

Pop Music



During the early sixties pop music was going through a quiet phase. The charts were mostly dominated by stars who had made their names in the fifties, and much of the rebelliousness had gone out of rock'n'roll.

There was, however, one craze that hinted at things to come. In 1961 a black singer called Chubby Checker had an international hit with *Let's Twist Again*, a song which launched a world-wide dance fad. The Twist involved a lot of energetic hip-wriggling that

Above Chubby Checker shows how to do the Twist. The great centre for twisters was the Peppermint Lounge, a club in New York City.

outraged some adults. And it started a new form of teenage dance in which couples faced one another but did not touch. Other dance crazes followed — the Watusi, the Swim, the Jerk, the Frug — all with the same feature in common. Teenagers no longer had to have a partner if they wanted to dance.

Beatlemania

The performers who seemed to change everything were the Beatles from Liverpool in England. Their first hit, *Love Me Do*, only crept up the British charts to number 17 in 1962. But they had an exciting new sound, based on a line-up of drums and three guitars. The pulsing of the bass guitar gave it an especially powerful 'beat' which began to catch on. The Beatles themselves were confident working-class youths with real song-writing talent and a lot of cheeky humour. Their distinctive 'mop-top' haircuts helped them stand out from other groups, and in 1963 they had a string of gigantic hits. The press wrote of 'Beatlemania'.



Above The Beatles, from left to right Paul McCartney, George Harrison, Ringo Starr and John Lennon. In the early days the 'Fab Four' performed in sharply styled mod suits with distinctive round-neck collars.



Above Twisting in the street. Many people believe that the craze caught on because it helped to release Cold War tensions in the early sixties. In this way it foreshadowed the 'freak outs' of later years.

When the group visited the United States in 1964 they had the same wild success. This was amazing, because until then America had always set the style in pop music. Other English guitar groups followed in the Beatles' wake: the Rolling Stones, the Animals, the Kinks and the Who were just a few. Like the Beatles they had all been strongly influenced by black American performers such as Little Richard, Bo Diddley and Chuck Berry. But because they were white youths they were able to reach a wider audience. They struck sexy, defiant attitudes which overwhelmed young fans everywhere. America and the rest of the western world were conquered by the 'English invasion'.



American sounds

Not all the big hits of the mid-sixties were English, however. In California the Beach Boys had created an exciting sound of their own, built around surf culture and hot rod cars. And black performers were starting to enter the charts on a regular basis through the Tamla Motown label. Founded in Detroit the Motown company rose to become the biggest black-owned business in America with a wealth of hits by the Supremes, the Four Tops, Smokey Robinson, Marvin Gaye, Stevie Wonder and many others.

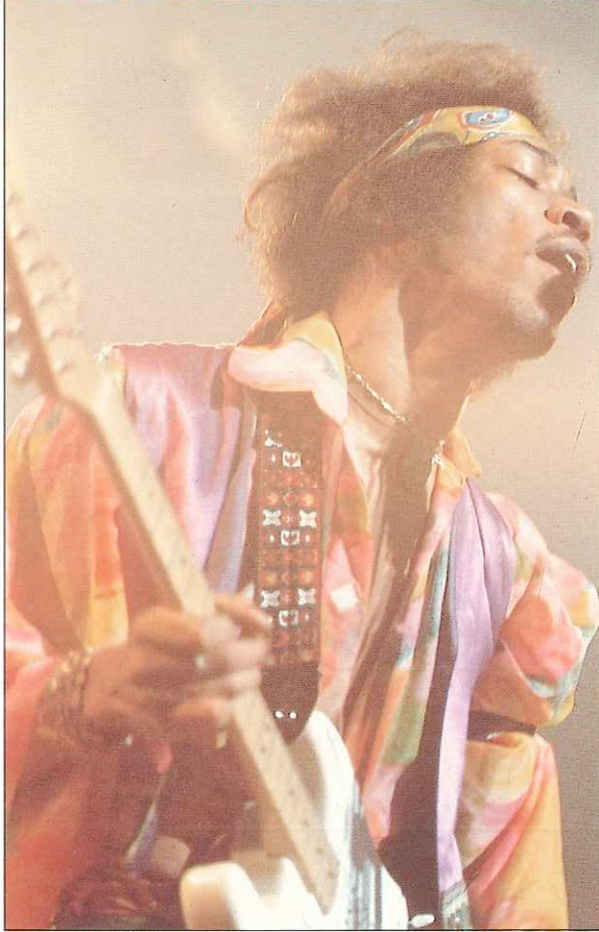
The most influential songwriter of the time was also an American, Bob Dylan. He had

Above The Temptations, one of many highly successful Motown groups. The company was founded by songwriter Berry Gordy Junior in 1962, and four years later was producing more hit singles per year than any other label. *Get Ready* was among the Temptations' greatest hits.

made his name as a folk singer writing songs of protest against war and racial injustice. But in 1965 he started to perform with an electric backing group instead of a simple acoustic guitar. His song-writing style changed too and he began to explore a moody, private world of dreams and visions. Dylan brought a new sense of poetry to pop, and his example encouraged the Beatles to write more experimentally.



Above Bob Dylan was an enormously influential songwriter. *Blowin' in the Wind* was among his early protest songs; *The Times They Are a Changin'* became a kind of anthem of the youth revolution.



Above Cult hero Jimi Hendrix helped to change the course of rock music through his astonishing guitar style. But he was also a casualty of the psychedelic era, dying in 1970 from drug abuse.

Psychedelia

Bit by bit the most adventurous pop stars started to lose interest in the kind of music which was aimed at the singles charts. They concentrated more on albums, where they could try out new ideas. The Beatles' *Rubber Soul* (1965) was one landmark, using the music of an Indian sitar on one track. Two years later the group brought out *Sergeant Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band*. This was an amazing creation, not only because it had a continuous theme running through it, but also in its use of a brass band, a symphony orchestra and weird sound effects. 'Psychedelia' had arrived.

Psychedelic music aimed to explore different ways of perceiving reality and to

suggest dreamy and mystical states. The Beatles did not invent the idea. In San Francisco, groups such as Jefferson Airplane and the Grateful Dead were already closely associated with the hippy movement and were making a new music. The Beach Boys produced a revolutionary album of their own in *Pet Sounds*. In Britain, one of the best-known psychedelic groups was Pink Floyd, who from 1966 used a spectacular light show when they performed live.

Black guitarist Jimi Hendrix also had a huge impact through his psychedelic playing style. He grew his hair out in a wild 'Afro' style too, cultivating a tribal look never seen before on a black performer. New freedoms in music also brought female artists to the fore, including Joni Mitchell and Janis Joplin.

Performers sometimes came together to give free open-air concerts. Out of these grew the first giant rock festivals. Half a million people turned up at the famous Woodstock festival held in August 1969 in New York State, USA.



Above Crowds at Woodstock, 1969. Festivals were a focus of the alternative society. The Woodstock event was held on a farm where half a million people gathered for three days of 'peace, music and love'.



Above Pink Floyd were among the pioneers of psychedelic music. Long instrumental solos and weird electronic effects were part of the style.

Back to bubblegum

By now pop singers were being treated in the media as the leaders of the younger generation. Fans themselves sometimes awaited a new album as if expecting new revelations about the meaning of life. But the stars themselves were finding it hard to live up to the expectations they aroused. The Beatles started to break up as a group in 1969, and in the same year Bob Dylan came out with a very straightforward album of country-and-western songs, called *Nashville Skyline*.

Besides, the whole psychedelic experience had taken pop music a long way from most ordinary teenagers' concerns. After all, young people still needed simple love songs and dance music. There was still 'normal' pop music to be found in the charts. For example, Louis Armstrong had a big hit in 1968 with *What a Wonderful World*. But it was the psychedelic groups who attracted most attention. In reaction against the long-haired groups, record companies started to bring out catchy singles again, aimed especially at younger teenagers. The Archies' *Sugar Sugar*, a smash hit in October 1969, was a classic example of what came to be known as 'bubblegum pop'.