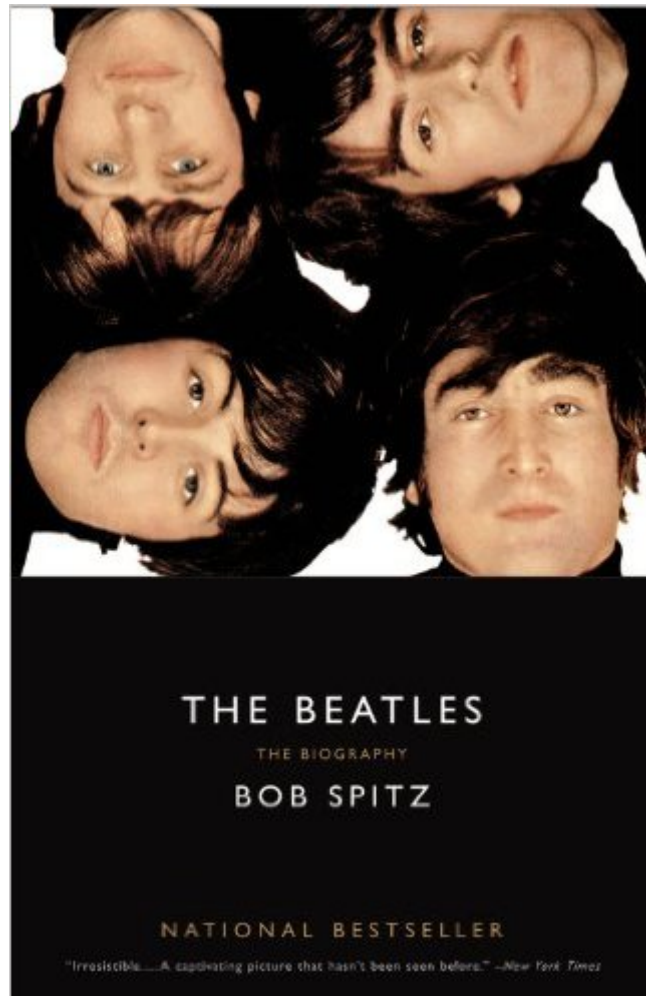


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The Beatles: The Biography



Synopsis

As soon as The Beatles became famous, the spin machine began to construct a myth--one that has continued to this day. But the truth is much more interesting, much more exciting, and much more moving. In this bestselling book, Bob Spitz has written the biography for which Beatles fans have long waited. 32 pages of b/w photos.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Is the world ready for a thousand-page critical history of the boys from Liverpool? The answer is a resounding yes, because Bob Spitz addressed this project with the thoroughness of a presidential biography. Moreover, he is a magnificent story teller, and even at its length this work is a page turner. The young reader will find this a remarkable tale of a defining moment in the entertainment industry, while old "Uncle Alberts" like myself will remember the days when we all hacked around on guitars to get that opening chord to "Hard Day's Night," George Harrison's G7 with an added ninth and a suspended fourth, as the author explains. [502] So what can the reader expect to learn from this compelling tale of the foursome?The British Setting. All four Beatles grew up in a country recovering from war, in an industrial port town [Liverpool], where the natives called themselves "Scousers" and nurtured a long-standing inferiority complex regarding London and England's upper class. The government owned radio station, the BBC, effectively embargoed the emerging US rock music as substandard. Teenagers like John Lennon devoured American artists like Elvis and the Everly Brothers from a rogue radio station in Luxembourg, of all places, while reveling in England's youth pop of the time, Skiffle.The Lennon-McCartney Brotherhood. Spitz is masterful in describing

the twelve year relationship of the two, who met at roughly the age of 17. They became like brothers, though in the mold of Esau and Jacob, perhaps. Much has been written of their composing mastery, but Spitz documents just how prolific and spontaneous they actually were. What is equally surprising is how they composed during periods of terrible strains in their relationships. When John and Paul could no longer be reconciled, the Beatles dissolved.

Brian Epstein. He is, as the story unfolds, the best thing and the worst thing to happen to the Beatles. He was the young manager of the record department in his family's department store, who for a multitude of reasons made the Beatles his project. His moxie, coupled with the Beatles' stage charisma and not a little luck, landed the group's contract with Britain's recording giant EMI [and its American subsidiary, Capital]. Again, for complex reasons, Epstein was able to control the group's inner dynamics after it became internationally famous. But he was a dreadful business manager--the EMI contract, for starters, paid pennies for most of the Beatles' greatest hits and copyrighted lyrics, and as an afterthought he sold marketing rights to Beatles' products to an unknown entrepreneur for a 10% return. [465ff]

Distracted by a dark and violent homosexual lifestyle, he probably cost the group close to a billion dollars in lost revenue.

Ringo Starr. Aren't drummers a dime a dozen? Not superstar drummers, apparently. As the Beatles stood on the threshold of their breakout in 1962, McCartney and Lennon determined that the absence of a first rate drummer was the missing piece. Although it meant parting with the handsomely popular but average stroker Pete Best and a lot of fan fallout, the Beatles raided Rory Storm's band for Richie "Rings" Starkey, and the rest, as they say...The Turbulent American Tours. Those of us who remember the two Beatles' tours of the US-including that Sunday night TV extravaganza with Ed Sullivan-will probably be shocked to discover the Beatles' own bitter reactions to their treatment by American audiences. Mick Jagger attended the Shea Stadium concert in the stands and became "visibly shaken," telling a friend "it's frightening." [577]

Aside from stage crashing and riots in the audiences, American fans mistook "jelly babies," the little gummy candies reportedly enjoyed by the Beatles, for "jelly beans" and pelted the group mercilessly with these painful missiles. John Lennon in particular became convinced that the noisy crowds had no interest in their musical art [impossible to hear in the melees] and after their second tour of the US the group decided to become a recording studio group only.

Reinvention. Spitz carefully examines the evolution of Beatles' style and substance. The milestone markers of the evolution were the albums. Beatle fans to this day can probably identify each Beatle album as a particular statement of where they were--artistically, emotionally, philosophically--at the time of release. And within the group itself, George Harrison came on strong at the end to establish himself as a lyricist, soloist, and musician. Harrison brought Eastern sound to the medley and later

penetrated the mysteries of the new "synthesizer," making the Beatles the first to use new age gadgetry in the recording process. John Lennon's Drug Addiction. Spitz does not back away from the truth that the Beatles were no strangers to mind altering substances, and all indulged prodigiously in alcohol, amphetamines, and marijuana [not to mention tobacco and, apparently, coffee]. But Lennon became a regular LSD user, and believing it expanded creative powers, he was enraged with McCartney's caution about the drug. Lennon later declined into serious heroin use, which led to paranoia. He came to believe, for example, that "Hey Jude" was McCartney's permission for Lennon to court the questionable Yoko Ono. Yoko Ono. In a departure from his uniform decorum, Spitz refers to Ono as "loopy," and this may be an understatement. What else can be said about a woman who marketed the sound of her miscarried child's heartbeat on an album? [834] Of course, by the time she "stole" the deeply disturbed Lennon from the Beatles, it was petit larceny at worst. George Martin. A middle-aged man with classical tastes, he was assigned the task of producing everything we know, love, and remember of the original Beatles' sound. Underpaid, infinitely patient [particularly in the Yoko Ono days], and remarkably open-minded in his shirt and tie, he gave the imprimatur to every sound of every track. Of everyone in this book, Martin is the man of shining character. God bless him. You will never hear the Beatles again in quite the same way.

The uproar among Beatles fans about this book surprises me, but it probably shouldn't. It reminds me of Ayatollah Khomeini's reaction to the Satanic Verses: anything short of hagiography is seen as vicious, and anything short of factual perfection is seen as unforgivable sloppiness. It is true that the photo captions are inaccurate to the point of perversity (the editor of these sections had clearly never even read Spitz's text, where the same mistakes are not repeated). The book also bears the scars of ruthless editing to get it down from a reputed 2700pp to a mere 850. As a result of this, sometimes things that seem to be foreshadowed (for instance, the Beatles first encounter with the Animals) never actually appear. Despite an earlier comment, I would say that Spitz spends the most time on the Fabs early career, and tries to spend as little time as possible on the painful details of their last two or three years together. Despite another earlier comment that the book is a love-letter to Paul and a character assassination of John, I must respectfully disagree. Neither man emerges from Spitz's book as an especially nice person, but I found the portrait of John elicited more sympathy. Maybe it was just easier to relate to John's way of dealing with his problems, than it was McCartney's relentless perfectionism and bossiness. Ringo comes off very well, and George gets high marks for his spiritual development. What really brings the book through is the storytelling. This book is about the men, not the music, insofar as it is possible to separate them. It may not be THE

book on the fabs for all time, but it is a pretty good one for right now.

The wonderful Arab expression, the dogs bark but the caravan moves on, certainly applies to the many derisive and dismissive negative reviews of Bob Spitz' excellent new biography of the Beatles. None of the carping on the site will seriously impact on the sales of this book, given the consistent positive reviews by professional critics in the national press. Anyone who bothers to actually pick this book up in a store and leaf through its text will see pretty quickly how shallow the criticism and complaints by previous posters are. The jibes and nitpicking centering on photo captions in a book with 850 pages of text and over 100 pages of notes and sources should give some sense of the agenda being pursued by these fans and lay-historians of the modern rock era. Don't be put off by these amateurish complaints. 'The Beatles. the Biography' is an outstanding piece of work, scrupulously sourced, that took over seven years to produce. There is nothing in its text that feels rushed at all. It is the most complete story of this band to date, period. It is not intended as a dissection/examination of their songs -- that's material that has been covered well by numerous other authors. This book is, as stated on the dust jacket, the biography of the group. There is material contained here that has never been explored in this detail, some from sources that have never before been available. This is one of a small handful of works on the Beatles that will stand the test of time. If you're looking for glossy fan semi-fiction, repetition of tall tales and legends and an attitude of worship, this is certainly not the book for you. But if you are interested in a serious biography that treats all its subjects as human beings with both talents and flaws, you'll find a compelling story here. Spitz has compiled so much information and writes so well that you don't have to be a fan to enjoy this. Anyone who wants to understand one major piece of what the 1960s were all about will find this biography required reading. In 1971 John Lennon told Jann Wenner, "We were just a band that made it very, very big, that's all." That's only part of the story. To learn the rest, read 'The Beatles, The Biography.'

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