

THE BEATLES: A CULTURAL REVOLUTION

Music Sunday

I probably saw them first on the Ed Sullivan Show when I was about 8, but I remember thinking at first that they were too loud and too repetitive and that their screaming teeny-bopper fans were obnoxious. I think my brother liked them better, but he is a couple years older than me. It wasn't long before I too embraced their music. I never had all that much vinyl, but one of the albums I bought was the Blue collection. It has been more than half a century since the Beatles kicked off the British invasion and set off a musical revolution that provided the soundtrack for the cultural revolution of the 1960s. Some of their songs were always included among the protest songs and church camp songs of my youth, and I even tried to play a few on my guitar back in the day!

I'm sure most of you here have memories similar to mine, but it is hard to explain to younger generations how much of an impact the Beatles had. It was really interesting to me when my kids started to play Beatles music during their own youth years. I'm not sure I expected such a strong revival of interest in Beatles songs, but I am glad that they are continuing to impact young people, continuing to touch lives, and continuing what has become an ongoing cultural revolution.

The one word that appeared frequently in Beatles songs that made all the difference is Love! *Love, love, love; Love, Love, Love, that's all you need!* Amidst the fears and turmoil of the 60s, the Beatles consistently provided a message of hope and love, the same message that we so desperately need today. Through some very difficult and scary times, their music provided encouragement, hope, and love! Some of the lyrics were just silly, but the songs were amazing, *Ob-la-di, ob-la-da life goes on...*, what does that even mean? You don't really need to know to find hope in *life goes on*, and somehow life did go on and most of us survived the 60s and are still here today.

They sang of Strawberry Fields, Walruses and Yellow Submarines and Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band. Their songwriting and production was prolific and their impact was amazing. They sang of sadness and loneliness and love and hope, capturing the mixed up energy of a crazy time in American history. The Beatles invaded America in February 1964 and had broken up by 1970, but they continued to influence the music scene for years afterwards. Though they only put out new studio albums after 1966 and did not tour, they remained popular even after John Lennon stirred up controversy over some of his political comments. Many of their songs continue to be played widely and have weathered well the changing times.

I believe that the energy of their music helped to release the pent up energies and frustration of a generation that was asked to fight a war on the other side of the globe on behalf of political and economic interests with which a large percentage of young people disagreed. The years of the Cold War, political suppression of open dialogue in the name of the Anti-Communist witch hunts of the 1950s McCarthy era, and pseudo-religious suppression of natural sexual energies along with many other factors all conspired to make the 1960s a period of societal upheaval. The relative homogeneity of post-World War II America was breaking down by the time JFK was killed, the US was getting deeper into the quagmire that was Vietnam, and the Beatles invaded the US. The Beatles, along with Elvis Presley, Bob Dylan, and other musicians of the period offered a range of lively musical alternatives that stirred the emotions and freed the souls of many of their fans.

The religious explorations of the Beatles also helped to bring Eastern Religions into the awareness of the American public. Was satanic music really there if you could figure out how to play it backwards? The cultural impact of the Beatles is hard to overstate. They did not alone overturn the norms of society, but they certainly acted as a catalyst helping to stretch and transform the musical, religious, and political sensibilities of America, the United Kingdom, and the world.

Until John Lennon was killed on December 8, 1980 in front of The Dakota in New York City, there were frequent rumors and widespread hopes that the Fab Four were going to get back together.

John, Paul, George and Ringo had all gone on to their own individual careers with varying levels of success. George Harrison died of lung cancer in 2001. Paul McCartney and Ringo Starr remain active in the music scene in their 70s and have each continued to leave their mark beyond their years as Beatles.

Most if not all of us here appreciate music and recognize its importance in our lives. Some of us are singers, some instrumentalists, and some just listeners, but even today, it would be hard to find anyone in the English speaking world who doesn't know something about the Beatles and who hasn't heard several of their songs.

This morning, as we are sharing several Beatles songs, we invite you to think back to when you first heard their music. When was it, where were you, and what impact did the music have on you? Did you ever see the Beatles in concert? Which songs and albums made the most impact on you? In a few moments, I will invite you to share some of your memories of the Beatles.

Many of the songs and videos of today may be bigger productions than those put out by the Beatles, but how many will stand the test of time as well as many of those written and recorded by the Beatles? It is often hard to see into the future with all the challenges faced by people of the world today. Which artists of today are addressing those challenges as well as the Beatles and Bob Dylan did the challenges of the 1960s?

Many people want to go back to a simpler time, but not many would choose the 1960s! It was a lively transformative time, in which sexism, racism, violence, war, and the gap between rich and poor in this country and around the world were being challenged in the courts, on campuses, and on the streets. It was a scary but invigorating time, a time not unlike our own at least in some respects. As we remember those days through the music of the Beatles, I challenge us to recommit ourselves to shaping a safer, healthier, more loving world for all people now and for the generations to come.

So may it be, Shalom, Salaam, Blessed Be, Namaste, and Amen!