

THE FOUR PHASES OF THE BEATLES

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(1) During the early Sixties, the four members of a rock band called the Beatles took the field of pop music by storm and their influence on music continues even today. But despite the identity of name and members, the Beatles were not always the same group. The group went through four distinct phases--the early years, the pop stardom period, the musicmakers phase, and the soloists--characterized by changes in the audiences they drew, the sound they had, and their image as a band.

(2) In the early years (between 1959 and 1962), the Beatles were starting a career which was challenging and uncertain. Entertaining the lower classes of Liverpool and the surrounding area with their crude versions of popular American songs at dilapidated dance halls and clubs, they were brash and vulgar. Their image as obnoxious troublemakers was well earned. In one instance, a club at which they played caught fire due to their antics on stage. They dressed as they pleased, paying no attention to fashion and normal modes of dress. This, coupled with their long hair, set them apart from other bands. Yet, in these early years, they improved their musical talents and gained valuable experience as entertainers. After they obtained Brian Epstein as their manager, the band changed dramatically.

(3) The next phase in the Beatles' history was pop stardom. They gained this status almost overnight after the release of their first two singles, "Love Me Do" and "Please, Please Me," their own compositions. The band's audience had become the world, and this widespread popularity caused many of the changes. Their sound became even better as they continued writing and performing their own music, dance songs whose themes were girls and falling in love. Because the Beatles were striving to keep the status they had gained, they had to change their image. Each member projected his personal character, and each became a celebrity in his own right. They were no longer hooligans but respectable, clean-cut, and charming: they had traded their leather jackets for suits and they all had exactly the same hair cut--straight bangs. This new appearance, along with their developing music, endeared them to their growing audience.

(4) In 1966, the Beatles entered yet another phase: they were now musicmakers. They withdrew from the limelight, performing only in the studio in order to put more work into writing and recording their music. Both

their audience, now limited to record buyers and radio listeners, and their sound had changed. SERGEANT PEPPER'S LONELY HEARTS CLUB BAND an album they released during the summer of 1967, is still considered a classic in rock history. Each song--"Strawberry Fields Forever," "Hey, Jude," and "Here Comes the Sun"--had a different theme and sound as the group explored many new forms of music. Each member was doing more writing on his own rather than with the rest of the group. As this happened, the band grew apart and each member began to go his own way. Each began to dress as he pleased and each grew his hair longer. This new image influenced many during the Sixties to dress as they pleased rather than to conform to the traditionally-accepted standards of proper grooming. The late Sixties image reflected a newfound individualism and set the stage for the Beatles' final phase.

(5) In early 1970, the Beatles broke up and the members became soloists, each with his following of fans, not only former Beatle fans but new fans who had not grown up with the group. Each member's distinct musical style was evident now more than ever, and each produced successful music on his own. Paul McCartney wrote songs such as "Maybe I'm Amazed" and titled his most popular album Band on the Run. John Lennon was best known for his song "Imagine" and the protest theme "Give Peace a Chance." George Harrison released All Things Must Pass, an album which contained many songs he had written while still with the Beatles but which the group had never used. Ringo Starr's biggest hit on the pop charts was "You're Sixteen," but he chose to become more involved with acting.

(6) These four phases of the Beatles' career show clearly the changes in their audiences, their music, and their personal images. This progression of changes combined with their widespread influence is what sets them apart from many other rock bands of the Sixties.