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Beatlemania: 50 years since The Beatles landed in the United States

Local residents recall the Fab Four reached people like no other band before or since

By James Grant of The News-Sentinel
 Thursday, February 6, 2014 - 8:40 am

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Fifty years ago this month, radio airwaves across America were being inundated by the strange, new and vibrant sounds of The Beatles' song "I Want to Hold Your Hand."

The Beatles were already a sensation in Britain, so much so that the British press had coined the phrase Beatlemania to describe the frenzied response audiences had to the group.

Teenage girls screamed and swooned at the sight of the four "Mop Tops," as they became known, and that same audience sent Beatle records to the top of the charts in the UK in 1963.

In February 1964, The Beatles — John Lennon, Paul McCartney, George Harrison and Ringo Starr — set foot in America for the first time.

"It really was an invasion," said Rena Black of Fort Wayne, who, with her brother, John Stein, first saw the band during one of their two concerts Sept. 3, 1964, at the Indiana State Fair Coliseum in Indianapolis. "It was overwhelming. It was everybody's favorite music. ... There just had not been a musical experience for my generation like The Beatles."

In one many upcoming anniversary events, "The U.S. Albums," a 13-CD boxed set of The Beatles' music, will be released Tuesday.

BREAKING THROUGH

The songs "Please Please Me," "From Me to You" and "She Loves You" had sold in record numbers throughout 1963 in Britain, but they hardly made a dent when released on small record labels in the United States.

EMI Records, who owned and released The Beatles' music in the UK through their Parlophone label, also owned Capitol Records, one of the major record companies in America at the time.

EMI tried to persuade Capitol to release The Beatles' music early in 1963, but to no avail.

Capitol passed on The Beatles initially, as hardly any British artists had sold well in America. So The Beatles' first three singles were released on the tiny record labels Vee Jay and Swan and failed to generate much radio airplay or sales.

All of that changed with the release of "I Want to Hold Your Hand" in December 1963.

Capitol Records finally decided to take a chance and release The Beatles' music in America, giving the band a major promotional push, and the floodgates suddenly opened for group in the United States.

Audio: Local residents remember Beatles



More Information

Share your Fab Four memories

Do you remember The Beatles' arrival in the United States in 1964, their appearance Feb. 9, 1964, on "The Ed Sullivan Show" or their two concerts Sept. 3, 1964, at the Indiana State Fair Coliseum in Indianapolis? We'd like to hear about it.

We'll compile your memories and publish them in early February in conjunction with the 50th anniversary of The Beatles' live debut in America.

If you have high-resolution photos of yourself watching their debut on "Ed Sullivan" or at the Indianapolis concert, please send those, too.

Send your memories by Feb. 3 to features@news-sentinel.com. Please put "Beatles anniversary" in the email subject line.

The Beatles anniversary events

Here is a list of events scheduled and items being released in celebration of the 50th anniversary of The Beatles' arrival in America in 1964.

Some items have not been confirmed by The Beatles' website or the Apple/Universal record label:

- Tuesday: "The U.S. Albums" 13-CD boxed set released. Individual albums will also be made available initially.
- Jan. 26: Grammy Awards tribute to The Beatles
- Jan. 27: Beatles Tribute Concert in Los Angeles with some of today's top acts
- Feb. 1: The Beatles on the cover of Time magazine
- Feb. 3-7: "Late Show with David Letterman" will feature a Beatles' song a day by other artists
- Feb. 9: The Jan. 27 concert will be shown on TV.
- February: Re-release of the vinyl "LOVE" album
- March: Henry Grossman's Beatles photos will be featured on "60 Minutes"
- June: Tentative release date for mono albums vinyl boxed set
- October: Tentative release date for video clip collection on

DVD, based on "1." Other tie-ins for "1" may include a re-released vinyl album.

Source: <http://wogew.blogspot.com/2013/12/upcoming-50th-anniversary-usa-events.html> and www.nycfab50.com



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On Feb. 7, The Beatles landed triumphantly at the then-recently renamed John F. Kennedy International Airport in New York City, drawing thunderous screams from hundreds of teenagers who were eager to catch a glimpse of the group.

On Feb. 9, The Beatles made their historic appearance on "The Ed Sullivan Show," one of the most watched variety shows in America. That evening's show attracted a then record-breaking television audience of over 73 million viewers.

A NEW ERA

It may be hard to imagine now in the age of the Internet and social media, but The Beatles' arrival on the shores of North America in February 1964 was a seismic change in not only the music industry but in society as well.

The Beatles had long hair (for the time), witty and irreverent personalities, wrote their own songs, and most of all had a fresh and energetic self-confidence that permeated their music.

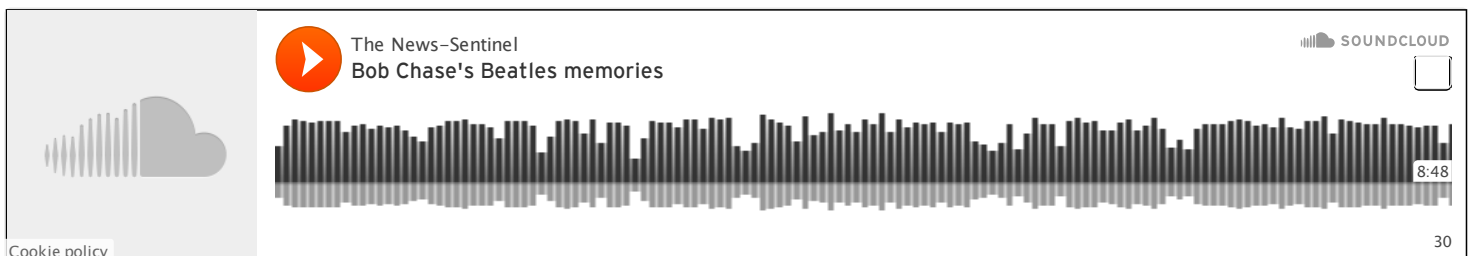
The early '60s also were a time when the Baby Boom generation was coming into its own.

Boomers were becoming a major consumer force, and that generation took to The Beatles' music and energy like no other musical artist of the time. It put The Beatles at the forefront of music and fashion, and, later, politics.

The Beatles' commercial dominance was so great that by April 1964, The Beatles held the Top 5 spots on the Billboard Hot 100 singles chart and also held the top two album spots on the Billboard Top 200 albums chart.

Bob Chase, then one of the popular disc jockeys on radio station WOWO, 1190-AM, in Fort Wayne, said the impact The Beatles had on music was so great that it's unlikely anyone will be able to surpass it.

Audio: Bob Chase's Beatles memories



The News-Sentinel
Bob Chase's Beatles memories

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"The Beatles, because of the hype they had before they got here and what they did here, probably (were) the most dominant music group of their kind that ever came to America," Chase said.

"Television was in at that point as well, and they got tremendous coverage," Chase said. "That's in the hey day of Ed Sullivan and all these kind of people who had incredible music variety shows. ... Anymore, ... social media has made so much accessible, you don't have to go to television or radio.

"I think because of that, you're never going to get that huge national bang that you used to get out of media prior to the time even cable (TV) came in," he said.

THE INDIANAPOLIS CONCERTS

Chase's first memory of The Beatles centers around their concert appearances Sept. 3, 1964, at the Indiana State Fair in Indianapolis.

"At that point, WOWO was very, very active in promoting, and we put a tour together and we took busloads down to Indianapolis to see The Beatles," he said.

"We had a chance to meet them and they were English kids, and we hadn't seen that many at that time," Chase continued. "They were a little different, but they were pretty humble. And it's obvious the more you listened to their music, ... they did things with their compositions and writing and stuff that proved that they weren't just a couple of kids with a guitar — they knew what they were doing."

Two other longtime Fort Wayne residents were also at one of the shows The Beatles performed in 1964 at the Indiana State Fair Coliseum.

John Stein and his sister, Rena Black, were fortunate enough to get tickets to see the afternoon show, the first of two shows The Beatles did that day.

Their father, who had business connections in Indianapolis, got them the tickets, and they both remember one thing from that show — the screaming.

"Our seats were directly under the sound system," Black said. "We were getting as much volume from the stage as it was possible to get, and it was still almost

impossible to hear (the band) because of the screaming girls.”

“We ... could barely hear them from time to time,” her brother concurred.

“There was an excitement with The Beatles in 1964 that I had not experienced in all of the late '50s and '60s up until '64,” John Stein added.

“For me, it just overwhelmed everything else,” he said. “The Rolling Stones, The Dave Clark Five, it didn't matter. Chad and Jeremy, Peter and Gordon, it didn't matter. It was just The Beatles and other pretenders.”

“It was something that had never existed before,” Black said. “Even with the rock 'n' roll that was around, nothing moved people the way this did.”

Betty Stein, mother of both John and Rena and a longtime News-Sentinel columnist, was a school teacher in Fort Wayne in 1964.

She remembers her reluctance to accept The Beatles' music when they first became all the rage in 1964, but she was won over by her students' love of the group and the group's songwriting capability.

“The kids in my class were absolutely crazy about them, thought they were wonderful,” Stein said. “And I kept pooh-poohing and saying there's nobody like, oh, Sinatra and Peggy Lee.

“And, one day, I had a call to come to the office, ... and they kept me there,” Stein recalled.

“By the time I got back to my classroom, every wall was covered with pictures of The Beatles,” she said. “And the kids had somehow smuggled in a little phonograph, and they were playing Beatles' stuff. When they got to one song, I said, 'That's not bad.' □

“□'Yesterday' is what sold me,” she said. “And then, of course, (when) they got around to 'Hey Jude' time, I was convinced that they were a wonderful gift.”

Donna Rondot, who was a grade school student in Fort Wayne in 1964, sums up what she and millions of other girls in America thought on their first exposure to The Beatles that long ago February night when she first saw them on “The Ed Sullivan Show.”

“I thought they were the cutest things,” Rondot said with a laugh. “I really did. I thought they were so cute, and I loved their hair and they looked totally different than anybody I had seen before. I think that's what I remember most.”