THE BEATLES

I first becme aware of the Beatles in late 1962. It was at Hope Church of England Primary School. One of my classmates had a newspaper and there was a copy of the weekly pop charts. I remember someone asking who was the group with the funny name. The record the charts was the first Beatles single Love Me Do, it was backed by P.S. I Love You. It did not go very high in the charts but I suppose that it was enough to arouse interest.

The pop music scene at this time was heavily dominated by American artists. I genuinely think too that in the modern age much of our lives are dominated by popular music and popular culture. We can signpost our lives by them. In relation to 1962 I always think of It Might As Well Rain Until September by Carol King. Co written with her husband Gerry Goffin, for me, this is a very evocative track. When I hear it am transported back! Other American artists that were influential in the very early 1960's were Bobby Vee, Pat Bonne, and Ricky Nelson, not to mention Elvis Presley.

The scene in Britain had begun in the 1950's, with Sciffle and very quickly Rock and Roll. Youth culture really began to be part of people's experience. The Two I's coffee bar in Soho in London had become a centre of this burgeoning youth culture. A notable artist being Tommy Steele. It was very difficult in those days for teenagers to be able get into pubs. So coffee bars became a meeting point for many British young people. I suppose things like espresso coffee machines gave a little bit of Italian sophistication into what was then perceived to be a very drab post war Britain. The early 1950's were characterised by austerity, note the use of this term in the last five years. By the late 1950's Britain had become more prosperous. This enabled youth culture to grow. Teenagers often having the means to have transistor radios and record players. The latter in the culture of the time being exemplified by the Dansette Company.

British pop acts did not do very well in the U.S.A. There were a number of young British men involved in pop music, Marty Wilde, Billy Fury, Terry Dean etc…The most famous of these being Cliff Richard. I suppose that Americans had their own stars so they had no need of others!

The Liverpool scene was very vibrant; there were a number of groups. At this time Liners sailed from Liverpool to New York and other locations in the USA. Ports are places that allow that blending and transference of different cultures and art forms. So I suppose it was no coincidence that Liverpool should have has this type of activity. The Cavern Club was a leading part of the Liverpool scene. The Beatles also played at the Star Club in Hamburg, Germany; another port with a thriving music scene. Their time here greatly enhanced their musical knowledge and experience. The Beatles were, of course, John Lennon, Paul McCartney, George Harrison and Ringo Starr. They had been born and brought up in Liverpool and were educated there. John Lennon at Quarry Bank High, Paul McCartney and George Harrison both at the Liverpool Institute; these were grammar schools. Ringo Starr was educated at Dingle Vale Secondary Modern School; he was not eligible to try for a grammar school as his early education had been greatly hampered by childhood illness

Back in the United Kingdom they came to the notice of Brian Epstein. The Epsteins were a prominent business family, they sold furniture. Brian Epstein ran a record store. A story exists that a customer came into his shop

and asked for the Beatles' record My Bonnie a traditional Scottish folk song, thought to be about Bonnie Prince Charlie who had gone into exile abroad following the defeat of his Jacobite Army at the Battle of Culloden in 1746. This had been recorded in Germany by the Beatles. On hearing this Brian Epstein went down to the Cavern Club to hear them, having not heard of them before. Some dispute this story saying that they were already quite well known in Liverpool and he would have heard of them.

When he saw them he was clearly impressed and decided to manage them. They failed an audition with the Decca Record. Company, for the rest of his life the producer responsible for this decision, namely Dick Rowe, carried the reputation of having been the man who turned down the Beatles. This is very unfair; he signed Brian Poole and the Tremeloes at the same sign that he rejected the Beatles. The base of the decision would seem to be that Brian Poole and the Tremeloes were a London based group whereas the Beatles were in Liverpool and would not have the same ease of access. I think in auditions, like interviews, senior members of staff can only go on what they see. It would have been imosssible to predict the phenomenon that they would become. Dick Rowe went on to sign Them (Van Morrison) and the Rolling Stones, two very good signings to say the least!

They were auditioned by George Martin at Parlophone. This was an outpost of the larger EMI Company. It was mainly associated with comedy and novelty records, Peter Sellers, for instance, recorded there. George Martin the producer felt that they did have some type of star quality. The Beatles insisted that they recorded their own songs. At this time there was some sort of demarcation line between the songwriter and the performer and people tended to specialise in either one or the other. John Lennon and Paul McCartney were both able to write both music and lyrics

Love Me Do, as stated, had a marginal impact on the pop charts but I suppose that in the sense of overview it was enough to arouse interest, they then recorded Please Please Me their first Number 1 but not it seems in every chart. Please Please Me was also the title of their first album. John Lennon and Paul McCartney were very rapidly gaining reputations as song writers. Brian Epstein had a number of acts in his stable. Gerry and the Pacemakers in 1963 were initially the most successful having three number one hits in a row. Another notable act in his stable was Billy J. Kramer and the Dakotas. They had two number 1 hits written by Lennon and McCartney (but mainly written by John Lennon) namely Do You Want to Know a Secret and Bad To Me. The former was used a part of the Soundtrack to the film Scandal which told the story of the Profumo Scandal. The Beatles also did a version of this and I suppose by chance it was apt for the time. Those of us who can remember and younger readers who may have read about these times will know how this scandal rocked the British establishment to its core. Some see these times as marking an end to the deference that had hitherto been shown to the higher social classes. Me To You was their follow up, single and was a number 1 hit.

A huge momentum was gathering. The Autumn of 1963 saw the release of She Loves You. This was number 1 for a number of weeks. There was a second album in 1963 namely With the Beatles. Not a Second Time a Lennon track on the Album, was critically reviewed in the Times. This must have seemed as a surprise at the time for a pop album to be reviewed in the

Times. The question that they and their manager must have been asking was whether they could keep the pace going. There was another question to answer and that was whether they could break into the highly lucrative American market. The answer to this was answered by their next single I Want to Hold Your Hand. This was number 1 both sides of the Atlantic Ocean. This started a Beatle Mania that was probably even bigger in the U.S.A. than it was in Britain. On the B side was This Boy, a song written by John Lennon and in the American doo-wop style of the late 1950's/ early 1960's. An instrumental version on this song appeared as a backdrop to the scene in A Hard Day's Night where Ringo Starr having fallen out with the others walks out and strolls along a towpath.

This single was written at the house of Dr. Richard Asher in Wimpole Street, London by Lennon and McCartney towards the end of 1963. Paul McCartney was the boyfriend of the actress Jane Asher. Dr. Asher was a consultant Psychiatrist, Haematologist and Endocrinologist. He was the first to chart the condition Munchausen's Syndrome and by extension, I suppose, Munchausen's by proxy. He was one of the best medical minds of the time. To this day London University awards a prize in his memory to outstanding medical work. Paul McCartney stayed at the Asher House. Dr. Asher, it seems, made over one of the floors of the house to him where he could work on his music. Mrs. Asher was a lecturer in music, principally the Oboe. She has also been the teacher of the Beatles producer George Martin at the Guildhall School of Music and Drama in London; here might one wonder whether it was here that the Beatles involvement with orchestration and the deployment of strings began.

In 1964 year Paul McCartney wrote World Without Love for pop duo Peter and Gordon. A huge number 1 hit. Peter was Peter Asher and the brother of Jane Asher. Gordon was Gordon Waller, both he and Peter Asher had been students at Westminster School, a leading public school and incidentally the alma mater of the current Deputy Prime Minister Nick Clegg.

So, 1964 was another huge year for them they produced a feature film A Hard Day's Night. The title song for this was apparently written by John Lennon in the back of a London taxi. It was the first Album that contained all Lennon and McCartney numbers. The album was heavily dominated by Lennon songs but the contributions by Paul McCartney were very strong. And I Love Her primarily by McCartney went on to become a classic. If I Fell by John Lennon was also a standout melodic song. This album I think displayed George Harrison's skills as a guitarist. He used a 12 String Rickenbacker to great effect. He equally played acoustic guitar very skilfully on And I Love Her. They had, I suppose, in the long run they had created their own pressure in that there would be an expectation of Lennon and McCartney songs. The Beatles for Sale album came out at the end of 1964. This despite what I have just written did not contain all Lennon and McCartney numbers.

Early in 1965 they had a huge number 1 hit with Ticket To Ride; this record was backed by Yes It Is; a song highly regarded by Paul McCartney but not by John Lennon who commented that he had reprised the earlier record This Boy. I think that this song is fascinating for its use of clever word play. This year also saw the second of their films namely Help! The title track written primarily by John Lennon was, in my view, a brilliant track; it also reflected the battles of the author to deal with the pressures of fame. Side two

of this album contained the song Yesterday. Written by Paul McCartney it is one of the most recorded and played songs of all time. It contained a Paul McCartney vocal and string quartet, No other Beatles played on it. It seems that the song had been around for some time within the group. It showed the versatility of the Beatles and the range of their song writing skills.

The end of 1965 saw the release of Rubber Soul. This album contained a number of songs that would gain great fame; Michelle, Girl, Nowhere Man, In My Life being obvious examples.

1966 was another landmark year for the Beatles in that this was the year that they gave up touring and concentrated instead on being a studio and recording based band (contrast this to the Rolling Stones who still give concerts and go on tours, They did an excellent concert at Glastonbury in 2013). Yellow Submarine/ Eleanor Rigby, always one of my favourite records was a big hit and showed how they were widening their songwriting repertoire. These two songs were part of the Revolver album. This album contained a number of classic tracks. Here, There and Everywhere by Paul McCartney was a brilliant track. John Lennon apparently thought it was the best track on the album. Good Day Sunshine mainly by Paul McCartney has been played often on a number of Space Shuttle missions. .Paul McCartney played this song live to the International Space Station on 13th. November 2005 this was the first live concert link up to the Space Station. Penny Lane/Strawberry Fields Forever released as a single at this time, unusually, did not go to number one.

1967 was to become known as Summer of Love. Those of us alive at the time can remember the images of hippy culture centred around San Francisco in the U.S.A. This year saw the release of Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band. I rate this Album very highly. Tracks like She's Leaving Home took the art of song writing to new heights. With A little Help from my Friends that gave the lead vocal to Ringo Starr I would suggest is probably the most recognised track to younger people who were not alive at the time. All You Need Is Love by John Lennon (not on the Sgt. Pepper album) was played live on 25th. June 1967 whilst being transmitted worldwide. This was the first live global link by satellite The Beatles had been commissioned by the B.B.C. to write a song for the British contribution to the Our World programme. It was watched by 400 million people in 25 countries! This year ended with the Magical Mystery Tour television show and an E.P of that name. this had mixed reviews but nonetheless had some standout tracks. The single Hello Goodbye was another huge hit. It was backed by I am the Walrus. This was a very innovative track with a very controversial lyrical content. It is said that this was the track that the Electric Light Orchestra believed that they had taken over from.

1968 saw the track Hey Jude that was backed by Revolution, very topical at the time; those of us alive at this time will remember the Paris student riots and the protests in Grovernor Square, London. He played Hey Jude as the final song in his performance at the London Olympics; it is as song that is anthemic and allows audience participation. It also saw the release of the so called White Album. This was a double long player record. It contained a large number of all original songs, an outstanding achievement and a pointer to just how productive they were as songwriters.

1969 was the year when their career as a group was inevitably drawing to a close. The album Abbey Road was released. The photograph at the front of them walking across the zebra crossing has proved to be iconic. Fans from all over the World photograph themselves waking across the road at this point. It is the back cover of this album that has always intrigued me. It shows a photograph of a young lady in a blue mini dress. She seems to be walking away from the picture. I question whether or not the designer was giving us a clue in relation to the Beatles' impending break up. The min skirt was one of the key symbols of the 1960's and was he telling us that an era was coming to an end? This Album also contains a number of outstanding tracks. The standout track is probably Something, written by George Harrison; apparently John Lennon insisted that this track should be the A side (it was backed by John Lennon's Come Together). It was the first A side that was not written by Lennon and McCartney if you discount the Twist and Shout E.P. the title track of this E.P. was written by Medley and Russell. (for younger readers E.P. means extended play, this meant that instead of an A side and a B side as on what was called as single, you had two tracks to each side. They carried a relative price premium but were not as expensive as LPs or Long Players).From a personal viewpoint on Abbey Road, three Songs stand out namely, You Never Give Me Your Money, Carry that Weight and Golden Slumbers. For me they point to what I perceive Paul McCartney's state of mind at the time and his sense of what was to happen when the Beatles broke up and what he would then do with his life.

A point that I have always been interested is as follows. Parrlophone was, as stated, an outpost of the larger EMI Corporation. Sir Godfrey Hounsfield was a brilliant electrical engineer who worked at EMI. He produced a whole body scanner in 1975. . In 1975 he was awarded the Nobel Prize for Physiology or Medicine; a prize that he shared Allan McLeod Cormack for his work in this area. EMI went on to develop body scanners that became widely used in Hospitals both here and abroad. Some people ague that the money aggregated from the sales of Beatles records on the Parlophone label helped fund the development of body scanners. Having trawled the Internet for answers for this, something I had always thought was the case, one gets a confusing picture. Some sites say yes to this but another I read said not and that the main financial input was from the British taxpayer.

In 1970 they released their final alum Let it Be. How does one evaluate their overall career? Clearly they were very influential both as performers and songwriters. A question that might be asked is who has been the successor to the Beatles? I would suggest no one really has been. The LA's a Liverpool band in the 1990's, for me, captured much of the essence of the early 1960's Merseyside sound with There She Goes. The video I remember, to me, evoked images and memories of Liverpool at that time. In 1995 the chart battles between Blur and Oasis seemed again to be very evocative of the 1960's. The media drew the battle lines much in relation to social class. The media commenting on the middle class young men from the south of England (Blur) and the working class young men from Manchester (Oasis). I remember being in Virgin Megastores in Shrewsbury in 1995 and hearing Oasis Don't Look Back in Anger and asking the young lady behind the counter what was that brilliant song? She told me and I became an Oasis fan. A student asked why does your age group so like Oasis? I replied it was because we cannot

have the Beatles back!. This was all very reminiscent of the 1960's with Swinging London and in the 1990's we had Cool Britannia, both eras having a Labour Prime Minister, the 1960's Harold Wilson and the 1990's Tony Blair. It is worth pointing out that neither era ended with the hope and optimism that they had started out with.

There is little doubt that the Beatles were a hugely innovative group and one whose influence will remain for many years to come.

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