

Guest Editorial



BY IAN WHITCOMB

I hate the Beatles. And I hate the Stones, and Bob Dylan. I hate them because they were destroyers of childhood. They wrecked the funfair, stopped the carnival, knocked the rock. And they did this by dragging dreary REAL LIFE into the wonderful world that was POP.

Poor children of the late Sixties and early Seventies! No romance to make first love to! No exchanging of rings, no white sport coat and pink carnation at the senior prom! No struggle to undo that bra! Instead the grim reality of chemicals: the pills and syringes. And who made the chemical world popular? Who advocated filling oneself with poison, and who pronounced this message with high pretentiousness and thus sent many kids to their doom? The Beatles and the Stones and their followers.

These invaders of Peter Pan Popland not only advocated drug taking as the new "reality," they also started dragging current affairs into the scene. The Beatles did this and went up the creek, sloshing around in philosophy of a particularly wet and foreign kind (I mean the faker fakir called Mahar-whats-his-name. Like most foreigners, Indians are only good for their cooking). Following them came the illiterate, whining Bob Dylan, with his moaning about his trivial problems and his finger-pointing at poor buggers like the clerkly Mr. Jones.

The more I write about that awful period of the Sixties the iller I become. Why, I may have to reach for an aspirin soon! What was that wonderful world of pop, before the Beatles! Why did I adore it so!

Well, the main thing was that in those days, in the Fifties and very early Sixties, the worlds of pop and real life were separate. And we, being intelligent, though innocent, teenagers, knew that. We were sensible enough to see pop music as akin to eating a mammoth hot fudge sundae. In other words, pop was a treat. Too much of the stuff could make you sick. We knew that the joys of real music, of art, were ahead of us: of Beethoven, Brahms, Charlie Parker, Jelly

Roll Morton and Scott Joplin. Music and Pop were worlds apart. Pop had, and should have, little to do with music, but a lot to do with youth society.

Let me be specific: the heroes of the golden age of rock and roll were wildmen writhing in gold suits with a fleet of Cadillacs gleaming in the background (Elvis Presley); or wildmen stalking the tops of grand pianos shouting about having a chicken in the barn while there was a whole lotta shakin' goin' on (Jerry Lee Lewis). These heroes were crazy when they were on stage, or record, or film. They did what we would like to do, but they confined it to the safety of the stage. In real life such behavior would have resulted in a jail term. We knew that, they knew that, the authorities knew it too. And the world turned and was OK.

And to counterpoint these stage outlaws of rock and roll there were glamorous, relaxing singers called Bobby (Vinton, Vee, Darin) and sweet girls like Connie Francis (she of the bleacher-reacher voice), and just plain good-lookers like Fabian (for rough trade lovers) and Ricky Nelson (for those with more sensitive leanings).

All these performers, caged on a stage, were managed by older men, by father-figure managers. These managers were respected — as the old should be respected. That is the way the world turns.

But then! In come the Beatles, etc. and break the rules. The inmates take over the asylum. The Rolling Stones, a rude bunch who, being middle class, ought to have known better, refused to be produced on TV shows like *Shindig*. Mick Jagger told producer Jack Good to "fuck off," when all Jack was doing was making a little pop art. The Beatles gradually sent their manager Brian Epstein into the world of redundancy and, hence, to eventual oblivion. Managers were sent packing, sent helter skelter. The old wise men ran scared. Some departed the business. Others, presidents of major record companies included, embraced the enemy by signing up groups who openly advocated a way of life in

which anything goes. Hard drugs were handed out by the major companies to their big-selling acts.

By the mid-Seventies pop had sunk into a sloshy stew of wall-to-wall Muzak, epitomized by the pap of the grotesque, fat and balding Elton John. Behold! A bank clerk elevated into rock Stardom!

And the guilty ones who started the destruction of pop childhood innocence — where are they? Where have all those flowers gone?

Many are dead from chemicals; others, with teeth and hair falling like a hard rain, are sliding into middle age. Dylan sits alone and unrecognized at ball games, deserted by his followers because they have seen the light and become the hard-working Mr. Joneses he once attacked. And what of the Beatles? Constantly being re-cycled, mummified, made into moving wax museums (see *Beatlemania*), molded into the very stuff of nostalgia. Nostalgia — the most destructive force in the world. The true evasion of reality.

One real Beatle does survive: Paul McCartney. For him the whole Beatle trip had a sensible goal: the raising of a tight-knit family far from the madding crowd.

But are there nights when his dreams are full of the ghosts of the children of the late Sixties? They scream: "You took away our childhood, you filled us with poison, you led us down the yellow brick road into the land of poison. And you survived — while we sit up here in Rock Heaven listening to the shrill demented choirs of Janis Joplin, Jim Morrison, Jimi Hendrix. Why, they're so fucking loud we can't hear Buddy Holly singing 'I Guess It Doesn't Matter Any-more'!!!!"

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Ian Whitcomb's book, After the Ball, is a text in many pop culture courses. He received his degree in American history at Trinity College, Dublin. He wrote and recorded "You Turn Me On" and "N-Nervous," respectable hits in the wake of the English Invasion. Since then, he's settled in Hollywood where he continues to write, record, and entertain. Mae West, whom Ian once produced, subsequently called him "a genius." He never hears from John, Paul, George, or Ringo