

## Syllabus for THE BEATLES

Wednesdays September 16-October 20, 1pm-3pm

Oakmont OLLI

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### FIRST SESSION

#### I. The Roots of the Beatles

A. The Liverpool childhoods of the four individual Beatles: John Lennon, Paul McCartney, George Harrison, and Ringo Starr. The musical and cultural influences to which they were exposed before they were teenagers, and before they heard rock'n'roll.

B. The key musical inspirations for the Beatles from the mid-1950s onward: Chuck Berry, Elvis Presley, Little Richard, Carl Perkins, Buddy Holly, the Shirelles, the Everly Brothers, the songwriting team of Gerry Goffin and Carole King, and others. Some original versions of songs the Beatles covered will be played to highlight the influences, and compared to the Beatles' own renditions.

C. The pre-Ringo Starr years of the Beatles as a performing group, 1957-1962. Their roots as the Quarrymen; the enlistment of Pete Best as drummer in summer 1960; their rising popularity in both Liverpool and Hamburg, Germany, where they toughened their act with long stints at nightclubs; the entry of Brian Epstein into the story as manager; their failed audition for Decca Records in January 1962; their successful audition for producer George Martin of EMI Records in June 1962; the replacement of Pete Best by Ringo Starr in August 1962.

Other themes discussed: the effect of post-World War II austerity on the Beatles' childhood and adolescence; the Liverpool rock scene in which they came into prominence; the effect of Hamburg on the Beatles and British rock in general.

#### II. The Rise to Stardom in the United Kingdom

A. The Beatles record their first single, "Love Me Do," in September 1962. They continue to slog around Liverpool and Hamburg clubs for a few months. That starts to change when their second single, "Please Please Me," becomes a huge British hit in early 1963. With the rapid growth of their musical tightness, melodically inventive songwriting, and exuberant harmonies, the Beatles become the first great original British rock'n'roll group.

B. The bulk of their first album, *Please Please Me*, is recorded in just one day in February 1963. It makes them an unprecedented phenomenon, topping the UK chart for 30 consecutive weeks. The Beatles are now touring throughout Britain and upstaging visiting American stars like Roy Orbison.

C. Their #1 single "From Me to You" consolidates their popularity, which rises to a historic level when "She Loves You" becomes the biggest-selling British single of all time. Several other bands follow the Beatles out of Liverpool to help revitalize the British record industry, several of them also managed by Epstein.

Other themes discussed: the rise of the Liverpool Merseybeat sound as a trend in the wake of the Beatles; the role of Brian Epstein in the Beatles' success; the importance of their BBC broadcasts in spreading their popularity and giving the group a chance to cover many songs never included on their records.

### III. British Beatlemania

A. Beatlemania takes off in Britain in the fall of 1963, as their concerts spark mass hysteria among the teenage audience. Kicked off by an appearance at the London Palladium, it goes into overdrive when they perform in front of the British royal family at the Royal Variety Show.

B. Their final single of 1963, "I Want to Hold Your Hand," is an even bigger hit than "She Loves You." Their second album, *With the Beatles*, finds them becoming more innovative as songwriters and musicians, and replaces *Please Please Me* at the top of the British chart.

Other themes discussed: Lennon-McCartney write hits for artists other than the Beatles; the British media frenzy over the Beatles in late 1963.

## SECOND SESSION

### I. The Beatles Conquer America – and the World

A. Despite their phenomenal success at home, none of the Beatles' records have become hits in the United States by the end of 1963. Brian Epstein lays the groundwork for American success by setting up appearances on the *Ed Sullivan Show* for February 1964. The Beatles start to tour in Europe outside of the UK.

B. "I Want to Hold Your Hand" becomes a #1 hit in the United States in early 1964. Beatlemania hits the US as the Beatles quickly dominate the music charts, holding down the top five spots in the singles listings (and #1, #2, and #4 in the LP charts) one week in spring 1964. Their brief first US tour in February 1964 is a huge success, their appearances on *The Ed Sullivan Show* drawing some of the largest television audiences to that time.

Other themes discussed: the difficulty faced by British acts in succeeding in the US prior to 1964; the British Invasion of groups that followed the Beatles to American success.

### II. *A Hard Day's Night* and *Beatles for Sale*

A. The album *A Hard Day's Night* is the first Beatles LP comprised entirely of group originals, all written by John Lennon and Paul McCartney. Their musical and lyrical ambitions continue to rapidly expand on classics like "A Hard Day's Night," "Can't Buy Me Love," and "And I Love Her." More than any other rock act before them, the Beatles are not only changing and progressing rapidly from album to album, but are making albums that are strong from beginning to end, and full of songs that are different to each other (and different to what they've done on previous albums), instead of sticking to successfully proven formulas.

B. The movie *A Hard Day's Night* is a huge hit, and the most successful integration of rock music into a feature film. Though the Beatles have already established themselves as witty interviewees and charismatic live performers, the film also cements their image as irreverent anti-Establishment rebels, as well as their different yet complementary identities as individual Beatles.

C. The "I Feel Fine"/"She's a Woman" single finds the Beatles rocking harder than ever, and proving their mettle as creative electric guitarists. In late 1964, *The Beatles for Sale* album offers their last batch of classic rock'n'roll covers, as well as original material that shows them moving toward more subtle folk and country textures and harmonies. Their summer 1964 American tour solidifies their grip on US superstardom.

Other themes discussed: *A Hard Day's Night* film director Richard Lester.

### THIRD SESSION

#### I. *Help!*

A. Recording the *Help!* album in early-to-mid-1965, the influence of Bob Dylan starts to permeate John Lennon's writing in "Help!," "You've Got to Hide Your Love Away," and "Ticket to Ride." Paul McCartney's "Yesterday" ballad has the Beatles using strings for the first time. George Harrison is starting to develop as a songwriter, placing two compositions on the album.

B. The *Help!* movie becomes a big hit in the summer of 1965, although it's a more superficial happy-go-lucky romp than *A Hard Day's Night*. Their influence is becoming huge on the American scene, helping Bob Dylan decide to move from folk to rock, and the Byrds to combine the Beatles and Bob Dylan in their form of folk-rock. Their summer 1965 concert at Shea Stadium is the biggest in history to that point.

Other themes discussed: the relationship between Dylan and the Beatles; the Lennon-McCartney songwriting partnership; the Beatles' pioneering of rock concerts in large arenas and stadiums.

## II. *Rubber Soul*

A. *Rubber Soul* marks a big change in the group's direction. Many of the tracks have a folk-rock feel, especially "Norwegian Wood," "If I Needed Someone," and "I'm Looking Through You." George Harrison is writing stronger songs, and also responsible for introducing the sitar into their music on "Norwegian Wood." The "Day Tripper"/"We Can Work It Out" single is a huge hit from the same sessions.

B. The Beatles begin to expand their exploration of the counterculture as their drug use widens and increases, encompassing not just marijuana, but also their first LSD trips. They dress more casually and flamboyantly, and grow their hair yet longer, their creativity now expanding to unusual album sleeves with *Rubber Soul*'s distorted, elongated photography and design.

C. The group does their last tour of Britain at the end of the year. They are beginning to tire of playing the same material repeatedly to audiences screaming so loud that both the listeners and the Beatles have a hard time hearing the music. To the disappointment of Brian Epstein, they begin to focus more on their studio work than the live treadmill, taking the first three months of 1966 off.

Other themes discussed: George Harrison's interest in Indian music and religion; George Martin's growing role as creative producer and interpreter of the Beatles' ideas as they grow beyond the standard rock lineup instrumentation; George Harrison's contributions as Beatles guitarist.

## III. The End of Touring Approaches

A. On mid-1966's "Paperback Writer"/"Rain" single, the group continues to furiously evolve lyrically and musically, investigating non-romantic non-traditional themes, and developing sounds with backwards guitars, tape loops, and string/brass accompaniment.

B. Touring becomes more stressful on summer jaunts through Japan and the Philippines, where the Beatles' safety is seriously threatened for the first time.

Other themes discussed: the primitive sound systems the Beatles were using to tour; the beginning of the perception of the Beatles as dangerous radicals by part of the Establishment.

## FOURTH SESSION

### I. *Revolver* and the End of Touring

A. On *Revolver*, the group continues to furiously evolve lyrically and musically, investigating non-romantic non-traditional themes, and developing sounds with backwards guitars, tape loops, and string/brass accompaniment.

B. John's statement comparing the Beatles' popularity to that of Jesus is taken out of context and causes a firestorm of controversy in the US, especially the South. After a summer tour of the US that ends in San Francisco, the Beatles are frustrated by the hassles and limitations of playing live, and decide to stop touring. In an unprecedented move for a star act, they determine to remain active only as a studio group. Upon returning to London, they pursue their own activities as individuals for a couple months, sparking Beatles breakup rumors.

C. After John Lennon acts in *How I Won the War*, George Harrison studies the sitar in India, and Paul McCartney composes a film score, the Beatles regroup in Abbey Road Studios in late 1966.

Other times: the influence of the avant-garde upon the Beatles' composing and recording.

### II. *Sgt. Pepper* and the Summer of Love

A. Released in early 1967, the "Strawberry Fields Forever"/"Penny Lane" single finds the Beatles going all-out into psychedelia, though the lyrics are inspired by their Liverpool childhoods.

B. The *Sgt. Pepper* album has the Beatles reaching the apex of their psychedelic studio experimentation. The group spend

unprecedented time and money on it in the studio, also designing the most elaborate packaging for a pop album to date.

C. *Sgt. Pepper* becomes the soundtrack album for the 1967 Summer of Love, with the Beatles' visual image reaching its peak of color and flamboyance. At the beginning of the summer, their "All You Need Is Love" single becomes an anthem of the hippie movement, beamed to hundreds of millions of people by the first satellite television broadcast.

Other themes discussed: Beatles songs start to get accused of advocating drug use; *Sgt. Pepper's* massive influence upon both established bands and emerging ones like Pink Floyd; the Beatles' support team of recording engineers and technicians at EMI/Abbey Road Studios.

### III. *Magical Mystery Tour* and the Death of Brian Epstein

A. In August 1967, Brian Epstein dies. Although his role in the band's affairs had diminished, especially after they stopped touring, it's a shock that has long-term effects on their stability and longevity. As they reorganize their management, their new company Apple starts to gather steam.

B. The *Magical Mystery Tour* film, largely conceived and directed by the Beatles (especially Paul McCartney), is the band's first true commercial and critical failure. It gets panned by critics after its broadcast on British TV, and isn't released in the US. The *Magical Mystery Tour* album, however, shows the Beatles continuing to investigate psychedelic directions, successfully and for the last time.

## FIFTH SESSION

### I. The Maharishi, India, and Apple

C. On the "Lady Madonna" single in early 1968, the Beatles shift from psychedelia back to their rock'n'roll roots. Right after recording it, they spend much of early 1968 studying transcendental meditation with the Maharishi in India, where they write much of the material to appear on *The White Album*.

D. John takes up with artist Yoko Ono, bringing her to all the Beatles' recording sessions, which becomes the single biggest source of tension within the band. In the meantime, they begin the Apple Records label, also dabbling in film, retail, and other pursuits with their Apple company.

Other themes discussed: the Beatles' business empire; Paul McCartney's ascendance to a dominant role in managing the band's affairs; the group's growing disillusionment with spiritual pursuits, George Harrison excepted.

## II. *The White Album*

A. After cutting their Indian trip short, the group start working on *The White Album* for six months in spring 1968. It grows into a double LP that's acclaimed as their most eclectic album, though tension within the group starts to rise, and Ringo quits the group briefly.

B. The "Hey Jude"/"Revolution" single, the first on Apple, becomes their most successful hit. A promotional film for the single starts to rekindle their interest in live performing. But the group continue to fragment as John's avant-garde projects with Yoko take up much of his time.

Other themes discussed: the Beatles' involvement with other artists on the Apple label; the role of promotional music films in the Beatles' career after they stopped touring; increasing prevalence of individual side projects, such as George Harrison's *Wonderwall* soundtrack and John & Yoko's *Two Virgins* album.

## III. The *Let It Be* film and album

A. In January 1969, the Beatles work on the album then known as *Get Back*, later to form the bulk of *Let It Be*. The plan is to film a documentary of the rehearsals and recording sessions, culminating in a live concert. The band work on new material, and also jam on innumerable rock'n'roll oldies.

B. The plan soon goes awry as tensions rise to their highest level yet, and George Harrison quits the group for a few days in mid-January. He comes back, but the plan is modified so that the live concert idea is scrapped, although the Beatles perform live (for the last time) on top of their Apple headquarters in London at the end of January for the film cameras.

C. Although two songs from the sessions ("Get Back" and "Don't Let Me Down") are released on a hit single in the spring, most of the material done for the album and film is unreleased for the time being as the group are unable to decide what to do with it. In the meantime group unity continues to fragment as John marries Yoko, Paul marries Linda Eastman, and the group fight over who should manage their affairs after American businessman Allen Klein takes over running Apple.

Other themes discussed: the growth of George Harrison as a songwriter, and his resentment over not having some of his songs recorded; the increasing organizational chaos of Apple; growing pressure from drug busts of Lennon and Harrison.

## SIXTH SESSION

### I. *Abbey Road*

A. The Beatles rally to record a strong album, *Abbey Road*. It shows them continuing to grow creatively with a nearly side-long medley, and two George Harrison songs that find him becoming the equal of Lennon-McCartney as a composer. Intermittent tensions continue to dog the sessions, however, and John sometimes doesn't show up.

B. Business disputes widen the division between members of the group outside of the studio. Three of the Beatles sign to be managed by Allen Klein, but Paul McCartney refuses, and wants his father-in-law Lee Eastman to handle their affairs.

C. John Lennon broadens his non-Beatle activities to peace activism with Yoko Ono, some of which is detailed in the mid-1969 hit Beatles single "The Ballad of John and Yoko." In mid-1969, he records his first single on his own, "Give Peace a Chance."

Other themes discussed: the end of the Lennon-McCartney songwriting partnership; a new level of recording sophistication with the use of eight-track technology; Lennon and Ono's avant-garde film projects.

## II. The Beatles Break Up

A. In September 1969, John Lennon performs outside of the Beatles at a Canadian festival, and records a solo single, "Cold Turkey," after the Beatles reject it as unsuitable. He threatens to leave the group in September, but is convinced not to announce his decision. Ringo and Paul start work on solo albums in late 1969, and George plays guitar on tour with Delaney & Bonnie.

B. The group do barely any recording (and none with John) after August 1969, and try to compile an album based around their January 1969 sessions, as well as a film from the footage taken during that month. Producer Phil Spector is brought in to help prepare the *Let It Be* album release, and "Let It Be" becomes a hit single in early spring 1970, with John's "Instant Karma" becoming a solo hit around the same time.

C. When he hears the *Let It Be* album, Paul McCartney becomes enraged at Phil Spector's production, as well as the group's request that he delay the release of his first solo LP. He quits the group on April 10, 1970. The *Let It Be* album and film are released shortly afterward, but Paul sues to end the Beatles' business partnership at the end of the year.

Other themes discussed: the "Paul Is Dead" rumor that sweeps the world in late 1969; a look at other acts on the roster of Apple Records; the gradual death of Apple's utopian ambitions.

## III. The Beatles Go Solo

A. John Lennon records starker, more personal material on his first two proper solo albums in 1970 and 1971. He and Yoko remain politically active in the early 1970s and move to New York, but

separate in 1973 for a year and a half, as pressure to deport John from the US mounts.

B. George Harrison unexpectedly becomes the most commercially and critically successful ex-Beatle for a while with the 1970 album *All Things Must Pass*, which includes numerous songs he wrote during his final years with the Beatles. He organizes the Concert for Bangladesh in 1971, the first large-scale rock concert for charity.

C. Paul McCartney at first struggles to attract the critical acclaim of John and George with his solo releases, though he has hit records. He finally attains it, after forming Wings, with the 1973 album *Band on the Run*. In the meantime, all of the other Beatles assist on the solo releases of Ringo Starr, who has a #1 album in 1973.

Other themes discussed: the bitter lawsuits between the band; the constant, unfulfilled rumors of a Beatles reunion; the effect of the Beatles' split on the rock and cultural scene as a whole.

#### IV. The Beatles' Legacy

A. The Beatles continue to be huge record sellers and cultural icons throughout the 1970s, even as their influence as solo recording artists diminishes. The assassination of John Lennon in December 1980 permanently puts to rest thoughts of a reunion.

B. Innovative packaging of the Beatles' audiovisual catalog is relatively neglected in the 1980s. In the 1990s, however, with the most bitter lawsuits settled, the three surviving Beatles reunite to participate in the *Anthology* documentary project. This produces numerous CDs of unreleased material, as well as a book and DVD box, that makes them as much of a force in the marketplace as they'd been since they broke up.

C. In the twenty-first century, the Beatles' popularity continues unabated with some other less imaginative repackages. They also put their catalog to use in new technologies such as the Rock Band game and, finally, the availability of their material on iTunes. They continue to be a huge influence on rock and pop musicians, four decades after they disbanded.

Other themes: the Beatles' own attitude to their vault material and legacy; the group's unmatched cross-generational appeal; what the future might hold for archival Beatles releases.

## **Suggested Reading List**

There are hundreds if not thousands of Beatles books, with more on the way all the time. Here's an opinionated, selective guide to 15 of the best of them, which covers the very most essential volumes written about the band, as well as the best starting points for those wanting to find out about the group. More specialized books about particular eras and aspects of the Beatles' life and times are listed and described in the six syllabuses for each of the course's weekly meetings.

1. *The Complete Beatles Recording Sessions*, by Mark Lewisohn (EMI Records, 2006).

Indisputably the #1 Beatles book, particularly for listeners primarily interested in their music. It covers all of their 1962-70 EMI recording sessions in great detail, with a lot of stories that clear up how many of their songs were recorded. And it's not dry or overly technical — indeed it's quite fascinating reading, with lots of quotes from George Martin, Paul McCartney, and many of the session musicians and engineers who contributed to the records.

2. *The Beatles Anthology*, by the Beatles (Chronicle Books, 2002).

You've probably heard about this one, since it was a #1 bestseller around a decade years ago. It's true that it offers a somewhat distorted perspective since it relies almost wholly on direct quotes from the Beatles themselves, and doesn't include contextual information or quotes from other insiders who might paint a more controversial picture, like Yoko Ono, Phil Spector, Allen Klein, or Pete Best. But it does have loads and loads of first-hand stories from the Beatles about their career, and tons of great photos.

3. *Shout!: The Beatles In Their Generation*, by Phillip Norman (Fireside, 2003).

A good general career overview of the Beatles, though some of the text is pretentious and judgmental, and some of the facts have been cleared up or corrected by subsequent researchers since this was first published in 1980.

4. *The Beatles*, by Hunter Davies (W.W. Norton, 2010).

Their authorized biography, first published in 1968. Again, subsequent research embellished or corrected much of the information here, and some of the more controversial aspects of their sex lives, Brian Epstein's homosexuality, and other private matters were not discussed. However, actually it does have a lot of interesting first-hand quotes from all four members, their families, and their associates, covering most of their career (stopping at the end of 1967).

5. *Lennon Remembers*, by Jann Wenner (Verso, 2001).

This compiles the long interviews Lennon gave to Rolling Stone in 1970 just after the Beatles broke up, in which he discusses, frankly and sometimes angrily, the Beatles and a lot of their songs.

6. *Paul McCartney: Many Years from Now*, by Barry Miles (Holt, 1998).

Miles is a longtime friend of McCartney and this is pretty much a biography, but virtually all of it covers the pre-1971 Beatles period, rather than his solo career. There are tons of long quotes from McCartney about the Beatles, and inside stories about the writing of virtually all of the Lennon-McCartney songs.

7. *A Hard Day's Write: The Stories Behind Every Beatles' Song*, by Steve Turner (It Books, 2005).

Like it says, the stories behind how all of the Beatles' officially released songs were written, and the incidents and people that

inspired them. Unlike many such books, its research and writing are excellent.

8. ***All We Are Saying: The Last Major Interview with John Lennon and Yoko Ono***, by David Sheff (2000, St. Martin's Griffin).

This compiles the long interviews Lennon and Ono gave *Playboy* in 1980 just before his death. It's not as good as *Lennon Remembers*, but it does have a section in which Lennon comments about virtually every Lennon-McCartney composition. Originally published as *The Playboy Interviews with John Lennon & Yoko Ono*.

9. ***The Complete Beatles Chronicle***, by Mark Lewisohn (Chicago Review Press, 2010).

From the same author who wrote *The Complete Beatles Recording Sessions*, this might be something you want only if you're a really big fan and have digested more general volumes first. But it's a pretty thorough record of their day-by-day professional activities, through their April 1970 breakup.

10. ***Beatles Gear: The Ultimate Edition***, by Andy Babiuk (Backbeat, 2015). For gearheads, an extraordinarily in-depth look at the instruments the Beatles used during their career, both onstage and in the studio. Originally published in the early 2000s, the 2015 "Ultimate Edition" doubles its size to 512 pages, with more than 650 additional photos and some updated text incorporating information that came to light after the publication of the first edition.

11. ***The Beatles: Ten Years That Shook the World***, edited by Paul Trynka (DK Publishing, 2004).

Assembled by MOJO magazine, this is a superb, lushly illustrated 450-page coffee table volume of expert special-interest historical articles about the band, covering dozens of facets of their career from 1961-1970.

12. *Tune In: The Beatles: All These Years Vol. 1*, by Mark Lewisohn (Crown Archetype, 2013). By far the most thorough biography of the Beatles, which is really saying something considering the voluminous competition. But note: this 900-page book is but the first of three volumes, covering only until the end of 1962. Though staggeringly detailed, it's also extremely readable, with vast first-hand research and much context from their Liverpool life and the rise of rock'n'roll. An "extended special edition," available in the UK only, runs 1700 (!) pages, with several hundred thousand more words. This too adds a lot of detail and many stories, though most readers will be satisfied with the standard 900-page edition, which covers the essentials well. Volume 2 is not expected until about 2020, and the third and final volume not until about seven years after that.

13. *The Unreleased Beatles: Music and Film*, by Richie Unterberger (Backbeat, 2006).

By the instructor of this course, this details the incredible wealth of music the Beatles recorded that they did not release, as well as musical footage of the group that hasn't been made commercially available. The book examines all their unreleased studio outtakes, BBC radio recordings from 1962-65, live concert performances, home demos, private tapes, fan club Christmas recordings, and other informal recordings done outside of EMI studios that have escaped into circulation. Chronologically sequenced entries for all the Beatles' unreleased recordings of note from 1957 to 1970 are here, as well as all the unreleased Beatles musical video footage of note from 1961 to 1970. Also included are overviews of songs composed by the Beatles that were never recorded by the group, but given away to other artists; recordings known or rumored to have been made by the group that haven't yet circulated; Beatles compositions never recorded by anyone; coverage of music the group didn't release while active, but later put out on albums such as *The Beatles at the Hollywood Bowl*, *Live! At the Star-Club*, *Live at the BBC*, *Let It Be...Naked*, and the *Anthology* volumes; and a history of Beatles bootlegs. The updated, expanded ebook edition has 40,000 additional words.