

Pop Go the Beatles

The expression pop music was coined by a British writer in the mid-1950s. Pop, of course, is short for popular. The writer used the term to describe a new type of music that people were beginning to listen to, something called Rock and Roll.

If you've never listened to songs from that period, you really should. It's happy music, light and bouncy, with lyrics that will always put you in a good mood. You wouldn't be able to *not* enjoy it.



There was popular music before the 1950s, of course. Music has been a part of every culture ever known. For most of history, the only way to hear music was to listen to a performer or learn to play an instrument yourself. In the 1920s, however, machines for listening to musical recordings at home became available. The earliest recordings were stored on hard wax cylinders. In time, disks called records took their place. These in turn were eventually replaced by cassette tapes and compact discs. All of these recording methods allowed people to enjoy their favorite artists at home any time they wanted. Now it's even easier to listen to a favorite song because all you have to do is download it!

By the 1950s, pop music had begun to change. Big Band music, a form of jazz, had dominated the charts all through the forties. Country and Western music also had a large following. But new sounds were emerging that foreshadowed a breakthrough in pop, and Rock and Roll was beginning to make its mark.

Then something happened that made pop go "bang!"

In 1960, five young men who lived in Liverpool, England, decided to form a group. They weren't very good at first, but over the course of the next two years, they practiced and played for people and got better. A couple of members left, and then, in 1962, the group gained a new drummer. He called himself Ringo, partially because of the rings he liked to wear. Ringo Starr and his bandmates—Paul McCartney, John Lennon, and George Harrison—toured and performed under a few different names. But by the end of that year, they settled on the one with which they would make musical history: The Beatles.



The Beatles Statue in Liverpool

The band's first single, a disc with one short tune on each side, contained two songs, "Love Me Do" and "P.S. I Love You." Those songs were very successful in Britain. Their next big song was called "I Want to Hold Your Hand," which transcended their home country and brought them international fame.

The Fab (for fabulous) Four attracted crowds of screaming fans everywhere they went. Everyone, it seemed, wanted to participate in Beatlemania. Their longish hair was unusual at the time and inspired young people all over the world to wear theirs in the same way. Some parents found this objectionable, while others jumped on the hairdo bandwagon.

They were known almost as much for their sense of humor and sharp wit as they were for their music. Once, when asked by a reporter, "So what do you call that haircut?" George Harrison replied, "Arthur."

In their eight years together, The Beatles released 11 collections of original music. In the process, they pushed the barriers of what a pop song could be by composing and performing ballads that critics compared to the work of great classical composers. Their Rock and Roll songs are still performed by some of the most talented musicians in the world.

Their final album, "Abbey Road," is best known for the 16-minute medley that concludes it. There are nine short songs in the medley. Some are poetry set to music; others, such as "Mean Mr. Mustard" and "Polythene Pam," are descriptions of unusual Londoners. The pieces all combine to paint an abstract picture of city life in the late 1960s.



Abbey Road in England

The group broke up in 1970. After the breakup, each Beatle had a musical career of his own. Each of them produced hit songs, although Paul McCartney's solo career has been the most successful by far.

The Beatles remain the best-selling band in the history of pop music. Despite the band's success, some people are not fans of The Beatles. These people clearly do not appreciate music that is able to withstand the test of time!

If you're not familiar with The Beatles, you should listen to some of their music. One song will convince you of their greatness, and you'll be tempted to listen to more and more.