

A HARD DAY'S NIGHT

The Beatles' 1964 Seattle Concert

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Reminiscing in 1995, a Pacific Northwest woman remembered an important event in her life—the evening of August 21, 1964, when she and 14,000 other young people witnessed the Beatles' first Seattle concert. "I was a fan all right," she noted, "but I wasn't screaming and weeping." She remembers especially the great extent of police and security arrangements and her surprise that the Beatles' limousine had its roof "caved in—collapsed under the weight of swarming girls!" She recounted a trip with friends to the Beatles' Seattle lodgings (at the Edgewater Inn), "just to see if we could get a glimpse of them," but instead finding hundreds of fans and police "and ropes all around." And she vividly recollects the concert itself, the huge audience, and the four young men on stage singing rock and roll music—music barely audible over the roar of the crowd. It was a night she will never forget.

The Beatles' 1964 Seattle summer concert is a tiny footnote in the early history of the world's most celebrated rock and roll band, yet it is a fascinating story nonetheless. England's Beatles—John Lennon, Paul McCartney, George Harrison and Ringo Starr—grew to maturity listening to, imitating and embellishing upon the rockabilly and blues stylings of 1950s American rockers like Chuck Berry, Buddy Holly, Little Richard, Carl Perkins and Elvis Presley. They learned their lessons well in nightclubs in Liverpool and Hamburg, Germany, combining tight harmonies and driving rhythms to achieve a classic yet unique approach to rock and roll music. Their first American appearance (on a February 1964 *Ed Sullivan Show*) made them an overnight smash in the United States. Journalists writing about "Beatlemania" termed the group's rise to popularity in America the "British Invasion" of 1964. In fact, the Beatles were, in their own unique way, reintroducing a new generation of American teenagers to the sounds of 1950s American rock and roll.

To begin to understand the impact of the Beatles' Seattle concert in August 1964, we have to recollect the nation, society, and culture of America and the city of Seattle at that time. In 1964 Jack Ruby, killer of Lee Harvey Oswald, testified in Washington, D.C., before the Warren Commission, which was charged with investigating the November 1963 assassination of President John F. Kennedy. The nation had only just begun to recover from the shock of that tragic event. In Atlantic City, New Jersey, the Democratic Party Convention was preparing to nominate President Lyndon B. Johnson to run against Republican Senator Barry Goldwater of Arizona. As tens of thousands of black civil rights advocates marched in the streets, America perched on the edge of the Vietnam War and the turmoil of "The '60s."

Meanwhile, in the nation's far northwest corner, Seattle enjoyed the summer weather and life-style of a city that was one of America's best-kept secrets. In the summer of 1964, the Seattle World's Fair was just two years past, and Seattle had begun what would prove to be a 30-year evolution from a charming yet provincial hinterland to the bustling Pacific Rim city we know

today. For entertainment, Seattle's children came home from school to watch J. P. Patches, Stan Boreson, Brakeman Bill and other television shows of that genre. Their fathers, returning home from work a bit later, tuned in the evening news with Charles Herring on KING-TV, followed by Chet Huntley and David Brinkley. The majority of mothers at that time were at home waiting for their children; day care centers and latchkey kids still lay a generation in the future (Betty Friedan's 1962 book, *The Feminine Mystique*, had yet to make an impression). At this time it was still not difficult for the average family to prosper with one wage-earner.

For those who wished to watch a current film, the movie theater, not the home VCR, was the answer. That summer, local offerings included *A Shot in the Dark* at Seattle's Blue Mouse, *Battleship Potemkin* with organ accompaniment at the Granada Organ Loft Club in West Seattle, or perhaps *A Hard Day's Night* at the Paramount. On the same weekend that the Beatles' concert was held, fare for the adult audience was offered at the nearby Opera House. Allan Sherman, comedian and singer, and Joe "Fingers" Carr, ragtime pianist, were featured in a back-to-back benefit performance for the Variety Club and Children's Orthopedic Hospital.

Despite their geographic isolation from the rest of the nation, Pacific Northwesterners were not innocents when it came to rock and roll music. The region had for over a decade boasted a vibrant local rock scene that was especially attuned to the black rhythm and blues and white hillbilly instrumentation and harmonies that lay at the heart of rock and roll. The Viceroy's, Wailers, Sonics, Kingsmen, Dynamics, and Paul Revere and the Raiders all rocked and rolled around Puget Sound, from Tacoma's Castle Club to Parker's Ballroom on Highway 99. Northwesterners knew good rock and roll when they heard it. And they heard it blasting from their television sets during the Beatles' famed February appearances on the *Ed Sullivan Show*. And, soon after, they heard it from the studios of KJR, KOL and other regional radio stations. Seattle's youths could hardly wait to hear the "Fab Four" perform live on August 21, 1964 in Seattle's Coliseum as part of their first American tour.

The Seattle media took notice of the concert approximately one week before the event. Journalists not only detailed the Seattle concert preparations but informed the city of the concerns of other municipalities, like San Francisco, over the phenomenon called "Beatlemania." When the Beatles arrived in San Francisco on August 18, reported the *Seattle Times* and the *Post-Intelligencer*, over 5,000 teenagers gathered at the airport to greet them.

Meanwhile, another much smaller group courted danger in an attempt to stage a protest. This group of religious people carried signs, one of which, the August 19 *Post-Intelligencer* reported, read, "Beatle worship is idolatry. The Bible says, 'Children keep yourself from idols.'" In an incident at San Francisco's Hilton Hotel, where the Beatles lodged, it was noted that a Mrs. Gertrude Goodman was robbed and shot by an intruder. Meanwhile her screams went unheeded because a maid mistakenly assumed that they "had something to do with the Beatles."

The hysteria over the Beatles' appearances prompted the Seattle Police and the staff of the Edgewater Inn Hotel to work in close cooperation to ensure adequate security measures for the duration of the group's brief stay. Since the hotel was located on a pier on Seattle's waterfront, the police arranged for the harbor patrol to guard against any attempt at illegal entry by water and, to this end, gave orders that would prevent boats from approaching within ten feet of the dock. With the erection of a 350-foot-long plywood fence wrapped in barbed wire and police stationed at all entrances and on all floors, the hotel began to take on the look of a fortress.

The Beatles' stay at the Edgewater Inn created inconveniences for other guests and prospective guests. All teenagers were immediately suspect, and various disruptions and injustices inevitably occurred. Two weddings that had booked well in advance for the night of the concert took place only after the hotel issued special passes to members of the wedding parties.

One other group was not so fortunate. Patti Bernier, Theresa Puzzo and Jeannie McCullough, who had graduated from Holy Names Academy the previous June, had confirmed reservations in hand dating from July 1. Nevertheless, upon their arrival at the hotel on Thursday, August 20, they were told that their reservations had been canceled. The management informed them that, due to insurance regulations, their parents would have to stay with them, but ultimately they were made to leave. The girls began a futile sit-in to protest the hotel's abrogation of their contract. When the police informed them that they could either leave or face arrest, they chose to leave.

The precautions seemed justified considering youthful fans' varied and industrious efforts to make contact with their "shaggy heroes." Ms. Marty Murphy, then public relations director for the Edgewater, told of such attempts: "One girl got hysterical when she found she couldn't stay here. She cried and cried on the telephone." Stacks of fan mail, some of it lipstick-smeared and marked "I love you;" a stuffed dog with a note attached; as well as sundry varieties of cakes, cookies, and other food items, all piled up at the hotel.

One teenager appealed for calm and a semblance of restraint. Liz Korol, president of the Beatle Brides Fan Club, an organization chartered by the official Beatles Fan Club in London, commented on their upcoming Seattle visit. "Soon the Beatles will be here and I feel sorry for them. They have been through many rough experiences before and we are afraid Seattle will be no exception." She invited fellow Beatles fans to join her club, suggesting that if they could "get enough kids to act right" perhaps they could actually "hear and see the Beatles when they perform."

Meanwhile Woolworth's Department Store advertised "it's a mad fad, dad" and offered such items as a Beatle wig for \$2.99, Beatle Bobbin' Head dolls, Beatle trading cards, wallet-sized photos as well as the inevitable fan magazines and record albums. With the Beatles at the peak of their popularity, their profit expectations were well-founded. KJR, the leading pop-music radio station in the area, had no less than five Beatles tunes on its weekly "Fabulous 50" list at a time when even Elvis and the Rolling Stones had but one apiece. The "KJR pick album of the week," on the Liberty label, was entitled, "The Chipmunks Sing the Beatles' Songbook." KJR's Pat O'Day, the leading Seattle pop-music disc jockey at the time, noted that the "Fab Four" had become in months "the biggest single force in the musical world" with a style that included "rockabilly blues." Alluding to the recent "payola scandal," O'Day informed Seattleites that the Beatles had succeeded on their own, "without the help of disc jockeys and radio broadcasting" industry insiders.

The Beatles were scheduled for one Seattle appearance on Friday night, August 21. As the success of their American tour mounted, however, Northwest Releasing offered them \$40,000 to stay for a second night. But the Beatles refused. Due to the poor financial showing of an earlier closed-circuit TV concert, Northwest Releasing had originally declined Beatles manager Brian Epstein's offer for a second Seattle show. The Beatles accepted offers in three other cities to appear for a second concert; Seattle's promoters were left wishing they had accepted Epstein's original offer.

The Seattle concert was a sellout, of course. Tickets went for \$5 apiece retail, but scalpers were able to raise the price in some cases to as high as \$30. Some were sold through classified ads in the local newspapers. The dearth of tickets also gave Northwest Releasing impresario Zollie Volchok a chance to fulfill an old promise. In 1936, when known as "Uncle Zol" on an Oregon radio show, Volchok gave not only an autograph, but a written promise to a faithful young follower named Joyce Sampson. The promise read, "To Joyce Sampson: If you ever need a favor any time at all, please just ask your old Uncle Zol." Twenty-eight years later she tore the statement out of her autograph book and mailed it to Volchok along with a request for Beatles tickets for her four children. True to his word, "Uncle Zol" sent four tickets, which he had reserved for his own emergency use.

Finally the night of the concert arrived. The audience at the Coliseum numbered over 14, 000, mostly girls in their early teens. As was usual with such events, other performers warmed up the audience, and at just after eight o'clock the concert began with the Bill Black Combo. They were followed by the Exciters, the Righteous Brothers ("You've Lost That Lovin' Feeling") and Jackie de Shannon ("What the World Needs Now Is Love Sweet Love"). The audience paid tribute to Jackie by singing "Happy Birthday" to her.

Then all hell broke loose.

At 9:25, introduced simultaneously by four local DJ's and Master of Ceremonies Pat O'Day, the Beatles made their appearance onstage to the accompaniment of a massive chorus of screams that surely must have been audible blocks away from the Seattle Center. They began with "All My Lovin'," sung to thousands of girls who wished fervently for exactly that. They followed with "Twist and Shout," "You Can't Do That," "She Loves You," "Can't Buy Me Love," "If I Fell" and "I Wanna Hold Your Hand." Throughout the concert they were pelted with various small objects as tokens of affection, especially jelly beans, which represented some sort of fad message. Ringo Starr then sang a solo entitled "Boys," which created a fresh wave of hysteria among the fans. Then came "Roll Over Beethoven" and finally Paul McCartney's raucous version of "Long Tall Sally."

Considering prior experiences at Beatles concerts, security was foremost in the minds of the concert promoters. One hundred navy volunteers from Pier 91 were recruited by the police and firefighters to join in providing protective cordons; they were desperately needed. With no area for dancers and fans to congregate at the head of the stage, police stopped the many girls who frantically attempted to reach the stage during the performance. It was for this reason that a new stage had been built 12 feet high atop the original one. The police, firefighters, sailors, and paramedics carried those injured or otherwise suffering from the effects of hysteria into a first aid station and made every effort to treat or calm them.

After their last song, the Beatles immediately left the stage for their dressing room and a near riot erupted as a great many of the audience attempted to follow them. Only the combined efforts of the police, firefighters and the navy, whose linked arms blocked the fans' passage, prevented complete bedlam. As it was, 35 people required first aid treatment for ailments ranging from broken heads to broken hearts. In one case, a girl fell 25 feet down an air shaft only to recover and rejoin the throng before an aid crew could reach her. Another fan was put onto a stretcher, restrained and urged to calm herself. All the while she screamed, "Paul! I love you, Paul! I love you!"

The Beatles remained in their dressing room for about an hour and then employed an escape ruse concocted by Zollie Volchok. While the group climbed into an ambulance and left unseen, Volchok and his wife drove out in their black Lincoln. Assuming the Lincoln to be the Beatles' transportation, teenagers instantly swarmed it, trying to climb on top and even beating on it, making later body repairs necessary. Meanwhile the "Fab Four" made good their escape back to the hotel, though, according to Volchok, Paul McCartney made a date with one young Seattleite whom he took to the Space Needle that night. The next afternoon the Beatles left Seattle for Vancouver, B.C., in a chartered airplane. Unfortunately, they forgot to clear U.S. Customs and had to return briefly to Seattle. This detail taken care of, the group was finally able to leave the United States, and Seattle was able to pick up the pieces.

Northwest Releasing earned a total of \$57,616.60 for the concert, with \$47,469.43 worth of expenses, of which \$34,569.96 was paid to the Beatles. This left a profit of \$10,147.17, which was not bad in 1964 dollars. There was still money to be made from the Beatles though. MacDougall's Department Store purchased the carpet in the room at the Edgewater where the Beatles had stayed and announced its intention to cut it up and sell pieces of it to Beatles fans. Approximately 75 teenagers waited outside the store until it opened on the day of the sale. Russell Lackie, president of MacDougall's, was quoted in the August 23 *Seattle Times*: "Based on the success of the sale, a contribution will be made to Children's Orthopedic Hospital and Medical Center." The amount of the proposed donation was not mentioned, but there could be no doubt of the sale's success.

Various prominent older Seattle citizens made comments concerning the Beatles' visit, and some, though not all, were vaguely approving. Emmett Watson said, "I'm determined to believe that the world will still go on, Beatles or no. As for me, I kind of like the Beatles—even if three of them do drink Scotch and lemonade, while the fourth one drinks bourbon and Coke." Lou Guzzo, a classical music proponent, decried the apparently swift success of such groups when he commented, "True talent trained in years of thankless effort goes begging for a hearing, while the noisy brigade of mediocrity counts its loot in the millions. Something is seriously wrong somewhere." Finally, the Most Rev. Thomas A. Connolly, then Roman Catholic Archbishop of Seattle, sounded a more approving note, saying that he didn't think any harm was done by youthful enthusiasm for the Beatles, "It's an outlet for youthful exuberance. If it weren't the Beatles, it would be something else."

Yet the Beatles' 1964 Seattle concert stamped the most indelible impression on the memories and imaginations of the tens of thousands of Pacific Northwest teenagers and young adults who reveled in the Beatles' sound and mystique. The concert forms a lasting memory, especially for the 14,000 who actually witnessed the Coliseum spectacle. One of them, a woman who attended the concert over 30 years ago, remembers the experience vividly even today. She recalls the keen anticipation, the airport arrival, the crowds of fans, the police and security arrangements, and her strong reaction to the excitement of the moment. But most of all she remembers the sights and sounds of that incredible August 21 concert and trying to hear the music "above the din" of the Seattle Coliseum's capacity crowd:

You know, it's funny—I don't remember what they wore or even what they sang. After 30 years, I remember how DARK it was in the Coliseum, and how bright and small and far away the stage seemed. And the noise! The air fairly quivered, shimmered with it. Can noise do that? Like heat rippling in a mirage?

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