

Title:

The Beatles are the Most Creative Band of All Time

Word Count:

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Summary:

The Beatles phenomenon went way beyond any kind of stardom that had ever been seen before because of their creative songwriting abilities, their musical abilities and their charismatic personalities.

Keywords:

The Beatles, Paul McCartney, John Lennon, Lennon/McCartney, George Harrison, Ringo Starr

Article Body:

BACKGROUND HISTORY: The first musical bands originated in New Orleans among black musicians who have traditionally been the innovators. The first jazz record ever recorded was by The Original Dixieland Jazz Band in 1917, and of course they were white because racism always rears its ugly head to hold black people back. But during the Roaring 20's, young white people couldn't resist the dance beat laid down by the black jazz bands. Fletcher Henderson, a black man, became the first band leader to achieve national fame possibly because he featured Louis Armstrong on trumpet. Duke Ellington, a classically trained musician, brought a level of style and sophistication to jazz that hadn't been seen before. But it wasn't until 1935 that jazz bands with a "swing beat" achieved national attention due to Benny Goodman who I think was the best clarinet player ever to blow air into that instrument. Benny also had the good sense and taste to bring the first great drummer, Gene Krupa, into his band.

When rock and roll exploded into human consciousness during the early 1950's, black musicians like Bo Diddley, Little Richard, Chuck Berry, and Smokey Robinson pioneered the way, but a white DJ named Alan Freed is believed to have coined the term "rock and roll". The first real rock and roll record was "Shake, Rattle and Roll", written by Jesse Stone who was black and recorded by Big Joe Turner who was also black but it wasn't a hit. The first big hit rock and roll record was "Rock Around the Clock" written by James Meyers and Max Freeman of obvious ancestry, and that one catapulted Bill Haley and his Caucasian Comets to stardom. During the 1950's and early 60's, there were countless "do wop" groups, rock groups, singers and songwriters but until The Beatles hit the charts, there had been very few bands which contained talented songwriters. The vast majority

of jazz and rock bands recorded songs written by songwriters who were not performers, with occasional exceptions like Duke Ellington and Buddy Holly. As time goes on, it's increasingly clear that Lennon/McCartney songs are brilliant classics which will never be forgotten. Now here's why The Beatles are the most creative band of all time:

1. BEST EXAMPLE OF FORM = CONTENT

As I sit here writing this at the keyboard of my computer facing the unique and colorful Beatles poster in my bedroom, I'm aware that I have been directly and indirectly inspired by John Lennon's music as well as by the way he lived his life offstage. Squarely in front of me is a full color poster of all four Beatles standing in a heavenly-like flower garden at about the time of the Abbey Road album. Paul is angelic in his pink suit with a white laced shirt. John is enigmatic peering out from the background. George is charismatic staring directly into the camera from the lower right. Ringo is on the left with a stylish blue suit and his pink ruffled shirt. I always wished I could dress like those guys but obviously there's a bit of a problem with a money differential there. Surrounding this gorgeous poster which I have never seen elsewhere are my 45 speed original Beatles hit records, including I Want to Hold Your Hand, She Loves You, Please Please Me, Twist and Shout, Can't Buy Me Love, She's A Woman, Yesterday, and of course, Hey Jude. And surrounding all that is a chain of 1-1/2" long orange flicker flame lights which are the most beautiful and unique Christmas lights I've ever seen. I chose to decorate the wall directly in front of my work station this way because, as I've written elsewhere on this site several times, The Beatles were my major musical influence and having them on the wall in front of me inspires me to write web pages like this one. I was also among the millions of people who were inspired by how The Beatles were actually living their off stage lives. The Beatles' music creatively stimulated millions of people to change the way they were living, and The Beatles behavior encouraged people to have fun by trying new life style experiences. That's what I call a perfect example of FORM = CONTENT. In this case it means that the creatively and masterfully varied music The Beatles were producing (form) embodied the real life styles which each of the four Beatles were living (content), together as a band as well as separately as unique individuals.

2. BEST SONGWRITERS

This should be self-evident, but just because Paul McCartney has the title of the most popular songwriter in history doesn't necessarily make him the best songwriter in history. The qualities which do make both Paul and John the best songwriters in history go beyond writing the greatest number of catchy classic songs. "Catchy" means that their melodies and lyrics are instantly memorable.

"Classic" means that they stand the test of time. But both Paul and John wrote very sophisticated melodies that moved beyond the simple groups of 2, 4 and 8 patterned phrases used by almost all other songwriters. John and Paul's melodies soared, floated, cascaded, dived and peaked with true dynamics, naturally following the syllabic lyric patterns - but not always. Sometimes the melodic and lyric patterns were independent of each other, almost counterpoint in nature, and as a songwriter, they never ceased to astonish me with their brilliance and originality. In the beginning, their lyrics were simple and their songs were simple love songs. But they soon began exploring new territory by writing about subjects that hadn't been covered before. Inspired by Bob Dylan, they wrote true poetry with feeling and depth, using evocative and unusual words. Rubber Soul marked the beginning of their evolution as mature songwriters, Revolver was a break-out album, and Sergeant Pepper was an historic landmark album in terms of new and innovative songwriting as well as production. Every song they wrote was significantly different from the last one even though each song had their unmistakable sound.

Most songwriters are only average players on their instruments, but John and Paul are both sophisticated guitarists who were able to integrate their playing into their songs and even into their song structure so that the "licks" they played became as catchy a part of their songs as the choruses and verses. Blackbird and Dear Prudence are only two examples of songs which couldn't possibly be written by any other songwriter because of the guitar playing which forms an integral part of the song structure. In similar fashion, Lady Madonna is the best example of a great song which derives from the unique and beautiful bass part which only Paul could possibly have created.

Average songwriters achieve the catchy quality by repeating a phrase endlessly or by beating a chorus to death. John and Paul found countless ways to be memorable without ever overly repeating something. The only time they repeated something over and over again for a long time was in Hey Jude, and what they chose to repeat is so gorgeous that one can only wish they had never ended the song. The Beatles were my biggest musical influence and I used to think, "If I could write just one song that's as good as John and Paul's worst song, I'd be happy." People tell me I accomplished that goal and they say one good example is John is Alive which is my sincere tribute to Sir Lennon.

3. BEST SINGERS

Even Ringo could sing when he got a little help from his friends who lived in the yellow submarine. But to say that Paul and John are two of the best singers in rock and roll is to state the obvious. Combining John, Paul and George created the best harmony vocals the world has ever experienced. Even their two

part harmonies were unusual, catching us all by surprise on their first hit record with the fast harmony melisma in the chorus of I Want to Hold Your Hand. John had a knack of placing a unique low harmony line underneath Paul's high melody line so as to form a second melody which created unusual harmony effects. He did that right from the beginning in the verses of She Loves You. Both Paul and John could blast out screaming rock and roll (i.e. Long Tall Sally and Twist and Shout), and both could break our hearts with touching, deep feeling ballads (i.e. Yesterday and Julia). There seems to be no end to their emotional vocal range, and John even explored the heights of vocal psychedelia in songs like She Said (Revolver) and Lucy in the Sky With Diamonds.

4. MOST CREATIVE PLAYERS

Paul brought a new style of melodic playing to the bass guitar, reaching a new high of creativity on Sergeant Pepper with a level of sophistication never heard before. Many other musicians besides me recognize Paul as being one of the best bass guitar players ever. George is underrated as a lead guitarist by people with average or below average musical knowledge or ability, but most guitarists (including Eric Clapton) know better. George's strength is in melody, pure and simple. It would be difficult to find a George Harrison lead which is not melodic, and each of his leads has a strong beginning, a stronger middle and a well defined ending. In fact, that's Eric's definition of what makes a good guitar lead. George continually developed new guitar sounds for each Beatles song. John and Paul are also excellent guitarists and both recorded great leads as well as innovative rhythm tracks. All three of the Beatles guitarists may lack showy technical fireworks but they make that definition of guitar mastery irrelevant by overwhelming the senses with creativity, style, and pure melody. The exact same thing can be said about John and Paul's keyboard playing. Ringo may be underrated as a drummer by the public but he is not underrated by other professional drummers. Ringo mastered the art of drum sounds. No drummer has ever recorded so many different sounds on so many different sounding records. Ringo invented a new style of slow drum playing, epitomized on A Day in the Life and Strawberry Fields Forever. John said many times, "Ringo has the best back beat in the business" and the successful studio drummers understand why John was correct.

5. TOTAL CHARISMA

A good definition of charisma needs to include "an unusual ability to influence people and arouse devotion" and "a personal attractiveness which enables a person to influence others". No musical group prior to or after The Beatles features true charisma emanating strongly from the entire group as well as separately from each member. The Beatles stunned the world with their photogenic

quality, their charm, their bubbling and lovable personalities, their cuteness and their unique style. Even before The Beatles achieved fame, people in Liverpool were imitating their haircuts, the way they dressed, the way they behaved, and the way they lived. Such a simple subliminal message about smoking marijuana got communicated to all the hippies who were waiting to happen without actual words ever being spoken. The Beatles had a lot to lose by being explicit on that subject, but they successfully avoided trouble by keeping it very subtle while at the same time clear enough so that we all got it. The Fab Four kept changing their styles rapidly, almost with each album cover, and soon the message became one of explicit spiritualism. After visiting India, The Beatles introduced eastern mysticism and meditation to the Western world for the first time through the mass media. John's long saga with internal angst, drugs, spiritualism, politics, personal battles, and ultimately his marriage to Yoko played out like a movie the whole world got to watch in fascination. Paul's happy life with Linda, George's great focus on meditation, and Ringo's equanimity throughout were all perfect examples of the power, the truth, and the effectiveness of true charisma.

6. SEXUAL AURA

Need I say it? Ask the millions of girls who were screaming and fainting at the very sight of them. "The Boys" didn't move like Elvis or dance like Mick, they just stood there shaking their "mop top" heads around, smiling, laughing, and looking gorgeous as they performed great music and that was it. On their first visit to America, some enterprising weirdo from New York City managed to cut up the hotel bedsheets The Beatles had slept on into 1" square pieces, and these things were actually sold to girls over the public airwaves by adult DJ's on the AM radio stations who should have known better. The Beatles phenomenon went way beyond the rock and roll sex star status that had been seen before. Teenage girls in uncountable numbers fell in love, their hearts to be trapped, their heart strings to be continually plucked, and ultimately, their hearts to be broken by the unobtainable object of their love. Worshiping a star from afar? Infatuation? Obsession? Not real love? For many of them, it was their first experience feeling love for a man/boy. Whatever it was, it was very real to all of them, and we all soon understood that The Beatles were The Real Thing.

That's why I call The Beatles the Most Creative Band of All Time. They were The Real Thing. The Creative Zenith. The high point on the bell curve of musical history.