

young people live their lives on- and offline simultaneously, it is the ephemeral, marginal genres omitted here that have continued to breed innovation and novelty. Despite these issues, however, *Popular Music and Retro Culture in the Digital Era* remains a useful and interesting book that successfully combines the multiple strands of the retromania debate into a single cohesive academic work.

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The Beatles.

By Ian Inglis. Sheffield: Equinox Publishing, 2017. 192 pp. ISBN 978-1-84553-865-1 doi:10.1017/S0261143017000733

When attempting to explain the band's titanic legacy, Ian Inglis reminds us that 'The Beatles presented a radical alternative to the perennial dominance of the solo singer' (p. 170). The latest in the *Icons of Pop Music* series, Inglis's *The Beatles* demonstrates how essential and, even decades later, radical that group identity still remains. Out of the 10 published and forthcoming volumes in the series, *The Beatles* is only the second (following Richard Witts's examination of The Velvet Underground) to focus on a group, rather than an individual artist. Previous volumes on Buddy Holly and Brian Wilson duly noted the contributions of each artist's respective group while primarily focusing on the individual, but Inglis's work emphasises how essential each of the fab foursome was to the band's music, image and legacy. As Joshua Wolf Shenk (2014) discusses in *Powers of Two: Finding the Essence of Innovation in Creative Pairs*, the image of the lone genius continues to dominate popular and scholarly perception of creativity and invention. Yet the Beatles' stature, with their collectively inspired output driven, largely, by the combined genius of the John Lennon/Paul McCartney songwriting partnership, continues to confound this belief.

Acknowledging the importance and essential contributions of all four Beatles established itself only recently as a fundamental element of Beatles scholarship. Following Lennon's narrative-defining breakup-era interview, *Lennon Remembers*, the press and many Beatles authors took sides, favoring one Beatle over another. In the 1980s many popular works, such as Philip Norman's heavily influential, but deeply flawed *Shout! The True Story of the Beatles* (1981), virtually ignored Ringo Starr and sidelined George Harrison. The wave of adulation that followed Lennon's 1980 murder saw group and individual biographies, including *Shout!* and Ray Coleman's *Lennon: The Definitive Life*, that tended to demean McCartney's character and inaccurately marginalised his contributions both to the Lennon/McCartney partnership and to the Beatles' catalogue. Faced with attempting to explain the source of the band's musical genius, authors from Norman to Coleman to Ian MacDonald, in the latter's 1994 musicological study *Revolution in the Head*, attempted to force a square peg into a round hole – rejecting the collective origin of the Beatles music and story by elevating their favourite Beatle while simultaneously diminishing the others. Where Norman and Coleman belittled McCartney and disregarded Harrison and Starr, MacDonald displayed a noted preference for McCartney, disputed Lennon's version of events and found little value in most of Harrison's work. These authorial preferences ensured that, despite the hundreds of books written on the band, more than 50 years later, the amount of balanced, objective evaluations of their music and story remains limited.

In addition to the pitfalls associated with such partisanship, Inglis suggests that the scarcity of objective analysis within Beatles historiography means that 'many writers . . . adopt an elegiac tone that veers between the sensational and the reverential' (p. 1). As part of a series intended for the general reader, the author labours to introduce newcomers to the Beatles story and analyse the band's music while avoiding undue reverence or explicitly taking sides. In *The Beatles* Inglis attempts to thread the needle between the most common approaches in Beatles historiography: the journalistic biography, as exemplified by Coleman and Norman, and the compendium study, exemplified by reference works such as Mark Lewisohn's *The Complete Beatles Recording Sessions*. In focusing primarily on a chronological analysis of the music and incorporating only necessary contextual biographical information, Inglis's *The Beatles* inevitably draws comparisons with *Revolution in the Head*. However, in contrast to MacDonald's work, Inglis's analysis contains less editorialising and speculation, and displays greater appreciation for Harrison's musical contributions.

This deliberate pursuit of objectivity is one of the work's strengths. Inglis's examination of both the biographical information and musical analysis is, largely, informed and balanced. However, there are omissions: he identifies 'In My Life' as solely a Lennon composition (p. 72), failing to note both Lennon's acknowledgement, in his 1980 *Playboy* interview (Sheff, 1981), of McCartney's partial melodic contribution and/or the still disputed primary authorship of the song's melody (MacDonald 1994, p. 137). A more significant error occurs when, in his laudable efforts to stress each Beatle's irreplaceable status, Inglis declares that the Beatles themselves never seriously discussed replacing a member: this statement ignores Lennon's recorded *Let it Be* era suggestions, in which, during Harrison's famous walk-out, he proposed substituting Eric Clapton for Harrison (Sulpy and Schweghardt 1994, p. 170). Inglis further stresses the irreplaceable nature of each Beatle by incorporating Emile Durkheim's sociological classifications as applied to the Beatles, offering compelling

insight into their social structure. Using Durkheim's standards, Inglis identifies the Beatles as an 'organic solidarity', in which each member occupies and fulfills 'distinct roles and function', as opposed to a 'mechanical solidarity', composed of easily replaceable members serving the same function (Inglis, p. 171). Lennon's 'Clapton' comment aside, Inglis's underlying argument, that, 'unlike almost all of their musical peers', including their friends and rivals The Rolling Stones, both fans and the Beatles themselves regarded 'the replacement of any single Beatle' as 'literally impossible' is well supported (p. 171).

Refreshingly, Inglis largely refuses to contribute to Beatles historiography's pervasive and toxic pattern of pitting Lennon and McCartney against one another and undervaluing the pivotal Lennon/McCartney songwriting partnership. In contrast, he argues that, while direct songwriting between the two declined over time, most notably following the end of touring, the tendency by certain fans and authors to label their post-1966 works as 'individual creations ... is not strictly true' (p. 140). Instead, he maintains Lennon and McCartney both sparked off one another creatively and 'continued to rely on each other for suggestions, advice, and contributions. Thus, while the weight of responsibility shifted from song to song, they effectively continued this working relationship throughout the 1960s' (p. 140). This assessment concurs with similar interpretations in Mark Hertsgaard's *A Day in the Life* (1995) and Jonathan Gould's *Can't Buy Me Love* (2007) and, seemingly, the emerging orthodoxy under construction by seminal Beatles historian Mark Lewisohn (2013). Lennon himself was a mercurial source, occasionally prone to searing self-contradiction. Yet his encapsulation of the innate artistry of the Lennon/McCartney partnership: 'I wouldn't write like I write now if it weren't for Paul, and he wouldn't write the way he does now if it weren't for me', in *Melody Maker* in March 1969 remains one of the best summations of its intrinsically collaborative nature. With *The Beatles*, Inglis provides general readers with an introduction to the band by filling a much-needed gap; emphasising the radicalism inherent in a collaborative, collective group.

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