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Books

The Beatles
Text by Geoffrey Stokes
Graphic Design by Bea Feitler
Times Books/Rolling Stone
Press, 246 pages, \$29.95

"(Bob) Dylan... first heard the Beatles over his car radio during a 1964 cross-country drive; he was knocked out: 'They were doing things nobody was doing. Their chords were outrageous, just outrageous, and their harmonies made it all valid... Everybody else thought they were for the teenyboppers, that they were gonna pass right away. But it was obvious to me that they had staying power. I knew they were pointing to the direction where music had to go.'"

And a long and varied road it's been, from "I Wanna Hold Your Hand" to "Norwegian Wood" to "Strawberry Fields" to Lennon's "How Do You Sleep?" It's a story many of us have listened to and read about, a story anyone growing up in this country over the last twenty years has had indelibly imprinted on their consciousness by every form of communication imaginable.

Who are/were the Beatles? Where did they come from and how did they get to be who they are? These are questions which have been variously raised and answered over the years by virtually everybody who ever knew the Beatles and by a whole host of folks who drew their facts from other sources. *The Beatles* is one of those books which made its way out of the latter circle.

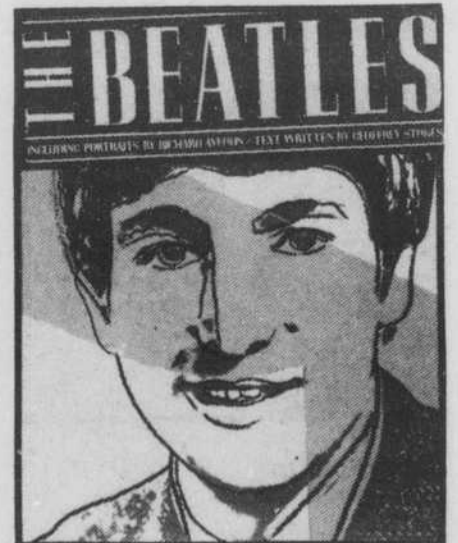
First, it's a big, oversized, handsome book, weighing a couple of pounds primarily due to the heavy, high-grade stock of its 246 pages. The text is all in quite large type and easy to read — even from about four feet away — although rather sparse. The main attraction seems to be the photographs which are all reprints from various newspapers, magazines, promotional material and private collections. The photos are all very interesting and nostalgic, but I suspect most of us have seen them all before.

The main problem I see with the book is the price tag. Exactly what is it about this book which may be worth \$29.95?

The text? Author Geoffrey Stokes, a Village Voice staff

writer, has done a competent job of researching his material. He's obviously read most of the material extant on the Beatles (a Herculean labor in its own right). And, as far as I can tell, he's made no glaring errors in reporting the Fab Four's rise and fall.

All the major events are mentioned: the early groups; learning their craft in Hamburg, Germany's rock clubs; Brian Epstein; the first American visitation ("the Beatles became the first pop act to get their break by means of the print medium"); the Ed Sullivan Show; the screaming and fainting fans; the jellybeans (remember that business?); the long hair brushed forward; the Beatle boots, stovepipe pants and four-button coats; ("By the time they returned to England, the Beatles were poised on the cutting edge not merely of a musical moment, but of a generational movement. Clothes, hair, sex, music, drugs, even the New York Times... nothing after the Beatles would ever be quite the same as it had been before."); Lennon's books; the films; the world tours; the presentation by the Queen of England of the MBE (Member of the Order of the British Empire) for their services to British commerce; the albums; their threats to the moral fiber of America's youth; Lennon's "We're more popular than Jesus Christ right now"; George Martin's brilliant studio work ("In the beginnings, he had performed sonic miracles — making (the Beatles) sound louder than anyone else without boosting levels and irritating radio stations. But by the time of *Revolver*, his job had changed. No longer did he just capture an existing sound; instead, he invented equivalents for sounds that existed only in their heads... he became the first producer to build a record layer by layer — creating not a new product, but a new art."); LSD; *Sgt. Pepper* ("The kids who had grown up screaming for the Beatles and the adults who'd been seduced by 'A Hard Day's Night' joined to create a new kind of pop audience. There was an army of fans waiting not to dance and shriek, but to listen. Preferably stoned."); the Maharishi; the Apple Corps situation; Yellow Submarine; Yoko Ono; the Paul is Dead affair;



the final breakup.

But it's just so many events strung together, there's no depth to the text. The "what" is there, but the "why" is conspicuously missing.

Stokes' surface approach (Just the facts, ma'am) makes for a quick and easy read — every word in the book could be read in three or four hours; but other than its brevity, it certainly offers nothing to compare with Hunter Davies' *The Beatles, An Official Biography*, Peter McCabe's and Robert D. Schonfeld's *Apple to the Core* or even Barry Miles' collection of *Beatles In Their Own Words*.

That leaves the visual elements. The photo credits in the back of the book take almost as much time to read as the text. The photographs and newspaper clippings are all state-of-the-art processed, well laid out and obviously a great deal of time and care was taken to do so. However, if you sit down to read the book, you will soon discover that the text and the photos never seem to be telling the same story. They are constantly interrupting each other's flow and momentum.

There is, however, another factor (albeit a bit of a gimmick) which may help justify the price of the book. Underneath the book-jacket is another cover which reveals itself to be a painting of the Beatles (circa "She Loves You") by none other than Andy Warhol. Suitable for framing, of course.

All told, if you have 30 bucks to devote to Beatlemania, or your coffee table needs gracing, or you'd like to put a new Warhol on your wall, this may be the book for you. It might also make an excellent Christmas gift to give your favorite Beatles' fan who has everything but the money to pay for such a book. For the rest of us, however, the Beatles story has been told better elsewhere.

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