

**1960s: Subculture, Pop Culture & Counter Culture.**

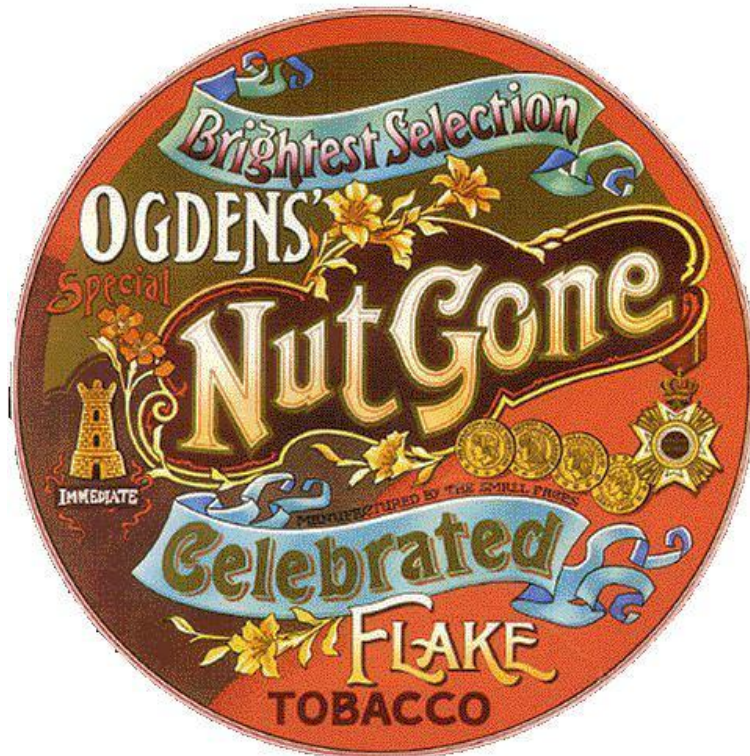
**Pop Music:**

**The album / concept album as a new art form.**

**(A comparison of the Small Faces 'Ogden's Nut Gone Flake' album and The Beatles 'Sgt Pepper'.)**

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On the 1<sup>st</sup> June 1967 The Beatles released the album Sgt Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band, and the whole production and recording techniques of popular music, and the confines of these procedures up until then, were blown apart. The album not only broke new ground in recording techniques and technology, but also heralded the use and improvisation of certain instruments into the field of pop music, that they had never before been associated with. A new term also came about from the release of this album, the term 'concept album.' An album that told a story or had a theme. This to some extent was denied by the Beatles camp, but it certainly registered as doing so with several other bands and musicians of the time.

One of these bands was The Pretty Things who in 1967 released what is now regarded as the first 'concept album' - 'SF Sorrow'. Telling the story in a 'psychedelic language' of Sebastian F Sorrow and his travels. This album influenced Pete Townsend to create the story of the deaf, dumb and blind boy 'Tommy' which became The Who's first venture into this genre of album production, paving the way for the future 'Quadrophenia' album. 'Tommy' also became the first of the 'rock opera' albums.

With the international success of Sgt Pepper, the main follow-ups in the concept album field were from British bands. Some of the content of Sgt Pepper's songs,

it can be argued, are influenced by elements of traditional British culture and of 'high culture.' For example, the title itself - the military connection, the marching band, the music hall overtones, the fair ground organ, the use of brass instruments, and its incorporating of classical music arrangement techniques in the shaping of the songs, are all used alongside the experimental use of new technology in instruments such as the Mellotron Mk II - a forerunner of the Synthesizer. Also, the band indulged in experimental recording techniques such as double tracking, over dubbing and tape splicing. There is of course the Eastern (Indian) musical cultural influence on the album, due to George Harrison's association with Indian musician Ravi Shankar. The Sitar and Delrouba (a kind of violin) being used on the song 'Within You, Without You'. To quote rock journalist Stephen Barnard (1983), 'Kings of the EMI castle, they now had the time, the money and – most importantly – almost unlimited musical and technological resources to be as idiosyncratic as they liked' (1).

The song 'Being For The Benefit of Mr Kite' came from an Edwardian period poster Lennon found in an antique shop. The poster for a traveling circus act, advertised the performances of characters mentioned in the song. Similarly many of these Edwardian reproduction posters could be found adorning the walls of Carnaby St and Kings Road clothing boutiques. The album cover always reminds me of the Lord Kitchener 'Your Country Needs You' recruitment posters.

Ironically the original album came complete with a cut out moustache and medal, there was also a shop in Carnaby Street called 'I Was Lord Kitcheners Valet' that sold military style tunic coats and other 'Empire' influenced fashion items. There

were a lot of cultural traditions 'bricolaged' into the Sgt Pepper songs and the cover of the album. What the album highlights for me is London in 1967. The Beatles no longer sounded like that 'Mersey Beat' group. The Sgt Pepper album became very much a part of the whole 'swinging London scene' and I would suggest gained them a new audience with the 'high brow' art culture set, that their original 'scouse street urchin' pop classics would not have registered with. This album slotted them in alongside the 'elite' with the Peter Blake / Jan Hayworth cover design. The emergence of the upper classes into this new swinging London scene such as photographers David Bailey and Lord Snowdon, gave the album an avenue to travel along that The Beatles as four Liverpudlian rock n' rollers would never have gotten near. Brian Masters (1985) mentions 'The single most surprising characteristic of the revolution in taste which took place in the 1960s was its domination by the style and habits of the young working class. Previous upheavals had been led from above, their direction dictated by the intelligent bourgeoisie.' (2). Rich young socialites were now becoming part of the scene, their adventures and misadventures reported on. Masters (1985 b) again, 'A rich young satellite of the Swinging London set, Tara Browne, died at the wheel of his car when it crashed into a parked vehicle in Chelsea;'(3). This of course was the story that influenced Lennon's line in the song 'A Day In The Life': –

*"He blew his mind out in a car, he didn't notice that the lights had changed.*

*A crowd of people stood and stared – they'd seen his face before,*

*But nobody was really sure if he was from the House of Lords”*

Lennon & McCartney (Northern Songs)

1967 (4).

Rock 'n Roll had started to become intellectualized.

Pete Townsend from The Who came from an Art School background, The Who as a focal point for the Mod movement / way of life, was all a vision of Pete Meaden their original manager / PR guy. The British R+B scene in London during the early sixties involved a very intellectual middle class group of performers such as The Rolling Stones Mick Jagger (The London School of Economics), Keith Richards (Sidcup Art School) and Brian Jones ex Cheltenham Art College. The Pretty Things Dick Taylor was also at Sidcup Art School and Manfred Mann's Paul Jones for example was an Oxford undergraduate.

But one band who were not manufactured in any way, came from a strong working class background, were very much part of the London Mod scene, and over their developing years as a pop band (influenced by black R+B / Soul music), not only highlighted the swinging London scene, but in their classic 1968 concept album (albeit only one side of the album) 'Ogdens Nut Gone Flake' captured it brilliantly; they were The Small Faces.

The album is as distinctive in its appearance as The Beatles Sgt Pepper. It has a circular gatefold sleeve and the printed front cover depicts a tobacco tin. In a recent edition of Mojo Magazine (Nov 2001) Lois Wilson described it as '...one of

the most elaborate sleeve designs in rock history.'(5). There are lots of similarities and coincidences in the making of the two albums that link them. Some are minor, but some situations are very reflective. The bugbear for me is that The Small Faces have never really been acknowledged with the credit they deserve for their work. The album cover is a noted credit, but the song craft on the album is very much overlooked. Compared to the adulation afforded the songwriting and production on Sgt Pepper, this album although acclaimed at the time, has not held the lofty position awarded to 'Pepper' as 'the definitive period piece.' But there were circumstances that influenced this. The Beatles had conquered the American market, so were more 'international' than The Small Faces. But as far as being the 'definitive period piece' from a totally British angle, this I feel is arguable. I would suggest that to a certain extent the Brian Masters quote (2) that I used earlier applies to The Small Faces and the Mod philosophy that they came from totally, but The Beatles had their 'bourgeoisie' contacts in place as well, just to give them that extra security. For example their upper class manager Brian Epstein and producer George Martin. The Small Faces never had this security behind them, they were working class and to quote music critic Charles Shaar Murray, very much "East End Herbert's" (6).

To highlight a few of those little coincidences. The Small Faces had recently signed with Immediate Records a company formed by Andrew Loog Oldham one time manager of The Rolling Stones. Before this they had been on Decca Records. Similarly to The Beatles they had grown tired of the endless pop merry-

go-round of single releases and soul-destroying tours. In the halcyon days of 1967 The Small Faces had progressed and ventured naturally from the 'Mod scene' into the 'Psychedelic scene'. With the freedom they gained from signing with Immediate Records, as far as gaining studio time in which to fully develop, compared with the stuffed shirt fuddy duddy mentality of Decca Records, the transformation paid dividends.

As with The Beatles there were two main songwriters in the band, Steve Marriott and Ronnie Lane, although Ian McLagan (keyboards) occasionally wrote too. Marriott and Lane were both multi instrumentalists. Marriott possessing arguably the best white soul voice ever, a guitar player whose skill as been shamefully overlooked, a more than adequate keyboard player in his own right and also a great blues harmonica player. Ronnie Lane also sang lead vocals or shared lead vocals with Marriott on some songs, was an incredibly solid bass player very much with a style of his own and also handled guitar as well on a lot of studio sessions. In Ian McLagan they had a keyboard player that suited their style brilliantly, easily moving from Booker T influenced Soul / R+B grooves to some straight forward boogie woogie playing, and on the drum stool the solid and dependable Kenney Jones.

The band from London's East End were sharp, sussed and wore their working class roots on their sleeves. Marriott and Lane especially seemed to treat the 'ass licking' side of the music business with the contempt it deserved and treated

a lot of the glitzy Knightsbridge and Chelsea set with mocking tongue in cheek humour. But when it came to capturing a period with great songs through the simple fact of being 'real' they were second to none.

The first release on the Immediate label, the single 'Here Comes The Nice' on 2nd June 1967 (the day after Sgt Pepper was released), acknowledged the 'Mod' amphetamine lifestyle. They rapidly followed this with an album on Immediate called simply 'The Small Faces'. At this time Marriott and Lane were handling production of their own material, something Lennon and McCartney were not. They had very little help with their ideas from the stagnant sound engineers that were originally around at Immediate. Ronnie Lane commented, " They thought we were smart arses...they would reply categorically, ' No, you can't do it that way, it's not right, it does not work technically nor ethically, and it's certainly not in the manual." (7). Obviously inspired by what they heard on Sgt Pepper they argued their point and proceeded.

They began formative instrument experimentation on this album, as well as varying the length of songs and the fusing of different musical styles. Harpsichord was used on 'Things Are Going To Get Better', Mellotron was used on the folky influenced 'Become Like You' and Acoustic Guitars were layered into a lot of the songs with new instruments like the Farfisa Organ. Even a calypso feel to the track 'Eddie's Dreaming'. This album was a kind of demo as they indulged and found their feet around the control booth.



Eventually they met a sound engineer who was very keen to experiment with sound, instruments and technology in the studio – one Glyn Johns. They began recording sounds and then playing them back alongside other tracks out of synch, creating ‘phasing’. This experimentation coming together brilliantly in the classic ‘Itchycoo Park’ released 4<sup>th</sup> August 1967. The phasing technique used on Kenney Jones’s drum fills and the vocal track. As with The Beatles releasing the double A-side ‘Strawberry Fields’ and ‘Penny Lane’ as a taster for Sgt Pepper this was a taster for Ogden’s. Similarity again in the fact that The Beatles had taken cherished childhood area’s of Liverpool and wrote classic songs around them, so Marriott and Lane took what many people say is Manor Park in London’s East End and once again with a certain amount of satire transferred the ‘trippy hippy love in the park’ California ‘happenings’ and relocated them to ‘Swinging London’ – but the working class East End of it. The song is a classic piece of British period pop music, brilliantly arranged and delivered by the band. Ronnie Lane commented, “I lifted the melody from that hymn, “God Be In My Head”, ...which was a piss-take, but ended up sounding so good that it went past the fact that it was a piss-take” (8). The song reached number 3 in the UK and surprisingly for the band number 16 in the US.

They followed this with another classic single before the tag ‘hippy’ could be attached to them. They rocked out the storming ‘Tin Soldier’ – Marriott’s vocal performance stunning. This was released on 2<sup>nd</sup> December 1967.

The recordings continued into 1968. The band having the idea of mixing tracks they had been working on during the later part of 1967 with the idea of a concept to one side of the album.

The Beatles with Sgt Pepper not only released a LP of inspirational songs, but also turned the whole presentation of their finished product into an inspirational piece of 'Art', by the fact that the album cover is as famous as the songs that feature on it. This was something new. The cover was as interesting as the songs. No longer just a smiling promo shot of the 'fab four' but a talking point along with the content of the songs. Artist Peter Blake the main designer of the cover gaining world wide recognition for his work.

The creative juices of The Small Faces were bubbling over with ideas on what the title and cover of their album should be, again with streetwise sensibilities playing its part. An ex employee of Decca records who was now working for the Immediate company, mentioned the idea of releasing an album in a round sleeve. When discussing this with Ronnie Lane, Lane had the idea of a tobacco tin. This of course having interwoven meanings given the era, culture and social class values of the band. The brand Ogden's being the band's favoured loose tobacco for rolling their joints with. But also the 'tobacco tin' being a particular working class 'artefact' and a very British one at that. A small link to The Beatles again is the fact that the Ogden's Tobacco Company was Liverpool based. Andrew Loog Oldham called the company up and they sent a catalogue of their

tobacco tin designs. So the story goes, Marriott saw the design for the brand Ogden's Nut Brown Flake and changed the word 'Brown' for 'Gone'. Lois Wilson (2001 b) quotes Kenney Jones " It was our little joke...We called it Nut Gone because your nut's gone if you smoke the stuff – you know, marijuana."(9).

The cover opens up to reveal humour and serious representation again running side by side. There's a psychedelic illustration from artists Pete Brown and Nick Tweddell that the band commissioned to represent the era. The opposite inner cover is a photograph taken by noted photographer Gered Mankovitz of a packet of cigarette papers with the brand name 'SUS' – no explanation needed I don't think. The rear cover depicting the weight of the tobacco tin – a 1lb Box. The cover also folded out into four gatefold inner pictures of the band members.

Another little link with the Sgt Pepper album is, on the front cover there are four small coins featuring the faces of the band members as coins of the realm and also a medal. This is similar to the subtle 'Britishness' and 'Empire' pop art noted on Pepper, and as I've stated earlier, on sale in Carnaby St and Kings Road boutiques.

I commented earlier that the cover of the album seems to have over the years overlapped the song content of the album in acclaim. For me they go hand in hand. As recently as October 2001 it was listed as Number 5 in a top ten review of Concept Albums in The Guardian newspaper by reporter Will Hodgkinson (SF Sorrow coming out on top in his estimation). He comments 'Only half is a concept album, but what a great one: like a cockney Lord of The Rings,'(10).

The B-side of the album was the 'concept' side. The songs being based around the story of 'Happiness Stan' who is searching for the other half of the moon. He travels on a giant fly meets characters such as 'Mad John' and finally discovers 'Happydays Toytown'. Mad – yes, and with the narrative by the king of cockney rhyming slang gobbledy gook - comedian Stanley Unwin linking the songs, it's a charming piece of work that combines psychedelic pop music, with performances that draw on music hall tradition at times. This can be linked to Marriott's fondness of the music hall from his youth. He actually appeared as 'The Artful Dodger' in composer Lionel Bart's West End production of 'Oliver'. In a Channel 4 documentary on the band as part of the Without Walls series Lionel Bart comments " I loved Steve's lyrics, I loved em' because they came from the same roots as I was doing – only with a younger kid writing them". (11).

I keep mentioning the humor but really it's a natural injection into the songs and performances. This is something though that the band felt got highlighted more than they intended it too. Especially when Immediate records released 'Lazy Sunday' as a single from the album – totally against the bands wishes. It became a massive hit for the band. Marriott apparently creasing everybody up at the recording session with the over the top 'cockney delivery'. A similar song on the A side of the album 'Rene' about an East End prostitute, has the same sing-along feel. But you can see the bands point when the album contained classic period songs again in the shape of 'Afterglow', Song of A Baker, Rollin' Over, etc. The band felt that as the music business became more intellectual they were being presented as a band that were not really 'serious' about their product. It

caused a major split with Immediate that never healed, even though the album was a massive hit with the public and critics on its release in June 1968 (a year after Sgt Pepper), reaching Number 1 and staying there for 6 weeks, then spending a total of 19 weeks in the album charts.

The song content in my opinion is as ambiguous as anything on Sgt Pepper. It doesn't bring us the mystical east flavouring of George Harrison's Indian music influence, but instead gives us the mystical East End flavouring of swinging London in 1968. It's an excellent example of a period piece of work that incorporates all the elements of the 'new art school' at the time. Art design, photography, presentation and the musical composition of the songs mixes classical instrument arrangements with new studio technology, inspired natural musical talent, excellent pop sensibility and song crafting for the time, and one very special element that future bands and 'concept albums' could have done with in an abundance. A sense of humour that enabled them to combat the self-indulgent musical masturbation by musicians that riddled the on coming 'progressive rock music' era.

To conclude my discussion. Both albums are premier examples of how popular music fusing with its past musical origins, new technology and other forms of artistic expression e.g. photography and design, came together to extend the boundaries of what people perceived as ART.

More importantly especially in the case of The Small Faces it proved that creativity should not be allowed to be hindered by social class.

### Endnotes.

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- (2). Masters, Brian. *The Swinging Sixties.* Constable & Company, London, 1985. p26.
- (3). Masters, p 175.
- (4). Lennon & McCartney, 'A Day In The Life' (Northern Songs) 1967.
- (5). Wilson, Lois. 'In With The Crowd' – Sleeve Design, in *MOJO Magazine – Collections.* November 2001, ed by Paul Trynka, E-Map Publishing, London. p 96.
- (6). Murray, Charles Shaar. 'My Generation – The Small Faces', *Without Walls.* Granada Productions, Channel 4, 1995.
- (7). Twelker, Uli & Schmitt, Roland. *Happy Boys Happy.* Sanctuary Publishing, London, 1997. p 46.
- (8). Pidgeon, John. *Rod Stewart and the changing Faces.* Granada Publishing, St Albans, 1976. p 28.
- (9). Wilson, Lois. 'In With The Crowd' – Sleeve Design, in *MOJO Magazine – Collections.* November 2001, ed by Paul Trynka, E-Map Publishing, London. p 96.
- (10). Hodgkinson, Will. 'Immaculate Conceptions Article' in *The Guardian Newspaper.* October 5<sup>th</sup> 2001. p 13.

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