

UP FRONT



ACROSS MY DESK

By Brian Butko, Editor

June 1967: prelude to 1968

As June 1967 dawned, the Beatles' new album, *Sergeant Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band*, was playing from every radio and turntable. By time the Monterey Pop Festival opened a few weeks later, the "Summer of Love" was in full swing. The three-day concert was inspired by Monterey, California's annual jazz festival but it was a concept not yet adapted to pop music. Monterey was the first major rock festival, bridging the gap between the more conservative folk music of the Mamas and Papas, the Association, and Simon and Garfunkel (much of it New York–Los Angeles based), and the new sounds of Janis Joplin, Jefferson Airplane, and the Grateful Dead (out of San Francisco).

Paul McCartney was on the festival's board but the Beatles' music had become too complex to perform live. Another board member was Brian Wilson, leader of the Beach Boys, who were set to headline Monterey. The band had kept up with the times by releasing their boundary-pushing *Pet Sounds* album and complex "Good Vibrations" the year before. Their next album, *SMiLE*, was an upbeat look at America, but progress slowed until the album was cancelled, and at the last minute, the Beach Boys withdrew from Monterey. Music was changing rapidly and the group worried their songs celebrating sun, surf, and happy times would look foolish alongside psychedelic groups singing about sex, drugs, and war. Any chance the Beach Boys had to *not* be seen as "squares" was actually sealed when they skipped Monterey.

History Center Chief Librarian Art Louderback recalls seeing some of the bands in Pittsburgh a week after Monterey, when he was 17:

After catching the new James Bond movie we went to see the Mamas and the Papas with two opening acts, Moby Grape and the Buckingham. There was even a surprise guest, Scott McKenzie whose new song "San Francisco (Be Sure to Wear Flowers in Your Hair)" was a major hit. The amazing part of the evening was walking up to the Civic Arena. It was Sunday night (date night) and all the men going to the show were dressed in sports coats and the girls in dresses.

While groups at Monterey like Moby Grape, the Byrds, and Buffalo Springfield offered up the new music of flower power and protest, an even edgier style was emerging out of London. Monterey also showcased acts like The Who pounding out "My Generation" and destroying their equipment, and Jimi Hendrix grinding to "Purple Haze" and lighting his guitar afire. A year later, even the Beatles' psychedelia had been supplanted by the bleak cover of *The White Album* and the group audibly weighing the merits of a "revolution."

Not that the summer of '67 had been all peace and love. That June saw the Six Day Arab-Israeli War. July brought riots in Detroit, Newark, and Milwaukee. In August, the U.S. military admitted it had expanded the Vietnam conflict by bombing Laos daily for three years without informing the public. And far-edgier

music had already been released in 1967 such as *The Velvet Underground & Nico* featuring Andy Warhol's iconic banana print on the cover.

And so the discord and disillusionment of 1968 was set in motion during 1967's idealized Summer of Love. Even the hippies tired of the relentless media attention, the co-opting and commercialization of their ideals into just another style. In October 1967, they held their own Death of Hippie mock funeral procession through Haight-Ashbury. Runaways were still arriving, as were harder drugs and crime, and so the original hippies were beginning to flee, or "going up the country" as later immortalized in song by Monterey performers Canned Heat. The Haight especially had been a place where bands and fans could intermingle and participate in shows. After Monterey, with careers born or emboldened, the artists took precedence, and they in turn took on the role of musical royalty separate from the overwhelming crowds, as seen at Woodstock two years later. The brief moment of innocence had passed, and in its place came the turmoil of 1968. ☼

Brian is researching June 1967 for a future project. He thanks music history proofreaders Rob Conroy, Jennifer Baron, and Jennifer Sopko for their helpful insights.



The Beatles' *Sergeant Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band* (1967) and *White Album* (1968).

