

BIGGER THAN JESUS

IN 1964, FOUR YOUNG MEN WITH STRANGE HAIRCUTS ARRIVED IN AUSTRALIA. ANASTASIA SAFIOLEAS EXPLORES WHY – 52 YEARS LATER – WE’RE STILL TALKING ABOUT THE BEATLES.

THE RAIN FALLS sideways onto the crowd gathered on the tarmac at Sydney’s Mascot Airport. Girls shrink deeper into their coats in an attempt to buffer the wind. Young boys daringly dangle cigarettes from between wet fingers. A gaggle of policemen look like they’d rather be someplace else. Suddenly, screaming girls begin to push against the flimsy barrier. The policemen spring into action, but they end up doing a terrible job of containing the surge. A few kids break free and attempt a mad dash towards a plane, only to be dragged back into the crowd.

The soundless black-and-white clip from that day is grainy, but it’s not hard to make out the four figures. John, Paul, George and ring-in Jimmie Nicol (Ringo won’t rejoin the group until Melbourne), disembark from their jet and climb aboard an open-top truck that will take them past their fans, many of whom have camped overnight in the rain to catch a glimpse of them. They’re wearing their trademark black capes and clutching umbrellas. One of them (maybe Paul) loses his umbrella in the wind. They skylark about, barely hanging onto the truck’s railings as they laugh and wave at the crowd. John seems intent on keeping his floppy fringe in place with his free hand, but then gives up. Jimmie looks like he can hardly believe his luck. The crowd screams for more. The year is 1964. Beatlemania has arrived in Australia.

In America just a few months earlier, sporting matching black suits and pudding-bowl haircuts, The Beatles tapped their feet and wiggled their heads through a performance of ‘I Want to Hold Your Hand’ on *The Ed Sullivan Show*. The

THE BEATLES ARRIVE BACK
IN LONDON AFTER THEIR
TRIUMPHANT AUSTRALIAN TOUR.
PHOTOGRAPH GETTY IMAGES

audience went nuts. It was watched by a staggering 73 million people looking for a distraction from the gloom that descended following the assassination of JFK only months earlier.

Meanwhile, in Australia, Robert Menzies is prime minister and no-one yet senses the danger of the Vietnam War. A loaf of bread costs 18 pence. Further afield, the Tokyo Olympics are about to begin, Muhammad Ali is crowned world heavyweight champion and *From Russia with Love* screens to packed cinemas. The Cold War is well and truly underway, and Australia feels like a conservative colonial outpost. But on a cold and rainy day at Sydney’s airport, the arrival of four young men from Liverpool ushers in a mood that will soon change this.

The Beatles: Eight Days a Week, a new documentary by Ron Howard (*The Da Vinci Code*; *A Beautiful Mind*), uses Super 8 footage and newly digitised sound to provide an immersive look at the band’s touring years, from 1962 to 1966. It was a period that encompassed 166 shows in 90 cities and 15 countries. The Fab Four had been booked to perform in Australia well before their explosive *Ed Sullivan Show* appearance. But they honoured their contract (despite the ridiculously low sum of money they were to be paid) and flew in to play shows in Sydney, Adelaide, Melbourne and Brisbane.

Nearly 300,000 fans line the streets of Adelaide to greet them. The hysterical scenes are now becoming commonplace, this time as they drive to the town hall in individual open-top convertibles. And it happens again in Melbourne a few days later. Their appearance on the Southern Cross Hotel balcony generates such levels of hysteria, footage shows St John Ambulance volunteers rescuing a quick succession of fainting girls from the crowd, carting them away on stretchers.

In a documentary screened on the 30th anniversary of their visit, former *Oz* magazine editor Richard Neville refers to this time as being about a generation yearning to be united against old age. That Beatlemania was “a kind of attack on the gerontocracy ruling Australia”. Menzies, serving for a second time and into his 15th year as prime minister, had just refused to ratify the International



1. COURTING FAME IN THE EARLY DAYS; 2. RINGO CRADLES A KOALA AND RISKS HIS HEALTH; 3. CAPED CRUSADERS DISEMBARK; 4. SPOT THE RINGO RING-IN, JIMMIE NICOL; 5. GEORGE HARRISON, IN ADELAIDE IN THE DAYS BEFORE SEAT-BELT LAWS; 6. BEATLES HYSTERIA GRIPPED THE WORLD.



PHOTOGRAPHS GETTY IMAGES EXCEPT 1: PHOTOGRAPH BY TERRY O'NEILL (ACE EDITIONS)

Labour Organisation’s convention on equal pay for women. Meanwhile, the newly introduced contraceptive pill had only limited availability. Robert Happell, a fan who attended one of the Festival Hall shows in Melbourne, recalls that at the time it was mostly religious programs on the radio.

But there was a sense of possibility in the air, and a devil-may-care attitude that had become contagious. Kids skipped school in the hopes of spotting The Beatles in town. Fans camped overnight to secure tickets to the shows. The Beatles had tapped into something that was only just beginning to take shape, and the anticipation of something big about to happen was tangible. It’s a feeling 60s pop idol Ronnie Burns can clearly recall.

“We were kids at the time – perhaps 16 or 17 years old – and The Beatles were hugely influential on the music I was making at the time. When they arrived in Melbourne they were taken straight to the Southern Cross. So Molly (Meldrum) and I went. So there we were, in a sea of human bodies when Molly all of a sudden disappears. People are getting crushed, and the footage from that day shows him down the front helping the police with crowd control. But the crowd surges forward and pushes him under the balcony where The Beatles were, and through the window of the florist shop. He’s lucky he wasn’t seriously hurt.”

In his biography *The Never, Um, Ever Ending Story* Molly recalls the mood following that day at the Southern Cross Hotel. “I later saw the Channel 9 news, with reporter Michael Charlton saying, ‘Mothers, if your child is out there, you should be ashamed. You should take a very good lesson from this. The stupidity of letting their children come to something like this.’” Such was the moral outrage.

The shows themselves were more scenes of mass hysteria. Christine Joske, 14 at the time, went to the show with her best friend, Rosemary. “Her mum drove us, and we were seated right up the back in the uncomfortable stalls. We didn’t hear any of the music because the screaming was too loud. The girl seated behind me was so overexcited, she threw up all over Rosemary and myself. Somehow it was still a great experience!”

Jill Stansfield, also 14 at the time, remembers being “gobsmacked” by all the screaming. “I hadn’t seen people scream at a concert before. It was a shock.” Sue Macgregor got a ticket to the show for her eighth birthday. “We were all sitting in the front row of the balcony. The screaming was hysterical but because we were upstairs we had the most amazing view of the band and the crowd.”

As for Ronnie, he had the great misfortune of being booted out of the concert along with Molly. “The excitement level [in Festival Hall] was hyper – it was amazing. The sound was deafening. As The Beatles walk out all the girls start screaming really loudly,

“ST JOHN AMBULANCE VOLUNTEERS RESCUE A QUICK SUCCESSION OF FAINTING GIRLS FROM THE CROWD, CARTING THEM AWAY ON STRETCHERS.”

including Molly. All of a sudden a St John Ambulance person makes his way to our row of seats and he takes Molly’s arm and says, ‘I think you better come outside with me’. The ambulance guy was extremely concerned. I stood up and grabbed Molly and clenched my fist at the ambulance guy. Well, two ushers saw my fist, came over, grabbed Molly and I, and threw us out! Molly turns around and tries to get back in so they lock the doors on us. When the doors slammed shut I could hear them start playing ‘Long Tall Sally’. Molly starts crying emotionally and hitting the doors and scratching the doors – I think his nail marks are still in the door.”

Beth Murray, 16 at the time, went to one of the Sydney shows with her sister. “We were coming out of rock’n’roll, and [The Beatles] was something new and really exciting. Something we could call our own.”

Bob Rogers, a popular Sydney DJ who hosted a music program on 2SM, accompanied the band throughout part of Europe and Australia and witnessed the mayhem firsthand. “I would talk to them every two or three days. It was always either Paul or John, they were the ones that were most obliging. I spent the best part of four weeks with them but it

felt like six months. I flew to Amsterdam with them and watched people jumping into canals. Flying into Australia we stopped in Calcutta, India, to refuel. Paul and I thought we’d go for a walk around the terminal but suddenly 300 people appeared from nowhere. In Melbourne, girls would knock on their hotel-room doors. They were so overexposed I said no-one would remember them in 12 months. And now we’re still talking about them 52 years later.”

In the aftermath of The Beatles’ visit, the slicked back rocker style favoured by boys was replaced by the unruly floppy fringe. And the showy outfits and colourful suits worn by most Australian

bands were replaced by the cooler, black beatnik-style favoured by their brand new idols. The music also changed. Suddenly everyone in the band could sing a song.

Australia, too, was slowly turning into a remarkably different place. The decade would go on to be characterised by escalating anti-war protests coupled with women demanding equal rights. A 1967 referendum saw Australians vote overwhelmingly for the recognition of Indigenous people as citizens. And bands like The Rolling Stones, who would go on to release a run of successful albums that triggered a rivalry with The Beatles that would last decades, further cemented the arrival of “youth music”. Menzies finally resigned in 1966, and the hippie movement was taking shape.

Footage from that rainy day at Mascot may render the past in hard-to-see, grainy black-and-white, but the sense of endless possibilities in the eyes of those kids who had gathered to catch a glimpse of their idols is clear for all to see. The future beckoned. One brilliant song at a time.

» *Anastasia Saffioleas (@Anast) is a former deputy editor of The Big Issue and has been a diehard Beatles fan for a long time. The Beatles: Eight Days a Week will be in cinemas from 16 September.*



INCREASE YOUR PROFILE IN THREE MINUTES!

Join the Australian Institute of Management on 29th August who will be hosting National Networking Day 2016!

Come along and meet like-minded professionals from a range of industries. This speed-networking event will create business opportunities and build your professional profile.

What's more, you will also be part of two Guinness World Records™ title attempts:

MOST PEOPLE ATTENDING A BUSINESS SPEED-NETWORKING EVENT (SINGLE VENUE):

The current record is 1,068 participants

MOST PEOPLE ATTENDING A BUSINESS SPEED-NETWORKING EVENT (MULTIPLE VENUES):

The current record is 5 venues and the total of attendees must exceed current single-venue record 1,068 participants.

Proudly supported by



8

LOCATIONS NATIONWIDE!

BOOK TICKETS TODAY!

Secure your spot.

Visit aim.com.au/nnd2016

Contact AIM Membership & Events on **1300 661 061**



Australian Institute of Management
LEADERSHIP MATTERS

LONG AND WINDING ROAD

ALAN ATTWOOD'S MUSICAL RELATIONSHIP WITH THE BEATLES HAS BEEN A SWEET AND SUSTAINED ONE, FROM 'SHE LOVES YOU' TO 'THE END' AND BEYOND.

LONDON, 1980. I'M with a trio of friends – one old, two new – walking near the Thames, singing. We're trying to see how much of the medley on the second side of The Beatles' *Abbey Road* we know by heart. The answer is: most of it. Our harmonies aren't a patch on the originals, but it's impressive how deeply this record, already 11 years old, has become engrained in all of us. None of us are surprised.

I've tried to explain this to my own grown-up kids: before computers and smartphones and Netflix and infinite entertainment, one of the things we used to do was sit and listen to records. Just sit. And listen. All we had to look at was a black disc going round and round and the albums' cardboard covers, some of which were more imaginative and informative than others. The front cover of *Abbey Road*, with no words, became part of the loopy "Paul is dead" conspiracy theory: he's barefoot, which (someone said) was how men were buried...somewhere.

I was 12 when it came out, in September 1969. All the Beatles were still in their mid-to-late 20s. At the time, that made them seem impossibly mature and sophisticated. Now, I just think: how young. But in 69 I was on The Beatles' bandwagon; had been since 'She Loves You' (1963), which we mimed at state school wearing plastic Beatles wigs.

I grew up with The Beatles. Didn't discover them later, as happened with early Elvis and early Sinatra. I had an older brother who actually bought the records, including four-track EPs featuring 'Help!' and 'Penny Lane' and

'Norwegian Wood' and then, in 1967, the *Sgt Peppers...* LP, with its gatefold cover. Our musical paths would diverge – he moved on to ponderous stuff by Emerson, Lake & Palmer, Yes and Genesis and, somewhere along the line, either in a moment of weakness or to renounce his pop past, my brother gave me his Beatles discs, which I still have in all their scuffed glory.

They came with me when I moved homes and states in the 70s, the decade that began with The Beatles' break-up, but stayed silent as I flirted with Slade, then Jethro Tull and The Moody Blues. At uni, when college corridors echoed with 10CC, Supertramp and Leonard Cohen, I got to know a guy who still played The Beatles. This struck me as quaint until I sat down with him and listened again and heard things I'd never noticed before. There were constant surprises – lyrically and instrumentally. My own old records came out again and I fixed the holes in the collection until I had them all. On vinyl.

Now – even when I also have half of them on CD or as downloads – I think of sides rather than songs if you push me for favourites. The first side of *Help* and *Revolver*, second of *Sgt Peppers*, third side of the *White Album* – which spans the aural rainbow from 'Birthday' to 'Helter Skelter' and the downy-soft 'Long, Long, Long'. The Beatles, and their influential producer George Martin, who died this year, spent a lot of time working on track sequences. Side one of *Abbey Road*, for example, ends with John's long and bluesy 'I Want You (She's So Heavy)'.

Then, after a pause to flip it over, side two kicks off with George's 'Here Comes the Sun' – and that's just how it feels. Light after darkness.

I keep going back to the last six minutes of that side, the conclusion to the final record they made together. There are better songs – I have a soft spot for 'And Your Bird Can Sing' on *Revolver*, and *Peppers'* climactic 'A Day in the Life' can still stop me cold – but when 'Golden Slumbers' moves into 'Carry That Weight', then reprises a bit of 'You Never Give Me Your Money' before 'Carry That Weight' kicks in again after some orchestral flourishes, well, it's like everything coming together just as John sang on side one.

Then comes 'The End' (which isn't the end at all, as Paul's 'Your Majesty' sneaks in after 20 seconds of silence), with Ringo's only extended drum solo and the other three taking turns on lead guitar. They're all in it together, everyone working together "frightfully well", Martin would say later. They knew it was almost over. To George, "it kind of felt like we were reaching the end of the line". Paul recalled a sense of "let's show 'em what we can do". And they did.

I hope we did it justice in London in 1980. Because, six months later in Venice, in a train carriage, an Italian girl in tears sought confirmation from me of some dreadful news, asking: "John Lennon *morte*?" I nodded. We sat in silence. It really did seem like the end.

» Alan Attwood is a former editor of *The Big Issue*.