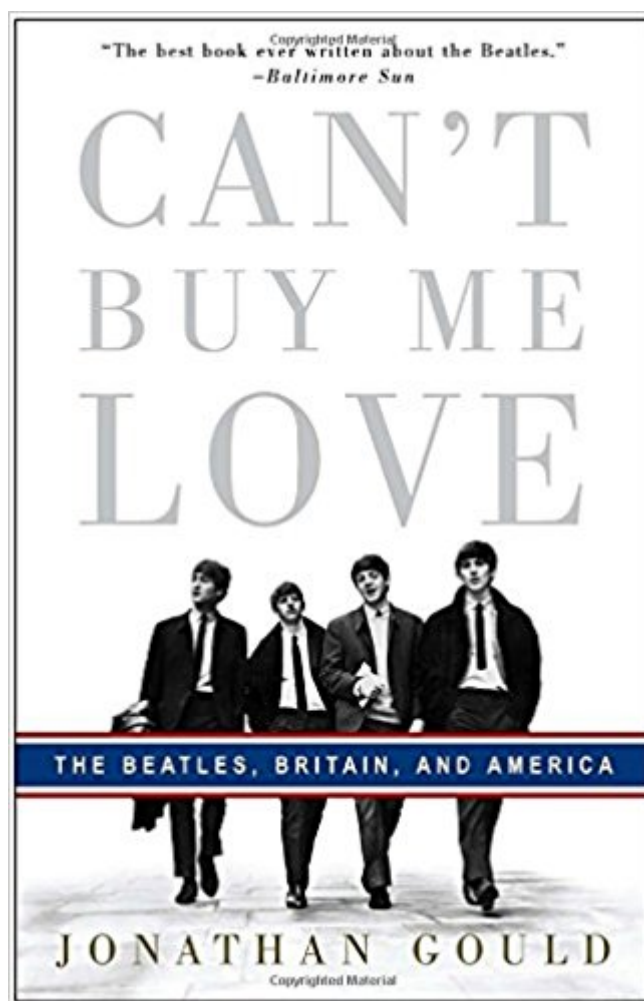


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# Can't Buy Me Love: The Beatles, Britain, And America



## Synopsis

That the Beatles were an unprecedented phenomenon is a given. In *Can't Buy Me Love*, Jonathan Gould explains why, placing the Fab Four in the broad and tumultuous panorama of their time and place, rooting their story in the social context that girded both their rise and their demise. Nearly twenty years in the making, *Can't Buy Me Love* is a masterful work of group biography, cultural history, and musical criticism. Beginning with their adolescence in Liverpool, Gould describes the seminal influences—from Elvis Presley and Chuck Berry to The Goon Show and Alice's Adventures in Wonderland—that shaped the Beatles both as individuals and as a group. In addition to chronicling their growth as singers, songwriters, and instrumentalists, he highlights the advances in recording technology that made their sound both possible and unique, as well as the developments in television and radio that lent an explosive force to their popular success. With a musician's ear, Gould sensitively evokes the timeless appeal of the Lennon-McCartney collaboration and their emergence as one of the most creative and significant songwriting teams in history. Behind the scenes Gould explores the pivotal roles played by manager Brian Epstein and producer George Martin, credits the influence on the Beatles' music of contemporaries like Bob Dylan, Brian Wilson, and Ravi Shankar, and traces the gradual escalation of the fractious internal rivalries that led to the group's breakup after their final masterpiece, *Abbey Road*. Most significantly, by chronicling their revolutionary impact on popular culture during the 1960s, *Can't Buy Me Love* illuminates the Beatles as a charismatic phenomenon of international proportions, whose anarchic energy and unexpected import was derived from the historic shifts in fortune that transformed the relationship between Britain and America in the decades after World War II. From the Beats in America and the Angry Young Men in England to the shadow of the Profumo Affair and JFK's assassination, Gould captures the pulse of a time that made the Beatles possible—and even necessary. As seen through the prism of the Beatles and their music, an entire generation's experience comes astonishingly to life. Beautifully written, consistently insightful, and utterly original, *Can't Buy Me Love* is a landmark work about the Beatles, Britain, and America.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Starred Review. Signature  
Reviewed by Mark Rotella  
As a teenager, I collected every album the Beatles put out, starting with their first U.S. release, 1964's *Meet the Beatles*, to their last, *Let It Be*, in 1970. As Paul sang *Mother Mary comes to me/ speaking words of wisdom*, I heard the wisdom of an aged sage. But as Jonathan Gould states in his brilliant biography of the Beatles, the band had effectively ended before any of them had reached the age of thirty. There have been several biographies of the band (including two outstanding ones, Bob Spitz's *The Beatles* and Devin McKinney's *Magic Circles: The Beatles In Dream and History*), but Gould leaves the gossip to others and instead relies on their music to tell the story, starting with the early days as a band in Liverpool (with Paul McCartney on guitar and Stuart Sutcliffe on bass) to the recordings at the Abbey Road studios in London (where Yoko became everpresent and George stormed out threatening to quit). They got their start in Hamburg, Germany, and were soon managed by a young, eager former furniture salesman named Brian Epstein, and produced by George Martin, a recording executive known for novelty records. Gould, a former musician, has written an engrossing book, both fluid and economical (aside from one overlong section on the concept of charisma). Page after page, you can hear the music; Gould's deft hand makes the book sing. This is music writing at its best. It begins with a musical wake-up call, Gould writes of *A Hard Day's Night*—the harsh clash of a solitary chord that hangs in the air for an elongated moment, its densely packed notes swimming into focus like eyes adjusting to the light. On *Here Comes the Sun*, Gould describes George's music, written as he became more steeped in Indian philosophy amidst turmoil within the band, as rays of sun cutting across the melting ice of winter... of coming through a long and arduous experience and emerging whole at the end. Focusing on the Beatles' influences, musical (Elvis, Chuck Berry, Bob Dylan, the Beach Boys) and otherwise (marijuana, LSD, the Maharishi Mahesh yogi), Gould elucidates the mystery of the band that changed the course of Western popular music. (Oct.) Mark

Rotella, senior reviews editor at Publishers Weekly, is the author of *The Saloon Singers*, about the great Italian-American crooners, to be published by FSG in 2008. Copyright © Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

**\*Starred Review\*** Gould's combination group biography, cultural history, and musical criticism artfully places the Beatles in their time and social context while examining with great skill how they became an international phenomenon comparable only to themselves. He examines cultural and historical moments on both sides of the Atlantic; the impact of John Osborne's epoch-making play *Look Back in Anger*, the arrival of Elvis Presley and the rise of rock and roll, the assassination of John F. Kennedy, the Summer of Love, Woodstock; while limning Liverpool, the working-class port city in England's industrial north from which the Beatles hailed, and the individual Beatles' strong senses of regional solidarity and fierce local patriotism. To understand the Beatles, Gould implies, you must understand where they came from. He follows them through their roller-coaster career: Hamburg, early days at Liverpool's Cavern Club, their "conquest" of America, the hysteria that came to be called Beatlemania, Sgt. Pepper's, and the eventual breakup. All bases are covered, but setting Gould's book apart are his careful dissection of cultural history and his astute critical eye (his masterful critiques of "Eleanor Rigby," "Penny Lane," "Strawberry Fields Forever," and "A Day in the Life," in particular, are miracles of economy). Long on history, short on gossip, he gives nuanced assessments of the world's most admired rock band and of its era.

Sawyers, June --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

As the author points out, the volume of press given to the cultural phenomena of the Beatles has included few biographies of the band itself. Think of this as a real biography of a band -- the story of a remarkable quartet set against the cultural influences that shaped them, tracing their growth, exploring the many factors that made them more popular, and more revered, than any other musical group before or since, and tracing their demise and peculiar afterlife as never-dimming cultural icons. (Ringo Starr remains a regular guest on talk shows, after all, where he would never appear except that he had *\*been a Beatle.\**) Apart from the writing mechanics -- lucid, clear, easy to read -- I find that Gould has brought out aspects of the people, their city, their times, and their work that no one else has done. He deserves to be commended for this. You are most likely to enjoy this book if you appreciate the band when you hear the music (and tap your feet to it), but also want to build a little bit of understanding of their phenomenon -- to develop some new insights into what made them

such a remarkable cultural force. The author puts their breakthrough moments into the context of the Profumo affair and uses sociological theory, especially Max Weber, to interpret why their fans went through such frenzies, after all. You will meet Aldous Huxley and Carl Jung as well. An author can very easily fall into pseudo-intellectual BS by drawing in so many cultural influences, but in this writer's case the story of the band is the meal, while such background events and theories are the seasoning. He talks of these both to draw the reader into that time and place, and (in some cases) to illuminate why each of the band's members took the courses they did. I think he does really well at this. In particular, when he talks about the obvious sexual appeal of the band to its teenage fans, he barely mentions Freud. He stays away from the more pretentious and dubious speculations that initially greeted the band, instead pointing out that two were different kinds of handsome, one was a charismatic rebel, and one reminded people of an adorable puppy, giving the female fans a virtual smorgasbord of options for their infatuations, as well as re-forming social cliques around those totemic figures. If you are simply interested in learning as much as you can about the members and the details of their lives, you will find plenty of that material here. You may want to skip over the analytical bits, which is easier done in a print than the Kindle edition, as he does not separate the analysis neatly into chapters. You may also want to start with Hunter Davies' 1968 authorized biography *The Beatles (Updated Edition)*, and Michael Braun's early and more gritty *Love Me Do!: "Beatles" Progress*. But for my money, Gould has done the best job of making the Beatles and their times come alive, as if the reader had been, not in the inner circle, but within visual range of it.

I'd LOVE to give this book 2 stars but there is just too much valuable, researched info I didn't have before to ignore. When you write a book about an iconic entity that changed the industry it worked in, it's better not to express one's ill-conceived complaints at all. Just note the various contributions and discuss how they impacted culture. Mr. Gould's excruciating song reviews are cringe worthy even when complimentary. They give the impression of this young guy writing a book he knows that me and millions like me will buy so sits with the 2009 box set and a copy of the Complete Beatles Song Book painstakingly describing which chord tone Paul's voice ends on a specific song. The pretentiousness goes over the top though when he describes what he considers "errors" or "gaffes" he thinks the Beatles made in their recording output. Mr. Gould loves the word "debacle." He uses it to describe both the Decca auditions and the Woodstock Festival. The Decca "debacle," Mr. Gould, was that the largest recording company in England at that time did not recognize the potential in the greatest recording artists of all time when they heard them. It was not in what the Beatles recorded

for them which was exactly what George Martin heard later and in which he saw the potential. Paul McCartney's performance of Til There Was You, far from being a "gaffe" is an iconic interpretation of a song which not only led the way to McCartney's own famous ballads but had the Beatles not recorded it, Til There Was You would share the fate of What Kind of Fool Am I, or Hey Look Me Over, forgotten songs from hit musicals. I suppose if you don't have a spinal column for Lennon's voice to slide up and down you might draw the conclusion that his spectacular vocal attack on Mr. Moonlight was "ill-fated." Perhaps if you weren't there at the time, you might think the fourth side of The White Album was "mediocre" instead of the greatest ending for any album to this day. I'd LOVE to see the poll you took that indicates "most people" who listen to the album skip Revolution Number 9. There are times when I and the people I know listen JUST to that track. Of course we're listening to it through the stethoscope the Beatles used in developing it and based on my reading of your book, you've never experienced that at all. There really is much in Can't Buy Me Love, The Beatles, Britain and America, that is of great value to those interested in this history. The author's arrogance at implying his ideas might have improved this most iconic of musical catalogs leaves me slightly enraged.

If you are going to read just one book on the Beatles, make it this one. This is a fascinating read, but also a serious work of scholarship. So, if you think the Beatles deserve to be taken seriously as artists, this is the book to read. Far more than just a group bio, Gould takes great care to place his subjects in the context of their time (the 1950s and 1960s) on both sides of the pond. He always presents both figure and ground. His discussions of their personalities and development, individual songs, the music industry and popular culture are all brilliant and integrated into the backdrop of historical and sociological trends. The chapter analyzing the psychology and sociology of Beatlemania is worth the price of admission alone.

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