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The Beatles and Their Influence on Culture

(B.A. Thesis)

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Declaration

I hereby declare that I have worked on this B.A. thesis independently, using only the primary and secondary sources listed in the bibliography.

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Introduction

Everyone knows the Beatles. There are people who do not know their music (although I do not believe there is someone in Western society who has not heard “She Loves You” or “Help!”), but even those have at least heard about the band and are familiar with the name. People recognize them in pictures, a lot of them know their names – at least the first names John, Paul, George and Ringo (very often named in this fixed order) – and most of them can tell which of them is which. The hairstyle the Beatles were wearing in the first half of their career is usually referred to as the ‘beatle-hairstyle.’ Glasses with round rims are called ‘lenonky’ in Czech, for it is the type of glasses John Lennon was wearing in the second half of the Beatles’ career and afterwards. Allusions to their songs and lives are often used in movies and TV series. And most probably, a lot of people who have learned English have spelt the word ‘beetle’ with an ‘a.’ The Beatles transcended pop music and became a part of cultural history of the world.

In my thesis I would like to look upon the Beatles as not only a musical but also a cultural phenomenon. I will seek to describe their rise to fame against the background of the times and to prove that their music, as well as their activities outside music, had an immense impact on culture in general both in and outside Britain.

The work is divided into five chapters. The first one describes the cultural background of the 1960s – of the ‘Beatle-decade.’ The second chapter attempts to explain why it was the Beatles who became the most adored band ever. Two following chapters deal with the Beatles’ songs – chapter 3 concentrates on their music and on what they brought to this field, chapter 4 discusses the Beatles’ lyrics. The last chapter brings concrete examples of their influence both during their active career and today.

1. Cultural Background

The legacy of the sixties has been definitely very important for the development of society and culture in what is commonly called ‘civilized countries,’ and the changes society underwent make the decade one of the crucial periods of the 20th century and a milestone we must pass by when we want to study the decades that followed. The sixties were in many respects revolutionary. The changes affected not only the civilized countries (especially Europe and the USA) but also less developed states (in Africa and South America). Let us, however, concentrate on the former.

As has been said, the late fifties and the sixties brought about changes in society that were very widespread geographically, but what is even more important and what distinguishes the sixties from other decades is the fact that these changes were also widespread demographically – they had an influence on a much wider age spectrum than in any previous decade (MACDONALD 7) – and touched almost every field (from politics to popular culture). But why was it so? Why did the sixties of all decades have such a great impact on people of all backgrounds? Obviously, there are many reasons for this, but one seems to be especially significant. It is what is called the ‘affluent society’ (MCGUIGAN 92, MARWICK 145). Indeed, after the forties marked by World War II and the fifties still very much affected by the economic consequences of this biggest armed conflict in history, the sixties were the first decade in which people appeared to be settled with the war, at least economically if not mentally (see “die 68er¹” in Germany). MARWICK’s words about Britain more or less reflect the situation all over Europe: “New production techniques brought down the price of consumer goods while making it possible to pay higher wages” (110). This is well illustrated by the statistics: only about 8 percent of British families had a refrigerator in 1956, in 1962 it

¹ “Die Achtundsechziger”: anti-consumerism movement in Germany in the sixties. See pp. 3-4.

was 33 percent, and in 1971 it was 69 percent; 75 percent of households had a television set in 1961 and this rose to 91 percent in 1971 (MARWICK 117). Labour-saving appliances helped people (especially women in households) do their chores; people had now much more free time and began to spend many more hours on free-time activities.

It was no longer necessary to work day in and day out to survive. The majority of people had a place to live, had clothes to wear and food to eat, which means they had all vital things they needed to feel secure. But wages and salaries were increasing and people started to want more than to survive – they wanted to have fun. The demand for entertainment rose, because people could afford it. MARWICK says about the UK: “[...] there was a new hedonism abroad in the land; [...] life was lived with greater gusto [...]” (152).

The increasing pay slightly blurred the boundaries between classes (see MARWICK 154-155) – this concerned mainly the working class and the middle class, the upper class being a bit detached – which is why the sixties are often regarded as ‘classless.’ The word is maybe too strong and e.g. Ian MACDONALD’s claim that class barriers collapsed overnight is really exaggerated (19). In fact classes did not disappear and the difference between the upper class and the working class was immense in all respects, but it is true that the status of the working class had changed. Regional accents, many of which had been connected with the working class (e.g. Cockney), began to be generally accepted and started to appear on television and radio (MACDONALD 19, MARWICK 154). And above all, people of working-class origin began to be successful (MARWICK 124, 154), of which fact the Beatles are an illustrious example.

The sixties witnessed commercialization of everything. The ‘new consumer society’ (this term e.g. in MARWICK 123) emerged, “in which hitherto underprivileged and silent groups now had, if not a voice, certainly purchasing power” (MARWICK 123). This was not

only the case of the working class, but also of the youth, which was leading the consumption boom (MACDONALD 19).

When I was thinking about what to write about society in the 1960s (which is, of course, a topic for countless studies) and when I was taking notes, I marked five words with an exclamation mark. These words are: affluence, youth, drugs, pop, and equality (or freedom). These are, in my opinion, the most important words linked with the changes that took place in the sixties, that influenced the culture and people's thinking the most, and that represent the reasons why the sixties are considered to be an enormously important decade. To a certain extent they overlap.

Affluence having been mentioned already let us continue with the youth. One of the crucial aspects concerning the youth was the fact that young people were now richer (or rather they had more money to spend on entertainment). As well as the working class, the young were among those "hitherto underprivileged groups" which had to be counted with as potential customers. Popular music began to be oriented on the youth; there were TV and radio shows for the young etc.

However, the fight of children against their parents' culture seems to be even more important. The 'generation gap' has been a very popular topic lately. There has always been a difference in tastes between parents and their children; very often parents do not understand their children's feelings and attitudes and children look on their parents' ways of living with contempt. However, in the sixties the gulf between these two age groups was even wider than it had ever been before (and most probably wider than ever after). In the whole world there was a feeling of discontent with the state of society among the young. It was, in their opinion, too consumption-oriented and corrupt. Young people held this corruption against the generation of their parents, though the reasons were different in different countries. The youth in Britain hated the "Victorian moral code" (MARWICK 147) with its prejudices and uptight

attitudes. The movement of 68er in Germany (at its peak in 1968, hence the name) protested against consumerism (they followed the ideas of Herbert Marcuse and the Frankfurt School represented by people such as Theodor Adorno, Max Horkheimer or Jürgen Habermas) and against exceeding tolerance towards former Nazis who were now successful and who had not been punished after the Second World War. In the same year Czechoslovak society had high hopes for a reform of the communist regime, which were shattered by the Soviet occupation on 21st August.

The most influential movement of the sixties connected with the youth emerged in the United States. The hippie movement protested against the war in Vietnam, which started in the early 1960s. Thousands of young men refused to join the army. They left their homes and lived in communities with other young people where they wanted to live in peace and love. Hippies were, in a way, followers of the Beat generation. They rebelled against the traditional values of their parents. The difference in thinking, which was very hard to bridge (if ever that was ever possible), is perfectly shown in the first movie Miloš Forman made in the USA, *Taking Off*² (1971). In the very last scene, the father is singing a song to the accompaniment of a piano (played by the mother), while the daughter, who left home and after some time came back, and her boyfriend are listening. The father is wearing a suit and the mother has on an elegant dress while the kids are sitting on the floor wearing casual clothes. The song the parents are performing is symbolically “Stranger in Paradise” (the Paradise can be interpreted as the world of love and peace which the young dream of and where the parents – strangers – will never belong), which is a 1950s musical song. On the one hand, the daughter and her boyfriend are carefully listening, which implies they are trying to understand the parents; nevertheless, a look in the daughter’s face reveals that they probably never will.

² According to the webpage www.imdb.com, the movie is inspired by the Beatles’ song “She’s Leaving Home.”

The centre of the hippie culture was San Francisco, California. “If you’re going to San Francisco, be sure to wear some flowers in your hair,” sang Scot McKenzie in his 1967 hit, and indeed, this city was a symbol of the hippie movement. People from all around the United States were gathering in this city and hoped they would find there a better future and an ideal world. This movement influenced a lot of artists (including the Beatles). The hippie culture was closely connected with drugs and popular music and hippies largely contributed to, if not started, the sexual revolution by promoting free love. The peaks of the flower-power movement were the “acid summer” of 1967 (this term e.g. in HARRISON 34; “acid” stands here for LSD, lysergic acid diethylamide: MARWICK 143) and the Woodstock festival, which was held from 21st to 24th August 1969 and where bands and singers such as the Grateful Dead, the Jefferson Airplane, Joe Cocker and Jimi Hendrix performed and “attracted a total audience of some 450,000 people” (GAMMOND 617). The importance of hippies for culture is illustrated by the fact that many films deal with this issue – *Easy Rider* (directed by Dennis Hopper, 1969), *Hair* (Miloš Forman, 1979) and to a great extent *Forrest Gump* (Robert Zemeckis, 1994), to name at least the most prominent.

Hippies embodied the new and fresh power that challenged the old world order. Society in the 1960s was generally absorbed in this fight of old prejudices and backward attitudes against new and progressive attitudes. Great Britain was one of the countries where this tension was felt most strongly. In this respect we must consider the sixties a response to the fifties. Arthur MARWICK speaks about “an attack upon the cosiness, the clichés, the stereotyped assumptions, and the parochialism of British society” (125); Ian MACDONALD compares Britain to a bomb which was sooner or later to explode (14). The sexual revolution of the sixties touched Great Britain as well and several important changes inspired and influenced by the mood of the decade took place in the United Kingdom. In 1967 two crucial laws were passed. The Abortion Act made it easier for women to have an abortion, and the

Sexual Offences Act ended prosecution of homosexuality. The “Victorian moral code” was relaxed, British society became more liberal (MARWICK 147-9).

The sixties in general and the hippie subculture in particular cannot be thought of without drugs; and there are two drugs which are regarded as the sixties drugs (though they had been used before). They are cannabis (marihuana and hashish) and LSD. Cannabis had been used by artists for a long time (Baudelaire wrote about hashish in 1860 in his essay “Les Paradis artificiels”: FÜRST 197). Having grown much more easily available in the 1960s, marihuana was now widely used among the young who thus wanted to experience something new, to escape from everyday boredom, and to break free from their parents’ world. There is another great scene in *Taking Off* – parents of children who ran away set up the “Society for the Parents of Fugitive Children,” and at one of the sessions they are taught how to smoke “pot” by an ex-hippie, so that they would understand their kids. Marihuana was used by hippies, but it was also used by other people, who did not belong to the flower-power movement. This cannot be said about LSD, which was almost exclusively connected with hippies and people directly influenced by them: “[I]n the middle sixties, it was the drug of the San Francisco underground culture [and] its spread to Britain was probably on a very limited scale” (MARWICK 143). LSD was promoted by its chief adherent, political radical Dr. Timothy Leary (MACDONALD 20). “Trips” were so popular because LSD opens a field of new experiences to the user, perception is much more intensive, colours and sounds are distorted (FÜRST 199), which was something hippies called for.

One of the most important words describing the sixties is pop. Popular culture became commercialized more than other fields, and the entertainment industry began to concentrate on groups which, until now, had not been important (again Marwick’s “hitherto underprivileged and silent groups” such as the working class and the youth). MARWICK also

points out that the “pop revolution [...] depended upon the spending power of the affluent teenager” (MARWICK 131).

The most important part of popular culture in the sixties was music. For a lot of young people music became a means of expressing oneself because hardly anyone could afford to shoot a film, but everyone could save some money, buy a guitar, and start playing. For those not talented or not willing to be active musicians, music was fun and a leisure time activity, as well as a way to socialize (concerts and festivals) or show their disapproval with something by attending performances of certain musicians (protest song writers such as Pete Seger, Joan Baez, and Bob Dylan were popular in the United States). In the sixties entertainment and fun ceased to be the chief and only purpose of music, and a new form emerged: music that carries a message, songs in which the lyrics are more important than the tune. Of course, the primary purpose was still present in music; there were still bands which concentrated on music per se and were not interested in political and social issues, and the other way round, the bands which focused on lyrics tried to accompany the words with good melodies.

The last of the words is equality (or maybe freedom). The 1960s witnessed a rise of the human rights movement. A lot of minorities strove to achieve equal position to the majority, some of them more, some of them less successfully. Gays and lesbians and the feminist movement were significant, the best known and most influential was, however, the fight for equality of black people. Personalities like Martin Luther King and Malcolm X (both were assassinated in the sixties) fought for equal rights for black, or more generally coloured, people. MACDONALD, however, stresses the importance of cultural, rather than political, emancipation of black people, notably of their music such as blues, rock and roll, and rhythm and blues, and its influence on music (15).

2. Why the Beatles?

In the previous chapter I briefly and generally described the cultural background of the sixties. Now I would like to attempt to explain why it was the Beatles who made the grade in this atmosphere and why they are regarded as the best band in the history of popular music.

However much I love the Beatles and their music, I find it slightly exaggerated to consider them *the best* pop group in history. They were definitely great and most probably *the most important* band, but in terms of music (both song writing and virtuosity in playing their instruments) and lyrics they have been caught up with, if not outrun, by at least a few bands. What makes them so special is their impact on music in general – the influence they have had on bands of various genres all over the world from the sixties up to the present day – and their immense influence on culture and people’s thinking. The death of John Lennon in December 1980 on the one hand buried all hopes of the Beatles’ coming together again, saddened all their fans, and shocked the whole world, on the other hand glorified John Lennon and with him the Beatles and made them even greater legends than they had been before. Nowadays the Beatles have a special status – strictly speaking they are a cult band – and no one dares to question their position of the best band in history, which is largely thanks to their importance for society and culture and not only because of their musical contribution, which has been vital for the development of music.

The main reason, or at least one of the main reasons, the Beatles became what they became was, quite naturally, their music. They were influenced by black music, notably by rock and roll and rock and roll musicians like Chuck Berry, Roy Orbison, Isley Brothers, and the “King of rock” Elvis Presley (surprisingly it was a white man who was dubbed the King of rock and roll). They were influenced by skiffle – a style of music popular in England in the 1950s (among their heroes was for instance Lonnie Donegan). Paul McCartney was, in a way,

influenced by music-hall – or rather the music-hall tradition, for music-hall and variety were becoming less and less popular and started to give way to American music like ragtime and jazz (CHAMBERS 134) in the forties, when Paul was growing up. This influence, however, became more apparent later in their career, e.g. in “When I’m Sixty-Four” (released in 1967 but composed sometime in the fifties: MACDONALD 181-2) and “Maxwell’s Silver Hammer” (1969). All these major and many minor musical influences combined, plus the influence of Liverpool as an important English port and thus a place where various cultures encounter, plus the young age of the four boys equals something new and fresh (MACDONALD, MATZNER). Many critics, including Lubomír Dorůžka and Antonín Matzner, stress the importance of the Beatles’ four tours in Hamburg between 1960 and 1962. They went there to earn money, and it was always very strenuous, for they were forced to play all night, and their performance had to have power and energy because it was what both the German audience and the owners of the clubs the Beatles performed at asked for. It was during the stays in the city on the Elbe that they “achieved their simple, economical, distinctive style, soon to be dubbed the ‘Liverpool’ sound” (GAMMOND 46).

But a distinctive style is still not enough. Every year a number of talented and inventive bands spring up, but very few of them actually break through. And the situation at the beginning of the sixties was very similar. The Beatles were not at all the only band that was fresh and full of energy. They were highly skilled in playing live but so were other bands. George Martin, one of the best and most important record producers in history (this is to a great extent thanks to cooperation with the Beatles), recalls what his feelings were when he first heard several songs by the Beatles: “I didn’t think a great deal of the songs or the singers. But I did think they produced an interesting sound” (HUNTER 163). At that time they were not yet brilliant and mature musicians; they were young boys (George Harrison was 19 in 1962,

when they started recording their first single “Love Me Do”) and, like many other equally promising groups, they wanted to break through.

Here, then, another crucial factor comes into play. Luck. One must admit that the Beatles were quite lucky even though they deserved it. In their case luck was personified by their manager Brian Epstein. Legend has it that Epstein, a shop assistant in his grandfather’s record store, learned about the Beatles from a youngster in a leather jacket called Raymond Jones, who came to the shop to buy a record the Beatles made in Germany as a backing group of Tony Sheridan – “My Bonnie.” Brian went to see the Beatles play in the Cavern. He was fascinated by them, and at the end of 1961 he became their manager (HUNTER 129). Bob Spitz, a Beatles fan who gathered a lot of material about the band and wrote a book which tries to correct commonly believed myths about them, denies this story and claims that Epstein had known the Beatles before and, as a homosexual, found them irresistible (HÖFER). But it does not really matter how Brian Epstein came to the Beatles; it is important that he was an honest and well-meaning manager, who loved the Beatles’ music and believed in them. He did his best to help them from the beginning of their career until his premature death (at the age of 32). He underwent dozens of interviews and negotiations to secure them a recording contract, he arranged everything for them, he was the man who ran an advertising campaign to promote them, and he was the force that held the band together (his death in 1967 was the beginning of the end of the Beatles) (MATZNER). He could actually be regarded as the fifth member of the Beatles, for if it had not been for him, the Beatles would most probably only have been famous in Liverpool. He deserves the credit for the Beatles’ becoming famous as much as the four musicians.

If Brian Epstein was to be counted as the fifth Beatle, then George Martin would have to be counted as the sixth. Being the producer, he was definitely closer to the Beatles’ music than Brian Epstein, who did not participate in the creative process but took care of everything

about it. Martin produced the Beatles' records for their entire career. He not only supervised the recordings, he also arranged songs for brass and string sections and other musicians (orchestras). The cooperation with the Beatles glorified George Martin as well, which is reflected for instance in the fact that he was allocated a separate entry in *The Oxford Companion to Popular Music*, an honour many great musicians, e.g. Freddie Mercury, one of the greatest and most famous singers ever, were denied. We can read there: "He signed up the Beatles in 1962 and became very much a part of their creative activities, not only leading them into various artistic and technical venues but also arranging for them and even recording with them" (GAMMOND 373). And indeed, the information in MACDONALD confirms that George Martin took part as an active musician (he usually played the piano) in more than 30 songs. This is another reason why the Fab Four became brilliant musicians and popular personalities: they were led by a capable producer, who was able to discover and use their talents.

To be a good musician is an indispensable prerequisite for anyone who wants to become a pop star. However, image should not be underestimated. There have been quite a lot of singers and bands whose image and appearance was almost as substantial as their music (among those are e.g. David Bowie, Genesis, Queen). The sixties were the decade in which television finally broke through as the main medium: "by 1961 [television] was reaching into the homes of 75 per cent of the population [of Britain]" (MARWICK 134). For musicians it was now necessary to look interesting in some way or other. Not only was the actual appearance (in pictures and photographs) important, but also how the band (the singer) looked when on stage, and if their 'acting' – for live performance is in large part acting – could attract people's attention and win audience. And the Beatles did look good and appealing, especially to young people. It was, actually, one of their major assets and another reason they became stars. Probably the most famous thing about the appearance of the lads from Liverpool, and

one that definitely drew attention, was their hair. They started to wear their typical hairdos in about 1961, when Astrid Kirchherr combed Stuart Sutcliffe – her boyfriend and a then member of the Beatles, who left the band and stayed with Astrid in Hamburg, where he died of a brain tumour a year later – in this way. The other members of the band were making fun of him at first; nevertheless, they soon adopted this hairstyle, having thus abandoned their combed up teddy-boy hair (MATZNER 71). But it was also their behaviour in general. The Beatles were young and rebelled against the cosy and dull way of living of their parents' generation; and this struck a chord with a lot of boys and girls in Britain. The Beatles's image is described by GAMMOND as follows: "As personalities they were endearing, arrogant, witty, cynical by turns; interesting and articulate, but out to have a good time; with a self-deprecating honesty that cut through the publicity hype" (46). Their fresh and cheeky behaviour must have been appealing to many British teenagers in the early sixties. Hanif KUREISHI wrote: "The Beatles became heroes to the young because they were not deferential: no authority had broken their spirit; they were confident and funny; they answered back; no one put them down" (86).

Here we have then a simple piece of advice for everyone who wants to become a music star: be talented, find an able manager, find a great producer and have an agreeable appearance and act in a way people will like. Obviously, this 'set of instructions' has been used for a long time (significantly spurred, if not started, by the commercialization in the 1960s) and many popular singers' careers have been based on this principle. However, most of the singers that have been more or less artificially created by producers and managers (though they may have been good at 'their craft') miss something to win the same acclaim, fame, and glory as for instance Frank Sinatra, Elvis Presley, the Beatles, ABBA, and Michael Jackson.

This thing could be described as a 'cult'. The Beatles were at first a local Liverpool phenomenon. In December 1961 they won a popularity poll ran by *Mersey Beat* (local musical magazine), and they had a lot of fans in Liverpool and Merseyside. However, until they met George Martin, they had been turned down by several record companies in London which thought the Beatles' music could not offer anything special (HUNTER, MATZNER). How come only two years later they were the most popular band in Great Britain, driving teenagers gaga and selling thousands of records? Had taste in music changed so significantly or had the Beatles improved so much within the time? The answer is no. It was Brian Epstein's hard work that got their first single "Love Me Do" on air (he told all his and the Beatles' friends to write to radio Luxembourg and ask them if they could play the song) and a bit of luck and good connections (their music publisher Dick James) that got them to the television programme *Thank Your Lucky Star* where they performed their second single "Please Please Me" (MATZNER). Thanks to this TV appearance, the song became their first number one hit. At that time there was no official chart; "Please Please Me" won the hit parades of the *Melody Maker*, the *New Musical Express*, the *Disc* and of the BBC radio show *Pick of the Pops* (MACDONALD 51). And when it was soon followed by another number one success of their third single "From Me to You" (MATZNER), the Beatles shot to stardom. Their music was the same and so was their audience's taste, but there was something special about them: they became fashion. And fashion is an important sociological and cultural factor which is usually relatively hard to explain. This time the fashion had its name. 'Beatlemania' was a term coined in the *Daily Mirror* in 1963 (MATZNER 124). At first this adoration of the Beatles and everything connected with them only concerned the young, but later it spread among all age groups. Davies HUNTER in the Beatles' authorized biography says: "People of all ages and all intellects [...] succumbed, though perhaps not all as hysterically as the teenagers" (182). And this is what distinguishes them from other bands, though good and successful like e.g. Rolling

Stones. The fuss and hysteria about them, the fact that they influenced everything³. Their pictures were everywhere, their records were bought by everyone and probably even people who did not like the Beatles or their music were in a way influenced by them because that is the way fashion affects people.

The thing about fashion is it does not last very long. Beatlemania lasted more than three years (it started in October 1963 and stopped by 1967: HUNTER 182), which is far more than a temporary vogue usually lasts. It calmed down, but the Beatles were still megastars. After something fashionable reaches the peak, it normally dies down. Not the Beatles. The crucial thing is they developed, and this is, in my opinion, the final reason for their being considered untouchable stars today. Had they remained the same, they would have become boring and their fans would have found another band to adore. The Beatles, however, changed almost everything (their music, their lyrics, their appearance, their ideas etc) and thus were still interesting for their fans.

As I have written, a lot of fans hoped the Beatles would reunite after the breakup, but the murder of John Lennon put a definite end to all speculations of this kind. He died a martyr and his tragic end made the Beatles an absolute cult because people felt that their career, although they had not played together for ten years, was destroyed by a maniac.

³ Harold Wilson was called the first 'Beatle prime minister' after he had won the election in 1964 (MATZNER 163).

3. Music

Even though the Beatles' music is not the primary topic of this essay, I find it necessary to write about the musical legacy of this band, about what influenced them and how they have influenced their followers.

The Beatles' beginnings and the influences that formed their musical thinking were partly covered in the previous chapter. They were influenced by black music – rock and roll, rhythm & blues, doo-wop etc – and skiffle, a style derived from black music popular in Britain in the fifties. Bands from Liverpool at the beginning of the sixties developed a distinctive sound called the 'Mersey beat' or the 'Liverpool sound.' It was “an anglicized form of rhythm'n'blues, with a swinging beat and clean harmonies,” it was most popular between 1962 and 1965, and apart from the Beatles, the style was played by bands like Gerry and the Pacemakers and the Searchers (GAMMOND 380). The Beatles were the most prominent Mersey beat group, and they were still very much a Liverpool sound band during the days of their greatest fame and glory, Beatlemania (approximately from 1963-66). It was only later (from the albums *Rubber Soul* and *Revolver* on – released in 1965 and 1966 respectively) that they started to change their sound and explore new areas of music. “On these albums the group moved away from simplicity, experimenting with electronic effects and added instruments in the studio, moving in all kinds of stylistic directions” (GAMMOND 46). An example: George Harrison was enchanted by the sitar, and “Norwegian Wood” from *Rubber Soul* was the first pop song in which the sitar was used (MATZNER 178). The Beatles later used this musical instrument in several other songs (e.g. “Tomorrow Never Knows,” “Love You To,” and “Within You Without You”), and thus brought oriental sound to the mainstream audience in Europe. The most important thing about *Rubber Soul* and *Revolver* was the fact that the black influence was beginning to be felt less and less in the Beatles' music, and that

from those albums on something new would be created. From that time on the Fab Four would pave the way of pop music. It is hardly a mere coincidence that the metamorphosis of the Beatles as musicians went hand in hand with their metamorphosis as lyricists.

Probably the most important Beatles' album is *Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band*, which was released in 1967. It is often regarded as their best album (e.g. by DORUŽKA 163) and it is crucial for the development of popular music for several factors. GAMMOND wrote about this album that it is "a mixture of surrealism, mysticism, vaudeville, and rock that took pop music to new levels of inventiveness" (46). Firstly, it is the first concept album (WICKE AND ZIEGENRÜCKER 281): an album which does not consist of various individual songs put together, but which is planned as a whole (though the songs do not have to be of the same kind). The songs on *Sgt. Pepper* are very different in style: there are rock songs such as the title song "Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band" and "Getting Better"; there are songs with strange harmonies ("Fixing a Hole" and "Being for the Benefit of Mr Kite"); there is a music-hall song ("When I'm 64"), a psychedelic song ("Lucy in the Sky with Diamonds"), a song influenced by Indian music and philosophy ("Within You Without You") etc. They are, however, not only a bunch of songs, but "a cycle of songs with a welcome, a conclusion and a postscript" (DORUŽKA 163, my translation). Indeed, the album is opened by "Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band" and ends with "Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band (Reprise)" (a shorter version of the song with different lyrics), which without a stop or pause goes into "A Day in the Life," one of the Beatles' greatest song. It consists of three parts: the first and the third are formed by the same theme written by John Lennon, the middle part is composed by Paul McCartney. The themes are entirely different, but they are interlinked and work together as a whole. The song crowns the album and its composition is similar to the composition of the whole album. Since the end of the sixties concept albums have been quite common (e.g. *Dark Side of the Moon* by Pink Floyd in 1973, *Diamond Dogs* by David Bowie

in 1974 or *Kid A* by Radiohead in 2000 to name some of my favourites), but it was the Beatles who started it.

Secondly, another novelty brought by *Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band* which was adopted by other bands and which is commonly used today was the lyrics printed at the back of the sleeve (MATZNER 211).

The third important thing is the mystification about the album. The fictitious Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band consists of the Beatles plus about seventy other (famous) personalities including writers Edgar Allan Poe, Oscar Wilde, and Aldous Huxley, actors Johnny Weismuller, Marilyn Monroe, Shirley Temple, and Marlene Dietrich, and other people of various professions (Albert Einstein, Bob Dylan, Sir Robert Peel, Laurel & Hardy). Paul McCartney's idea was to make an album which would be released as a record of a fictitious band and which would conceal the fact it is recorded by the Beatles (Brouci.com). This idea was later abandoned, probably for financial reasons, and *Sgt. Pepper* was released as another Beatles' album. The imaginary band, however, stayed on, and thus one of the first attempts, if not the very first (and definitely the first to be noticed worldwide), to add something of this kind to music, to mystify and confuse the fans, and to make them think and doubt was created. This was brought to perfection in 2001, when the band Gorillaz released their first album. The group consists of four cartoon figures each representing one 'living member' of the band. Their videos are cartoons and the real people (the lead singer is Damon Albarn, the lead singer of Blur – one of the most famous British bands of the 1990s) never show themselves⁴.

On *Sgt. Pepper* (or rather in this period) the Beatles were supported by many guest musicians. The Beatles' first album with guest musicians (if we don't count their producer George Martin and Andy White – a studio drummer who replaced Ringo at the Beatles' very

⁴ Gorillaz ceased to be entirely fictitious in November 2005, when the living members performed live at Manchester Opera House (www.bbc.co.uk/radio1, www.musicserver.cz).

first recording session) was *Help!* (1965): there is a string quartet in “Yesterday” and a flautist in “You’ve Got to Hide Your Love Away” (MACDONALD). On *Sgt. Pepper* there are, however, many more of them, including an orchestra of 40 people (MACDONALD 185) in “A Day in the Life.” This can be regarded as another Beatles’ contribution to popular music, for it was not at all common for bands in the sixties to have a symphony orchestra (though in the case of “A Day in the Life” reduced to a half) on their records.

Moreover, the making of “A Day in the Life” was recorded on video, and a film was supposed to be made (MACDONALD 188). This project was not realized, but later (in 1970) the Beatles recorded a documentary, called *Let It Be*, which shows them in the studio working on their final album of the same name.

Sgt. Pepper’s Lonely Hearts Club Band is the Beatles’ most critically acclaimed album. It is, however, largely due to its importance for the development of pop music; the following albums are not significantly inferior in quality (if we do not count *Yellow Submarine* (1969), which is a soundtrack to an animated cartoon), but they lack the revolutionary features of *Sgt. Pepper*. Nevertheless, they are all cult albums (which the albums from the first half of the Beatles’ career are not). *Magical Mystery Tour* (1967) contains, among other great songs, “Strawberry Fields Forever” and “Penny Lane,” which had been previously released as a double A-sided single and had reached number one in the charts. *The Beatles* (1968), often referred to as the *White Album*, is a double album, and it is very famous for its cover (entirely white, with the title ‘The Beatles’ written on it in grey and scarcely visible). *Abbey Road* (1969) is particularly popular with the Beatles’ fans. It contains familiar hit songs like “Come Together,” “Maxwell’s Silver Hammer,” and “Here Comes the Sun,” and its cover depicting John, Ringo, Paul and George crossing the street in a row is one of the best known album covers ever. And finally, *Let It Be* (1970) is the Beatles’ last album; it was released a month after the Beatles had officially broken up.

By way of illustration how the Beatles influenced other bands, I would like to quote Brian May, the guitarist from Queen – one of the best and most famous British bands ever. He recalls how Queen were recording their biggest hit “Bohemian Rhapsody” (released in 1975; named The Song of The Millennium and the Guinness Book of Records’ Number One Song of All Time: “Queen: Greatest Video Hits 1”) and speaks about double tracking (recording the same track, in this case the lead vocal, twice to get a better or more interesting sound):

[...] very much like John Lennon used to do with the Beatles. And the Beatles were our Bible, it has to be said, in a lot of ways, although we were able to take some things further than the Beatles because we had better technology, and we had the benefit of their experience. But the Beatles just did so many things right, and John Lennon double tracking stuff would normally make it just a little bit different so you could feel the humanity of the two voices, it wasn’t just like an automatic double track [...]. (“Queen: Greatest Video Hits 1”)

There are a lot of Beatles revival bands all over the world – in the Czech Republic there are e.g. Pangea (Šumperk), The Teplo (Kladno), Glass Onion (Brno) and the Backwards (from Košice, Slovakia) – most of them are very popular and their concerts are very well attended. But the people who come to their concerts do not come to listen to the revival band but to listen to the Beatles, for it is the only way to see the ‘Beatles’ live. Hopefully, the two living members of the band, Paul McCartney and Ringo Starr, will not try to make a comeback as the Beatles⁵ because, apart from earning big money, the contribution to the legacy of the Beatles would be zero.

Apart from technical improvements and inventions the Beatles and George Martin pioneered in the studio, the Beatles were also interesting for having four lead singers: Lennon and McCartney were proper lead singers, Harrison and Starr performed as lead singers now and then.

⁵ Hopefully, they will not follow the example of Brian May and Roger Taylor from Queen, who in 2005 set out on tour with Paul Rodgers, announcing the ‘Queen comeback.’ Out of four original members there were only the two mentioned; Rodgers was supposed to take over the part of the legendary lead singer, Freddie Mercury, who died of AIDS in 1991. According to this scheme, it would be possible for McCartney and Starr to perform as the Beatles (they would be also two out of four and Lennon would be replaced by someone else), but due to the exceptional status of the band and to the exceptional status of the individual members within the band, nobody would probably take them seriously and recognize them as the ‘Beatles.’

4. Lyrics

Between 1962, when they released their first single (“Love Me Do”), and 1970, when they broke up, the Beatles underwent a significant change. They were no more four yelling guys with distinctive hairdos making jokes on the stage. They became capable musicians with long hair, dressed in all kinds of clothes. But it was not only their appearance and their music that changed. In this chapter I would like to focus on the lyrics of the lads from Liverpool – on how they reacted to various influences, commented on the society and how they reflected the spirit of the sixties.

Everyone knows that the Beatles come from England and that they sing in English (although they also recorded two German versions of their hits “I Want to Hold Your Hand” and “She Loves You” – “Komm, gib mir deine Hand” and “Sie liebt dich”: MATZNER 268). Nowadays, when the whole world (including traditionally patriotic nations such as the French) sings in English, it is nothing special. There are, however, very few people who realize how immensely the Beatles contributed to the Anglicization of music. Beatlemania reverberating all over the world in the sixties crowned the process of Anglicization and Americanization of music, which started in the rock and roll fifties, and made people from non-English-speaking countries start learning English. In those days, records were for many people the only source of authentic English and very often it was the Beatles (being the most popular band of the time) to whom the people listened. A lot of bands started to sing in English, for English was regarded as something special and a “guarantee” of quality.

In the beginning the Beatles were a rock and roll band. They were followers of, among a number of others, Chuck Berry, Little Richard and especially Elvis Presley, and thus no one

can be really surprised that most of their songs were about love. In the first period⁶ of their career they wrote lyrics almost solely about love. Out of 100 songs⁷ (76 original songs and 24 cover versions) recorded between 1962 and 1965 only 14 are not explicitly about love and even in most of these there are some allusions to love, girls and women, or relationships. Of course, a significant number of songs written in the second period are love songs too, on the other hand, love gradually ceased to be the only topic.

Even in these rock and roll songs about love there was, however, something new: it was their down-to-earth and authentic language, which was something new in Britain. A good example is for instance in “I Saw Her Standing There” from their first album *Please Please Me*: “Well my heart went boom when I crossed that room and I held her hand in mine.” It was the opposite of the language of crooners, and it was the language the young really spoke, understood, and could identify with (MACDONALD 54).

It is interesting that there is no social criticism in the Beatles’ early songs. All members of the group came from a poor, or at least not rich, background (Marwick writes about John Lennon and Paul McCartney as about “two working-class lads”: MARWICK 132), there is, however, no mention of social injustice, no attacks on the rich. Nothing against the establishment, neither against politicians, in spite of the image of rebels and naughty boys the Beatles kept at the beginning of their career (clearly shown in the movie *A Hard Day’s Night* from 1964). It was not until 1966 that the Beatles released *Revolver* with George Harrison’s opening song “Taxman,” probably the only song that contains overt criticism of the government (“I’m a taxman and you’re working for no one but me.”). George Harrison wrote

⁶ In my work I concentrated on the Beatles’ LPs *Please Please Me* (1963), *With The Beatles* (1963), *A Hard Day’s Night* (1964), *Beatles For Sale* (1964), *Help!* (1965), *Rubber Soul* (1965), *Revolver* (1966), *Sgt. Pepper’s Lonely Hearts Club Band* (1967), *Magical Mystery Tour* (1967), *The Beatles* [often referred to as the *White Album*] (1968), *Yellow Submarine* (1969), *Abbey Road* (1969), *Let It Be* (1970) and on the collection of singles and unreleased material recorded from 1962 to 1970 *Past Masters – Volume One* (1988) and *Past Masters – Volume Two* (1988). The 1965 album *Rubber Soul* is usually regarded as a boundary between the first and the second period of the Beatles.

⁷ According to the list of songs in MACDONALD (the songs are ordered chronologically, according to the date of recording).

about this song: “Taxman was when I first realised that even though we had started earning money, we were actually giving most of it away in taxes; it was and still is typical. Why should this be so? Are we being punished for something we have forgotten to do” (HARRISON 94)? Even this criticism is, for practical purposes, moderated. In order not to harm himself politically, Harrison attacks not only the Labour government (under Harold Wilson), but also the leader of the Conservative Party, Edward Heath (MACDONALD 166).

On the other hand, already in a few songs from the first period the Fab Four ridiculed certain sorts of people, which is something they were to use quite often in the second part of their career. An example from the end of the first period could be “Day Tripper,” which was released as a single in December 1965 (MATZNER 271). The lyrics mock people who are “trippers” for just one day. It is, however, ambiguous what the word “tripper” means in this song. According to MACDONALD, Lennon later claimed that the song was supposed to be an attack on “weekend hippies,” but MACDONALD points out that at the time the song was released, the term ‘hippie’ was not used yet and that LSD (the experience after using LSD is called a “trip”) was only taken by a very few people in the United States (139).

The year 1965 marked a real change in the Beatles’ attitude to lyrics. They felt their lyrics were rather shallow and simple when compared with other singers and groups whose lyrics reached beyond the field of common pop songs (e.g. Bob Dylan’s protest songs) and that there was a real danger of the Beatles becoming dull (MACDONALD 135). The young in the middle of the sixties felt that there was more to music than fun and entertainment. They began to regard music as a spiritual thing, as well as a powerful weapon. The Beatles wanted to change their style and, though they had still retained their old appearance and image so far, started to experiment not only with the music but also with the lyrics.

They wrote several comic songs for the *Rubber Soul* album (1965). “Norwegian Wood” or “Drive My Car” are narrative songs with a more or less funny ending, songs like

“Girl” or “Michelle” also fall into this category. They are, however, comic songs and nothing else (maybe with the exception of “Norwegian Wood,” which is usually regarded as the first song by the Beatles with lyrics more important than music and as a breakthrough in their song writing: MACDONALD 135-6). Later, the Beatles would use this genre to criticize and make fun of society or particular kinds of people. “Eleanor Rigby” from the 1966 album *Revolver*, which is not a comic song but which we can definitely count as a narrative song, is a song about a spinster who regularly goes to the church and is very lonely. McCartney sings that she wears “the face that she keeps in a jar by the door” and asks: “Who is it for?” In the end Eleanor Rigby dies and no one attends her funeral. The song is an obvious attack on the uptight Victorian morals of the generation of parents and grandparents which are dull and useless in the eyes of the young. “The Fool on the Hill” (from *Magical Mystery Tour*, 1967) is a criticism of people’s blindness and narrow-mindedness and of their tendency to consider anyone who is different a fool. The song “Mean Mr. Mustard” from *Abbey Road* (1969) is a joke written by Lennon in Rishikeshi to kill some time (MACDONALD 294). It mocks a stingy man who “shaves in the dark, trying to save paper.” *Rubber Soul* is an album with the greatest concentration of comic songs. It is a real turning point in the Beatles’ career because, apart from the comic songs, it contains serious songs about something else than only love (e.g. “Nowhere Man”). From this album on, their lyrics were more serious, they, however, did not abandon the genre of comic songs and still kept on writing songs which did not really carry a serious message: “Ob-la-di Ob-la-da” (from *The Beatles [White Album]*, 1968) or “Maxwell’s Silver Hammer” (from *Abbey Road*, 1969) are among the most famous.

The Beatles, of course, could not avoid the topic of the generation gap in their lyrics. John Lennon, Paul McCartney, George Harrison and Ringo Starr were all born at the beginning of the forties and were aged from 24 to 27 in 1967, when the flower-power reached one of its peaks usually described as “acid summer” or “summer of love.” Their generation

was the one which felt the generation gap the strongest. In 1967 the Beatles were, however, no longer the speakers of the new generation (or it is at least disputable if they should be regarded as ones). The Beatles had spoken for the young at the beginning of the sixties, when they had been models and heroes of the young, who had dressed and combed like them. Now it was the Beatles who dressed and combed according to others. They definitely sympathized with and were influenced by the hippie counterculture – if not anything else, they had long hair and they took LSD (MACDONALD, MATZNER, KUREISHI), which is a hippie drug – but (unlike e.g. Janis Joplin and Jimi Hendrix) they were not true symbols of this movement. They rather swam with the tide and, like a number of other bands, became a part of the hippie generation, and as such expressed some of its wishes and opinions. The reason they are often considered speakers of the hippie generation is obvious: they were immensely famous and what they did was carefully observed and often followed by their fans. People did not notice that several young people started to wear coloured t-shirts, but they definitely noticed that John, Paul, George and Ringo had long hair and beards.

I have already mentioned “Eleanor Rigby,” which can be looked upon as a song expressing the difference in values of the old and the young generation. But the generation gap – the difference in the way parents and their children perceive the world – was most clearly expressed in “She’s Leaving Home” from the 1967 album *Sgt. Pepper’s Lonely Hearts Club Band*. The song was inspired by an article in the *Daily Mirror* (MACDONALD 1999). It is about a girl who has secretly left home to live her own life. Her parents do not understand it and wonder why she did it: “We gave her most of our lives, sacrificed most of our lives, we gave her everything money could buy.” To which there is a clear answer in the last lines of the song: “Fun is the one thing that money can’t buy” and “Fun – Something inside that was always denied for so many years.” While the primary concern of parents, who suffered during

World War II, was to survive in the hard post-war years, their children (born in the forties and early fifties) wanted to have fun and experience as much as they could.

The Beatles might not have been the real speakers, but they were definitely “preachers,” who spread the ideas of the young, and for many people it was them who embodied the new generation, which was again largely due to the publicity they were receiving.

This is depicted, for instance, in the closing scene of David Lodge’s campus novel *Changing Places* (published in 1975). One of the main characters, 40 years old academic Philip Swallow, mentions the lyrics of *Why Don’t We Do It in the Road?* from the 1968 album *The Beatles [White Album]* (“Why don’t we do it in the road? No one will be watching us. Why don’t we do it in the road?”) as an example of a new approach to life and of sexual revolution for which he is, in his opinion, too old:

PHILIP: We’re private people, aren’t we, our generation? We make a clear distinction between private and public life; and the important things, the things that make us happy or unhappy are private. Love is private. [...] You know that Beatles’ song, ‘Let’s Do It In The Road’...?

[...]

PHILIP: [...] All I’m saying is that there *is* a generation gap, and I think it revolves around this public/private thing. Our generation – we subscribe to the old liberal doctrine of the inviolate self. It’s the great tradition of realistic fiction, it’s what novels are all about. [...] Those kids [...] are living a film, not a novel. (LODGE 249-250)

The story takes place in 1969, which means Philip Swallow is only about ten years older (and David Lodge only about five years older) than the Beatles, but he already belongs to the older generation and regards John, Paul, George and Ringo as members of a generation he does not really understand.

The sixties witnessed a large increase in drug abuse among the young; artists (and musicians in particular) started to use drugs to discover new worlds and to be more creative. The Beatles were no exception. “Musicians have always been involved with drugs, but the Beatles were the first to parade their particular drug-use – marijuana and LSD – publicly and

without shame” (KUREISHI 89). This fact was reflected in some of their songs as well. Some of the Beatles’ lyrics (actually, a lot of lyrics of the second period) were written under the influence of drugs or describe what the Beatles experienced when they were high. “They were writing songs about drugs, songs that could be fully comprehended only by people who took drugs, songs designed to be enjoyed all the more if you were stoned if you listened to them” (KUREISHI 87). According to MACDONALD, LSD influenced e.g. “Strawberry Fields Forever,” “A Day in the Life,” “Tomorrow Never Knows,” and “Rain”. However, one song is particularly famous for this. John Lennon’s “Lucy in the Sky with Diamonds” from *Sgt. Pepper’s Lonely Hearts Club Band* (1967) is a song with crazy and confused lyrics (“Picture yourself on a train in a station with plasticine porters with looking glass ties”). Moreover, if you take the capital letters from the title, you get LSD. This is commonly believed to be intentional, and this myth is so widely known that it even found its way to MARWICK’s cultural survey of Britain after 1945 (143-4); it is, however, denied by MACDONALD, who says that though the lyrics definitely reflect an acid trip, the LSD in the title is a mere coincidence⁸ (195). Allegedly, many more songs were written on or influenced by drugs, but in no lyrics is there such an obvious trace of it (maybe except for “I Am the Walrus” from *Magical Mystery Tour*, 1967).

It is also interesting to have a look at what inspired the Fab Four’s lyrics writing. In the first period, it was nothing special: the lyrics were based either on personal experience (usually something connected with love), or they were rock’n’roll clichés about love, sadness, girls, holding hands or holding each other etc. Actually, it is very hard to tell these two apart because even the former brim with rock’n’roll clichés. Also, a lot of songs of the Beatles’ repertoire at the beginning of their career were cover versions of rock and roll and rhythm and blues songs.

⁸ According to www.beatlesagain.com, the title was inspired by a drawing by John Lennon’s four-year-old son Julian: “He brought home a picture he drew in nursery school, and told John it was his friend, Lucy, in the sky, with diamonds.” <<http://www.beatlesagain.com/bmyths.html>>

The second period is much more varied. There are, as I have already mentioned, quite a lot of songs about love (e.g. “For No One” from *Revolver*, “Something” from *Abbey Road*, and “The Long and Winding Road” from *Let It Be*) and songs influenced by drugs. Apart from that, the Beatles also started to do something they had not been doing in the first part of their career: they wrote songs inspired by special or strange events, by newspaper articles, by pictures, television etc. “She Came In Through the Bathroom Window” (from *Abbey Road*) was based on a real event: a Beatles fan got to Paul’s house (obviously through the bathroom window), where she stole a photograph of his father (MACDONALD 295). McCartney wrote “Lady Madonna” (single, 1968) after he had seen a photograph of a black woman breastfeeding her baby entitled “Mountain Madonna” (MACDONALD 224). “Being for the Benefit of Mr Kite” (from *Sgt. Pepper*) was inspired by a Victorian circus poster Lennon bought in Sevenoaks in Kent (MACDONALD 192-3) etc.

There is another thing worth mentioning. It’s the song “Back in the USSR” from *The Beatles [White Album]*. The title was originally supposed to be “I’m backing the USSR” (inspired by an industrial campaign “I’m backing Britain”). The song was recorded on 22nd and 23rd August 1968, it is a day after the Warsaw Pact armies invaded Czechoslovakia, which gave the song a special meaning (MACDONALD 252). The *White Album* was released in November 1968 and the song was on. The title was changed to “Back in the USSR,” but the pronunciation was the same, and so the song still could be associated with the occupation of Czechoslovakia. It was probably meant as a joke, though not really a good and tasteful one (MACDONALD 252). Nevertheless, it shows that even the Beatles went sometimes too far in their carefree and freewheeling attitudes.

In conclusion, I would like to stress that it is never certain what the Beatles really meant by their lyrics. When analyzing their lyrics, we must bear in mind the fact they were known to be jesters often making fun of other people, and thus some of their songs usually

considered serious may be in fact meant in fun and the other way round (funny songs can in fact be serious and deep). We will never know for sure because we cannot believe even the Beatles' own interpretations, for they may deliberately try to distort or obscure the meaning of the song. Moreover, it is more than probable that the individual members' interpretation of certain songs from the second period would be very different. Therefore, it depends very much on everyone how they understand and interpret the Beatles' songs. This is certainly interesting for some fans, who can find allusions in the lyrics which the Beatles did not think of at all. Their lyrics can thus be regarded as very current and topical, which only contributes to the positive perception of the band today.

5. Influence

What the Beatles have meant for people all around the world has been partly discussed so far. And as it would be absolutely impossible to cover everything, I would like to present at least a few concrete examples of their influence.

The sixties

Naturally, the Beatles' influence was the strongest during their active career, in the sixties. During Beatlemania (approximately 1963-1966), when their fame reached a high, they had an unbelievable impact on the young and a strong influence on everyone else. They very much influenced men's fashion. In the chapter "Beatlemania" from the Beatles' authorized biography by Hunter DAVIES we can read:

Manufactures all over the country were by [December 1963] competing to get a concession to use the word *Beatle* on their products. Beatles jackets—the collarless ones, usually in corduroy, first worn by Stu in Hamburg—were on sale everywhere as early as September 1963. Beatle wigs started appearing. [...] Most teenage boys were growing their own Beatle-length hair. From November on there was a continuous stream of newspaper stories about schoolboys being sent home from school because of their long hair and of apprentices not being allowed into factories. (187)

Another important thing that has already been mentioned is the Beatles' image of rebels. In the first half of the sixties, however, their 'rebellion' was fairly moderate. It was very rock'n'roll-like: cheeky guys who wanted to provoke and annoy their parents' generation by wearing hairstyles and clothes that generation did not approve of, listening to and playing loud and noisy music, talking back etc. On the one hand, it seems nearly ridiculous to consider these youngsters 'rebels' and then use the same word in connection with the punk movement, which was at its peak some fifteen years later (according to MACDONALD, it was in 1976-8). On the other hand, society had changed in the twenty years, and rock and rollers in the fifties and early sixties were regarded as rebels as much as punks were in the seventies.

In the case of rock and roll it was more the form than the content – the loudness of the music, rather than lyrics – that mattered; with punk it was both.

The image of rebels was also shown in the Beatles' feature films, especially in *A Hard Day's Night* (1964). The movie shows the Beatles' disrespect to authorities (there is a chase with the police towards the end of the film etc) and naughtiness. This film also presents a new approach to music films in Britain: "British rock was never fully integrated into a plot until the Beatles made *A Hard Day's Night* (1964) and *Help!* (1965)" (GAMMOND 497). Several movies have been made according to this model since; a quite recent example is the 1997 film *Spice World* starring the girl band Spice Girls.

However, the Beatles' influence was also more spiritual. When Paul McCartney had a concert in Red Square in Moscow in 2003, a documentary was shot, in which several Russian personalities recall what the Beatles have meant to them, even though they were not allowed to perform in the Soviet Union and their records were extremely hard to obtain. Sociologist Artemy Troitsky said:

[...] the Beatles have started the whole huge movement in the Soviet Union. Movement, which involved not thousands or even hundreds of thousands, which involved millions of young people who became, as communist publicists have said, inner immigrants. They still lived in the Soviet Union with their body but mentally and spiritually they were somewhere else. ("Paul McCartney in the Red Square")

And musician Boris Grebeshikov⁹ adds:

What the Beatles did [...] they gave us the opportunity to look each other in the eye and to say 'Look, we are the same. We are the same. And the terms like capitalism, socialism, communism, they mean nothing because we're human beings.' Do you want me to prove it? [...] Listen to the Beatles. ("Paul McCartney in the Red Square")

The popularity of the Beatles in the sixties was really fantastic. And they were awfully rich too. The article "How Does a Beatle Live? John Lennon Lives Like This" by Maureen Cleave, published in the *Evening Standard* on 4th March 1966, describes John Lennon's house

⁹ There is no subtitle during the speech, and therefore it is not really clear who is speaking, but according to the voice it seems it is Grebeshikov.

in Weybridge and sketches out what his hobbies and interests are and what he does in his free time. The article is, however, famous for something else. It is this article in which Lennon said the Beatles were bigger than Jesus:

Christianity will go [...]. It will vanish and shrink. I needn't argue about that; I'm right and I will be proved right. We're more popular than Jesus now; I don't know which will go first – rock'n'roll or Christianity. Jesus was all right but his disciples were thick and ordinary. It's them twisting it that ruins it for me. (qtd. in CLEAVE)

This started a wave of protests all over the world. Shortly after the article had been published, the Beatles went on tour to the United States, where the outrage was the strongest, especially in the 'Bible Belt' (the South and Midwest of the USA), where their records and everything connected with them were boycotted and burnt at the stake. Lennon apologized in Chicago, but the tour was unsuccessful anyway (MACDONALD 176). It was not only due to the article, but the article largely contributed to it. The bigger-than-Jesus affair, however, hardly shook the Beatles' popularity. Nevertheless, it clearly shows how the Fab Four were influential: had someone unimportant said something like that nobody would have minded. It was the fact that the Beatles were inconceivably famous and maybe indeed more popular than Jesus and thus threatening his position that enraged Christian fundamentalists.

The Beatles were probably the most important trendsetters of the 1960s (definitely the most important trendsetters in Britain). They largely contributed to the popularization of the hippie movement outside the United States. They were against the war in Vietnam. According to KUREISHI they were "popularizers of esoteric ideas – about mysticism, about different forms of political involvement and about drugs" (88). For many people the sixties mean the Beatles and vice versa. Their career stretched over the era and ended with the end of the decade. Composer Aaron Copland once said: "When people ask to re-create the mood of the '60s, they will play Beatles music" (gtd. in MATZNER 5, MACDONALD 7)¹⁰. Both the music

¹⁰ In both books the quotation is translated into Czech. I took the English version from <<http://www.lennonthemusical.com/lennon-cm.html>>.

and the lyrics capture the spirit of the sixties. New ideas, new approach, sexual revolution, generation gap and drugs – we can find it all in the lyrics of the Beatles’ songs, as well as in the stories of their lives. The evolution of the band from carefree and cheeky boys screaming *She loves you* to hairy hippies searching for the meaning of life and singing *Strawberry Fields Forever* reflect the increasing influence of hippie and oriental cultures and the overall shift in people’s interest from earning one’s living to other more philosophical issues too.

After the breakup of the band in 1970, every Beatle pursued his own career as a musician; they, however, remained very influential in other fields too. John Lennon was an anti-war activist. George Harrison organized the “Concert for Bangla Desh” in 1971 to help the starving people in that country. Nevertheless, they usually benefited from the fame of the Beatles.

Today

Even though this year it has been 36 years since the Beatles stopped playing together, John, Paul, George and Ringo are still best known as ex-Beatles. They are more famous for what they did as the Beatles than for their individual careers although e.g. John Lennon’s “Imagine” and Paul McCartney’s “Mull of Kintyre” were megahits. Nowadays, the legacy of the Beatles is primarily their music. A lot of musicians still find inspiration in the Beatles’ songs. The Beatles are, of course, no longer heroes for the young and their position is different (though hairdos similar to those that the Beatles wore are back in fashion). However, they are still very famous and allusions to their work, lives etc can be found almost everywhere. I chose several more or less recent examples to show how deeply the Beatles are rooted in popular culture and how often and in different contexts they are used in various cultural fields (especially in movies, on the radio and television).

1. In the BBC sitcom *Red Dwarf*, the main character, Dave Lister, the last living man, has two robot-goldfish, which are called Lennon and McCartney. The sitcom takes place in the 23rd century¹¹ and the 20th century is reminded by mentioning the most important events (e.g. World War II) and people (the Beatles, Adolf Hitler, Marilyn Monroe etc.).
2. There are dozens of allusions to the Beatles in *The Simpsons*. An episode in season 5 is based entirely on the story of the Beatles' career: Homer's band 'Be Sharps' is very successful and later breaks up; one of their albums is called *Bigger Than Jesus*; Barney's girlfriend is a Japanese conceptual artist (like John Lennon's wife Yoko Ono); they have the last concert on the roof etc¹².
3. A part of *Dermot O'Leary Show* on Radio 2 from the BBC is Gladiatorial Quiz. Both contestants are asked three questions. If the answer is correct "Yeah! Yeah! Yeah! Yeah!" from the Beatles' 1963 number one hit "She Loves You" is played.
4. There is a scene in *Bridget Jones: The Edge of Reason* (2004) in which Bridget, thinking she may be pregnant, talks to her boyfriend Mark Darcy, a successful human rights lawyer, about their baby. He would like to have a boy and send him to Eton with which she does not agree. Mark says the alternative is the boy "attending some progressive school where the whole day is spent singing 'Yellow Submarine' and practising group masturbation" ("Bridget Jones: The Edge of Reason"). Here the Beatles' song is used as a symbol of working class and middle class culture, as opposed to upper middle class and upper class culture.
5. The 1988 Red Hot Chili Peppers EP album is called *The Abbey Road* and on the cover there are the four members of the band crossing the street in a row (like the

¹¹ Lister works on the Jupiter mining spaceship Red Dwarf, which set out in the 23rd century. There was a radiation leak that killed the crew; Lister was the only one to survive because at the time of the leak he was in 'stasis' (field where time does not exist), from where he was released by the ship computer 3,000,000 years later, when the radioactive fall-out had disappeared.

¹² For a list of allusions to the Beatles in *The Simpsons* see <<http://www.snpp.com/guides/beatles.refs.html>>.

Beatles on *Abbey Road*), but they are naked except for long white socks on their genitals. It is probably an attempt to amuse people by caricaturing a familiar album cover.

6. Naturally, the Beatles have also been important for Czech culture and Czech music scene. Apart from their infinite influence on music (the sound of the Olympic in the sixties was very similar to the sound of the Beatles), they are often used in lyrics as a symbol of the sixties – often by middle-aged musicians remembering their youth. Good examples are Michal Prokop’s “Kolej Yesterday” (1984) and the more recent “Marx Engels Beatles” (1998) by Vltava.
7. In the 1994 movie *Forrest Gump* (directed by Robert Zemeckis), the main hero meets John Lennon in a talk show and, speaking about his experiences from China, where he played table tennis for the USA, he inspires Lennon to write “Imagine¹³.” In *Forrest Gump*, like in *Red Dwarf* but in a different way and a different context, only the most important events and personalities are remembered and Lennon, in this case for himself and not as an ex-Beatle, which is not that common, could not be omitted.
8. If you type ‘Beatles’ in Google you will get 80,100,000¹⁴ results, which says it all. Comparing this number with other megastars, we find out they beat ‘Elvis’ (72,800,000), ‘Dylan’ (69,200,000), ‘Michael Jackson’ (43,400,000), and ‘Sinatra’ (27,300,000). ‘Madonna’ gets more (88,500,000), but this is because of the fact the word does not stand only for the singer and, like ‘Elvis’ (e.g. in the name of British musician Elvis Costello) or ‘Dylan’ (e.g. in the name of Welsh poet Dylan Thomas), can be used to describe something or somebody else without any

¹³ They are on Dick Cavett Show: “Forrest: Well, in the land of China, people hardly got nothing at all. John Lennon: No possessions? Forrest: And in China, they never go to church. John Lennon: No religion, too? Dick Cavett: Oh. Hard to imagine. John Lennon: Well, it's easy if you try, Dick.” (Forrest Gump, www.imdb.com)

¹⁴ The number can change, of course. This and the following numbers are from 18th April 2006 <www.google.com>.

connection to the singers. As opposed to this, the word 'Beatles,' thanks to its unique spelling, always relate to the band or is somehow connected to it. The Internet is a fairly new medium. Are more than 80,000,000 results not an evident proof of the Beatles' timelessness and importance for culture?

All this, however they are only a few examples, confirms what an important cultural phenomenon the Beatles have been from the early sixties up to today. They are definitely one of the best groups in the history of music and they are definitely the most famous one. In the preface to the first Czech publication about the Beatles, written by Miroslava Černá and Jiří Černý, released in 1966, which is at the time when their most remarkable musical achievements were yet to come, music critic Dr. Lubomír Dorůžka wrote that it was interesting that all the commotion was caused by four guys playing a sort of music which had not yet been acknowledged by our professional circles. On the other hand he wrote:

Wait, I really don't want to overestimate all that noise which has got many features of a short-term and superficial sensation [...]. It is certainly true that it will disappear after some time, the troubled waters will get calm again, and it won't cause any political or social revolution, and perhaps it won't really significantly contribute to the great treasury of world culture. (ČERNÁ and ČERNÝ IV, my translation)

I believe forty years are enough time for us to be able to say he was wrong. The Beatles sold 400 million records during their active career, which makes them the most successful band (Michael Jackson comes second with 350 million, and the third is Elvis Presley with 300 million records sold). The overall number of the Beatles' records sold up to the present day is approaching one billion (VLASÁK). The beginning of the entry 'Beatles, The' in *The Oxford Companion to Popular Music* confirms their special status: "British rock group. Any history or sociological survey of Britain in the 1960s would have to include a section on the phenomenon of the Beatles. Clearly the most important group in the history of pop music, their influence is incalculable" (GAMMOND 46).

It would also be interesting to make a research how often and in what way they are used in the mass media, for the word 'Beatle' is slowly losing its original meaning and it is becoming a kind of idiom for something unforgettable and unrepeatable.

Conclusion

It has been said about a hundred times that the Beatles have been probably the most influential band of all times. Only Elvis Presley's face is as well-known as the Beatles' pictures, but the Fab Four's music is much more listened to nowadays than Elvis's. This is also thanks to the release of two singles from the archive in the nineties ("Free As a Bird" in 1995 and "Real Love" in 1996), which aroused new interest in the Beatles' work.

Although all chapters of this work are more or less focused on concrete examples, since it is utterly impossible to discuss the Beatles and their influence as a whole, they try to give a general picture of the Beatles' importance for music, culture and society since the sixties. In one of the most eventful and noisiest decades, and among countless other music groups, four young guys from Liverpool played and sang and changed the world. As has been said, their music is still attractive to young listeners and many of their methods of recording are nowadays commonly used in recording studios all over the world. Their lyrics are very well-known and often quoted. The last chapter brings enough examples to prove that the occurrence of something which is connected with the Beatles in some way or other is not only occasional and not only restricted to music but that it penetrates almost every social and cultural sphere.

The Fab Four are indispensable for anyone who wants to study the history of pop music, but they are also unavoidable for anyone who is interested in modern British history and in British culture. In his essay "Eight Arms to Hold You," Hanif KUREISHI says about the Beatles: "And certainly they're the only mere pop group you could remove from history and suggest that culturally, without them, things would have been significantly different" (89). Knowing the Beatles is almost as important as knowing Shakespeare if you do not want to

miss a lot of jokes and if you want to understand many parodies in the British context.
Knowing the Beatles is important if you want to understand British culture.

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