

You Love Them, Yeah, Yeah, Yeah!

The “world sort of stopped and everybody listened” 50 years ago, when the Beatles were introduced to America.

By Robin L. Flanigan

IN THE SPRING OF 1964, WALKING ACROSS THE EASTMAN QUADRANGLE, EDWIN (Ned) Ferguson '66 heard someone shout from a first-floor dorm room: “They’re on!” He rushed to the room, which was covered with Beatles photos and posters, and gathered with eight or nine others around an AM radio to jam to “She Loves You.”

Ferguson, now a physician living in Madison, Wis., has remained a devoted fan all these years. He sings to his digitally remastered Beatles CD box set every night before bed, and hires a band several times a year so he can play along to Beatles songs.

“No group will ever be remembered with such love 50 years later,” he says.

The legendary British foursome will be remembered with great pomp and circumstance in February—the golden anniversary of the month the group debuted on *The Ed Sullivan Show*, gave birth to the British Invasion, and ushered in the frenzy known as Beatlemania.

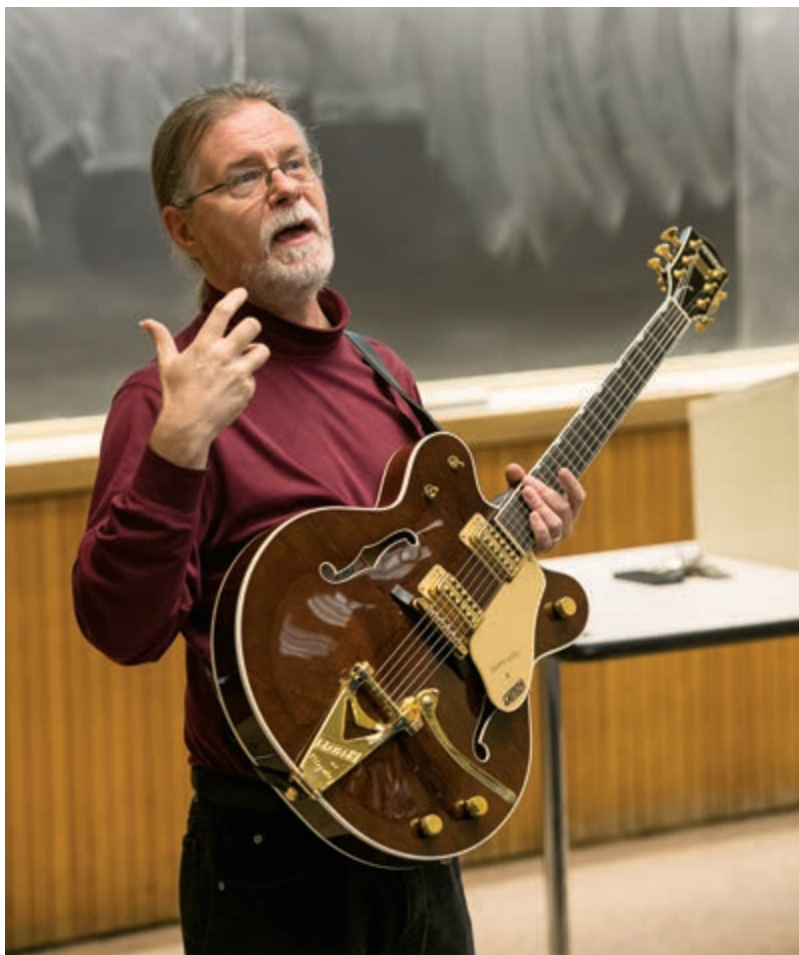
A LOVE LIKE THAT: Arriving in America 50 years ago this winter, the Beatles set off a wave of musical and pop cultural excitement.

The University’s Institute for Popular Music, dedicated to promoting the scholarly study of music produced primarily for commercial consumption, will celebrate the occasion with music by faculty and student performers at 8 p.m. February 9, exactly 50 years, to the hour, since an estimated 73 million viewers tuned in to see and hear the Beatles. Lectures by experts on Beatles music and equipment will be coordinated with the event.

The first of its kind in the United States and only the second major academic center for the study of popular music in the world (the other is at England’s University of Liverpool), the institute received attention from around the globe when it opened in 2012. With an advisory board of leading scholars







HE'S GOT A FEELING: Covach, director of the Institute for Popular Music, says people sometimes underestimate the influence of popular music in helping shape cultural history.

from the United States and the United Kingdom, it supports research in musicology, music theory, ethnomusicology, and performance, as well as five existing majors and programs, including courses on the Music of Black Americans and Progressive Rock in the 1970s. Future plans include the creation of predoctoral and postdoctoral fellowships.

Beatlemania!

The Institute for Popular Music (www.rochester.edu/popmusic/) has organized several events marking the 50th anniversary of the Beatles' first American tour.

Feb. 5: Noted instrument expert Andy Babiuk will discuss the Beatles' musical gear.

Feb. 9: Walter Everett, professor at the University of Michigan and author of two books on the Beatles, will talk about the band's legacy, a presentation followed by a concert featuring University faculty, staff, and students backed by the Rochester band, the Smooth Talkers.

Feb. 9: John Covach's Coursera course, The Music of the Beatles (www.coursera.org/course/beatles) begins. During the spring semester, Covach also will teach an on-campus course on the Beatles.

Founding director John Covach says that after years of visualizing such a distinguished repository of musical knowledge at the University, the time for such an institute has arrived.

"The field of musical scholarship tends to be a very conservative field, not politically, because many musicians are liberals, but in the sense that oftentimes you have people who know more about papal tax records in the 16th century than they know about *American Idol*," says Covach, who has dual appointments in the College's Department of Music, where he's the Mercer Brugler Distinguished Teaching Professor, and at the Eastman School, where he's a professor of music theory.

"Years ago, there was nothing about popular music that seemed to scratch the itches that made them study classical music. But today, people my age who are chairs of departments and tenured professors all grew up listening to the Beatles, and they don't have a sense that popular music is second rate. There is no bias or cultural divide."

Covach, both musical scholar and performer, was five years old when he begged his father to go to the store to buy the first Beatles album. It was sold out, but his father brought home the Beatles' second album instead, which had been released that day. He listened to it relentlessly on a record player with a nickel taped to the tone arm, singing along while jumping on his bed with neighborhood friends.

When his grandmother took him to see *A Hard Day's Night*, the 1964 British comedy starring the Beatles, she had to hold him up throughout the film so he could see over the heads of the standing, screaming, mostly female audience. (She took him to see the film again a few weeks later, after the excitement died down.)

There's little question that the Beatles defined a pivotal moment in musical history, for the group and for a generation—and beyond.

"The Beatles are absolutely one of my favorite groups, and I suspect that I own more of their music than the average fan," says Cassia Kuhn '15, a film and media studies major who has collected "every studio album from the band and each member's solo career, a few compilation albums, live performances, and plenty of bootlegs. I find it fascinating that they were at, or at least close to, the start of so many trends found in rock and other genres."

Jacob Arthur '14, a music major, owns every Beatles album. He appreciates that the band pushed the envelope so far that "it has become difficult for artists to find barriers to break down that the group didn't already tend to."

Richard Sorrell '66, who has taught history at a New Jersey community college since 1971, offers a popular course on the social history of rock and roll, devoting multiple weeks to the Beatles. He attributes the band's success in this country to three factors: the enormous hype preceding their *Ed Sullivan Show* appearance, the emotional catharsis that needed to happen following the assassination of President John F. Kennedy, and the sheer number of youthful baby boomers yearning to express themselves musically.

The professor thinks people often underestimate how influential music can be. He says he's instantly transported to another era when a Beatles song comes on the radio: "If I hear 'I Wanna Hold Your Hand,' I think of them on the Sullivan show. Any song from *Sgt. Pepper*, I think of when I started graduate school in Buffalo. The first time I ever heard 'Get Back,' I was driving to school for a substitute teaching assignment. I can instantly see those images.

"They are by far the most musically talented pop group of all time."



HERE & THERE: David '68 and Amy Zimmerman Freese '71 still sing the occasional Beatles song ("Here, There, and Everywhere" is Amy's favorite) five decades after Amy saw the band as a high schooler on the *Ed Sullivan Show* (below).

IN PERSON

'Meet' the Beatles

"There are lots of neat things about my life, but when I tell people about this, their mouths drop," says an alumna about her chance to be part of a historic musical moment.

By Amy Zimmerman Freese '71

My girlfriend's dad was president of an advertising agency, and some of his clients advertised on the *Ed Sullivan Show*. He got tickets for us and our boyfriends. We were beyond excited.

We all got dressed up, and at 14 years old, without a chaperone, we took the train from Westport, Conn., to New York City, got off at Grand Central Station, and got ourselves to the theater. We felt very grown up.

I didn't know who went to the *Ed Sullivan Show* on a regular basis, but that night, it was all kids. I remember standing in line outside. We weren't sure we knew what to expect, but we knew it was important.

We had really good seats; in the 10th row left of center.

The set was blue and gray. Ed Sullivan came out before the show and said, "If you kids can't behave, I'm not going to bring the band out." I can still hear his voice in my head. He said this was the Beatles' first appearance in the United States, and then the curtain opened, and there they were.

It was like the sun was shining behind them. Everyone was standing up and screaming and crying. It was pandemonium. We wanted to hear the

music but you couldn't hear a drumbeat, a guitar, or anything. We just saw them playing and swinging their hair. They were certainly groomed. Oh, my God, they were so cute. Especially Paul.

It's funny, I specifically remember that we did not scream, but my friend remembers that we got caught up in the moment.



We did feel like we were at the beginning of something special, that something cataclysmic was coming, though we couldn't define it at the time. I don't remember the trip home. I don't even remember leaving the theater.

It was one of those defining moments of my life. There are lots of neat things about my life, but when I tell people

about this, their mouths drop. It's like being there when man discovered fire.

It's not just that I grew up when the Beatles were popular or that I have every one of their albums (and an extra copy of the *White Album*, which has never been opened).

It's that after that show, things were different. I was there when an era started.

—As told to Robin L. Flanigan

Amy Zimmerman '71 met **David Freese '68** on campus when she was auditioning for the a cappella group, the Tritones. David, a member of the YellowJackets, accompanied her on guitar for her first solo: Peter, Paul, and Mary's "Leaving on a Jet Plane."

They dated and, of course, sang Beatles songs together. They got married in 1970.

Today, Amy is a director of technology for a law firm and David is a professional photographer and photography professor in Philadelphia, where they live.



DIG IT: “They are by far the most musically talented pop group of all time,” says Richard Sorrell (above) who, along with Class of 1966 classmates like Ned Ferguson (left), first heard the Beatles while at Rochester. “No group will ever be remembered with such love 50 years later,” says Ferguson.

History of Rock course has exceeded 100,000 students since last May, when it launched, with nearly 3 million video views worldwide. Meanwhile, nearly 17,000 people have signed up so far for *The Music of the Beatles*, which will go live, fittingly, at 8 p.m. February 9 and track the musical development of the band through its relatively short but distinguished six-year run. The group “was an interesting blend of a number of qualities that we tend to appreciate in popular music, all in one very tidy little act,” Covach says. The music was always authentic, mostly happy, and often avant-garde, and each member had a distinct personality.

Not everyone finds the group unceasingly endearing, however.

“Toward the end I’d moved on to other music,” recalls Chuck Brush ’66, a retired research and development director who lives in Arizona and once saw the band perform at a Cincinnati baseball stadium. For a music appreciation class during his senior year at the University, he wrote a paper on ways the Beatles used harmony and counterpoint. He got a bad grade. “It probably wasn’t that good to begin with, but the professor was an old-school type who probably wanted a biography of Beethoven.”

Covach, who received special dispensation to stay up past his bedtime to watch some of that famed *Ed Sullivan Show* performance, maintains that people can’t fully understand American culture without becoming familiar with the venerable group’s music.

And that goes for scholars who never were fans of the Beatles.

“You cannot talk about the history of the presidency in the 20th century and, if you’re a Democrat, only study presidents who were Democrats because you think the Republicans were misguided,” he says. “An album like *Sgt. Pepper* is important because it was important to so many people who were involved in the events of the 60s.

“The world sort of stopped,” he says, “and everybody listened.” 

Sorrell remembers having to help persuade the upperclassmen in his dorm to let him and some 70 others watch the Sullivan performance on the basement television. The older students, who “were into Peter, Paul, and Mary and the Kingston Trio and thought rock and roll was beneath them,” finally relented.

Ferguson, who caught a Beatles concert with Sorrell in 1966 just before the band stopped touring, was part of that basement crowd. “Their vocal harmonies were in sync, their guitar work was impeccable, they shook their heads and their long hair flopped back and forth,” he says. “It was breathtaking.”

That sentiment resonates widely, even if looking only at the popularity of the free courses Covach teaches through Coursera, the free network of massive open online courses, or MOOCs. Enrollment in his two-part