Beatles Essay, Research Paper

The Beatles-the singer-guitarists Paul McCartney, John Lennon, and George Harrison, and the drummer Ringo Starr-have been the most influential performing group in the history of rock. Their music, hairstyle, dress, and lifestyle were imitated all over the world, resulting in a phenomenon known as Beatlemania.

All four Beatles were born during the early 1940s in Liverpool, England, and dropped out of school in their teens to devote themselves to rock. Lennon and McCartney, the main songwriters of the group, began working together in 1956 and were joined by Harrison about two years later. In 1962 Ringo Starr became their new drummer. The group gained experience by performing in Hamburg, Germany; and in Liverpool, a port to which sailors brought the latest American rock, rhythm-and-blues, and country-and-western records. In 1961 the Beatles made their first record, and by 1963 they were England s top rock group. In 1964, they triumphed in the United States, breaking attendance records everywhere and dominating the record market. Audiences often became hysterical, and the police had to protect the Beatles from their fans. Beatle dolls, wigs, sweatshirts, and jackets flooded the market. Along with a steady flow of successful records, the Beatles made several hit movies: A hard Day s Night, Help! and Yellow Submarine.

The Beatles stopped touring in 1966, possibly because some of their most imaginative effects were achieved in the recording studio and could not be duplicated in live performance. For several years they devoted themselves to recording, producing such long-playing albums as Sgt. Pepper s Lonely Hearts Club Band (1976), The Beatles (1968; a double record set nicknamed the white album ), and Abbey Road (1969).

In 1970 the Beatles disbanded to pursue separate careers; and the fatal shooting of John Lennon in 1980 seemed to symbolize the end of an era. As recently as 1994, though, the Beatles Live at the BBC was a best-selling album.

The Beatles highly original style derived from a variety of sources, including traditional blues, the rhythm and blues of Chuck Berry, the rock and roll of Elvis Presley, English folksongs, and the lyrics of Bob Dylan. The impact of Indian religions led Harrison to use the sitar. And the Beatles brief period of experimentation with hallucinogenic drugs was reflected in some of their songs of 1967. In their early days, the Beatles strove for originality so strongly that they consciously eliminated cliches of melody and harmony. Their style evolved continuously, growing in sophistication with each new album.

The Beatles vocal delivery sounded carefree and spontaneous, and Lennon s and McCartney s lyrics were unusually inventive. Their songs were often based on modes-rather than major or minor scales-and their harmonic vocabulary was richer than that of most rock. Sometimes their songs contained changes of meter and phrases of irregular length. Most striking was the Beatles use of many electronic and instrumental sounds not previously associated with rock. Many of these novel features can be heard in Sgt. Pepper s Lonely Hearts Club Band.