



# Can't Buy Me Love: The Beatles, Britain, and America

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Nearly twenty years in the making, *Can't Buy Me Love* is a masterful work of group biography, cultural history, and musical criticism. That the Beatles were an unprecedented phenomenon is a given. In *Can't Buy Me Love*, Jonathan Gould seeks to explain why, placing the Fab Four in the broad and tumultuous panorama of their time and place, rooting their story in the social context that girded both their rise and their demise.

Beginning with their adolescence in Liverpool, Gould describes the seminal influences—from Elvis Presley and Chuck Berry to *The Goon Show* and *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*—that shaped the Beatles both as individuals and as a group. In addition to chronicling their growth as singers, songwriters, and instrumentalists, he highlights the advances in recording technology that made their sound both possible and unique, as well as the developments in television and radio that lent an explosive force to their popular success. With a musician's ear, Gould sensitively evokes the timeless appeal of the Lennon-McCartney collaboration and their emergence as one of the most creative and significant songwriting teams in history. And he sheds new light on the significance of *Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band* as rock's first concept album, down to its memorable cover art.

Behind the scenes Gould explores the pivotal roles played by manager Brian Epstein and producer George Martin, credits the influence on the Beatles' music of contemporaries like Bob Dylan, Brian Wilson, and Ravi Shankar, and traces the gradual escalation of the fractious internal rivalries that led to the group's breakup after their final masterpiece, *Abbey Road*. Most significantly, by chronicling their revolutionary impact on popular culture during the 1960s, *Can't Buy Me Love* illuminates the Beatles as a charismatic phenomenon of international proportions, whose anarchic energy and unexpected import was derived from the historic shifts in fortune that transformed the relationship between Britain and America in the decades after World War II.

From the Beats in America and the Angry Young Men in England to the shadow of the Profumo Affair and JFK's assassination, Gould captures the pulse of a time that made the Beatles possible—and even necessary. As seen through the prism of the Beatles and their music, an entire generation's experience comes astonishingly to life. Beautifully written, consistently insightful, and utterly original, *Can't Buy Me Love* is a landmark work about the Beatles, Britain, and America.

## Can't Buy Me Love: The Beatles, Britain, and America Details

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Author : Jonathan Gould

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Gould**

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## From Reader Review Can't Buy Me Love: The Beatles, Britain, and America for online ebook

### Karen says

I took a class on the Beatles in college. It counted as a general ed requirement! I still feel lucky. I do like the Beatles and this will be the second book "about them" that I'll have read (The first was "Shout," for the class). I hope I like it.

### MAY 3 UPDATE

This is a great book. The author makes a point early of describing how he wanted this book to differentiate itself from the other books about the band, and his angle was examining the music from a cultural and historical perspective. I love examining things from cultural and historical perspectives! It's like he wrote it with me in mind.

He also points out that it is a biography of the band, not the individuals. That is not something I probably would have noticed, but now that I know this it is holding up true. I am really enjoying it, at least the first sixth of it. It could theoretically tank.

### MAY 14 UPDATE

Holy crap! The more I learn about Yoko Ono the freakier she gets. From the few things I had read about the Beatles breaking up I had figured she really was scapegoated but this author is painting an entirely different story and I am digging hating on the ocean child. John Lennon achieved great heights of dickery, too.

### MAY 15 UPDATE

Turns out all the Beatles were dicks at the end. But that didn't really hamper my enjoyment of the book, and I'm sure once they separated they more or less settled back down to the normal, convivial people that they started out as. I don't really know much about them.

### OVERALL RESPONSE

I really enjoyed this book. I thought the close readings of individual songs and album analysis was fantastic, and I wish I'd had the CDs plugged in right next to me as I was reading, but that would have added what? Another 20 hours to my reading?

It started to drag after Sgt Pepper. I just really couldn't follow the financial messes that caused so much distress, but that's not why it dragged (because there really only were a few pages of that). And I'm hardly the first person to say it, but once the Beatles started going through the motions of being a band and hardly tolerating each other, the book lost a lot of steam. The format and writing style didn't change at all, but the content ceased to be compelling and you just started watching a bunch of assholes get what was coming to them. Which is sort of sad, because they didn't set out to be a bunch of assholes but the stress gets to you in the end. I can totally understand how being put upon inspires the desire to kick others in the face. Now imagine what I would do with millions of dollars I can't get to, people demanding my time and presence, a lot of testosterone in my system (because I am a guy), and not even having the levelheadedness of turning thirty yet.

Oh well. At least they had Hamburg.

Man, does that author hate Yoko, though! He was outrageously catty towards her character. I enjoyed every word.

## EPILOGUE:

I found a misspelling in someone's name as I was reading the book but let it slide. I'd only been surfing the net looking for more information about a television personality the author had mentioned: Cathy McGowan. He'd spelled it McGowen. I didn't know if he or the website was correct. Now I learn that he spelled the author Margaret Forster as Margaret Foster. That's pretty sloppy. Dude. How long could it take for an intern to check names online? Less than a day.

I may email the publishers just so I can stop fretting about it.

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## Alan says

I blame Tuck. He asked me a question about a particular Beatles book on my review of *Revolution in the Head*, and I sent him an article/discussion of 'best Beatles books'. Of course it made me think, haven't read that one or that one, and I've ended up buying 'Love Me Do', a slim fly-on-the-wall paperback following the Beatles on tour and making programmes like *Juke Box Jury* from 1964, and getting this one from the library, in contrast a massive 700 page tome, published in 2007 and covering *everything*, including the importance of the scouse accent. Read 50 pages before I knew it...

..enjoyed, more later...

I didn't learn too much that was new about the band (hardly surprising given the number of Beatle books consumed) but the astonishing story of four scousers changing the world still grips. I did learn a bit more about America's complex relationship with the Beatles, treating them first as saviours, the fan worship, the Ed Sullivan shows, the distraction from the Kennedy assassination, to the later condemnation (the Maryland Ku Klux Klan burning their records outside the Washington stadium) to their two way influence on West Coast music.

Also the psychology of the band – eg their self-reliance, their interaction - and their influence on society is well explored, (possibly overdone) using Weber and Freud to explain the phenomenon. The music comes to the fore in the second half of the book, some songs only warranting a brief mention, others get pages (Penny Lane, I am the Walrus etc). One or two new sidelines on the music for me – And Your Bird Can Sing (my favourite track, despite it being a throwaway according to Lennon) was apparently inspired by Guy Talese's profile of Frank Sinatra that appeared in the April 1966 issue of *Esquire*. "*Bird*," Talese wrote, "*is a favourite Sinatra word.*" The article compared the Beatles unfavourably to Sinatra, and this is Lennon's riposte. I'd always thought (read somewhere) it was about Mick Jagger's then girlfriend Marianne Faithful ('bird' being British slang for 'girl') who had a song in the charts at the time. Gould is a good music critic (being a musician might help), eg describing George's repetitive riff playing on 'Dizzy Miss Lizzy' as having *the self absorption of a child perfecting his signature, and each repetition seems to affirm some deeply held belief that these eight notes, in this configuration, represents the only conceivable accompaniment to the song.*

I will stop on the Beatles books now, at least until Mark Lewishon's three volume magnum opus 'The Beatles' comes out in the autumn.

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## Sharon says

This book exceeded my expectations far more than any book I've read in a very long time. In addition to

being a biography of the group as a whole, this is also a social history. Everything about the Beatles, from their childhoods in Liverpool to the seedy nightclubs of the Reeperbahn in Germany, from their Scouse accents to the musical arrangements of their most popular songs, is placed carefully within the perspective of Britain and the United States at the time.

The writing flows wonderfully. Despite a textbook feel to the prose, it never becomes weighted down or abstruse. Short, well-focused chapters keep the pace moving briskly along and I never lost interest. In fact, I often found it hard to put the book down! There is also a good balance between the principal players, with of course the greatest attention paid to John Lennon and Paul McCartney. Decades later, it is still painful to follow the disintegration of such a close collaborative friendship.

That the Beatles changed society and popular music and helped lead a generation goes without saying. But this book does say it, laying out the intricate ways in which the Beatles shaped their world and were shaped by it. It is a fascinating read.

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### **Jim Swike says**

This is a terrific book, for all music lovers and especially if you remember the 1960s era of the Beatles. This is a great history of the Beatles from start to finish. Enjoy!

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### **Anna says**

Its both comprehensive and vague at same time. Quite an achievement

Sure he mentions offhandedly how certain Beatles movies (HELP! mostly) looked like modern MTV [or rather, what MTV *used to be*] - but no mention of their ACTUAL MUSIC VIDEOS?

Like.. oh I dunno... Paperback Writer/Rain combo being filmed in the park specifically for sending out as promos? Or Strawberry Fields/Penny Lane hiring a movie director and havin fancy mini-movie editing and even full concepts instead of them just standin around pretending to play

Yoko's giant ego would be pleased by how much she and John are mentioned in final chapters. The other boys' family life barely gets a line (especially Ringo. Not even that!), but J/Y relationship and publicity stunts take up pages!

Now that their heroin and meth timeline is in proper alignment - no longer feel sorry for her miscarriages. Bitch deserved to not reproduce while that full of drugs!

The author also does give a quick rundown of their solo work followups, but woooooow does he downplay the Vicious Vendetta that is John's "How do you sleep?"

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### **Brianna says**

I was incredibly skeptical about the Baltimore Sun review quoted on the cover ("The best book ever written about the Beatles"), but not any more.

Gould is clearly a fan of The Music. I thought I couldn't respect their albums any more than I already did, but

the author's technical appreciation gave me a better understanding of just how aptly they accompanied the subtleties of each song's enthusiasm, heartbreak, jest, or sarcasm with chord changes, vocal stylings, or instrumentation. Almost 100% of the time, I agreed with Gould's overall praise or criticism of each song.

I've never read such a well thought out documentation of the changes in recording which helped allow the Beatles' transition from albums like A Hard Day's Night to Sgt. Pepper. For instance, Gould explains that George Martin resigned his role as head of Parlophone and, instead of working for EMI, essentially worked as an independent producer for the Beatles themselves. Thus when the Beatles' began to request (demand?) more studio time for each album, no one at EMI dared turn them down. (And Martin, who might have been able to convince them of the financial necessities, was no longer accountable for EMI's expenses)

This book is less biographical than others, which has the benefit of making it less sentimental and biased. Still, I learned alot, and not just about the recordings. He dug up quotes I'd never heard before from (presumably British) newspaper archives. Gould doesn't use a lot of quotes but he chooses carefully, often giving powerful insight into John Paul George or Ringo's frame of mind in the 1960s.

The only negative I can find to say about the book is that his use of similes is sometimes a bit ridiculous. ("[T]heir songs cavorted atop the pop charts like a pack of playful seals...")

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### **Donna says**

I wish I could say that I finished it but I didn't. I got bogged down in the middle by the minute details of each song and each album and I gave up. I love the Beatles but I guess I don't love them enough to know all the guitar chords for each song on Rubber Soul. This book is truly well researched though and is definitely for the ultimate fan.

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### **Ross says**

Not just another Beatles book. It recounts the familiar tale of these four individuals, "clearing away the ephemeral, the apocryphal, and the merely anecdotal" in order to focus on the bigger picture, their lives and their music in social and historical context. Fab.

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### **Nathan says**

Rather misleadingly titled, this book devotes only a fraction of its considerable bulk to a study of the titular threesome of subjects, insisting instead on analyzing, album by album, track by track, the music of the Beatles. While this jerky change of topic might be forgiven in light of the (limited) value of the analysis, Gould suffers from delusions of academia and insists on psychoanalyzing the minutest detail, whether lyrical, conceptual or personal, droning on in a snooty monotone that ends only when the last song of "Abbey Road" has been parsed beyond recognition. Not worth it.

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### **victor harris says**

When it addressed social history, the ascent of the Beatles, and the England-U.S. interaction in the recording industry, it was excellent. Unfortunately, when breaking down individual songs, it got terribly long-winded and pedantic. It could easily have been compressed into a 300 page book. The stories on manager Brian Epstein and studio man George Martin are definitely worth checking, the material on Yoko Ono got tedious. Exactly a 3 rating.

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### **Amanda Hamilton says**

I have a weird feeling when I read books about the Beatles book that is chronological, I get more and more excited and then about the time they start talking about the White Album, I get sad. I get all swept up in the narrative of their career and then get sad when they break up. That may be why I've only see "Let it Be" once all the way through.

I think with the Beatles, reading books about them is the same reason my Dad reads books about WWII: he knows pretty much everything there is to know about WWII and could recite the chain of events from memory BUT there's always some new insight, a new angle on it that wasn't apparent before.

I've read Beatle books from a lot of different angles and this one took a bigger picture perspective on why the Beatles blew up the way they did. Its not full of a lot of biographical details, only really the ones that colored what kind of people they grew up to be. Though, it suffers from something I've seen in a LOT of Beatle books: around '68, '69, it starts running out of steam. I dunno. Can't be helped, I guess.

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### **Jeff says**

I really enjoyed this book. I've read quite a few Beatles books and I learned some new stuff from this one. Very thorough.

My only complaints, and they are very minor:

\* I love how "thorough" the book was/is, but sometimes it was just overkill, especially on the early albums. For example there was 45 - 60 mins (I listened to audible version) on the Beatles early haircut and mod outfit, yet the last 30 mins of the book basically covered finalizing Abbey Road, Let It Be and the breakup and post breakup activities. That felt very rushed but the early part of their career I often felt bored with how in depth it went.

\* The author was not as objective as I felt he should be with describing some of the albums. It felt his personal distaste for The White Album and Abbey Road and Let It Be really impacted his description of those tracks/albums rather than just focusing on the facts and reception. He would mention they sold over 4M copies sold in a few months but because the collaboration on the tracks by the band had pretty much stopped, he was very negative on most.

Overall, very good book and I would recommend it to any Beatles fan or anybody that would want to learn more about them. I would just suggest really power through the early years if you are getting bored because it does get very riveting after the release of Please Please Me.

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### **Judith Borgardt says**

Fabulous book!!!! It is several things at once: American & European history, music criticism of the highest order, sociology, industrial sociology, and A history of the socio-economic changes that broke open, then separated the 50s from the 60s generation.

One of the best aspects of this book is the author's deep examination of musical structure and how each of the Beatles contributed to making that genius work. Who played/wrote which lines or songs, what each person contributed in terms of Major vs minor keys, rhythm, beat and so on.

Magical book and eminently readable. It totally turned me around from seeing the Beatles As nothing more than a media phenomenon to recognizing the depth, breadth and creative genius of their work.

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### **Megan Sanks says**

I really enjoyed this book. Gould did a wonderful job of integrating biographical information about the Beatles and the people around them with an analysis of their music, all while providing historical context. No better way to understand the Beatles.

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### **Ursula says**

The point of the book isn't really to be about the various personalities of the Beatles themselves, but more about placing them and their music in the context of the times, showing how they were influenced and benefited by what was going on around them. And then later on, how that influence worked in both directions.

In addition to that, there's of course stuff about the time in Germany, the making of the albums, the interpersonal issues and the ultimate breakdown of the group. Some of the more interesting things to me were the sections that actually talked about the music - assessing the albums and individual songs thematically and musically. I had never realized that "Eleanor Rigby" has only two chords, or that some of the other songs had lyrics cribbed from other people's songs, or poems.

In spite of the fact that it wasn't about the individual Beatles, I will say that by the time I finished the book, I liked John Lennon a lot less than I had when I started it. I don't know that any of them particularly come out covered in glory, but his flaws certainly show large in the book.

Overall, I enjoyed most of it but occasionally the story got bogged down in seemingly tangential facts, especially in the early parts. But it made me want to listen to all of the songs again and hear the various things Gould talked about, and that's got to be a good thing.

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