



TDT'S COLLEGE OF USELESS KNOWLEDGE

FAB-4 401

How did you find America? Turn left at Greenland; Carnegie Hall; A Hard Day's Night; He's very clean; Rubber Soul; Apple Corp; Bigger than Jesus; Sergeant Pepper; All You Need Is Love; HELP!; Shea Stadium; Blue Meanies; #9, #9, #9, #9; The Maharishi; Yoko & Linda; Yesterday; Newspaper Taxis; Candlestick Park; Paul is Dead; Abbey Road; Let It Be; Rooftop Concert; April 10, 1970.

All of those now mythical touchstones plus billions of adoring fans & unfathomable fame & wealth were still in the future on February 7, 1964 when The Beatles were still four relatively unknown lads flying across the Atlantic on Pan Am flight 101 & straight into the eye of a strengthening hurricane. They'd been booked by Manager Brian Epstein for an unprecedented 3 consecutive Sunday night appearances on Ed Sullivan.

The day after that first show it seemed the entire planet had been watching on that February night 50 long years ago. According to the Nielsen folks, the majority of us were, that 1964 show still has the highest percentage of American TV viewers of any broadcast.

That afternoon as a group of my pals shot hoops on the neighborhood goal, on the front of Peddicord Paint & Wallpaper, an older kid whizzed by on a bike & without stopping, shouted a pre internet text message at us, "The Beatles are gonna be on TV tonight." We'd seen him before but didn't really know who he was but at that moment I vividly remember thinking, this is gonna be something really big.

Even before the show started you just knew it was going to be a sea change. The excitement had been building for weeks on radio & TV. When the normally serious newsmen Walter Cronkite & Huntley-Brinkley ran features on this strange musical group from England with the weird haircuts, you knew it was a big deal. This pre publicity only helped ignite the fuse of Beatlemania before the lads had crossed the pond. You could sense it, sitting there in our 1950's era family room, in front of a not even close to HD, flickering black & white Admiral TV, that everything we'd known was about to change.

After Ed's typically stilted intro;

"Now yesterday & today our theater's been jammed with newspapermen & hundreds of photographers from all over the nation, & these veterans agree with me that this city never has witnessed the excitement stirred by these youngsters from Liverpool who call themselves The Beatles. Now tonight, you're gonna twice be entertained by them. Right now, & again in the second half of our show. Ladies & gentlemen, The Beatles! Let's bring them on!"

"Close your eyes & I'll kiss you, tomorrow I'll miss you..." & with that the majority of my gray matter vaporized. Over the previous couple of weeks & with several songs at the top of the US charts, I'd heard them a few times on WCYN (what starts with a W, ends with an N & has a C & a Y in the middle? WCYN? That's right!) which was cool enough but I'd never seen a

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picture of them. I'd heard all the girls at school talking endlessly about "the cute one" & the drummer with all the rings but I wasn't even sure yet which one was which. Cynthiana, being a somewhat backwards farm town did not yet have the AlGoreNet in 1964 (I know, but it's true). To finally see what they each looked like & see them play their instruments live, it was electrifying. If they had been three-eyed green Martians blasting the audience with skin melting ray guns disguised as guitars, it would have been no more shocking. That hair, those outfits, those sounds, it was mesmerizing. I wasn't exactly sure what I was seeing, but by gosh I liked it & I couldn't look away. It was simultaneously frightening & captivating.

I lay transfixed on a brown rag rug (whose smell I remember to this day) over top of our basement's green & white checkerboard tile floor. Flat out on my stomach, elbows dug into the rug, chin supported by both palms, feet kicking in the air & only inches from the screen as they reeled off All My Loving, Till There Was You & She Loves You to start the show. Then we had to wait what seemed like a lifetime for the encore. All the while watching cornball comedy skits & a magician, it was nails on the blackboard torture.

Even my mother said, "Oh that poor man," as Fred Kaps, had the thankless task of following the greatest moment in television history by doing hokey magic tricks with cards & a salt shaker. He did his best under the circumstances but the audience didn't react, at all. How could they, they were hypnotized & "poor" Fred was greeted by stunned silence as the studio audience, & those of us at home, struggled to catch our breath & force our brains to process what we'd witnessed moments before.

Surely Fred's agent was fired the next day for booking his client into that slot. I mean, the man followed the freakin Beatles with a salt shaker trick!!! On any other Sunday night he might have been the star of the show & received a standing ovation, but having drawn the short straw to follow The Beatles, he could not have looked any more prehistoric if he'd done shadow puppets of the characters from Ivanhoe.

Finally, after what was surely 2 or 3 hours, the other acts were finished & The Beatles came back for an encore of I Saw Her Standing There & lastly I Want To Hold Your Hand. If it was possible, the girls got even wilder & louder with every Haaaaaaand.

Contained within that one hour variety show was the seed of what would soon be dubbed by the media as the generation gap. Old versus new; corny one liners & a skit from Broadway's Oliver (coincidentally featuring a young actor & future Pre-Fab 4 member, Davy Jones) versus the look & sound of the future, poised to overthrow all that had gone before. An older depression era, conservative generation & one that would prove to be anything but, stood toe to toe like heavyweight fighters at the weigh-in.

It was like going from black & white to HDTV, from propellers to space shuttle, from telegraph to iPhone, all in the blink of an eye. Just like when Dorothy opens her door in The Wizard of Oz & her boring black & white world instantly transforms to brilliant Technicolor, it was no less dramatic. After that, everything else seemed ancient, tired, outdated...

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Then there were those girls screaming, I'd never seen, heard or even imagined anything like it, no one had. Yes, girls screamed for Sinatra, Elvis, Fabian & Jerry Lee, but not like this, this was light years beyond all that. These girls were going batshit crazy, crying, fainting, waving & flailing spastically about as a couple of adults in the audience exhibited the first ever recorded examples of WTF face. "Those girls look like carp in the bottom of a boat" commented by music critic father.

I've heard it said before & it really felt like the youth of the world inherited the universe that night. Change happened so fast once The Beatles exploded. I was already into music before that February night but that cemented my interest & future plans. I was gonna be in a rock & roll band if it killed me, &/or my parents.

John Fogerty apparently had the same reaction & he sang about it on his 1985 Centerfield album in his song, "I Saw It On TV"....

*I know it's true, oh so true, cause I saw it on TV.
We gathered round to hear the sound, coming from the little screen.
The grief had passed, the old men laughed & all the girls screamed.
Cause four guys from England, took us all by the hand.
It was time to laugh, time to sing, time to join the band.*

And join the band we did, whether by attempting to emulate The Beatles by actually forming a band or by becoming lifetime Beatlemaniacs, the first generation. Apparently me & my buds weren't the only ones, as hundreds of famous & millions of not so much famous musicians credit that precise moment in time as the ignition point for their entry into the world of music. In the following weeks & months, sales of electric guitars & drum kits skyrocketed. Some of the more famous musicians whose careers started that magical night include:

Billy Joel

"The Beatles really synthesized what I wanted to do. The single biggest moment that I can remember being galvanized into wanting to be a musician for life was seeing The Beatles on The Ed Sullivan Show."

Gene Simons, KISS

"There is no way I'd be doing what I do now if it wasn't for the Beatles. I was watching The Ed Sullivan Show & I saw them. Those skinny little boys, kind of androgynous, with long hair like girls. It blew me away that these four boys from the middle of nowhere could make that music."

Joe Perry, Aerosmith

"Seeing them on TV was akin to a national holiday. Talk about an event. I never saw guys looking so cool. I had already heard some of their songs on the radio, but I wasn't prepared for how powerful & totally mesmerizing they were to watch. It changed me completely. I knew

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something was different in the world that night. The next day at school the Beatles were all anybody could talk about. Us guys had to play it kind of cool, because the girls were so excited & were drawing little hearts on their notebooks, "I love Paul," that kind of thing. But I think there was an unspoken thing with the guys that we all really dug The Beatles too. We just couldn't come right out & say it."

Steven Van Zandt, Bruce Springsteen & The E Street Band

"This was the main event of my life. It was certainly the major event for many others, whether or not they knew it at the time. For me, it was no less dramatic than aliens landing on the planet. There's no equivalent of that today, TV shows that literally everybody watched. All ages, all ethnic groups, all in black & white on a 14-inch screen. It was their sound, their looks, their attitudes. It was so many things. A time to look at things differently, question things a little bit. All kinds of things were new."

David Crosby, Buffalo, Springfield, The Byrds, Crosby Stills Nash & Young

"My first taste of The Beatles, like everyone else on the planet, was on Ed Sullivan. I was in Chicago, living with a guy named Clem Floyd on Well Street, right in the middle of it all. The next weekend Clem walks in with that first Beatles album, Meet The Beatles. He put it on & I just didn't know what to think. It absolutely floored me. I said, Those are folk-music changes, but it's got a rock & roll backbeat. You can't do that, but they did! Holy yikes! I ate it for breakfast."

Dave Grohl, Nirvana & Foo Fighters

"Since I wasn't born until the year before they broke up I sadly missed Ed's really big shoe, but if it weren't for The Beatles, I absolutely wouldn't be a musician. They are my mom's favorite band, my favorite band & now my daughter's favorite band. The Beatles are the foundation of everything we do today."

Then, as abruptly as it had started the show was over, the closing credits flashed on the screen. The sudden void sucked the oxygen out of my parent's family room & decompression set in. Like a couple of million other kids, I sat stunned for a few minutes, then was hustled off to bed before I could come to terms with what I'd seen. After a few Ringo inspired drum solos on my mattress, I picked up my comb. There was much work to be done.

In a single weekend everything in my life had changed. I'd come home from school that Friday afternoon looking like the poster boy for the Young Rotarians & I went back to school on Monday morning with my hair dry & combed forward. The makers of Vitalis & Brylcreem lost an entire generation of customers in that single hour. That's how quickly it happened & I wasn't alone, virtually every guy I knew in school went through the same weekend metamorphosis. The Beatles waved their magic wand, created a shimmer of style, hipness &

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the long overdue death of the greaser. The direction of our lives shifted as radically as the direction of our hair. It was magic.

For only 6 far too short years, the world was the beneficiary of near perfection from a group of working class lads who tried their hand at every musical genre imaginable & pulled it off brilliantly. No other musicians before or since have grabbed the world's imagination & affection quite like John, Paul, George & Ringo.

Why else would people make a video game from their music 40 years after their last album was released; or buy new versions of albums they'd already bought multiple times in vinyl, 8 track, cassette, CD & now digital? Why else would anyone travel to Liverpool just to sit in a barber's chair; visit a clean fire station; trace a name on a tombstone or stand with a tear in their eye at the gates to an orphanage. Why else would anyone go halfway around the world to take a picture of their feet on the spot where two of them met almost 60 years ago?

What John Lennon, Paul McCartney, George Harrison & Ringo Starr gave the world is a catalog of songs that are safe enough for children, but complex enough to write a doctoral thesis on, which is why so many subsequent generations have grown up on them since the 60's.

Despite the recent onslaught of media coverage, The Beatles aren't back because they've never gone away & from all appearances never will. They are part of our collective DNA. They remain the most popular band across all ages of all time. Why do The Beatles still have the power to hold our collective & multigenerational attention?

Beyond their incredible songs, trend setting fashions & razor sharp wits, they did something even more important. They made people feel good. They gave people hope. They brought people together. They made people smile. Fifty years after they first captivated us they're still doing it.

What do their songs mean to me?

In my life, I've loved them all!