

‘Guitar Groups are on the way out, Mr Epstein’: The Impact and Effect of the British Invasion



Journée d'étude - Symposium
Université d'Orléans, Hôtel Dupanloup
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'Guitar Groups are on the way out, Mr Epstein'.¹

The Impact and Effect of the British Invasion

University of Orléans, Hôtel Dupanloup, Friday May 29th, 2026

9h15: Doors open

9h45: Welcome

Panel One (Chair: Eric Tabuteau)

10h00: *The Beatles in America: Media, Performance, and Format*

Erick Falc'her-Poyroux, University of Tours, France

This paper reappraises the Beatles' early American breakthrough and the ways in which it reshaped the U.S. music market between February 1964 and August 1966. It first considers Brian Epstein's New York press initiatives of late 1963 and the group's 73-million-viewer performance on The Ed Sullivan Show (9 February 1964), tracing how these media interventions produced immediate chart supremacy and institutionalised a new promotional template, linking national television exposure with large-scale touring. The second section analyses the logistical constraints and audibility problems associated with mid-sixties touring, from the inadequate public-address systems of baseball stadiums to the limited capacity of the custom Vox 100-watt backline used during the 1965 American tour. The landmark Shea Stadium performance of 15 August 1965 established the stadium concert as a mass-culture event while rendering the band's music largely inaudible, thereby accelerating their withdrawal from international touring. The final section will argue that the band's American impact can be best measured, not only in sales or ratings, but in format shifts: a reorientation from singles-driven pop toward album-based listening, supported by emergent FM programming and by the Beatles' own cohesive LPs from *Rubber Soul* onward. The paper ultimately wishes to show that the Beatles redefined, in under three years, the distribution, reception, and scale of popular music, not only in the United States, but across the globe, with enduring consequences to this day.

Erick Falc'her-Poyroux is Professor of Irish and British Studies at the University of Tours, and Deputy Director of ICD (Interactions Culturelles et Didactiques, EA 6297). His research explores popular music, cultural identities and transnational circulation between Ireland, Britain, and France. He is the author of *The Beatles Clichés* (2020), of a symphony for Irish instruments (*Siansach 32*, with the Irish Chamber Orchestra, 2022) and of a monograph on Irish traditional music (*A Brief History of Irish traditional Music – from the Dagda to DADGAD*, 2024). efp@univ-tours.fr

10h20: *Dylano-British Relations: A Few Thoughts*

Adrian Grafe, University of Artois, France

While Matthew Graves has masterfully set out some of the English influence on Dylan's artistry in the early sixties (in *Bob Dylan and Myth*, M. Graves, P. Lanfranchi, C. Milanesi [eds.], Presses universitaires de Provence, 2023), the present paper sets out to examine his relationship with Britain from the mid-sixties onwards. By 1965, Dylan was himself a one-man invasion of Britain. The paper seeks to build up a picture of Dylan's commitment to British music and other art forms. Dylan in his own way participates in the spread and appreciation of British rock culture in America—he is a facilitator of an ongoing 'British invasion'.

¹ Ben and Eric would like to point out that they do know there is a great deal of controversy surrounding the veracity of this 'quotation'!

Adrian Grafe, BA Hons (Oxon), PhD, is an English professor at Université d'Artois in Arras. He has published broadly on poetry, literature and popular music. His writing has appeared in *Essays in Criticism*, *Notes & Queries*, *The Spectator* and *TLS*. Adrian coedited *Ink on the Tracks: Rock'n'Roll Writing* (Bloomsbury, 2024; paperback 2026) with Andrew Mckeown. adrian.grafe@univ-artois.fr

10h40: "The House of the Rising Sun" and the British Rhythm and Blues Invasion

Jeremy Price, University of Poitiers, France

The Animals' 'The House of the Rising Sun', (1964), is the most commercially successful version of the traditional American folk/blues song (sometimes entitled 'Rising Sun Blues'). It was the first British rhythm and blues 'invasion' record to reach the top of the United States singles charts heralding a stylistic and thematic departure from the more romantic British and American love songs prevalent in the early 1960s. The Animals offered a radical alternative which confirmed the emergence of British electric guitar driven rhythm and blues (along with the Rolling Stones, the Kinks, the Yardbirds etc.). This was a cruder, more direct, more aggressive combination than British beat music, based on electric imitation of African American acoustic and electric blues. Some British rhythm and blues groups worked as backing groups or support acts for African American blues, (and rock and roll), musicians touring Britain. The Animals were one of the support acts for the 1964 Chuck Berry tour. Convinced they could not 'outrock Chuck Berry', they looked for 'something dramatically different' to stand out. They had been impressed by Bob Dylan's acoustic 'House of the Rising Sun' (which borrowed heavily from Dave Van Ronk's folk/blues arrangement). The Animal's guitarist, Hilton Valentine, began experimenting with an electric guitar arpeggio over Dylan's cyclic strummed acoustic chord progression in A minor: Am, C, D, F, Am E Am E (i III IV VI) with its pentatonic and modal influences. This provided a technically simple but effective and immediately recognisable introduction. The arpeggio repeats throughout most of the arrangement and is taken up, reinforced and amplified by bass, electric organ and drums to produce a strong, cyclic rhythmic base for Eric Burdon's powerful 'shouted blues' and for Alan Price's electric organ solo. Towards the end of the song the guitar makes more room still for organ and voice, adopting less obtrusive strummed rhythmic accompaniment. The arpeggio lends to the swinging triplet quality of the 6/8 time generating a rhythmic novelty to the Animals' version compared to the ¾ time of the Dylan version. The overall structure facilitates exploration of the 'vertical interiors' of the song, with blues inspired emphasis on improvisation, individual expression and catharsis, contributing to the single's unusually long duration for the time (4 minutes 27 seconds). The Animals were among the first to experiment with electrification of folk infused modal chord progressions as an alternative way of harmonizing blues melodies thus providing a pointer to the future development of rock songs based on simple blues guitar riffs, electric amplification and improvisation.

Jeremy Price is a lecturer at the University of Poitiers. He teaches British studies and is particularly interested in British popular culture since 1945: notably music, film and visual culture. He is also a translator and conference interpreter. jeremy.price@univ-poitiers.fr

11h00: Questions

11h20: Morning Coffee

Panel Two (Chair: Ben Winsworth)

11h50: Mary Quant's Miniskirt and the Paradoxes of the American Youthquake

Kamila Benayada, University of Orleans, France

In Britain, Mary Quant presented her miniskirt as what the modern girl in the high street wore, as fashion coming from girls rather than from designers, and it was welcomed as a symbol of rebellion against 'proper' middle class definitions of 'girlhood', embodying equality, freedom, youthfulness and naturalness. How did this definition fit in the US in the age of the Vietnam War and Lyndon Johnson's war on poverty? On one hand, despite its accessibility through department store collaboration with Quant, the miniskirt was worn by middle-class girls rebelling against rigid gender definitions that were entrenched in suburban culture. However, it also imposed rigid definitions of the female body that went beyond the perception girls and young

women had of themselves. The miniskirt, as a symbol of societal change and modernity, embodied the 'now' of female lives rather than the future imposed by society that limited them to roles as housewives and mothers, and then became the symbol of an inaccessible future, that of science fiction and pop stardom. The miniskirt thus appears as a nexus of contradictory perceptions that, perhaps, led to the dissenting countercultures' adoption of other clothes as forms of self-representation and identity construction in the late 1960s.

Kamila Benayada is Senior Lecturer in American studies at the University of Orléans and a specialist in 20th century painting and iconography in the USA. She has written various articles and book chapters on the relationship between image and ideology and has a particular interest - and growing list of publications - on the work of Stuart Davis, and modernist and regionalist art of the US. kamila.benayada@univ-orleans.fr

12h10: *The Beatles and the 'British Invasion' of America: A Girl's-Eye View*

Christine Feldman-Barrett, Griffith University, Australia

The Beatles' arrival in the United States in early February 1964 initiated a wave of socio-cultural change often made visible through music, style, and youth-oriented activities. A widely cited phenomenon to support this argument is how scores of teenage boys and young men grew their hair 'long' and took to founding garage bands scant days after the Liverpool group performed on the Ed Sullivan TV show on February 9, 1964. However, it is what girls and young women were doing at that time which provides the most compelling evidence for this cultural transformation. As US news coverage depicted the good-natured and witty band members charming every person they met, adolescent and teenage girls stood in euphoric unity outside New York's Plaza hotel – clearly aware that something new and exciting was in the process of happening. If this was the start of the 'British Invasion', it was a welcome one – and one that positioned girls and young women at the centre of the action. In the months that followed, this cohort of dedicated Beatles fans would not just come to further embrace and 'promote' their favourite band but show a growing interest in all things British – whether Mod fashions, movies and TV shows, slang, or the other UK bands that soon found stateside success. Indeed, Beatles fandom was parlayed into a new, girl-led vision of the 'special relationship' between the United States and Great Britain. Through narratives drawn from a mix of primary and secondary sources, this presentation offers a 'girl's-eye view' of a period in US history (1964 to 1966) that was thrilling and dynamic due to the young women who enthusiastically embraced the Beatles and a new wave of British imports that followed in the band's wake.

Christine Feldman-Barrett is a youth culture historian and Beatles scholar. She is a Senior Lecturer in the School of Humanities, Languages and Social Science at Griffith University in Queensland, Australia. She is most well-known for *A Women's History of the Beatles*, which was published with Bloomsbury in 2021. Additionally, she is the author of *'We are the Mods': A Transnational History of a Youth Subculture* (Peter Lang, 2009), editor of *Lost Histories of Youth Culture* (Peter Lang, 2015), and a co-editor of *The Life, Death, and Afterlife of the Record Store: A Global History* (Bloomsbury, 2023). She is also a founding editorial board member of the *Journal of Beatles Studies* (Liverpool University Press) and has published in journals such as the *Journal of Youth Studies*, *Popular Music & Society*, and *Space and Culture*. c.barrett@griffith.edu.au

12h40: Questions/Debate

13h00: Buffet Lunch

Panel Three (Chair: Eric Tabuteau)

14h00: 'Ever Get the Feeling You Been Cheated?' *The British Invasion—Myth & Countermyth*

Andrew McKeown, University of Poitiers, France

'Ever get the feeling you been cheated?' Thus spoke Johnny Rotten, goading the crowd who had come to see the latest thing in rock and roll from the other side of the pond and who got instead a parody of rock and roll as it fell apart on stage. And thus came to an end a story begun a decade or so earlier by the Beatles and their peers. It was the story of the 'British Invasion', where British bands brought rock and roll back to the land of its birth and showed they too could play. For over a decade British bands had re-enacted the story by returning to the US on tour in search of that El Dorado of rock: the 'breaking' of America. Some bands succeeded (Led Zeppelin), some bands didn't (Mott the Hoople). But in the end the point of this mythical invasion was not its success or failure in real, ie financial, terms: what mattered to British rock and roll was that its celebrants believed in the myth. And then they didn't. Johnny Rotten's cattle prod sarcasm sounded an end to the hubris of this particular rock myth and replaced it with a countermyth— the breaking of rock and roll. Of course plenty of UK 'punk' bands continued to tour the US and some, like the Clash, became utterly adept at recycling the old myth (in museum style with 50s outfits and outlooks). But the times had moved on. There was no undoing the countermyth and, as the digital age dawned, invasion was a dead duck anyway; rock and roll had become global and permanent and homeless. This paper will examine a selection of retellings of the British Invasion. It will focus on Sex Pistols' 1978 US tour but will also consider other versions of the myth/countermyth, including Ian Hunter's *Diary of a Rock and Roll Star* (1974) and Rob Reiner's *This is Spinal Tap* (1984).

Andrew McKeown is Senior Lecturer in English at the University of Poitiers. He has co-edited works on poetry (*Edward Thomas's Roads from Arras*, Cambridge Scholars, 2018) and popular music (*Ink on the Tracks: Rock and Roll Writing*, Bloomsbury, 2024). His short fiction has appeared in a number of literary magazines. andrew.patrick.mc.keown@univ-poitiers.fr

14h20: Britpop and the British Invasion: From Penny Lane to The Universal

Guillaume Clément, University of Rennes, France

The Britpop wave of the mid-1990s in British rock music is often described – or indeed dismissed – as a plagiaristic copy of the British Invasion sound. The main two songwriters of the era, Noel Gallagher and Damon Albarn, never shied away from comparisons with The Beatles and The Kinks, and the influence of Lennon and McCartney on Oasis, or that of The Kinks on Blur, can definitely be felt, with regards both to melodic patterns and to lyrical inspiration. Several songs on *Morning Glory* essentially sample songs like 'Imagine' and 'Lucy in the Sky with Diamonds', and Damon Albarn, in his anglocentric phase, sought to bring Ray Davies's dedicated followers of fashion and well-respected men into the nineties by turning them into charmless men and city dwellers, successful fellas. However, beyond such obvious links, one could also claim that the Britpop sound and lyrics is also defined by its attraction to influences beyond the British Invasion. Oasis's sound seems undeniably indebted to British influences which can't be restrained to the 1960s (glam and punk rock in particular) and, from a very early stage, Noel Gallagher's lyrics sought to attain a degree of universalism which seems incompatible with his band's anglocentric reputation. Similarly, within Blur, guitarist Graham Coxon needs to be credited for giving his band a more transatlantic feel thanks to the influence of lo-fi bands like Pavement on his guitar tones. This paper will examine this tension between an allegiance to the British Invasion and the attraction of further musical and lyrical influences to reveal Britpop's complexity.

Guillaume Clément is a Senior Lecturer in British studies at the University of Rennes, France. His research focuses on the interactions between popular culture and politics in the United Kingdom, more particularly the political dimension of rock music since the 1960s. He has written articles and book chapters about Brexit (*Civilisation Britannique*, Hachette, 2020) and has co-edited "*OK Computer, Twenty Years On: Radiohead's Musical, Cultural, and Political Legacies*" (LISA e-journal, 2020). He is also the editor of a bilingual collection of essays on social commentary in British rock music since The Beatles (*Musique rock et chronique sociale au Royaume-Uni (1963 - 2023): Des Beatles au Brexit*, Presses Universitaires de Rennes, 2025). He is the Vice-President of the French Centre de Recherches en Civilisation Britannique (CRECIB) and co-director of the *Revue Française de Civilisation Britannique*. guillaume.clement@univ-rennes.fr

14h40: Questions

15h00: Afternoon Tea 'when are you free to take some tea with me?'

Guest Speaker Dr Richard Mills (Chair: Ben Winsworth)

15h30: *The Beatles and Black Music: Musical Hybridity, Postcolonial Theory and Remix Culture*

Richard Mills, St Mary's University, UK

Music is a zone where we connect, and popular music is a series of hybrids, convergences, and appropriations. The Beatles embody these connection zones. Using excerpts from ten Beatles songs my talk will discuss the audio colour of The Beatles' music in the context of their African-American influences. Listening to this type of pop music without seeing the performers sing, their identities are not pre-fixed for the listener. Just listening to the words and the tunes, we are in a post-colonial fractured mental space of ambivalence.

The Beatles' music is not only the work of psychedelic hippie dreamers that personifies rock heritage culture, but their work is also transformative music that transgresses moribund white legacy categorisation.

In my talk I will delineate the massive debt The Beatles owed to Blues, Rhythm and Blues, Soul, Dixieland Jazz, Reggae, and to Disco and Hip Hop in their solo careers. I will also examine the extent to which the Beatles adapted black music and tweaked these forms into new radical hybrid songs. These songs are a mix of Orientalism and absurdism ridiculing the colonial project.

Richard Mills is Senior Lecturer in English Literature and Popular Culture at the University of St Mary's, Twickenham. He is a member of the editorial board of the *Journal of Beatles Studies* and has co-edited and single authored a variety of books including *Mad Dogs and Englishness: Popular Music and English Identities* (co-edited with Lee Brooks and Mark Donnelly, Bloomsbury Academic, 2017), *The Beatles and Fandom: Sex, Death and Progressive Nostalgia* (Bloomsbury Academic, 2019), *The Beatles and Humour: Mockers, Funny Papers and Other Play* (co-edited with Katie Kapurch and Matthais Heyman, Bloomsbury Academic, 2023) and - most recently - *The Beatles and Black Music: Post-Colonial Theory, Musicology and Remix Culture*. (Bloomsbury Academic, 2025.) richard.mills@stmarys.ac.uk

16h10-16h30: Questions/Debate/Concluding Thoughts.

16h30- 17h00: End of Conference Cocktail.

10h00: 'The Beatles in America: Media, Performance, and Format', Erick Falc'her-Poyroux, University of Tours, France

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