

ROUTLEDGE FOCUS

# THE BEATLES AND FILM

*From Youth Culture to Counterculture*

Stephen Glynn

ROUTLEDGE  
  
Focus

# The Beatles and Film

This concise yet comprehensive study explores the emblematic journey by four young men from Liverpool from the epicentre of teen-led youth culture to the experimentation of the counterculture and beyond.

Beginning with the celebration of Britain's own 'youthquake' in the joyous and genre-shifting *A Hard Day's Night* (1964), the author delves into how the Beatles' film work allows us to chart their subsequent musical maturation and retreat from the tribulations of stardom in *Help!*, their tentative attempts at improvised filming in the televised *Magical Mystery Tour* (1967), their acceptance of cartoon representations as leaders of the hippie counterculture in *Yellow Submarine* (1968), and the final implosion of their musical dynamic in the recording studios of *Let It Be* (1970). The book analyses how, as they grow with their fanbase, the Beatles' films alternate stylistically between mimetic representation and allegorical interpretation, and switch narratively between fan-filled and welcoming worlds, to films relaying introspection and isolation.

Offering an in-depth case study of the successes and failures of British youth culture in a volatile decade, *The Beatles and Film* is an engaging text for both scholars and general readers alike.

**Stephen Glynn** lectures in Film and Television at De Montfort University. His research specialisms are in British film genres and the interconnections between film and popular music. Previous monographs on cinema and youth culture range from the general, *The British Pop Music Film* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), to the specific, *A Hard Day's Night* (London: IB Tauris, 2005) and *Quadrophenia* (London and New York: Wallflower, 2014).

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Cinema and Youth Cultures engages with well-known youth films from American cinema as well the cinemas of other countries. Using a variety of methodological and critical approaches the series volumes provide informed accounts of how young people have been represented in film, while also exploring the ways in which young people engage with films made for and about them. In doing this, the Cinema and Youth Cultures series contributes to important and long-standing debates about youth cultures, how these are mobilized and articulated in influential film texts and the impact that these texts have had on popular culture at large.

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From Youth Culture to Counterculture

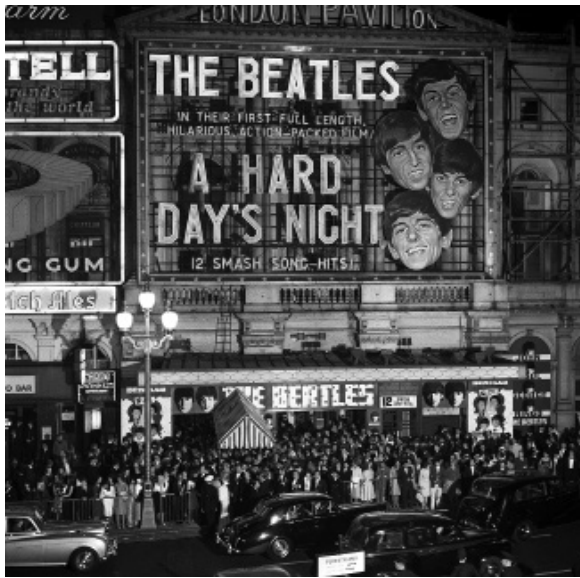
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# The Beatles and Film

## From Youth Culture to Counterculture

Stephen Glynn



First published 2021  
by Routledge  
2 Park Square, Milton Park, Abingdon, Oxon OX14 4RN

and by Routledge  
52 Vanderbilt Avenue, New York, NY 10017

*Routledge is an imprint of the Taylor & Francis Group, an informa  
business*

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*British Library Cataloguing-in-Publication Data*

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

*Library of Congress Cataloguing-in-Publication Data*

Names: Glynn, Stephen, author.

Title: The Beatles and film: from youth culture to counterculture/  
Stephen Glynn.

Description: London; New York: Routledge, 2021. |

Series: Cinema and youth cultures | Includes bibliographical  
references and index. |

Identifiers: LCCN 2020026026 | ISBN 9780367225278 (hardback) |  
ISBN 9780429275357 (ebook)

Subjects: LCSH: Beatles—In motion pictures. | Beatles—Influence. |

Motion pictures and rock music. | Popular culture—History—20th century.

Classification: LCC ML421.B4 G59 2021 | DDC 782.42166092/2—dc23

LC record available at <https://lcn.loc.gov/2020026026>

ISBN: 9780367225278 (hbk)

ISBN: 9780429275357 (ebk)

Typeset in Times New Roman  
by Deanta Global Publishing Services, Chennai, India

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## Series editors' introduction

Despite the high visibility of youth films in the global media marketplace, especially since the 1980s when Conglomerate Hollywood realised that such films were not only strong box office performers but also the starting point for ancillary sales in other media markets as well as for franchise building, academic studies focusing specifically on such films were slow to materialise. Arguably the most important factor behind academia's reluctance to engage with youth films was a (then) widespread perception within the Film and Media Studies communities that such films held little cultural value and significance, and therefore were not worthy of serious scholarly research and examination. Just like the young subjects they represented, whose interests and cultural practices have been routinely deemed transitional and transitory, so were the films that represented them perceived as fleeting and easily digestible, destined to be forgotten quickly, as soon as the next youth film arrived in cinema screens a week later.

Under these circumstances, and despite a small number of pioneering studies in the 1980s and early 1990s, the field of 'youth film studies' did not really start blossoming and attracting significant scholarly attention until the 2000s and in combination with similar developments in cognate areas such as 'girl studies.' However, because of the paucity of material in the previous decades, the majority of these new studies in the 2000s focused primarily on charting the field and therefore steered clear of long, in-depth examinations of youth films, or were exemplified by edited collections that chose particular films to highlight certain issues to the detriment of others. In other words, despite providing often wonderfully rich accounts of youth cultures as these have been captured by key films, these studies could not have possibly dedicated sufficient space to engage with more than just a few key aspects of youth films.

In more recent (post-2010) years a number of academic studies have started delimiting their focus and therefore providing more space for in-depth examinations of key types of youth films, such as slasher films

and biker films or examining youth films in particular historical periods. From that point on, it was only a matter of time before the first publications that focused exclusively on key youth films from a number of perspectives appeared (*Mamma Mia! The Movie*, *Twilight* and *Dirty Dancing* were among the first films to receive this treatment). Conceived primarily as edited collections, these studies provided a multifaceted analysis of these films, focusing on such issues as the politics of representing youth, the stylistic and narrative choices that characterise these films and the extent to which they are representative of a youth cinema, the ways these films address their audiences, the ways youth audiences engage with these films, the films' industrial location and other relevant issues.

It is within this increasingly maturing and expanding academic environment that the **Cinema and Youth Cultures** volumes arrive, aiming to consolidate existing knowledge, provide new perspectives, apply innovative methodological approaches, offer sustained and in-depth analyses of key films and therefore become the 'go-to' resource for students and scholars interested in theoretically informed, authoritative accounts of youth cultures in film. As editors, we have tried to be as inclusive as possible in our selection of key examples of youth films by commissioning volumes on films that span the history of cinema, including the silent film era; that portray contemporary youth cultures as well as ones associated with particular historical periods; that represent examples of mainstream and independent cinema; that originate in American cinema and the cinemas of other nations; that attracted significant critical attention and commercial success during their initial release and that were 'rediscovered' after an unpromising initial critical reception. Together these volumes are going to advance youth film studies while also being able to offer extremely detailed examinations of films that are now considered significant contributions to cinema and our cultural life more broadly.

We hope readers will enjoy the series.

Siân Lincoln and Yannis Tzioumakis  
Cinema and Youth Cultures Series Editors

# Acknowledgements

In my life it all began with the Beatles, a childhood Christmas viewing of *A Hard Day's Night* shaping my love of cinema and youth culture: this volume acknowledges the group's seminal influence. My thanks also to another 'Fab Four': to the Routledge series editors, Siân Lincoln and Yannis Tzioumakis, for their advice in helping this volume come together; and to Sarah and Roz, as ever the recipients of all my loving.



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# Introduction

## Overviews and origins

Interviewed in 2012, America's pantheon director Martin Scorsese eulogised over what he termed 'one of my favourite moments in movies', a moment that 'influenced a lot of the work I've done'. After contextualising how overall 'The freedom of the picture was something that was very important: the sense of breaking all the form', Scorsese moved onto his chosen scene where, he emphasised, there was 'something very musical and dancelike about the editing', while the filming possessed a creative tension with 'the freedom of the camera alongside the constraint of the characters looking towards the lens' (quoted in *Arena* ... 2012). One of most cine-literate of directors and a recognised champion of world film history and preservation, Scorsese was not highlighting the skills of his idolised Michael Powell, nor the work of other revered filmmakers such as John Ford, Jean Renoir, Stanley Kubrick, or Alfred Hitchcock. No: his praise here was reserved for the title-track sequence to a television film of 1967, a debut-directed and long-derided piece largely improvised and under an hour in length, a work so neglected that reputedly no negative had been properly archived – Scorsese was lauding Apple Corps' production of the Beatles' *Magical Mystery Tour*. Though pilloried at the time of its release, the film has of late been restored, re-released and reappraised – with the help of authorities like Scorsese – as a seminal example of a key aspect in the work of the most important pop group in western culture – the Beatles and their films.

The Beatles' treatment by academia now constitutes a long and winding road, with myriad volumes dedicated to assessing their lasting influence from musicological, industrial, linguistic, sociological and cultural perspectives (see Inglis 2013). One of that long road's less excavated sections, however, concerns their film work, the focus of this volume. Throughout their career, the Fab Four made regular recourse to film, be it as corporate exploitation or a vehicle for personal expression. Beat poet Allen Ginsberg saw the Beatles' progression from mop-top heart-throbs to

## 2 Introduction

disciples of transcendental meditation as constituting ‘a “paradigm for the whole era”, symptomatic of the whole cultural change the sixties ushered in’ (Taylor 1987: 137), and this volume aims to demonstrate how the films of the Beatles offer a prism through which one can trace these seismic youth movements of the 1960s. It explores this emblematic celluloid journey by four young men from Liverpool from the epicentre of teen-led youth culture to the mind-expanding experimentation of the counterculture and beyond. Enacting a fluctuating synergy as they grew with their fanbase, *The Beatles and Film* charts both the successes and failures of youth culture, British and beyond, in a varied and volatile decade.

Firstly, some broad-stroke parameters must be drawn. It is a given that the primary importance of the Beatles’ films was understood to reside in their music, and the very acceptance of the Beatles into cinema can be interpreted as contributing as much to the pop music industry as to the film industry. Indeed, the narrative content of the majority of these films could be read as largely ‘incidental’ to the songs and performance sequences. Music is central to myriad subcultures, and this study acknowledges and explores the importance of the Beatles’ musical sequences, but there already exist studies that have concentrated on discrete and detailed analyses of how the Beatles’ musical numbers function both intratextually, within their discrete film setting (Fremaux 2018), and intertextually, within the broader scope of the filmed musical genre (Glynn 2013). The principal focus of this study, therefore, is on the Beatles’ film work as an attitudinal indicator of youth socio-cultural movements. From the outset this is distinctive. If the development of young people’s identities and personhood is generally recognised as a social activity undertaken via sustained interaction with significant others, the Beatles’ films begin by showing a precocious advance on early top-down models of socialisation whereby responsible adults (notably parents and teachers) are acknowledged as transmitting stable cultural norms and knowledge by inculcating long-established social attitudes and practices. Here from the outset is the dynamic engagement by Beatles fans in an emergent adult-free socio-cultural framework allowing the interactive realisation of their sense of selfhood.

The terminology at work here also needs addressing. In this study ‘youth’ is understood as conveying a wider significance than ‘teenage’, especially as ‘teen films’ have tended to emphasise experiences of and in (predominantly US) high school. The Beatles and their fanbase extend beyond this focus to a number of identity factors, both post- and pre-adolescence, including the ‘elongation’ of youth – the exploration of lifestyles deferring traditional milestones of maturation such as settling down, starting a family, etc. These permeable temporal parameters encompass the differing youth cultures on show in the Beatles’ films. Their early films, *A Hard Day’s Night* (Lester, 1964) and *Help!* (Lester, 1965), are examples and examinations