

Beatles' genius gave '60s generation a sense of perspective, identity

By J. M. BURRIS

"Everyone in the theatre as time goes by gets a little bit older and a little bit slower."

John Lennon's disguised voice on the mish-mash of voice-overs and over-dubs for the incomprehensible "Revolution #9" spoke to an obvious biological and psychological fact. It came as no surprise to hear it in that fleeting moment as it came over the stereo, first in 1968; it was just one more of the unexplainable words and maxims and tunes and cheers on that particular record. But as I reflect on age and getting old — not so much in terms of months and years as in styles and tastes — the phrase pops into my mind time and again. I'm still relatively young, 24 to be exact and have no interest yet in immortality; I expect to live forever because I know no other existence. And the same goes for rock music, now that I think of it, because that, too, is all I've known.

I can't imagine being in anyone's domicile, whether for an evening visit or a week-long stay, without finding some kind of music system there with at least one Beatles record somewhere around the house. I'm sure there's not a young man or woman my age who couldn't identify the group from almost any of the band's photos or songs. But I found out not too long ago while teaching college freshmen for the first time that not only can Johnny not read nor write, but Johnny also has one hell of a time naming the greatest songwriting duo since Francis Scott Key and the Stars and Stripes.

So, it's not that I'm getting old; not even I fear baldness or droopy chins... yet. It's that no longer is there that great frame of reference by which to define individual experience within the universal. No longer is there that vast backdrop, that starting point "A," from which we can relate with one another. The great equalizer of my generation is that whole tradition of popular music begun before but never realized until the Beatles proved to be the personification of all that a generation held sacred.

Many culturalists have written eloquently on what the band symbolized for the youth movement, the carefree and vivacious energy in good-natured defiance of what traditional 20th century culture stood for. Rock critics called Lennon, McCartney, Harrison and Starr cult figures, as important for what they began as for what they actually did. Those interested more specifically in music or recording point to the Beatles' innovations: the album as a thematic whole: *Rubber Soul*, as unified artistic expression: *Sgt. Pepper*, as an exercise in spontaneity: *Let It Be*. All of

this is valuable in its place, no doubt, and there is a place still for redefinition of all these elements now that we've gained some real perspective in the matter. The Beatles are, after all, of the past, at least musically. But my contention is that the Beatles had an unexplainable, unfathomable effect on a group of young persons, almost a whole generation, kids from eight to 20 — they had such an effect on those people that events, happenings and even ideas are dated by the release of "Yesterday" or "Hey Jude" or *Abbey Road*. Not one rock musician can hand out his own list of acknowledgements without thanking, somewhere along the way, the Beatles for their influence upon him, for making music come alive. And, for better or

worse, our culture is married to popular music because of them, and judging from the divorce rate (No, I'm not going to suggest that the increase in the number of divorces since 1970 has anything to do with the band's breakup that same year), it's been a long and gratifying union.

From Lennon's proclamation that the Beatles were more popular than Jesus Christ to Charles Manson's sick interpretation of the pure noise of "Helter Skelter," there is no denying the band's cultural influence. "I'm Down," the forgotten flip side to "Help!," brought screaming rock 'n' roll out of the slums and into the sophisticated home; images of Lennon playing piano with his elbow, a la Jerry Lee Lewis, dance in my

head even today whenever I hear that song on the radio. The fab four were more than the gods of the screaming meemies out in the live studio audience of *The Ed Sullivan Show*; they were also the satirists and imaginative humorists older but no-less-rabid fans admired as cult figures: "Lady Madonna," "Back in the USSR," "Polythene Pan" and the ubiquitous, if somewhat obscure, "You Know My Name (Look Up the Number)" — all are refreshing not only for their distinct melodies but also for their mirthless humor. I'm agog today over the different voices all were capable of coming up with. Everyone thought for such a long time that Ringo sang "Lady Madonna," then it was supposed to be the new Paul, the one hired through a look-alike contest to replace the Paul smashed up in a car accident. (I still have the tape I made of the words spoken between "I'm So Tired" and "Blackbird" on the white album. I played it backwards and it *did* say "Paul is a dead man. Miss him. Miss him. MISS HIM!" And the "number nine" backwards and all the other "clues" too.) Eventually Paul confessed he strove to attain that sound for that song, just as he went to the studio at 6 a.m. six morning in a row so that he could get the vocal on "Everybody's Got Something to Hide (Except for Me and My Monkey)" to sound as though he'd just gotten out of bed. Such inventiveness, alas, we no longer witness. I defy anyone to come up with a being from Saturn (for that may be the only place where an unbiased opinion might be found), one who has never heard a Beatles record, sit him down in a sound room and have him be able to identify that the vocals on "All My Loving," "Michelle," "Drive My Car," "I'm Down" and both parts of "Rocky Raccoon" are all sung by the same person.

They're responsible for most of my list of the greatest moments in rock 'n' roll history, and though I'm morally opposed to lists per se, this one, I must admit, is harder to break into than any bank vault. Briefly, here are a few of the Beatles' contributions: the famous chord skip in "All You Need Is Love"; a consensus favorite — the "One, two, three, fah!" that opens "I Saw Her Standing There"; the vacuum tube opening of "Your Mother Should Know"; the rooftop concert and, contrived though it is, the yawn in "I'm Only Sleeping." Childish as it may seem, my blood still runs jauntily through my body whenever I think about any of them.

What all of this has to do with frames of reference and growing older and such stuff may not be immediately obvious, nor may such detailed references on my part. I first realized for myself what age and time had to do with the Beatles and me several months

ago when one of my freshman English students asked if I had heard that new Beatles single. "Have I missed word of a reunion?" I said to myself. "A renewal of purpose, a reconciliation of professional and personal differences? Yoko Ono's death, perhaps?" No such fiasco had taken place. No, the young woman (my estimation of her rose in a flash when she asked, then plummeted to new depths when I learned the truth) was mistaken. The song she referred to was "Got to Get You into My Life," the Beatles' answer to the brass sound of Motown, a song recorded more than a decade before the *Revolver* album. But here, a full 12 years later, it was selling enough to puncture *Billboard's* top twenty, and there were umbles from Capitol Records that it was only the first of a whole slew of rereleases planned.

But the electricity wasn't there; the movement died out as quickly as the rejuvenation of Mae West and for much the same reason. The elements did not allow the magic to conjure itself up again. The band was no longer real, alive, vital, changing; instead it was fake, dead, stale and stagnant. The music seemed as false as the early Monkees records — made in the forest by elfish stand-ins for the incompetent band members. The Beatles are no more, and kids today are not able to suspend their disbelief for very long. More importantly, the Beatles of my time never had to ask us to suspend anything. They were everywhere: at parties with Peter Fonda (depicted in "She Said She Said"), at the London Palladium (where Lennon told those in the cheap seats to clap, the wealthy to "rattle their jewelry"), at the movies *Hard Day's Night*, *Help!*, *How I Won the War*, *Candy*, *Let It Be*, *Magical Mystery Tour*, on television (*The Ed Sullivan Show*, a phantom appearance on *Shindig*, and the abortive *Magical Mystery Tour*), and on up to four albums and countless singles a year.

Even though those who follow us, those teenagers whose minds are being shaped now, lack the sense of energy and vigor and purpose we are said to have had, the political and social activism, the dogged determination to stand up to a bureaucratic draft board or a soft-shelled crab like Richard Nixon, we need to mourn for them for yet another, perhaps more tragic defect. Not only can we not communicate with them, but neither can they communicate with one another. There's no longer that solid frame of reference, that strong sense of perspective, that impenetrable balance of individual and universal experience, with which one might define himself within the context of his peers. Diversity runs rampant

through the youth of today and the difference between my generation and that of my 16-year-old brother is that he cannot see himself in the total picture of existence; he feels no part of the times he lives in; he's totally alienated from everyone and everything.

Now, the Beatles by no means were solely responsible for making me see that I'm the child of my father and the brother of my fellow man, but they helped. Their genius in the right place at the right time helped lend definition to our ways of life, as diverse as they were. But they, combined with other, some stronger, elements — that insane war, campus revolt, sexual consciousness, adulthood, space shots, the emergence of the



Beatles arrive in New York for first U.S. tour



Songwriters Lennon and McCartney

American film as serious art, *Catch-22* or *Slaughterhouse-Five* — all of these helped define not only purpose but also existence for all of us. It gave us, no matter how different we all were, a point to begin from and one to build and reflect upon — just as I've been doing here. Earlier generations had something similar to bind them together — that's what American history has been about all this time. My greatest fear, however, is that the present generation is leap-frogging this process, and the consequences as anyone can see, are disastrous. A reunion of the Beatles certainly wouldn't help them, though it may do our tired, old hearts some good.

Until that happens, though I don't think it will, I'll have my memories. But years from now, what will my younger brother have?

J.M. Burris is an English graduate student from Chapel Hill.

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The Daily Tar Heel

85th year of editorial freedom

Letters to the editor

Five minutes late, and the busdriver takes a break

To the editor:

Picture, if you would, the typical South Campus resident on a typical winter's morning. Said student could live in James or Morrison or Craig; it really doesn't matter because it's a hefty walk to North Campus and warm classes from any one of these locations. Our typical South Campus resident, however, is without fear for deep within one of his pockets is a pink, plasticized bus pass that will (with the addition of one bus) whisk him magically to his classes. He glances at his watch; no need to worry, plenty of time.

Meanwhile, the flesh of our student's right hand (the hand that numbly grasps four centuries of British literature) is beginning to change slowly to a shade of light blue. He shifts Shakespeare to his left armpit and blows on his right hand. He watches his breath rise slowly over the growing bus-stop crowd, a crowd where the late-comer and late-riser rub elbows with the most diligent of students as there are now only three minutes to the start of classes. Contrary to popular belief, there are occasionally reasons for going to class at the proper time; on this cold February morning, our student has reasons.

At precisely the moment when class should begin, a bus (large enough to accommodate perhaps a third of the crowd) appears, closely followed by a second (which will accommodate perhaps one-half of the total crowd). Our student is not enough math major, but he has enough of his wits about him to know that not everyone can ride, and that he will be one of the dozen or so left behind.

Suddenly, out of the early morning mist, an S bus appears, and although it isn't going quite where he wants to go, he figures that it is probably his best chance to make class before it is time to leave again. He quickly sprints across Manning Drive and climbs aboard the bus, holding in his hand (by now little more than a frozen hook with fingers) his bus pass, a card by this time as magical as government-issue toilet paper.

He falls into a seat and again glances at his watch; he's already five minutes late, and there's a five-minute bus ride yet to go, but at least he'll be able to put in an appearance. He looks up and sees that the bus driver is gone. Cigarette break. Our student looks at his bus pass, wishes he had saved his goddamn money in the first place and gets off the bus to return to his little cinderblock room.

The purpose of this little story is to point out that the people who run the bus system around here aren't very good at what they do. This isn't, of course, to say that they are totally incompetent — just very, very close.

Michael Ridge
752 Hinton James

A doggone story

To the editor:

Sunday dinner at grandma's was a patchwork quilt of food. But for dessert, pass the heroism: My brother Mike became a hero by rescuing a drowning dog. His bravery is revealed not so much in his act as his method of rescue.

Pond ice had collapsed beneath the dog 50 feet from shore, and all my uncle's tuscie

efforts had failed. Just as the dog appeared doomed to exhaustion and sure death, Mike stepped, a la tennis shoes, jeans and sweat shirt, through the ice and proceeded to walk into the pond. At first he broke the ice with a stick, and when it shattered, he pushed through the remaining 10 feet with his hands. The ice cut him several times, and the chest-high water was bitter and biting, but the dog was saved. Despite this obvious act of unselfishness, the dog's keeper offered only a nonchalant, nearly inaudible "thanks" for a reward. Perhaps the end justifies the means, but I believe Mike's name should occupy an important place in some APS (Animal Protection Society) scrapbook of heroism.

Gary Oakley
Route 3

Beware of Russian danger

To the editor:

The *Daily Tar Heel* February 1 editorial, "Helms Uses Scare Tactics to Boost Arms Race," shows a shallow knowledge of nuclear strategy, and therefore, fails to adequately discuss the problem of nuclear conflict.

American strategy for nuclear war is based on mutually assured destruction, the threat that in case of nuclear war both sides will face unacceptable damage, and so neither side will start a strategic nuclear conflict. Essential to this strategy is the belief, by both sides, that the other camp cannot be injured enough by the first strike to make the attacked party unable to effectively counterattack. But if the Russians believe the United States could be damaged by a first strike to the degree where the United States could not inflict unacceptable damage on Russia, then there is little reason for the

Soviets not to attack the United States.

This is where the *DTH* editorial makes its mistake, for the editorial assumes that a Russian attack would do no damage to the United States. The editorial stated that "if military leaders were to launch ICBMs and strategic bombers the moment nuclear conflict began" that the American bombers would be useless because our ICBMs would destroy the Russian targets before the bombers reached their targets. The author of that editorial, David Stacks, assumes that American military leaders would know exactly when the Russians launched their weapons so American weapons could be dispatched at the same time. It is a fairly secure assumption that if the Russians attack the United States they will not inform our military leaders of their plan in advance.

In case of nuclear conflict the most important question for the United States is not the state of American weapons before the war but how many of those weapons will be left after the first strike against the United States. If the Soviets ever got to the point where they were confident that our nuclear force could be destroyed in a first strike then nuclear conflict will be a much greater threat to occur than if neither side thought it could win such a conflict.

Mr. Stacks' editorial complains that bombers will make little difference in the case of nuclear war because ICBMs will already have struck Russian targets. The problem Mr. Stacks faces is what if the bomber force is incapable of reaching Soviet targets and the ICBMs have been destroyed. By modernizing the three American nuclear delivery systems — ICBMs, bombers and submarine-launched missiles — the American ability to strike back at the Russians will be increased, and therefore, the likelihood of an attack against the United

States and the chances of a nuclear conflict will be reduced.

Frank White
732 Tinkerbell Road

Editor's Note: The article referred to in Mr. White's letter is a personal column by David Stacks, not an editorial. Columns represent the personal opinion of the author, not the newspaper.

Down with punk cartoons

To the editor:

When are you going to quit printing Govus' "punk" cartoons. They are tasteless and boring. Blank space would be more entertaining.

Kathy Silverthorne Jarvis
Mount Sinai Road
Elizabeth Jennette
D-10 Kingswood Apts.

KKK free to assemble

To the editor:

George Batten (*Letters to the editor*, Feb. 7) should read the First Amendment to the U.S. Constitution. There he will find that freedom of assembly is as important a right as freedom of speech. The local chapter of the Ku Klux Klan has as much right to peaceful assembly as does the Black Student Movement, the Carolina Gay Association, the Young Democrats or any other organization.

The belief that if the Ku Klux Klan were in control we would lose all our rights is not grounds for denying our organization its rights.

Roy Rockliff
Department of chemistry

Primates in crucial battle against man's death tests

Things are looking up for lower-order primates. The lives of thousands of monkeys and baboons may be spared due to recent developments. The practice of killing animals in scientific research projects has been attacked successfully in Michigan and India.

After angry animal lovers protested, scientists at the University of Michigan's Highway Safety Research Institute abandoned experiments in which baboons were killed in a study of auto crash injuries. Twenty-four baboons died in the study before researchers called off the tests because they had acquired sufficient data to complete the study.

"The Committee to Save the Baboon Seven" led the fight against the Michigan experiments which the leader of the group said "flies in the face of decency and concern for living things." The Baboon Seven was the group of animals which was awaiting death when the protests began. The seven became the six last Thursday when the most recent, and the last, experiment was completed. But the group of animals is still referred to as the Seven because the committee organizers were left with many "Save the Baboon Seven" bumper stickers.

In India, the world's leading animal exporter, primates may have won a more extensive victory. Prime Minister Morarji Desai, a devout Hindu, announced that he is banning the export of rhesus monkeys from his country. The Indians are upset because they feel the United States has violated an agreement that specifies that exported monkeys be used only for medical research or the production of anti-poliomyelitis vaccine.

According to *Time* magazine, the United States government is using many monkeys for military experiments. In a study of the effects of the neutron bomb, rhesuses were exposed to huge doses of radiation. They suffered the effects of the radiation: vomiting, diarrhea, loss of hair and death.

- Time* listed other American violations cited by Indians:
- Ten monkeys were examined for burns after they were immersed in 194 degree water for 15 seconds.
 - In a study of gunshot wounds, ten monkeys were shot through the head.
 - Monkeys were operated on without anesthesia in a study of shock.

What's good news for primates is bad news for scientists. Experimenters are bemoaning the loss of subjects for their studies — some of which could result in important medical breakthroughs. Biologists are stepping up efforts to breed rhesuses in captivity.

This means that the deaths of monkeys in experiments are likely to continue despite the Indian ban, though there will be a limited number of subjects available because of the difficult breeding process. Scientists are likely to scrutinize experiments in the future to determine if animal experiments are really needed.

Such scrutiny will come a little late for two dozen Michigan baboons. The use of animal subjects for medical research is a proper practice that may some day result in the saving of millions of lives. However, the deaths of monkeys in experiments which measure man's capacity to destroy cannot be justified. Scientists should search for alternatives before they condemn innocent animals to die.

