



“IN MY EARS AND IN MY EYES”

The Beatles and Michael Jackson as the Voices of Their Generations

Abstract

The Beatles and Michael Jackson defined the music of the late twentieth and early twenty-first century. Both artists lyrically appealed directly to their fans, reinvented themselves frequently, and revolutionized the music industry. Their music united their generations and continues to influence today’s musicians.

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Overture

When I asked the adults in my life who they felt was the voice of their generation, depending on their age, they would answer the Beatles or Michael Jackson. After more research, I felt that it would be blasphemy to declare someone other than the Beatles or Michael Jackson as the voices of their respective generations. The Beatles belong to the Baby Boomers and Michael Jackson belongs to Generation X. With all of their accomplishments and their massive influence, it would be impossible to choose anyone else.

The Beatles released their first album, *Please Please Me*, in 1963.¹ Their 1964 performance on *The Ed Sullivan Show* caused them to become the most famous band of the 1960s.² The Beatles went on to change their sound and image drastically. After several reinventions, they stayed household names, despite their breakup in 1970. Songs such as “Hey Jude,” “Here Comes the Sun,” “Yellow Submarine,” and “Let It Be” are famous songs with equally as famous meanings. The Beatles are a staple of the 1960s and Hippie Culture. John Lennon’s influence is written all over New York City and the Beatles as a whole have a global presence.

Michael Jackson started as a child musician with the Jackson 5, a Motown group, in 1964.³ The Jackson 5’s career defined them as a staple of the Motown genre. When he was twenty, Michael Jackson moved on from the Jackson 5 and began working as a solo artist. His debut album,

¹ Vincent, Alice. “The Beatles’ Please Please Me, 50 Years on - 10 Facts about the Debut Album.” *The Telegraph*. Telegraph Media Group, March 22, 2013. www.telegraph.co.uk/culture/music/the-beatles/9946799/The-Beatles-Please-Please-Me-50-years-on-10-facts-about-the-debut-album.html.

² Norman, Philip. *Shout!: The Beatles in Their Generation*. New York: Simon & Schuster, 2013.

³ “The Jackson Five.” *Preceden*. Accessed December 9, 2019. www.preceden.com/timelines/68926-the-jackson-five.

Off the Wall, was released when disco was at its peak and put him on the map as a skilled musician.⁴ *Thriller* was released after *Off the Wall* and is now known as one of the most successful albums of all time.⁵ This album redefined pop music and appealed to a multiracial audience. Michael Jackson became one of the first black musicians to appear on MTV, which led to him becoming a household name, like the Beatles. Jackson continued to release pop album after pop album. His sound is instantly recognizable, and his influence can easily be heard by listening to today's pop music.

Michael Jackson was the first musician to impact me personally. I knew all of his songs and thought he was the coolest person to ever grace the earth. My grandparents played their *Thriller* vinyl for me when I was in second grade and I have adored his music ever since. It was not until later that I discovered the Beatles. Of course, I always knew about them and somewhat liked "Ticket to Ride" and "I am the Walrus," but I never quite understood the Beatles. One day, I decided I was going to teach myself to play "Hey Jude" on the piano. It was the first song of theirs that I ever truly comprehended and enjoyed. From there, I listened to "Eleanor Rigby" and "While My Guitar Gently Weeps." Because I adored these songs so much, I decided to listen to their albums. The Beatles resonated with me and so I introduced them to my brother. He and I bonded over their music, while I chauffeured him around during the summer.

To me, these musicians are always there, whether it be through their music, words, or aesthetics. The Beatles and Michael Jackson have been omnipresent in the cultural zeitgeist of the last fifty years, but I wanted to know why. What elements specifically determine these artists as history's most influential musicians? Which career commonalities defined both the Beatles and

⁴ Partridge, Kenneth. "Michael Jackson's 'Off the Wall' at 35: Classic Track-by-Track Album Review." *Billboard*, August 8, 2014. www.billboard.com/articles/review/album-review/6214222/michael-jacksons-off-the-wall-at-35-classic-track-by-track.

⁵ Lynch, John. "The 50 Best-Selling Albums of All Time." *Business Insider*. *Business Insider*, April 23, 2019. www.businessinsider.com/50-best-selling-albums-all-time-2016-9.

Michael Jackson as the voices of their respected generations? What did they have in common that led to their overwhelming influence? Answering these questions is important because music unites people. In divided times such as these, it is crucial to understand musicians and how their music unites people. Hopefully, an upcoming musician will find themselves in a similar situation and their career will assist in reuniting people. Both the Beatles and Michael Jackson appealed directly to their listeners through their lyrics, reinvented themselves frequently as artists, and became innovators within the music industry. All of these factors combine and serve as the reasons why Michael Jackson and the Beatles are described as the voices of their generations.

Opening Number

The Beatles and Michael Jackson will always be remembered for the powerful messages within their music. Michael Jackson sang about changing the world by changing yourself.⁶ The Beatles told their audience that all they needed was love.⁷ While their music is remembered fondly, the feelings associated with the musicians are quite different. The Beatles are remembered positively, while Jackson's image has continued to tarnish in the decade since his passing.

Despite the positive reception of his first three solo albums, Michael Jackson's image began to change with the release of his last three albums. During the release of *Dangerous*, *HIStory*, and *Invincible* multiple allegations were made against Jackson, accusing him of molesting young children. The first accusation, made by a thirteen-year-old boy, was settled out of court. Another allegation came about, leading to a criminal trial, which started in 2005, but he was acquitted by the jury. Michael Jackson died of cardiac arrest on June 25, 2009, causing the

⁶ "Michael Jackson— Man in the Mirror." *Genius*, January 16, 1988. www.genius.com/Michael-jackson-man-in-the-mirror-lyrics.

⁷ "The Beatles— All You Need Is Love." *Genius*, July 7, 1967. www.genius.com/The-beatles-all-you-need-is-love-lyrics.

controversy to subside for a little while.⁸ “Fans around the world mourned his death...Famous performers around the world told about the influence he had on their work. Michael Jackson left a huge mark on popular culture. His memory will live on in his unforgettable music.”⁹ The topic of Jackson molesting young children continues to arise.¹⁰ Most recently, the *HBO* documentary *Leaving Neverland*¹¹ revisited this issue, resurrecting the controversy regarding Michael Jackson. This documentary caused many to demystify Jackson and consider the known facts, returning the singer to the image he possessed before his death.¹²

Both the Beatles and Michael Jackson have managed to stay relevant. While the Beatlemania of the 1960s passed, the members themselves remained pop-cultural icons. John Lennon was assassinated in 1980, Paul McCartney was knighted in 1997, and George Harrison died in 2001.¹³ Ringo Starr¹⁴ and Paul McCartney¹⁵ both continue to work as solo artists. Despite

⁸ “Michael Jackson's Final Day: A Sleepless Night, Dangerous Drugs and a Death That Shook the World.” *Los Angeles Times*. *Los Angeles Times*, June 25, 2019.

www.latimes.com/local/lanow/la-me-michael-jackson-death-anniversary-20190625-story.html.

⁹ Orozco, Katherin. “MICHAEL JACKSON.” Academia.edu. Accessed October 11, 2019.

www.academia.edu/35209425/MICHAEL_JACKSON?email_work_card=view-paper.

¹⁰ Sisario, Ben. “What We Know About Michael Jackson's History of Sexual Abuse Accusations.” *The New York Times*. *The New York Times*, January 31, 2019.

<https://www.nytimes.com/2019/01/31/arts/music/michael-jackson-timeline-sexual-abuse-accusations.html>.

¹¹ “Leaving Neverland: Documentaries.” *HBO*. Accessed December 3, 2019. www.

Hbo.com/documentaries/leaving-neverland

¹² Lavanya Ramanathan, Elahe Izadi. “How Leaving Neverland Puts Michael Jackson's Cultural Legacy and \$2 Billion Empire in Jeopardy.” *The Washington Post*. WP Company, March 5, 2019.

www.washingtonpost.com/lifestyle/style/how-leaving-neverland-puts-michael-jacksons-cultural-legacy-and-2-billion-empire-in-jeopardy/.

¹³ Norman, Philip. *Shout!: The Beatles in Their Generation*. New York: Simon & Schuster, 2013.

¹⁴ Harris, Keith, Eddy, Chuck. “Meet the Beatle: Ringo Starr's Solo Career in 20 Songs.” *Rolling Stone*, August 29, 2019. www.rollingstone.com/music/music-lists/meet-the-beatle-a-guide-to-ringo-starrs-solo-career-in-20-songs-176537/.

¹⁵ “Reassessing Paul McCartney's Solo Career: Successful by Every Measure.” *pastemagazine.com*, July 16, 2018. www.pastemagazine.com/articles/2018/07/reassessing-paul-mccartneys-solo-career-successful.html.

the fact that the band broke up fifty years ago and that half of the members are deceased, the Beatles are still a relevant cultural landmark. Just when they seem to fade into the past, something (whether it be a film, a remastered album, or the remaining members) always brings them back. Similarly, Michael Jackson is still culturally present, despite the fact that he passed away ten years ago. His music is still played on the radio and enjoyed by millions. His iconic clothing and music videos have been paid homage to repeatedly in films, television programs, and by other musicians.

Though both musical acts are relevant, the way they are remembered is quite different. Both are remembered for their revolutionary music and the major changes they brought about within the music industry. However, Michael Jackson's image has been stained by the allegations made against him in the 90s and early 2000s.¹⁶ The notion of him sexually abusing young boys has tainted what was once a positive figure. I feel like it is my responsibility to acknowledge the allegations made against Jackson and the damage he has done. At the same time, I still have to acknowledge his impact on music as a whole. Michael Jackson made one of the most important albums of all time and paved the way for African American musicians to be successful. This in no way excuses the allegations and the harm he has done to others.

The Beatles are remembered for their message of love and peace. Any controversies surrounding them were minuscule or quickly forgiven. For example, most people do not remember the Beatles for John Lennon's "bigger than Jesus" comment, which caused a temporary boycott of the Beatles by religious groups.¹⁷ Though both artists have been incredibly influential, it is hard to

¹⁶ Tsioulcas, Anastasia. "Michael Jackson: A Quarter-Century of Sexual Abuse Allegations." *NPR*. *NPR*, March 5, 2019. www.npr.org/2019/03/05/699995484/michael-jackson-a-quarter-century-of-sexual-abuse-allegations.

¹⁷ Cava, Marco della. "Missing a Few Beats: Five Beatles' Controversies." *USA Today*. Gannett Satellite Information Network, February 9, 2014. www.usatoday.com/story/life/music/2014/02/09/five-beatles-myths-hoaxes-controversies/5271607/.

think of Michael Jackson without thinking of the allegations against him, while the Beatles are remembered positively, because their minor controversies were forgotten with time.

Main Set

The Beatles and Michael Jackson lyrically appealed directly to their generations, which is one reason why they were so influential. It is easy to find a trend in these three song titles: “I Want to Hold Your Hand,” “She Loves You,” and “All You Need is Love.” The emphasis on “you” is present in all of those titles. This presence continues throughout the Beatles’ discography. Other song titles such as “I’m Happy Just to Dance with You” and “From Me to You” include the word “you.” The lyrics continue to invite the listener in, even if the title does not always include the word “you.” Songs such as “Love Me Do” and “A Hard Day’s Night” speak directly to the audience with catchy hooks written by Lennon and McCartney, expressing how much they love “you.” In a video essay titled “How the Beatles Wrote Love Songs,”¹⁸ music journalist Noah Lefevre analyzes how throughout the Beatles’ career, many of their songs spoke directly to their listeners. Part of the Beatles’ success stems from the fact that their songs, particularly their love songs, speak directly to the young men and women who were listening to them.

In my research, I went through every Beatles album and all of their singles, in order to determine exactly how many of their songs speak to the listeners. In the end, I found that out of the 213 recorded songs, 114 of them speak directly to the listener, which is approximately 53% of their music. Fourteen of those 114 peaked at number one on the *Billboard Hot 100*,¹⁹ about 12.3%. If half of the Beatles music spoke directly to their listeners and led to their success, perhaps the

¹⁸ Lefevre, Noah. “How the Beatles Wrote Love Songs.” *YouTube*. *YouTube*. Accessed December 3, 2019. www.youtube.com/watch?v=Epv6HLysQz4

¹⁹ “The Beatles Twist And Shout Chart History.” *Billboard*. Accessed November 12, 2019. www.billboard.com/music/the-beatles/chart-history/hot-100/song/332889.

same should apply to Michael Jackson's discography. If the emphasis on the audience worked so well for the Beatles, then surely it should work for the voice of Generation X.

Michael Jackson, like the Beatles, has many famous song titles that include a stress on the word "you": "The Way You Make Me Feel," "Rock with You," and "Don't Stop 'til You Get Enough." Songs such as "Thriller" and "PYT (Pretty Young Thing)" direct their lyrics towards the listener, both of which are two of Jackson's biggest hits. Michael Jackson recorded 147 songs, seventy-six of which direct their lyrics at the listener. This is approximately 52% of his music, which is comparable to the Beatles 53%. Nine of these seventy-six songs were number one hits, which is around 11.8%.²⁰

The music of the Beatles and Michael Jackson was appealing because teenagers could hear it and think, "They're speaking to me." When music creates an intimate connection with the listener, they will want to continue listening, fueling the musician's success and staying power.

The Beatles and Michael Jackson became the voices of their generations by frequently reinventing. When the Beatles took over America with their performance on *The Ed Sullivan Show*,²¹ in the year 1964, they possessed a clean cut, family-friendly image. The young men wore suits, kept their hair long, and sang innocent lyrics such as "Love, love me do/ You know I love you/ I'll always be true."²² Lennon's wit, Harrison's mysteriousness, Starr's lightheartedness, and

²⁰ "Michael Jackson Say Say Say Chart History." *Billboard*. Accessed November 12, 2019. www.billboard.com/music/michael-jackson/chart-history/HSI/song/333889.

²¹ Norman, Philip. *Shout!: The Beatles in Their Generation*. New York: Simon & Schuster, 2013.

²² "The Beatles – Love Me Do." *Genius*, October 5, 1962. www.genius.com/The-beatles-love-me-do-lyrics.

McCartney's charm enticed audiences.²³ They were recognizable archetypes in matching suits. Everyone could pick a favorite Beatle and enjoy their innocent sound.

The Beatles quit touring in 1966 and their sound and image changed.²⁴ Their album, *Revolver*, was released in August of that same year.²⁵ This album built on the experimentation of *Rubber Soul*. *Rubber Soul* was released a year before *Revolver*²⁶ and featured grittier lyrics, such as the ones found in "Run for Your Life." Nonetheless, the 1965 album still features tracks with the traditional Beatles sound, like "Drive My Car" and "In My Life." *Revolver* includes "Eleanor Rigby" and "Love You To," both of which feature unorthodox instruments. "Eleanor Rigby" includes a violin octet, while "Love You To" allows George Harrison to demonstrate his sitar skills. Their image was still the same with the release of *Revolver*, though their sound was changing dramatically. Despite this, the world still saw them as the four young men on *The Ed Sullivan Show*.²⁷

The dramatic rebranding came with the release of *Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band* in May, 1967. The Beatles were no longer black and white images on the television wearing suits and singing commercial pop music. Now, they were Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band, donning colorful satin military uniforms, performing songs with overt references to drugs, and ending their album with the lyric "I'd love to turn you on."²⁸ This was a completely different band

²³Cooper, Lana. "The Magical Mystery Four: The Beatles As a Successful System of Archetypes." *PopMatters*. *PopMatters*, October 4, 2018. www.popmatters.com/115695-the-magical-mystery-four-the-beatles-as-a-successful-system-of-arche-2496119932.html.

²⁴ Giles, Jeff. "The Day the Beatles Decided to Stop Touring." *Ultimate Classic Rock*, August 21, 2017. Accessed December 3, 2019. www.ultimateclassicrock.com/beatles-stop-touring/.

²⁵ "Revolver." The Beatles. Accessed November 12, 2019. www.thebeatles.com/album/revolver.

²⁶ "Rubber Soul." The Beatles. Accessed December 3, 2019. www.thebeatles.com/album/rubber-soul

²⁷ Norman, Philip. *Shout!: The Beatles in Their Generation*. New York: Simon & Schuster, 2013.

²⁸ "The Beatles – A Day in the Life." *Genius*, June 1, 1967. www.genius.com/The-beatles-a-day-in-the-life-lyrics.

from the one seen on the television in 1964. Their short love songs had morphed into psychedelic ballads that take the listener on a colorful ride. This was a total reinvention of the Beatles and the fans followed along, continuing to love them. The fans adored it so much that *Sgt. Pepper's* became the Beatles' most lucrative album.²⁹

Musically, *Sgt. Pepper's* was different from any album previously, by the Beatles or anyone else. This becomes obvious when comparing "I Want to Hold Your Hand" to "A Day in the Life." "A Day in the Life" is more musically complex than "I Want to Hold Your Hand." The music in "I Want to Hold Your Hand" is provided by the Fab Four alone, with a 2:27 run time, and stays at the same tempo the entire time. The song, which is an early example of commercial pop music, allowed the Beatles to finally receive American airplay.³⁰ "A Day in the Life" is like falling asleep for a few moments, having a strange dream during that time, and slowly waking up again, realizing the dream was actually a nightmare. This song changes tempo, changes tones, utilizes the blending of musical techniques the Beatles had been working on perfecting since *Revolver*, and features an orchestra,³¹ taking a total of 34 hours to record.³² Compare this to the entirety of the *Please Please Me* album which took a total of 9.75 hours to record. The song was

²⁹ Berman, Nat, Uncoached Corporation. "The Five Highest Selling Beatles Albums Ever." *Money Inc.*, October 18, 2018. www.moneyinc.com/the-five-highest-selling-beatles-albums-ever/.

³⁰ "I Want To Hold Your Hand' by The Beatles. The in-Depth Story behind the Songs of the Beatles. Recording History. Songwriting History." BEATLES MUSIC HISTORY! Accessed November 12, 2019. <http://www.beatlesebooks.com/hold-your-hand>.

³¹ Music, Sheet. "A Day In The Life Sheet Music Piano Beatles." Free Sheet Music pdf. Accessed November 12, 2019. <https://sheetmusic-free.com/a-day-in-the-life-sheet-music/>.
"Michael Jackson." Discogs, n.d. www.discogs.com/artist/15885-Michael-Jackson.

³² Joe. "Recording: A Day In The Life." *The Beatles Bible. The Beatles Bible*, February 4, 2019. <https://www.beatlesbible.com/1967/02/10/recording-a-day-in-the-life-4/2/>.

banned by the BBC for the lyric “I’d love to turn you on,”³³ whereas “I Want to Hold Your Hand” was praised for its innocent nature. They no longer sounded modern and eternally upbeat. Now, they were dreamlike and reflective, not family-friendly teenyboppers anymore. They were maturing with their fans, providing the growing Hippie subculture with a musical religious text.³⁴

Though the summer of 1967 is remembered as the Summer of Love,³⁵ the summer of 1968 was quite the opposite. 1968 was a tumultuous year, so much so that an article from *Smithsonian Magazine* refers to it as “The Year that Shattered America.”³⁶ The Vietnam War raged on, student protestors were shot dead, Martin Luther King, Jr. and Robert F. Kennedy were assassinated, and the year ended with Apollo 8 being launched into orbit. On October 6, 1968, the Beatles returned to American television on *The Smothers Brothers Comedy Hour*.³⁷ The song they performed was as simple as their earlier works, but just as epic as anything off of *Sgt. Pepper’s*, potentially the most epic song they had written thus far. The Beatles were no longer wearing brightly colored marching uniforms or singing about LSD. The song they performed included a prominent, now iconic piano part, which was not common for the Beatles at that point in their career. The audio

³³ Fleming, Colin. “Beatles’ ‘A Day in the Life’: 10 Things You Didn’t Know.” *Rolling Stone*, September 22, 2019. Accessed December 3, 2019. www.rollingstone.com/music/features/beatles-a-day-in-the-life-10-things-you-didn-t-know-191427/.

³⁴ *Rolling Stone*. “500 Greatest Albums of All Time.” *Rolling Stone*, July 29, 2019. <https://www.rollingstone.com/music/music-lists/500-greatest-albums-of-all-time-156826/the-beach-boys-pet-sounds-54298/>.

³⁵ AARP. “A Look Back at the Summer of Love.” *AARP*. Accessed November 12, 2019. <https://www.aarp.org/politics-society/history/info-2017/remembering-the-summer-of-love-50th-anniversary.html>.

³⁶ “A Timeline of 1968: The Year That Shattered America.” *Smithsonian.com*. *Smithsonian Institution*. Accessed November 12, 2019. www.smithsonianmag.com/history/timeline-seismic-180967503/.

³⁷ “Imagine That It’s 1968 and You Are Hearing the Beatles Perform ‘Hey Jude’ for the Very First Time.” *DangerousMinds*, December 18, 2015. www.dangerousminds.net/comments/imagine_that_its_1968_and_you_are_hearing_the_beatles_perform_hey_jude_for.

quality was not overtaken by the sounds of screaming girls. The audience was listening and then singing along respectfully when invited to do so. The television screen focused on Paul McCartney singing into the camera, seated at a piano, playing a simple F Major chord, paired with eighth note rhythms. The song opened with the now instantly recognizable opening lines: “Hey Jude/ Don’t make it bad/ Take a sad song/ And make it better.”

“Hey Jude” stayed at number one for nine weeks.³⁸ It spoke to the people listening in 1968, like no other song had before.³⁹ The song struck a deep, emotional chord with its generation, and is now considered one of the greatest, most successful songs of the 1960s. It was a strange, more subtle artist reinvention. It was not as flamboyant or obvious as *Sgt. Pepper’s*, but it was nothing like their original sound and image. With the release of “Hey Jude,” the Beatles became a mature musical act.

Michael Jackson began his musical career at a younger age than the Beatles. While the Beatles were in their teenage years, Jackson was no older than ten when his career with the Jackson 5 began. This band was made up by Jackson and his brothers. The Jackson 5 is the definition of a Motown group.⁴⁰ Motown refers to both the record label and the genre of music.⁴¹ An article from LiveAbout defines a Motown song as being “a bright, uptempo number done as a 2/4 shuffle or a hard 4/4 beat.” The article details that Motown “[lyrically] dealt almost exclusively with

³⁸ “The Beatles Twist And Shout Chart History.” *Billboard*. Accessed November 12, 2019. www.billboard.com/music/the-beatles/chart-history/hot-100/song/332889.

³⁹ Sheffield, Rob. “‘Hey Jude’ at 50: Celebrating the Beatles’ Most Open-Hearted Masterpiece.” *Rolling Stone*, August 27, 2018. www.rollingstone.com/music/music-news/hey-jude-at-50-celebrating-the-beatles-most-open-hearted-masterpiece-714736/.

⁴⁰ Fontenot, Robert. “A Basic Look at ‘The Sound of Young America.’” *LiveAbout*. *LiveAbout*, April 13, 2018. www.liveabout.com/motown-music-genre-overview-2523478.

⁴¹ “Motown Music - The Sound That Changed America.” *Motown Museum*. Accessed November 12, 2019. www.motownmuseum.org/story/motown/.

romance...it also typically featured...a sax-heavy, rhythmic brass section, sweet strings, glockenspiel or other bells, and a surprisingly funky bass line.” The Jackson 5 hit, “I Want You Back,” perfectly fits into this definition of a Motown song, based on the article. The song opens with the “surprisingly funky bass line” mentioned in the article. It also has a bright sound and it was written in 4/4, one that is very easy to pick up on. It has a triumphant trumpet line, which is introduced early on in the track. The song was written in Bb Major, which gives it a cheery tone. “I Want You Back” is also, like many Motown songs, a love song.

This upbeat, Motown sound was associated with Michael Jackson for all of his early career. Jackson redefined his sound and image with his solo album, *Off the Wall*, released in 1979. This album was released at the height of disco and features some of the most famous disco tracks, including “Rock with You.” The lyrics focus on losing oneself to music. It is also in 4/4 which is a defining characteristic of disco. Because listeners can pick up on the 4/4 rhythm easier, it is better for dancing, which is the primary goal of disco.⁴²

As disco grew less popular, Michael Jackson changed his style once again with his second solo album, *Thriller*. While this album carried over some of the disco influences, it was something entirely new. The album ushered in a new definition of pop. *LiveAbout* defines pop music as “Music accessible to the widest audience.” *Thriller* assisted in creating this definition. A *Rolling Stone* article⁴³ explains this by saying, “The album's nervy, outsized blend of pop, rock and soul would send seismic waves throughout radio, inviting both marquee crossovers (like Eddie Van Halen's guitar solo on ‘Beat It’) and sneakier attempts at genre-meshing.” There is something in

⁴² “Improvised Dance - Revision 1 - GCSE Music - BBC Bitesize.” *BBC News*. BBC. Accessed September 12, 2019. www.bbc.co.uk/bitesize/guides/z84x6sg/revision/1.

⁴³ *Rolling Stone*. “500 Greatest Albums of All Time.” *Rolling Stone*, July 29, 2019. www.rollingstone.com/music/music-lists/500-greatest-albums-of-all-time-156826/the-beach-boys-pet-sounds-54298/.

this album for everyone. Rock music fans had Eddie Van Halen's guitar solo in "Beat It." Those still stuck in the disco era had "Billie Jean." "The Girl is Mine" features Paul McCartney, allowing those who grew up with the Beatles to enjoy something as well. *Thriller* is currently the second most successful album of all time, selling thirty-three million copies.⁴⁴ With the release of *Thriller*, Michael Jackson was no longer a Motown artist, or a disco artist. *Thriller* was the new standard to which pop music would be measured. This album is what defines Michael Jackson as the King of Pop.

Michael Jackson's image would continue to grow grittier and edgier. His next album, *Bad*, still appealed to everyone the way *Thriller* did, but the lyrics contained a darker subject matter. "Smooth Criminal," "Dirty Diana," and "Leave Me Alone" are all much angrier songs about being wronged. *Bad* was less successful than *Thriller* and the reception of *Bad* was mixed upon its initial release. An article from *The Atlantic* says, "For all of Jackson's bionic upgrades, *Bad* was bigger and bolder, but not better." The article argues that as a result of *Bad* coming out five years after *Thriller*, the "songs sound calculated and corporate-minded." Nonetheless, Jackson was still a powerhouse of pop music and his sound was slowly evolving, though the reception of his music would continue to be mixed.

Despite the musicians' changes, their fans continued to enjoy their music and support their art. Each time they changed their fans were intrigued by the differences in their image and their sound. The Beatles' albums increased in success with each dramatic change. Though Jackson never made an album as big as *Thriller* again, he continued to grow in pop stardom and became one of the most instantly recognizable celebrities. Michael Jackson went from being a young

⁴⁴ Lynch, John. "The 50 Best-Selling Albums of All Time." *Business Insider*. *Business Insider*, April 23, 2019 www.businessinsider.com/50-best-selling-albums-all-time-2016-9.

Motown star to a disco artist to becoming the King of Pop. The Beatles started as teenyboppers and then became psychedelic hippies, ending their career as skilled, mature musicians.

Michael Jackson and the Beatles both made major changes within the music industry. The Beatles technically innovated the industry, perfecting techniques that are still used today.⁴⁵ “Eleanor Rigby” and “Yesterday” introduced the use of orchestral strings in popular music. Because those songs utilized string instruments, they became a defining trait of the next decade of music, disco.⁴⁶ The Beatles famously (and successfully) utilized the blending technique on their album *Sgt. Pepper’s Lonely Hearts Club Band*. The opening track and the follow-up song, “With a Little Help from My Friends,” blend together seamlessly, adding to the theatricality of the album. This practice is now commonplace and has gone on to be used by artists such as Queen, Pink Floyd, and LCD Soundsystem. The Beatles encouraged other musicians to experiment in the studio because some of their most famous and greatest tracks are the result of experimenting. “A Day in the Life” is frequently listed as the best Beatles song, and while that is entirely subjective, it is still telling that many fans and critics responded well to the experimentation.

Michael Jackson innovated the music industry in an entirely different way than the Beatles. Michael Jackson was one of the first African American musicians to have a multiracial appeal.⁴⁷ In the early 80s, when MTV was just starting out, music videos by black musicians were turned away. The three music videos from *Thriller* (“Billie Jean,” “Beat It,” and “Thriller”) were some of

⁴⁵“How The Beatles Changed Music.” *Digital Media Academy*, July 17, 2019. www.digitalmediaacademy.org/2016/01/21/how-the-beatles-changed-music-2/.

⁴⁶Lefevre, Noah. “How Daft Punk Made Disco Cool Again.” *YouTube*. *YouTube*. Accessed December 3, 2019. www.youtube.com/watch?v=toFb4441e_I

⁴⁷Mitchell, Gail. “Exclusive: How Michael Jackson's 'Thriller' Changed The Music Business.” *Billboard*, January 14, 2013. www.billboard.com/articles/news/268212/exclusive-how-michael-jacksons-thriller-changed-the-music-business.

the earliest music videos by an African American musician to receive airplay. “Billie Jean” was the first of these music videos and “‘Billie Jean’ opened up the door for other artists of color to be featured on MTV.”⁴⁸ This is one of Michael Jackson’s greatest accomplishments. “Though ‘Thriller’ changed a lot about the way music was produced and promoted, the real importance of this album lies in the racial impact it had,” says an essay on Michael Jackson’s career.⁴⁹ The essay goes on to say “Albums by African-American artists were usually marketed to an entirely black audience. However, Michaels record label, Epic, advertised ‘Thriller’ everywhere to everyone.” Michael Jackson paved the way for other black musicians, whether they were his contemporaries or those who came after him, to become immensely successful.

Counterargument

In my research, I asked Dr. Rick Goodstein of Clemson University and Professor David Berry of Converse College my research question. Goodstein agreed that “Without doubt, The Beatles were the voice of the 60’s.” Dr. Goodstein explained that “their music led the way for a ‘British Invasion’ of music, fashion and culture that dominated the 1960’s pop culture,” and that is why they were and still are so influential. However, Professor Goodstein stated, “There have never been such transformational artists to hit music since that time,” which is countered by Professor Berry. Professor David Berry reasoned that culturally the Beatles dominated, largely because of their performance on *The Ed Sullivan Show*. He also noted that their impact on other

⁴⁸ Nittle, Nadra Kareem. “How MTV Handled Accusations of Racism and Became More Inclusive.” *ThoughtCo. ThoughtCo*, December 26, 2018. www.thoughtco.com/when-mtv-first-aired-black-videos-2834657.

⁴⁹ Wilburn, Aly. “The King of Pop: How Michael Jackson Revolutionized the Music Industry.” *Medium. Medium*, May 2, 2018. www.medium.com/@aly.wilburn/the-king-of-pop-how-michael-jackson-revolutionized-the-music-industry-f90087dd2928.

musicians is why they have remained so important. Professor Berry listed several examples of musicians who were inspired by the Beatles: “The Eagles wanted to be them, Billy Joel and Elton John wanted to be them. Bruce Springsteen wanted to be them. Michael Jackson followed their flamboyant approach to career building, and their music echoes in almost everything he recorded.” While Professor Goodstein said that music has not seen “such transformational artists,” Professor Berry noted that “fifty years later the [Beatle’s] music still shines and influences, where Jackson’s has long since started to fade.” The musicians of the late 90s and early 2000s are certainly influenced by Michael Jackson’s music and image. Since the allegations against Jackson and his death in 2009, the desire to imitate him has died. Largely because of the negative way Michael Jackson is now viewed, his influence will continue to dwindle. Successful musicians, who have already been influenced by Jackson, will be credited for impacting upcoming musicians, instead of Jackson.⁵⁰

Closing Number

As a way of taking this information out into the community, I believe a music appreciation night would be the best way to accomplish this. The music appreciation night would be at school, where students and families of all ages would be welcomed. This event would allow student musicians and band classes to prepare music for a “concert” of sorts and perform. It could also give service-based groups (such as National Honors Society and Beta Club) an opportunity to gain hours.

⁵⁰ Grace, Chantelle Landon, Muskan, and Michell Lagunas. “10 Famous Artists Inspired by Michael Jackson.” *CuriosityHuman*, March 10, 2018. <https://curiosityhuman.com/artists-inspired-by-michael-jackson/>.

The music appreciation night would feature selections by the Beatles and Michael Jackson, along with a few other successful and important musicians. Through these performances, the information discussed in this paper would be explained and demonstrated to the audience. Music is the best way to analyze music. By performing songs by the Beatles and Michael Jackson, the audience would come to understand the career commonalities that led to the two becoming the voices of their generations, all while enjoying a communal, musical experience.

The concert would open with a brief explanation of what similarities between the Beatles and Michael Jackson led to their influence and success. Then, the music of the Beatles would be analyzed and performed. After that, the music of Michael Jackson would also be analyzed and performed. Historical context would be provided for the time of the musical selections release. Student musicians would be invited to play any of these songs that they would like, in order to gain another opportunity to perform.

The music appreciation night would demonstrate why music is so important. Music brings people together, which would be the ultimate conclusion drawn by the school event. The music appreciation concert would be the best and most entertaining way to present this information to the community.

Encore

A question was raised during this research: Will the influence of these musicians ever be repeated? Will the popularity of the Beatles ever occur again? Will the success of Michael Jackson ever be seen again? It seems as though lightning struck twice and careers such as these will never occur again. As of now, it is too soon to tell. The Millennial Generation seemingly has no single defining artists. Musical acts such as Tupac, Nirvana, and Beyoncé may be the closest to defining the sound of the 1990s and the early 2000s. Music has not progressed far enough to tell which of

the Millennial artists has had the most influence. It does not seem as though any artists has had such an immediate impact on the music industry in the same way Jackson and the Beatles did. With both musicians, one could see an immediate impact that they brought about. Pop music was the defining genre of the 80s, thanks to Michael Jackson's success and influence. Musicians of the 60s and 70s copied the techniques and musical stylings of the Beatles.

The Beatles and Michael Jackson share several traits that define them as the voices of their generations. Both reinvented themselves throughout their career, appealed directly to their listeners through their lyrics, and revolutionized the industry they worked in. The most important trait they shared was their ability to bring their generations together. The Beatles and Michael Jackson succeeded because they used their influence to bring their generations together. While the Vietnam War raged on, the Beatles wore bright colors, sang upbeat tunes, and promoted peace and love, with songs such as "All You Need is Love." The Baby Boomers listened, and the Hippie subculture of that generation took to protesting the hate.⁵¹ Michael Jackson wrote "We are the World" with Lionel Richie in order to raise money for assisting Ethiopia during a famine.⁵² The single raised 6.3 million dollars for the famine relief,⁵³ a number that came from Jackson's fans buying his latest single. Both musicians brought their generations together so that they could do something spectacular. The Beatles inspired their audience to protest the hate of the Vietnam War. Michael Jackson released a charity single, with the intention of having his enormous fan base purchase it. "We are the World" brought in millions of dollars because the generation it was marketed towards

⁵¹ History.com Editors. "Vietnam War Protests." History.com. *A&E Television Networks*, February 22, 2010. www.history.com/topics/vietnam-war/vietnam-war-protests.

⁵² Edwards, Gavin. "'We Are the World': A Minute-by-Minute Breakdown." *Rolling Stone*, June 25, 2018. www.rollingstone.com/music/music-features/we-are-the-world-a-minute-by-minute-breakdown-54619/.

⁵³ Fletcher, Dan. "Brief History: Benefit Songs." *Time*. *Time Inc.*, March 1, 2010. www.content.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,1966457,00.html.

believed in the musician and the cause. Jackson and the Beatles have proven that a generation defining musical act will bring their audience together, so they can “take a sad song and make it better.”

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