TOP OF THE MOUNTAIN

THE BEATLES AT SHEA STADIUM 1965

LAURIE JACOBSON

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To the late, great Marc Weinstein, whose sense of adventure took him to exciting places including the edge of the stage at Shea. What chutzpah! What photos! What a guy.

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RINGO JOHN
I LIKE
BEATLES
GEORGE PAUL

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The story of The Beatles at Shea Stadium lies in the many voices of the people who were lucky enough to be there. Endless thanks for your help and contributions . . . yeah, yeah, yeah.

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Love and thanks to my husband, Jon Provost, smart, fun, and totally fab.

And my deep gratitude to John, Paul, George, and Ringo, without whom this world would be a very different place.


STIX, BAER & FULLER
and SEVEN-UP present
AUGUST
21
1966
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ONE PERF.
BUSCH MEMORIAL STADIUM
ST. LOUIS, MO
ADMISSION
$5.50
NO REFUNDS
— THE BEATLES —

INTRODUCTION

In August 1965, during a sweltering heat wave, fifty-six thousand people traveled by plane, car, bus, ferry, and subway train to pack New York's Shea Stadium on a Sunday evening—not for a baseball game, but for a rock and roll concert. No rock band had ever played a baseball stadium, and no one believed it could be pulled off. But on that glorious night, The Beatles sold out Shea Stadium, shattering all existing box office and attendance records in show business history. Oh, and they also changed the world.

I am pinching myself that I wrote a book about The Beatles. I'm your average devoted Beatle fan. I have all their albums and 45s original from the day—mono—and even some rarities. I have a literal trunkful of scrapbooks about them, which I began in 1964 and ended only recently, and many pieces of memorabilia. I was so lucky to see them in St. Louis in 1966, and I've seen Ringo and Paul solo every tour and George in '74. I can barely stand to mention that I went a different way in Central Park one spring afternoon in 1974 and missed John giving an impromptu concert for a fortunate few. Hands down, biggest life regret. I know a fair amount about them, but there are many who know so much more. No matter—The Beatles had an enormous impact on me. They got me through the best and the worst times of my life. They influenced me on every level. I deeply love them. And I will carry them in my heart and soul forever.

That said, quite some time ago, I tucked away the feelings that went with the music. I had the image of me curled up in front of the speaker of my parents' hi-fi listening to every note, but I had not reconnected with the wonder of it in a very long time: the thrill of a new Beatle album coming out, the rush to the store on release day to buy it, running home to listen to it alone or with friends to talk about each song and to play it over and over—without smoking pot.

Working on this book has reawakened that dormant exuberance in me. And I couldn't be happier about it, because those were among the best times of my life. To have them back is a tremendous gift. I don't intend to ever lose touch with them again.

Author with John Lennon statue in Havana, Cuba. PHOTO BY JON PROVOST

I have spent years gathering stories from people who were involved with Shea on every level. I learned things about The Beatles and the craziness that surrounded them in those days that gave me insight into them as young men and the solo paths they would take in the future. The treasure trove of photos I found captured this magic time. And I met some fab Beatle People along the way. I am a Beatlemaniac all over again.

Beatlemania is contagious. I hope you catch it reading *Top of the Mountain*. Whether you recapture a wonderful time in your life or discover The Beatles for the first time, you will never read another story like this—because it only happened once.

Laurie Jacobson

Santa Rosa, California

August 2021

That concert in 1965 at Shea Stadium . . . I saw the top of the mountain on that unforgettable night.

—John Lennon

1

LIFE BEFORE SHEA

THE BEGINNING

To know where you're going, you've got to know where you've been.

In the early 1960s, the Rat Pack was cool, Elvis was hot, and Annette and Frankie ruled the beach.

Bobby Vinton is an American singer, songwriter, and actor.

Bobby Vinton: I was a Las Vegas performer. I wanted to hang out with Sinatra, Sammy Davis Jr., and Dean Martin. Those were my idols. Those were the guys to know.

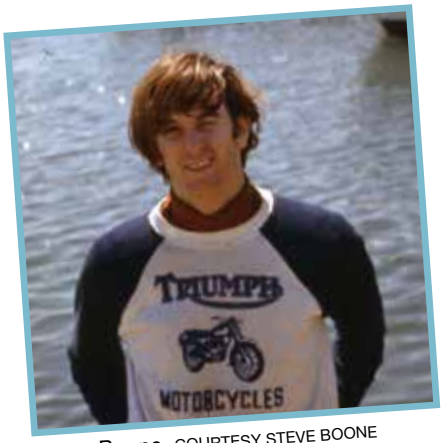
John and Jacqueline Kennedy, the nation's youngest president and his beautiful wife, seemed more like movie stars than politicians. Gorgeous, charming, and fashionable, they ushered in a new era with the focus on youth. JFK inspired high school and college graduates with hope and confidence for a future they could help to shape and build. By 1964, ten thousand Americans—mostly people in their twenties—had volunteered for JFK's Peace Corps to aid developing countries in the struggle

against poverty, illiteracy, and disease. Baby boomers were encouraged to make the world a better place, to dream and dream big. Reach for the stars, and one day we'll even walk on the moon. All things were possible.

But in November 1963, the nation's dreams, big and small, were crushed with Kennedy's assassination. It was a harsh reality for all, but hardest on the young. They had seen a light—what they could be if they dared, what the world could be. A generation had been awakened, but evil had won—or had it? The answer came back: only if they let it. The boomers were not going to let it; no, not this generation.

They began to turn away from the establishment and their parents' "five o'clock" way of life. Hollywood was still dishing up pablum: a flag-waving John Wayne or Sandra Dee's virginal Gidget and her beach scene, where no one ever drank or took drugs or had sex—ever. Boomers were choosing instead to search for something of their own, something real. And that meant music. Sure, there was Elvis, but the army had taken the bite out of him. And prior to The Beatles' first appearance on *Ed Sullivan*, the number-one spot on the Billboard Top 100 had been held for eleven weeks by the Singing Nun. Something had to give.

Steve Boone played bass for the Lovin' Spoonful.



Steve Boone. COURTESY STEVE BOONE

Steve Boone: The formula had worn out, the formula being: a record producer goes to 1650 Broadway—the Brill Building—and says, "I need a medium-tempo song about boy-meets-girl-and-falls-in-love." Then they take some artist they're developing . . . into the studio. They hire the musicians, bring in a songwriter who has written this song according to the producer's dimensions, and then they produce it. And the artist is really a "come in and sing the song and go home. We'll take care of the rest of it." That formula was getting tired.

In the '50s, you were expected to leave music behind when you got out of high school. The '50s were very buttoned-down. Once high school was over, you stopped having fun. You went to college or got married or both in some cases. Rock and roll was for kids. But all that was changing . . . in the American post–high school scene. The entertainment at college was mostly jazz and folk and poetry. The Lovin' Spoonful was the first rock band to tour extensively on college campuses. But somebody else would have done it if we hadn't. That's what I mean. [Change was to be expected] because the whole mood of how young people listened to music and participated in the culture was changing.

Not that I wasn't impressed by The Beatles' talent—I certainly was—and their records, their songs, and the change they made in the entire record industry, but it was an inevitable change. It was going to happen whether it was The Beatles, the Lovin' Spoonful, the Searchers, the Rolling Stones, or the Byrds. Somebody was going to come along and be a self-contained music machine—[a group who] writes their own songs, plays all their own instruments on their records. The Beatles just got there first—and more power to them.

The Lovin' Spoonful. COURTESY STEVE BOONE

In other words, the stage was set for something different, and John, Paul, George, and Ringo were in the right place at the right time and—most importantly—primed and ready for the moment. They had played more gigs in Hamburg, Germany, and at the Cavern Club in Liverpool than many artists play in their entire careers. That's where they developed style and presence and moves. And that's where they learned to make enthusiastic fans of complete strangers.

Peter Asher is a music producer, half of the successful pop duo Peter and Gordon, and the brother of Jane Asher, Paul's longtime girlfriend.

Peter Asher: It's like that sort of perfect storm period: if everything falls into place in exactly the right direction and exactly the right people and exactly the right time, it's one of those miraculous events. And something about the coincidence or whatever it was that got those musical talents to form a band, there's never been anything like it. Because as remarkable as they were individually—and that's terribly important to remember—if George Harrison was in any other band, he would have been the leader and a gigantic star.

Bill Angelos—with his partner Buz Kohan—won an Emmy for his work on *The Carol Burnett Show*. This prolific team wrote and produced hundreds of songs and shows of all genres during their decades-long careers.

Bill Angelos: Martin Block used to have something called *The Battle of the Baritones.* It was a battle between Frank Sinatra and Bing Crosby. That's

what the music was. Prior to rock and roll, there was jazz. And prior to that was swing. And prior to that was ragtime. Once rock and roll took over, it morphed into hip-hop, but rock and roll still is here. And that's fifty years later. To my knowledge no musical genre, with the possible exception of classical, of course, has lasted that long.

It was the beginning of an entire culture of change, first of all, beginning with the music. At the time we were working for Perry Como and that element of the music business got scared. Oh yeah. Oh yeah. You could just sense it. And we were at the time very much looking forward to writing for Broadway. But even that started to change.

My sister was a bobby-soxer and she took me to see Frank Sinatra at the Paramount Theater when he was really at the beginning of his career. And the major difference between the bobby-soxers and The Beatle fans [was that] the bobby-soxers would never think of even shouting when Sinatra was singing. The bobby-soxers *swooned*. . . . They kind of sighed. But it would be almost sacrilegious to do anything to him when he was singing.

I actually went to an Elvis Presley concert in Texas when I was in the air force. This had to be in 1955, '56, when he was just starting out. And for all of his gyrations and machinations, he was really extraordinary. You had never seen anything like it. But the audience was respectful. They listened to him and watched him.

It was this screaming and shouting that, as far as I know, The Beatles were the first ones to experience that. Whether that was initially manufactured or not, I don't know. I doubt it. I think that may have been an actual change in the evolution of humanity. Suddenly we had to scream when things like that happened.

Buz Kohan: I had a partner named Bill Angelos. We had gone to high school together—the Bronx High School of Science. I had a band called the Blue Notes and he was my vocalist. Then I went on to the Eastman School of Music. I played piano. Bill was the vocalist. He didn't play an instrument. He went on to Syracuse. And he got involved in a number of shows with a number of people whose names you would probably be familiar with because it was a very good time there for theater and things.

We had never really written together but I said, "You want to try it? Let's try a partnership." So, when we finally got together, we decided we would focus on writing material; and we got signed by the William Morris office as a team. One of the first things we did was . . . Arthur Godfrey. And we were writing stuff for his radio show and his personal appearances.

Bill Angelos: The first time I actually heard them [The Beatles], I was in Florida driving down Arthur Godfrey Boulevard—with Arthur Godfrey. We heard, "She loves you—yeah, yeah, yeah," and I said, "What is that?" It was just a foreign sound. Literally a foreign sound because it wasn't Chuck Berry. It wasn't the rock and roll we were aware of. I'm telling you, it scared people. Here's a quick story. This is a true story. When we were working with Perry Como, we came across a song we wanted Perry to sing. We knew that if he knew who had written it, he wouldn't sing it. So, one day Buz and I went into the room next door to Perry's office and there was a piano there. Buz started playing and I started singing, "Yesterday . . . Dah dah dah da." And Perry came in and the sheet music was on the piano turned over. And he stood next to me and he listened to me singing this song. He turned over the sheet music, saw who wrote it and then started singing with me. We had to ease him into the fact that these are the guys who are taking over. And they did.

1964: THE BEATLES ON *ED SULLIVAN* AND THE LAUNCH OF BEATLEMANIA

The Ed Sullivan Show was the national cultural touchstone. You could see the greats of popular song, comedy, opera, ballet, Broadway, jazz, jugglers, unicyclists, plate spinners, dog acts, puppets, bell ringers—there is no act that you could name that wasn't on his show. There was something for every member of the family, so families watched together, often gathered around the only television in the house. If you didn't like one act, wait three or four minutes for the next one. It was all held together by the stiff, awkward Sullivan, who often mispronounced names, but who had the goods week after week in every color and nationality.

Robert E. Precht is the eldest of Sullivan's five grandchildren.

Robert E. Precht: When people think of him, they think of family togetherness—watching his show together. It's a legacy of shared experience that's a unique, vanished part of America.

Robert's brother Vincent was a Los Angeles schoolteacher. In 1964, he was six years old.

Vincent Precht: Maybe having The Beatles on his show seemed like the only thing to do, to my grandfather. The country was reeling after Oswald shot Kennedy. It needed something to sing about. It needed hope.

Cousin Brucie Morrow was the nighttime deejay on New York's WABC, making him the highest profile deejay in the country.

Cousin Brucie. COURTESY BRUCE MORROW

Cousin Brucie: The Beatles weren't very sophisticated. Never mind young, talk about sophisticated. They had no sophistication. These guys came from a working-class environment. They went all over Europe, which was fine. They had a little bit of education. But they did not have what they got when they came here. It [the experience] was tenfold, maybe even more than that. So that's why I say they were not ready for what they were to garner in this place.

Not only were they good, but let's think about this thing, this is very important too. What was going on in our lives as Americans in the United States? In the United States at that time, we went through an assassination. We were going through terrible racial strife. Economics were not good. Politics were terrible, as they are now. Awful. We were in a real bad ball of wax. So we needed something very badly. So our reaction probably was ten times the amount that it would have been during a normal time. So because of this angst that we all had and this desire for something to relax with, we reacted to them even more. They were giving us something different. They took the American music idiom of rock and roll. Let's face it. They took the Everly Brothers and Chuck Berry and Elvis and all the people they loved, and they added a little excitement to it. Some energy, which we needed, because we were out of energy. But here were these mop tops who were then followed by all these other mop tops at that time, and they were giving us this new energy. And we needed something to hook onto. We needed a smile. We needed a laugh. We needed something to look forward to with a little bit of positive energy.

Though the group had been rapidly gaining popularity in America since the December 1963 release of "I Want to Hold Your Hand," their *Ed Sullivan* appearance confirmed that Beatlemania was sweeping the country.

Bob Precht, Ed Sullivan's son-in-law, produced *The Ed Sullivan Show*.

> **Bob Precht**: I met Epstein at my father-in-law's apartment at the Delmonico Hotel in November of '63. Peter Prichard, our representative at the Grade organization in London, had set up the meeting. The deal for the appearances for the following February was made at that time. Brian was a cool, confident, immaculately dressed Brit. He knew what he wanted for his boys and made sure he got it. We got along well, and I think he was pleased with how the boys were presented.

About seventy-three million people watched when *The Ed Sullivan Show* went on the air the night of February 9, 1964. That's twenty million more than the 1964 population of England. CBS received fifty thousand requests for 728 tickets to see them live inside what was then CBS Studio 50, a former Broadway house later renamed the Ed Sullivan Theater. That's an acceptance rate of 1.45 percent. The odds of getting into an Ivy League college were better. The Beatles didn't know from Ivy League. And Sullivan's show didn't either. It went into living rooms across the country regardless of race, color, or economic standing.

> **Vincent Precht**: I know they're important—my father has informed me—and I'm a little nervous about meeting them. . . . It's sound check time. My father seats my brother and me in the audience a few rows back. The Beatles start playing "I Want to Hold Your Hand." It's the most beautiful thing I have ever heard.

Bob Lefsetz is an American music industry analyst and critic. He is the author of *The Lefsetz Letter*, an email newsletter and blog.

> **Bob Lefsetz**: Fifty years ago, our nation was changed literally overnight. Guitar sales burgeoned and barbershops closed. Because we'd all seen The Beatles on *Ed Sullivan*.

Mikal Gilmore is a famed writer and music journalist.

Mikal Gilmore: Their American debut, on *The Ed Sullivan Show* on February 9, 1964, coincided with my thirteenth birthday. I certainly didn't understand everything I was seeing—the girls in the audience sticking their tongues out leeringly at the group, the whole shock-of-the-new effect of these four men who looked so foreign and who commanded their melodies with such assurance and their instruments with such synchronous force—but I knew, as millions of others did, that I was witnessing something seismic.

The next day, The Beatles' performance was the only thing we talked about at school. The girls loved the band members' long hair, the boys seemed unnerved by it, but everyone agreed that The Beatles and their music was an awakening.

In the days following, the arguments and reactions around the country only grew. While Elvis Presley had already shown us something about using rebellious style as a means of change, The Beatles helped incite something stronger in American youth that night—something that started as a consensus, as a shared joy, but that in time would seem like the prospect of power—a new kind of youth mandate.

Bobbie Molina is a Beatle fan.

Bobbie Molina.
COURTESY OF BOBBIE MOLINA

Bobbie Molina: Yeah, on the black-and-white TV in those days. They came on and everybody saw them there, and from that night on it was like magic. They just presented themselves and those two songs, "I Saw Her Standing There" and "I Want to Hold Your Hand." And then when they put the names on the screen, my favorite one to begin with was Ringo. I just loved the way he flopped his head back and forth and smiled. I know that the other guys were gorgeous, but for some reason, it was Ringo. You know everybody had a favorite Beatle. From there on the next day when I went to school everybody was talking about it. "Did you see The Beatles on TV?" I said, "Yeah, oh my god!" My friend liked Paul and the other one liked John and so on. Then in a couple of days, in the candy store we stopped in on the way home, we saw a pack of gum with The Beatles cards in them. So if you bought gum, you would have pictures they took of The Beatles. And we were buying that

bubble gum and collecting the cards. My thing was, "Well, I'm going to go to London and see them one day."

Mary Wilson was one of the legendary Supremes.

Mary Wilson: I was not a Beatles fan at all, to be very honest. The music didn't move me because to me it was kind of square. I was one of those black people who was totally into soul music because that is what I grew up with—soul, the blues, and all that kind of stuff. I became a Beatles fan years later because of their style of writing and the artistry in it as opposed to seeing them perform. Seeing them perform to me was kind of square. We still came from that thing where it was black or white. So they were kind of like "white square." And that's not true of all music because I grew up listening to great radio here in America where you heard all kinds of music—the Brenda Lees and so forth. My best friend from England was Dusty Springfield. I liked her more because she was really singing soulfully. For me, that's more of what it was.

Mary Wilson. COURTESY MARY WILSON

Whoopi Goldberg is an actor, author, comedian, and television personality.

Whoopi Goldberg: I remember the song was "I Want to Hold Your Hand," and they played it on the radio, and I thought, "I like that. I like that. Who is that?"

We used to watch *The Ed Sullivan Show* every Sunday night, my mom, my brother, and I. It wasn't even a question; it was just that's what we do. And man, I'd never seen anybody that looked like that. It was like a revelation. And when you're a little kid, you don't know it's a revelation, but it was like the whole world lit up. Suddenly I felt like I could be friends with them . . . and I'm black! [laughs] . . . I never really thought of them as white guys. They were The Beatles. They were colorless. And they were fucking amazing.

The critics had yet to be convinced. They mostly covered their ears, held their noses, and hoped it would pass.