number of their own compositions), and succeeded in "conquering" the public. When the musicians returned to Liverpool at the end of 1960, it was not surprising that they now found themselves the most exciting group on the beat scene (known as Mersey Beat, the British response to American rock-and-roll, created, not just by the Beatles, but by hundreds of other groups, most of whom have now long been forgotten). The Beatles continued to perform in local clubs, including in what had become their favourite venue, the Cavern - the "incubator" of the Mersey Beat sound. Sutcliffe soon left the group, having decided to continue his education at art college. McCartney moved to bass guitar and Harrison remained solo guitarist. Lennon took on the rhythm guitar. All three sang, creating a very pleasing vocal ensemble. During subsequent tours in Germany, the group made their first recording as a backing group for the British singer, Tony Sheridan (not released until 1994). The girlfriend of Sutcliffe (who, sadly, died of a brain tumour in 1994), Astrid Kircher, created a new, recognisable image for them - collarless jackets and long, perfectly-trimmed fringes. This was a small, but very important detail in the creation of the inimitable style of the Beatles.

At the end of 1961, in their home town of Liverpool, the Beatles acquired a manager, the owner of a local record shop, Brian Epstein, whose commercial achievements aided the success of the group considerably. However, at first, after recordings had been heard at several studios, the group was rejected. Nonetheless, producer George Martin of the Parlophone label (part of EMI) saw the huge potential of the group, and a contract was signed. The managers believed, though, that if they were really to succeed they would need a good drummer. In 1962, Pete Best was sacked from the group and Ringo Starr (born Richard Starkey), drummer with the Liverpool group Rory Storm and the Hurricanes, took his place. The first single "Love Me Do"/ "P.S. I Love You" was recorded with him. Both sides contained the original compositions of Lennon/McCartney - a composing duo which would go on to write the Beatles' best tunes. The group didn't achieve real success, though, until the single "Please Please Me", which reached number one in the British "top twenty" in 1963. This single, with its gentle, benevolent melodies and simple harmonies, marked the beginning of what is known as the "British invasion". The single "From Me to You" also reached no. 1, as did the debut LP "Please Please Me", which was recorded in just one day, but topped the British charts for 30 weeks. The economy and accessibility of the musical language, concentrated and developed in their arsenal, and the entire "collection" of universally recognised intonations, the infectious sincerity and genuine charm, coupled with the attractive appearance of the four Liverpudlians, who were exactly just "like you and me", but at the same time having sharply defined personalities, all helped to elevate the Beatles to the status of idols. Each of the following four albums, largely adhering to the rock-and-roll ballad format, represented a new step forward and offered new solutions of an already well-known formula. "With the Beatles" (1963), "Beatles For Sale" (1964), "A Hard Day's Night" (1964), and "Help!" (1965) are clear landmarks on this path (the latter, by the way, was already moving towards the "transitional" phase). After the Beatles were shown on national TV at the end of 1963, a wave of Beatlemania swept the country. Everywhere the musicians appeared they were swamped by worshippers, prepared to rip their idols to shreds. The actual music cannot be heard in parts of early video recordings because of the incessant screaming of the girls ... The group was faced with the problem of conquering America. Capitol

released the single "I Want to Hold Your Hand" in the USA, which climbed to the top of the American charts a week after it came out (it should be pointed out that American releases, as a rule, differ from British releases in terms of content and quantity). An appearance on The Ed Sullivan Show stimulated the American wave of Beatlemania (as well as the "first British invasion", which paved the way into America for groups such as the Rolling Stones, The Animals, The Kinks and others). Never before had "interlopers" had such a strong hold on the American charts - the "Beatles" remained at the top of the transatlantic hit parades until they split up in 1970! In 1964-65, the group embarked in successful world tours. At the same time, the musicians made the musical films "A Hard Days Night" (1964) and "Help!" (1965) with sparkling humour and tireless energy (the eponymous albums are essentially soundtracks for the eponymous films).²

The albums "Help!", "Rubber Soul" (1965) and "Revolver" (1966) - are transitional works demonstrating an inclination towards a more complex style, a broadening of musical language and "dramatisation" of songs, the subject of which was now moving further away from the typical "I love you" towards more subtle lyrical sketches and social and philosophical motifs. The inclusion of a string quartet in the arrangement of the evergreen hit by McCartney "Yesterday" ("Help!" album) was an innovative move; Harrison makes his first ventures into the territory of Indian music in "Love you to" and "Tomorrow Never Knows". "Eleanor Rigby" ("Revolver"; also with a string quartet) relates the drama of a humble person, and some caustic and satirical notes could be detected in "Taxman" and the powerful "Paperback Writer". However, the Beatles did not prove immune to obstacles on the road to success: in the summer of 1966, in the Philippines, having failed to show due respect to the wife of President Marcos, Imelda, they were thrown out of the country, and Lennon's throwaway remark that "the Beatles are more popular than Jesus now", led to public censure and the mass burning of their recordings in America. The incessant, exhausting tours and the threat of commercialisation forced the Beatles, after completing their final concert in San Francisco, to turn down tours and concentrate on studio work and creative experimentation. The result of this "seclusion" was the album "Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band" (June 1967), a real chef d'oeuvre of rock music. Its entire contents - from the musical form to the sleeve design - were ground-breaking. For the first time, an album appeared as a single work, developing along general lines, a cycle of compositions in which the principal hero is played by a concert "band" (the album is framed by the compositions of "Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band" and "Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band: Reprise", followed by the postface "A Day In The Life"; several compositions are joined in a montage). A file of characters and genre scenes alternating with lyrical and philosophical intermediaries passes before the listener.

1. For example: The Swinging Blue Jeans, The Merseybeats, The Sorrows, Gerry And The Peacemakers and others.
2. It should be explained that the American-produced LP albums are entirely made up of the soundtracks. As for the British records, the soundtrack appears on only the first sides of the albums.