

WERE

THE
BEATLES



THAT GOOD?

HzS  d

“Fighting to Stay Free”

#181...February 2014

And now, ladies and gentlemen...

...imagine if you will a pop-based recording act coming out in 2014 with music having the production values of three to five years ago, much of whose repertoire consists of songs that were R&B hits over the past seven years.

A formula for success? If you asked most radio programmers today, they'd probably say no.

That's what most PDs in the U.S. said when they first heard the Beatles in 1963. Of course, circumstances were different then: with few exceptions, what was made in England stayed in England. There wasn't the automatic access to music from anywhere that we have now. Except for *American Bandstand* and a handful of local teen dance shows on weekends, there was no TV outlet given over entirely to youth-targeted popular music. Radio was it, so PDs and DJs were the gatekeepers of musical taste - not only for teens, but everyone.

Then again, some circumstances, as it happens, were the same. Pop success was singles-based: few artists could produce an album's worth of music deserving of young adults' spending money. Top 40 radio was successful and perceived as healthy musically, with a crop of new artists and sounds that broke with the recent past. Then it was The Beach Boys and surf, The Four Seasons, Spector and serious folk, now it's alternative and a wave of retro-pop. And in both eras, teens ultimately decided what to listen to on a portable pocket-sized player, only then that control was exercised by changing from one already-programmed station to another.

The big difference in 1963 was an event so tragic for our nation it rendered the then-current crop of hits ineffective as mood-swingers. In hindsight, it seems clear now (if it wasn't so much then) that Capitol Records saw that opening and went to fill it with "I Want To Hold Your Hand." After nearly a year of the opposite situation, the Beatles suddenly found themselves in the right place (as in America) at the right time (as in after the Kennedy assassination).

In the weeks that followed that single's rise to the top of local station countdowns, we found out that much of the Beatles' output at the time was music America had already heard by its own artists: The Shirelles, Motown's Miracles and Marvelettes, rock's pioneers like Chuck Berry and Little Richard. Even though 'recycling' wasn't yet a word, that's exactly what the group had done.

So, the question must be asked: could pop's savior in December 1963 have been any act, not necessarily the Beatles? Was it all timing, luck and Ed Sullivan, or were they really that good? Had "I Want To Hold Your Hand" not captured young America's imagination (and I recall not being so certain it would at the time), what artist or genre might have taken its place? Could America have come to its own rescue?

Those last two questions aren't as impossible to offer logical answers to as one might think. Not every part of the U.S. was knocked over by Beatlemania as quickly as on the East Coast (we were closest to the U.K., after all). Take Minneapolis-St. Paul, where not only did "Surfin' Bird" by local group The Trashmen move to No. 1 the week after the assassination, it stayed there until AFTER "I Want To Hold Your Hand" landed in America and on KDWB, denying the Beatles the top spot until February. If that suggests that under the right circumstances, this slice of early surf-garage-pre-punk – also with lower production values than most of the hits at top 40 at the time - could have lifted America from post-Camelot blues, consider that another early low-fi garage classic was at No. 1 or No. 2 in many markets (such as Minneapolis) from November until the Beatles hit: the Kingsmen's "Louie Louie." Granted, in some parts of the country – such as Boston, where "I Want To Hold Your Hand's" success was immediate – "Louie" had hit before November 22. And let it be noted, both songs were remakes. (Let it also be noted that in a strange twist, "Surfin' Bird" took nearly 50 years to hit the top 10 in England, reaching No. 3 in December 2010.)



If not for the Beatles, could the "Invasion" have been an inside job?

All the above is to suggest that were there no Beatles and no British Invasion, the impact of both "Surfin' Bird" and "Louie Louie" on pop music may have been greater earlier - but that's another column. The question remains, could the Beatles have eventually made it in America the same way they did everywhere else? Odds are quite good the answer's yes, especially given the success of the Kingsmen and Trashmen. The Beatles would have become the obvious next step in that de-evolution (at first) of pop by adding the element of – initially, anyway - cuteness. It probably goes without saying that the songwriting of John Lennon and Paul McCartney and production of George Martin would have eventually won

out and turned the Beatles into contemporary music's most influential act ever all over the world, even if it may have taken a Bob Dylan "Like A Rolling Stone"-style 180 to do it here in the states (with a song such as "I Feel Fine").

Fortunately, we don't have to think about "what if," and instead we can enjoy – and celebrate - what was, 50 years ago.

Long live the Beatles.

NOW THIS



Here comes that Number 7. Hz So Good's 7th annual I.R.S. (as in, "It Really Shoulda" been a top 10 hit!) is officially in business again. It's that time of the year when we ask: what songs "Really Shoulda" been Top 10?

It's your call, when you fill out your I.R.S. form, which you can do at <http://www.musicradio77.com/IRS.html>. Just send your list of songs that make you say "THAT really shoulda been a Top 10 Hit!" before April 1, 2014. (All rules, regulations and other fun stuff is at the link above.)

As in past years, random I.R.S. filers will win a 4-disc set of the resulting 7th Annual I.R.S. Top 104, based on what songs show up most on those forms and where they're ranked. And you can hear the complete countdown of the Top 104 on [Rewound Radio](#) just before tax deadline. More details are coming soon.

We had a record turnout last year, our sixth. If you love music and you've never taken part before, join the fun and let's make the 7th our biggest I.R.S. yet.

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