

Beatlemania



Their first hit, “Love Me Do,” reached only number seventeen on British music charts in 1962, but their powerful “beat” and distinctive haircuts helped them stand out from other groups. With the release of “She Loves You” in 1963, the Beatles began a string of major hits. After an appearance on American television in 1964, they enjoyed phenomenal success. At one point, they held the top five spots on U.S. charts—a feat that has yet to be repeated. Quite possibly, the Beatles are the greatest musical group in history.

Just how did four boys from Liverpool make it so big? Their story began in 1957 when John Lennon invited fifteen-year-old Paul McCartney to join his group, the Quarrymen. Guitarist George Harrison had joined the group by August 1961, as well as drummer Pete Best. In 1962 Best was replaced by Ringo Starr. After record store owner Brian Epstein became their manager, they signed with a recording company. It was not long before the Beatles became England’s biggest-ever idols. Their live performances were accompanied by unprecedented hordes of screaming fans. After their February 1964 appearance on *The Ed Sullivan Show*, “the Fab Four,” as they were sometimes called, became transatlantic chart-toppers. While their first albums had combined pop-soul songs with some of Lennon’s and McCartney’s original compositions, later albums reflected the whole group’s efforts. They even wrote scores for their own films. *Help!* and *A Hard Day’s Night* depicted their lives and the hysteria that followed them. In 1966 the Beatles gave up touring to concentrate on studio work. The resulting *Revolver* album has been regarded by many as their finest work, but the most innovative was *Sergeant Pepper’s Lonely Hearts Club Band*. Released in 1967, the album was an eclectic mix of styles, combining psychedelia with symphonic sounds. More changes were in the future as the Beatles explored Eastern religion with the Maharishi Mahesh Yogi. After their manager died, they set up their own record company and released “Hey, Jude,” their best-selling single. Other albums and a third movie, *Yellow Submarine*, followed, but in 1970 the Beatles broke up their partnership. Ten years later, John Lennon was fatally wounded outside of his New York City apartment building, denying forever a possible, much-rumored reunion.

Suggested Activities

Response Write this quote on the board: “The Beatles were, quite simply, phenomenal. They changed lives, they changed pop music, they changed the world.” Ask the students to write a response to this quote.

Investigate Find out more about the three Beatles, Paul, George and Ringo. What paths have their careers followed?