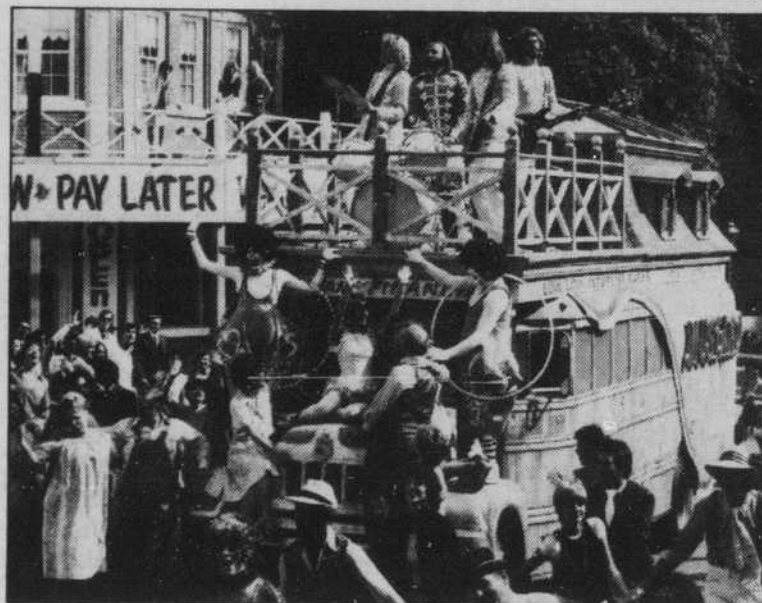




Pam Mitchell, agog over Beatle hairs in *I Wanna Hold Your Hand*; crazed Beatle fans (right).



Teresa Saldana (left, below) Wendie Jo Sperber (center), and Mitchell stalk the Beatles.



The Bee Gees, Frampton, Donald Pleasance and Paul Nicholas (far left); Sgt. Pepper's \$1 million Heartland set (near left).



business," explains Barry. "The B.D. Brockhursts (the corrupt record company president who signs the LHC in L.A.) come up all the time in this business. The good guys are a minority. It's too big of a business for them not to be. But, this is *not* an acting film. It's a lot-of-fun rock musical."

Four teenage girls, topped with bouffant hairstyles, crowd into a service elevator in the Beatles' hotel in New York City. The elevator door closes, then opens. On cue, one girl shrieks. Another screams. "It's a print!" Robert Zemeckis, 26, is directing and very much in control of his first feature-length film, based on a screenplay he wrote with friend Bob Gale. Watching the action of *I Wanna Hold Your Hand* from the side of the set, Steven Spielberg's gaze is intense, but, at the same time, complacent. It was Spielberg who convinced Universal Pictures to assign the project to Zemeckis. "My role as executive producer," he says, "initially was to reassure the studio that a first-time-out director, like Bob — whom I had complete faith in — could direct a major studio film, and I would be in the wings in case he was run over by a honey wagon. Which we knew would never happen," he chuckles. "I was like a kind of negative pick-up deal to insure Bob's ability, even though he's only had two USC shorts to his credit." Spielberg's track record included *Jaws* and *Close Encounters*

of the *Third Kind*; how could Universal doubt him?

Where *Sgt. Pepper's* has a cast of stars, *I Wanna Hold Your Hand* is full of unknowns. "It's like a family," says 27-year-old Nancy Allen, one of the film's six principal players. "It's not a very serious, uptight set, basically because we're all young."

Set in February 1964 amidst the chaos surrounding the Beatles' arrival in the United States, *I Wanna Hold Your Hand*, budgeted at a modest \$3 million, is the story of four teenage girls from Maplewood, New Jersey who make plans to travel to New York City, sneak into the Beatles hotel and, maybe, get into the *Ed Sullivan Show* to see the Beatles perform live. Photographer Grace Corrigan (Teresa Saldana); Beatle fanatic Rosie Petrofsky (Wendie Jo Sperber); anti-commercial activist Janis Goldman (Susan Kendall Newman); and Pam Mitchell (Nancy

Allen), who decides to make her last pre-marital fling with the Beatles, are joined by Larry DuBois (Marc McClure), the undertaker's son who "borrows" one of his father's limousines for the trip; and Tony Smerko (Bobby DiCiccio), who has the hots for Janis — not the Beatles.

Universal Studios' Stage 33 — which for the purposes of this film is the Beatles' hotel — is a flashback to the early Sixties, complete with Capri pants, ratted hair decorated with bows, white lipstick, crewcuts (the most difficult to find for the casting director), and pointed shoes. Relaxing on a sofa in an alcove near the Beatles' bedroom, Wendie Jo Sperber, who was only five years old in 1964, ponders: "I can't believe people really dressed like this." Wendie's 15-year-old Rosie character is the most ardent of Beatle fans and is in love with Paul McCartney.

In reality, only two of the

cast's six leads are old enough to remember the clothes and effect of the Beatles. At home in Sherman Oaks, California, Susan Newman, daughter of Paul, reminisces, "I went to a lot of Beatle concerts. I stood in line and saw *A Hard Day's Night* 39 times. I knew every single line, the order of the songs and every song by heart. Yes," Susie sighs, "I was very much caught up in the Beatles." A reminder of days gone by, a personally autographed poster of the Beatles, hangs on her living room wall. "They were the stepping stone for me," she said, "from your basic kid into your basic adolescent, and nothing else seemed to affect me as much as they did." Later Susan adds, "This isn't a profound film, but it does begin to deal with what people do with that whole concept of hero worship. And, let me tell you," she says, "when you get into that Hollywood Palace (which stands

in for the Sullivan theatre in New York) and they turn on the tape and 'She Loves You' comes blaring out over the loudspeakers and 400 extras are jumping on their feet screaming and crying, it *does* take you back." Twenty-year-old Marc McClure found himself somewhat amazed by it all: "It's a mad, mad world — really."

What makes *I Wanna Hold Your Hand* that much different from *A Hard Day's Night*? "Richard Lester's films about the Beatles are wonderful," says Spielberg, "but this picture is more about the social impact on six kids from New Jersey who come down to New York City for different reasons to be part of the mania. *Why* did she scream, hyperventilate and pass out? What was the magic? What was in the air that year that caused so many people to come unglued from themselves?" Within Spielberg's questions lie a certain validity for this film — the attempt to give some respectability to a hoard of screaming, crying, fainting girls, and perhaps even touch on the sociological whys and wherefores that caused the phenomenon.

"I think the time is right for a Beatles movie," Spielberg says, "but you never really know until the audience tells you. There's enough time certainly between the Beatles' debut on the *Ed Sullivan Show* and now — 13 years is enough time between the two extremes. Besides," he chuckles, "nostalgia is the junk food of America."

