

7.6. “But who doesn't know The Beatles anyway?” Young fans of New Beatlemania today

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Abstract

Under the broad concept of retromania, our contribution presents a case study of a specific group of “oldies” music lovers: the younger fans of The Beatles today. We present our findings that examine how their taste for this band comes to be formed and what it takes and means for them to be a fan of a band that stopped performing long before they were born? In fact, may we still speak of a “Beatlemania” regarding these younger fans today, as we did in the 1960s? Leaning on a pragmatist approach in sociology, we conducted our research focusing not on the passivity of fans in following their idols, but their activity in constructing a personal taste in music. Our results are based on thirty-two interviews conducted online, using various online research methods for recruiting interviewees and completing the interviews, on two social-networking websites with special focus on music. We will thus discuss how these fans came to discover The Beatles, how their fandom is in perpetual (re)construction, how they use their “fan capital” to seek out other fans, how they see their retromania, how they find ways of getting closer to The Beatles – given the impossibility to see them live – and how they appropriate their listening to this music, never left to chance. In this, we present the ideal-typical path to becoming a young Beatles fan today.

Keywords: Retromania, The Beatles, fandom, popular music

Introduction

The rock band The Beatles no longer exists, since 1970, but continues to have its audience and young fans today, being for the latter a band of “another generation”. Judging by personal experience and empirical data on various musical websites, our starting point was noting the firm presence of this young Beatles audience and their visibility and activity online¹. Sociological literature is scarce around the question of knowing how young people come to call themselves “Beatlemaniacs” today, whereas this band stopped their musical activity some forty years ago and the term “Beatlemania” has been used in a specific context of the 1960s to describe the sudden craze around The Beatles, reaching previously unknown scopes of fandom over pop music. Driven by both a personal and sociological interest for the topic, we carried out an empirical study to better understand what lies behind this “New Beatlemania” (Freund 2001), by looking more closely at what these young fans themselves have to say about their fandom.

Given that young fans today, of about 18-25 years, were born after the break-up of The Beatles, our research question was: how does the taste for The Beatles develop among youth

¹ At the time of the study (2012), data on www.last.fm (online radio with 40 million users) showed The Beatles had more than 3 million listeners, many aged 16-25, and were constantly in the weekly top ten list of artists.

today and what does it mean for and take from them to call themselves “fans” of this band? Moreover, can we still speak of “Beatlemania” among youth today, as was done in the 1960-70s when The Beatles were still musically active?

If part of The Beatles’ success in the 1960s could be explained by a bandwagon effect, and especially the sudden mass hysteria among young women, their continued success nowadays requires a more nuanced explanation. A first glance at the matter suggests that contemporary young fans, born after The Beatles disbanded, are more consciously aware of their choice of a favourite band, more critical and reflexive, since not caught in the context of the 1960s craze and, on the contrary, defying their own contemporary mainstream culture.

In this article, we briefly introduce the main elements in the theoretical approach we used for studying fandom, having found a gap in the existing sociological literature around the topic of young Beatles fans today. We then briefly discuss some of the methodological aspects of our study, completed almost entirely through online research methods. Finally, we present our findings following the ideal-typical path to becoming a young Beatles fan today, from the discovery of The Beatles to the more advanced stages of fandom. This, we shall see, is just one example of the wider youth “retromania” and quest for the “oldies”.

A pragmatist approach to studying fandom

The concept of fandom is not new in sociological study, with many different, even contradictory, definitions and approaches existing in the scientific literature. Numerous are the debates about the correctness of terms, definitions and implied meanings of “fandom”. Authors have provided detailed definitions of the term “fan”, introducing typologies and categories (Hersent 1988; Mignon 1988; Boyer 1988; Fiske 1992), studied the connection between fandom and identity formation (Lewis 1992; Bennett 1999; Le Bart 2000; Hennion 2005), or focused more closely on the active participation of fans in the formation and maintenance of their taste (Grossberg 1992; Jenkins 1992; Brower 1992; Baym and Burnett 2008; Hennion 2007; Coulangeon 2003; Brunstein 1997).

Studies more specifically focused on fans of The Beatles are, however, more rare. In fact, most of the literature around The Beatles consists of biographies, essays, illustrated memoirs etc. The most significant sociological contribution to studying Beatles fans is Christian Le Bart’s *Les fans des Beatles. Sociologie d’une passion* (2000) [*Beatles fans. Sociology of a passion*]. Based on around thirty interviews with Beatles fans of all ages in France, Le Bart adopts a psycho-sociological approach to study identity and taste formation among fans. Other studies have analysed the success of The Beatles in terms of musical aesthetic properties, or gone further to argue in terms of the socio-political context of the time, hence seeing Beatlemania both as a musical trend and social movement, or, further still, highlighted the importance of the band’s management and projected public image (Ehrenreich *et al.* 1992; Inglis 1996; Le Bart 2004; Freund 2001; Cura 2009; Abbet & Stoecklin 2012).

In our comprehensive study of what it means to be a young Beatles fan today, we adopted a pragmatist approach in sociology, based on the theory of taste formation elaborated by Antoine Hennion (2005, 2007). This theory challenges the critical theories in sociology – such as those elaborated by Theodor Adorno, Pierre Bourdieu and Edgar Morin – and embraces a comprehensive approach, giving voice to those concerned, in this case the fans. In this approach, the sociologist follows the explanations given by the fans themselves regarding their fandom. These explanations, then, form the basis of the sociological interpretation and the

attention moves away from seeing fans in a state of dope in following their idols and lack of a critical thinking, to seeing the active participation of fans in their taste formation. Taste is not given or to be discovered, argues Hennion, but constructed and maintained by the individual. For understanding fandom or the formation of cultural taste, Hennion suggests the analysis of four elements, all inter-related: 1) the object of taste, 2) the communities of amateurs, and other fans, that allow confrontation of tastes, 3) the setting in which the tasting takes place, 4) the body that tastes and feels, trains itself in judging and even transforms itself as a result of taste-making. We leaned on these four elements to design our empirical study.

From automatic criteria to the self-proclaimed fan

To find fans and recruit interviewees for our study, we used two social-networking sites centred around music. The first was the online radio *last.fm*, which claimed more than 40 millions users in 2010². Anyone can listen to this radio by choosing a "channel" (artist or genre) and create an account and install the special programme called "scrobbler" that will record statistics of all music that the user listens to on a computer, mobile device or online on *last.fm*. Each user's personal page will then show his or her top lists of artists and albums (weekly, monthly and overall) or recently listened tracks. The website's specificity lies in its algorithms that analyse users' tastes, suggest "similar artists" and other users with similar taste. For our study, we used a handful of criteria that could be qualified as objective, since automated via algorithms. We leaned mostly on the users' top artists lists to find those who had The Beatles on top of their lists. The interviewees we recruited on *last.fm* are hence not self-proclaimed fans, but assigned as such by ourselves according to our evaluation of their top artists lists. In other words, the status of "fan" is in this case more spontaneous and less explicitly intended or declared by the user.

The second website we used was *fanpop.com*, a social-networking site that allows users to personalize their profiles by becoming members of "fan clubs" of different artists and cultural products. Users can browse other users' profile pages, contact them privately or publicly, become a fan of other users to follow their activity, etc. Once a member of a "fan club", hence publicly claimed as a fan of someone or something, users can then add content (images, videos, text, etc.) to the club's page, participate in forums, create or participate in polls, receive news and see updates, etc. Contrary to *last.fm*, the criteria here are never automated, so every member is a fan by personal will to show oneself as such. In other words, there is no means of deciding or verifying a user's level of fandom: we must take their word for it and trust that those who call themselves fans, by becoming a member of a club, *are* in fact fans. Hence, all our interviewees from this website are self-proclaimed Beatles fans – not decided or evaluated as such by ourselves.

Collecting data online

Given the broad presence of young Beatles fans today throughout the world and our starting point being online spaces such as *last.fm* and *fanpop.com*, we decided to use an entirely online methodology for this study, including the recruitment and running of our interviews. This

² "The artist feedback loop", Last.fm, <http://blog.last.fm/category/announcements/?pg=5> (15.05.2014)

meant, first and foremost, having an easier access to a large number of fans to interview: we completed 32 interviews with fans from 20 countries, a total of 15 men and 17 women. But, challenges also arose. We would now like to briefly discuss the benefits and drawbacks of online interviews, especially when conducted via email (Salmons 2012; Bishai 2012; Bampton & Cowton 2002; Dowling 2012; Houston 2008; Deegan 2012).

Nowadays a common means of communication, the use of email or private messaging remains limited and even mistrusted in the scientific domain as a means of data collection. Its benefits, however, are numerous. First of all, online interviews ease contacting a large number of individuals, reducing obstacles related to geographical distance and differences in time zones, thanks to the asynchronous aspect of the communication when via email and not chat or instant messaging. However, while asynchronous communication allows for more time to reflect and better prepare both questions and answers, it also brings in the risk of losing a certain spontaneity in the exchange. Second, online interviews have negligible financial costs and eliminate the work of transcription. Moreover, the transcribed text in this case will be exactly as the interviewee would have meant the text to be, since re-transcribing interviews is already a first step in the researcher's interpretation and analysis. Third, communication at a distance can ease more subtle obstacles such as psychological distance when discussing sensible issues with a stranger. In our case, asynchronous communication, via email and private messaging, presented more advantages than drawbacks, but didn't spare us from the uncertainties or difficulties that came with.

In an asynchronous interview, the interviewee should, in principle, have fewer inclinations to quit due to lack of time. Meanwhile, the interviewer faces other difficulties: losing "control" of the disposition of the interview, not knowing if the interviewee is multi-tasking during the interview or not, how much care is put into answering the questions, if some questions require reformulations or more time to be answered, etc. One of the main difficulties for the interviewer is delimiting and framing the interview: when to start and finish, how to send the questions (in blocks or one by one), how to react to long pauses in the exchange, how and when to send reminders, etc.?

But, online interviews also imply the loss of an entire palette of data, especially gestures and the visual, which can only be regained by the use of videoconferencing methods. One way of filling this void in email interviews is to take even more seriously the interviewee's writing: the style, punctuation, use of smileys, etc. And yet, this would mean, somewhat paradoxically, relying more heavily on textual aspects where the problem is caused precisely by the over-dependence on textual data. Added to this are the issues of online anonymity that, surely, reduce social constraints of the face-to-face, thus facilitating expression, but also bring in uncertainties of identities, opposing the "real" to the "virtual". For a sociological study, these uncertainties complicate the researcher's task as soon as the issue regards sampling or, simply, knowing who the interviewee is. Arising from the asynchronous aspect of the communication, another major difficulty is the uncertainty regarding the duration of the exchange, thus complicating the running of the empirical campaign. In our case, some interviews were completed in a few hours or days, while others took several weeks, for around the same

Being a young Beatlemaniac today

We have organized our findings in what can be viewed as the ideal-typical path to fandom regarding today's younger fans of The Beatles. This path is far from being the same for all, but presents typical stages to go through, in an almost linear way, that we traced in the narrative answers of our interviewees. Some of these stages can, at times, be completed simultaneously, others may take longer or more effort for different people. But, little by little, step by step, these young fans go through the different phases of fandom, constantly (re)positioning themselves on the continuum between "not really fan" and "big fan", or even "obsessed". They use these categories, and all those in-between, to judge not only themselves, but also others, endlessly creating hierarchies between each other based on who has reached which stage on this path to fandom: who has "already" passed or "yet" has to reach this or that point.

The path starts with the discovery of The Beatles, followed by the accumulation of "fan capital" (Fiske 1992), consisting of knowledge about the band and objects to collect. This goes hand-in-hand with being able to choose favourite songs and albums. Once enough fan capital has been gathered, fans then start looking for other fans, using this capital to identify each other in the crowd, while at the same time looking for ways of getting closer to The Beatles – dressing like them, playing music like them, trying to "see" them through tribute band concerts, and going to visit "authentic", almost "sacred", places collectively known as "Beatles sites". Finally, fans also come to develop personalized ways of listening to this music, creating rituals, hence appropriating The Beatles and almost sacralising this activity, never leaving it to chance.

Discovering the band

The first step in the path to any fandom is, of course, discovering the artist. Most of our interviewees had discovered The Beatles, and 1960s music in general, through their parents, family or friends, while others mentioned media such as radio and television, and only two people recalled having used online sources. The most frequent answers were of the type "I have always known them, I grew up with The Beatles", especially given that discovering this band can be traced to a very young age for some, even as far back as the age of five. In fact, rather than naming one particular occasion, fans often recollected a whole series of events that led to their fandom, of the sort "first there was this, then that, and finally I became a fan."

If Barbara Ehrenreich *et al.* (1992) argue that the sudden massive craze for The Beatles in the 1960s can partly be explained in terms of a social movement of youth against adults, then in the case of today's younger fans, the argument fades. In our study, youth's taste for 1960-70s music was most frequently influenced directly by adults, and mostly parents. Is contemporary Beatlemania bringing these two generations closer together, as opposed to the generational divide that the 1960s' Beatlemania would have aimed? We will return to this point.

Choosing favorites

The next stage comes directly from not wanting to let go of The Beatles once having discovered them: the enthusiasts continue to search for other Beatles songs, digging anywhere and everywhere. And this, until the point of knowing almost the entire discography of The

Beatles, including lesser known pieces, unedited or re-mastered versions, alternative versions of the same piece, etc.

Such a detailed knowledge of this music should, then, imply in having favourites, or *more* and *less* favourites. In the case of our interviewees, however, naming a favourite song, album, film or band member came to be a more complex task than it may first seem! Some refused to answer or compared it to choosing a favourite child: impossible and unfair. Others mentioned a constant change of favourites, as if the “real” taste for The Beatles resides precisely in such an indecision: a most favourite can only be so temporarily, subject to change based on circumstances. The unease was more accentuated when having to name a favourite Beatles member: between those who refused to answer and those who had a solid favourite, the others were either divided between more than one favourite, or named one but added nuances to their choice, had changed favourites through the years, or chose a “5th Beatle” such as their manager Brian Epstein or an earlier member like Stuart Sutcliffe.

This general unease in choosing favourites is part of the permanent construction of a taste for The Beatles. It is as though having favourites defines fandom, but at the same time, the “real” fan would be unable to pick a favourite once and for all and would constantly change opinions. And this, because being able to choose favourites requires a strong “fan capital”, objects and knowledge combined, hence constantly changing favourites implies possessing this capital, thereby (re)affirming one’s fandom.

Accumulating fan capital

The third stage on this path, then, goes hand-in-hand with the second and is the accumulation of fan capital: acquisition of knowledge and collection of objects. Most fans mentioned having a collection, large or small, of objects related to The Beatles, whether band merchandise (posters, t-shirts, mugs, etc.) or objects that convey knowledge and “cultural capital” (books, CDs, DVDs, etc.). Some had more, or less, of one type than others, but the common feature was that all spoke in terms of regret of not having more, except the rare cases of fans who completely refused all such commercialisation of music. When merchandise was unavailable, fans did not hesitate to improvise and create their own! Since the size of the collection is a measure of fan capital, hence the level fandom, we can see how this may create rivalries and jealousies between fans: the bigger and the more visible the fan capital, the “better” or “bigger” the fan.

In fact, there is an entire hierarchy of collectibles. Some objects are clearly valued more than others and are a source of pride among fans, especially original vinyl discs and other “authentic” objects dating from the 1960s, most of the time passed down to them from older family members. Such objects not only convey a certain aura of the 1960s and The Beatles, but are usually sold at auctions at prices generally unaffordable for youth, adding to their preciousness for those who own them.

Collecting objects is not only a way of publicly showing one’s taste for The Beatles and comparing oneself to other fans, creating hierarchies based on the level of fan capital, but also a way of bringing images home in compensation for not being able to see The Beatles live on stage. Today, The Beatles exist only through recordings, films, videos, images, books and other material objects. To collect as much of these objects as possible would then almost be a way of saying “I know them, I have seen them”.

The search for other fans

Once a certain level of fan capital attained, fans can go in search of other fans, now able to identify each other in the crowd. For youth, knowing other Beatles fans not only becomes a way of affirming their own fandom, but also acts as "proof of one's own normality", as writes Le Bart (2000: 78). In fact, this is an almost constant preoccupation for these fans, a perpetual searching around to find other like-minded fans, not to feel "strange". It is especially here that we clearly see the link that fans draw between fan capital, in all its forms, and fandom: differentiating the "real fan" from the "not really fan", creating a hierarchy of categories. Knowing "only" a few famous Beatles songs or listening to them on rare occasions does not qualify a person for being accepted as a fan by other fans. Similarly, listening to more contemporary music together with The Beatles often marks the person as "not really fan".

When struggling to find other fans, some manage to "convert", as they say, their friends and family into Beatles lovers, while others turn to online spaces and virtual friends. The Internet allows many fans to come together and interact in virtual spaces such as the above-mentioned "fan clubs" on *fanpop.com*, groups like "Beatlemaniacs" on *Facebook* or other sites, blogs, forums, etc. One third of our interviewees had participated in such online activities, sometimes with the intention to "educate" and influence their friends and others into appreciating The Beatles. Others expressed regret in their non-participation due to lack of time, lack of original ideas, the linguistic barrier for non-English speakers, or other barriers of age, gender, etc. Then, there were those who preferred listening to the music instead of debating it, or still those who did not *yet* participate, modestly waiting to accumulate more fan capital before becoming publicly active.

Getting closer to The Beatles

Accumulating fan capital allows not only to publicly display one's taste and find other fans, but also to get closer to this band: being and doing like The Beatles. We present here this next stage on the path to fandom: the four main ways of getting closer to The Beatles for today's younger fans.

To dress and to comb like them: Perhaps the easiest way for fans to feel closer to their favourite band is visual style: dressing and having a hairstyle like The Beatles. But, far from blindly imitating them, these young fans are very critical towards The Beatles' and their own styles, constantly judging how well the style will suit them, if at all, what elements to take or reject, in what situations, etc. One third of our interviewees said having been influenced by the 1960s style, the "Mod" or the "Swinging London" styles. Men, of course, can adopt a Beatles style much easier than women, who then turn towards 1960s feminine styles or adopt elements of the Beatles' style to being more feminine. Others had either decided, after much contemplation, that this style would simply not suit them, or were still contemplating.

To play an instrument, like them: Once dressed like them, the next step is trying to learn to play Beatles songs on a musical instrument, especially one that the band members also played. Most of our interviewees could play an instrument, at various degrees, ranging from beginners to those who played on stage. The most mentioned instrument was the guitar, followed by piano, bass guitar, drums and harmonica. Those who did not play any instrument had, generally, either tried or hoped to start one day. While many fans often played Beatles songs, mostly in an amateur way – for the pleasure of playing, for friends and family – others had been inspired by this band to take up an instrument or had a repertoire that turned exclusively around The Beatles.

Going to see tribute bands: Generally, a third way of getting close to a favourite musician is to see him or her live on stage. This is perhaps the ultimate way of affirming one's fandom, as being able to say "I have seen him/her in concert" brings in more fan capital. Given the impossibility to see The Beatles in concert today, the younger fans look for alternatives, the most "authentic" of which being the chance to see a concert by one of the remaining members. The lesser "authentic" alternative is seeing tribute bands in concert, thereby imagining what a "real" Beatles concert would sound, look and feel like. In the case of our interviewees, opinion was largely divided regarding tribute bands: while some clearly despised even the idea of "copies" of their favourite band, others welcomed them with open arms. The dilemma usually resided in one criterion: the authenticity of the concert. If it is not "them", said some, then it is not worth the time or money. But, the rest argued that with some imagination, it can become "them", or very close, and that tribute bands help spread the word among a younger audience – a mission, we saw, that some young fans assign themselves.

Visiting places, going on pilgrimage: The ultimate way for young fans to get closer to The Beatles, and that remains a dream for most of them, is by visiting places related to this band, the "Beatles sites": the childhood houses of the members, now museums, the iconic crossing at Abbey Road in London, real places mentioned in Beatles songs (the orphanage Strawberry Fields, Penny Lane street in Liverpool, etc.), or the John Lennon memorial in New York. Here, too, the discriminating criterion is authenticity: these are real places through which The Beatles have passed. Seeing places and touching objects as authentic as these is the supreme means of being able to "feel" The Beatles, compensating for the void in the impossibility of seeing them.

But, visiting such places remains financially unaffordable for most youth, and it is precisely this rarity that makes up important fan capital: having saved enough money and put time and effort in going to see these places means being a "real fan", as if going on a pilgrimage. In the meantime, fans visit all other places accessible to them: local clubs, museums, etc. But, being less authentic, these remain less preferable options. Regarding our interviewees, some had already seen Beatles sites, and were most proud, while others had begun planning, researching or were looking for more opportunities of visits. In all cases, visiting Beatles sites was never judged as unnecessary, contrary to questions about dressing style or tribute bands, for example, when fans were very critical sometimes and far from accepting everything and at all costs. Even if the market readily plays on the sensibility of fans towards such "sacred" places, and if some Beatles sites have come to be very commercialised, unavoidable and even fetish, the market and fans fuel each other mutually: the most marketed places are the most authentic, hence most often ranking on top of fans' list of places to visit.

Appropriating The Beatles

In accumulating fan capital and finding ways of getting closer to The Beatles, fans also undergo phases of appropriating this music: creating individual ways, almost rituals, of listening to The Beatles, with a personal touch. That is, distinguishing between the times and situations for listening to The Beatles and other types of music. Even listening to The Beatles at all times and in all situations is always a conscious activity: the time and place for it are carefully chosen, according to the what, where and why of the situation. This is an activity never left to chance: fans constantly judge, decide and choose carefully.

Most of our interviewees had a favourite time or place for listening to The Beatles. Sometimes, this music was reserved for more solitary times – in the car or at home, in the evenings – be it for being able to sing out loud, cry or laugh without disturbing others, or for being able to contemplate the lyrics and feel the music without being disturbed. Then, there were those who always listened to this music in the same situations, during the same moments, passing by the same places, with a feeling of not being able to do without it. Others still followed the order of release of albums in listening or, on the contrary, preferred matching the music to a given situation. That is, being able to choose the right moment for the right song, and the right song for the right moment, according to mood. There are songs more fitted for dancing, for example, and others for when one's mood is down. And for this, one must know well the entire discography, of course, which implies a certain level of fan capital.

Youth "retromania": nostalgia without nostalgia

We would like to conclude this article with a more general aspect of the Beatlemania of today's youth: their often acute taste not only for The Beatles, but for the 1960-70s music in general, the "oldies". This "New Beatlemania" is an example of the more general tendency of preferring music from previous decades, "retromania" (Reynolds 2011). In fact, more than half of our interviewees preferred mostly, if not "exclusively", the 1960-70s rock/pop music, sometimes with open irony towards more contemporary music, calling it "new disney music" or stating "my mind just instantly shrugs it off."

Taken from the group "Beatlemaniacs" on *Facebook*³, Figure 1 shows a visual illustration of this "retromania" among youth. Both ironic and sincere, the image is divided into two parts: the top shows portraits of musicians from past decades, now deceased (including two Beatles members), while the bottom shows portraits of contemporary young musicians, with the caption "Heaven must sound beautiful... cause it's hell down here".

This "retromania" among youth has raised questions and puzzled authors, but few answers have been suggested. The essayist Charles Paul Freund (2001) writes: "Since when do teen consumers identify with music that is so closely associated with a previous generation? Isn't teen culture usually about distancing a rising generation from its predecessors?" The sociologist Christian Le Bart notes, in his above-mentioned study, "this anonymous modern teenager who, contrary to his friends fans of Oasis, takes the risk to show his taste for the sixties"⁴ (2000: 11). The musicologist Simon Reynolds (2011) calls this tendency among youth "nostalgia without nostalgia", since they have no personal memories ("nostalgia") of the decades in question. Reynolds furthers his argument to speak of a "stagnation" and even "retreat" of contemporary music, arguing pop music has not seen many new styles lately:

"Instead of being the threshold to the future, the first ten years of the twenty-first century turned out to be the "Re" Decade. The 2000s were dominated by the "re-" prefix: *revivals*, *reissues*, *remakes*, *re-enactments*. Endless *retrospection*: every year brought a fresh spate of anniversaries, with their attendant glut of biographies, memoirs, rockumentaries, biopics and commemorative issues of magazines. Then there were the band *reformations*, whether it was groups *reuniting* for nostalgia tours in order to *replenish* (or to bloat still further) the members'

³ "Beatlemaniacs", Facebook, <https://www.facebook.com/groups/139155622807231/> (15.05.2014)

⁴ Our translation from French.

bank balances [...] or as a prequel to returning to the studio to relaunch their careers as recording artists." (2011: 11)



Figure 1

If Reynolds is worried about the future of pop music more in terms of production, what interests us here is the tendency of youth to prefer music of past decades: The Beatles, The Kinks, Pink Floyd, Rolling Stones, Led Zeppelin, Queen... Should we, as Reynolds, worry for this young audience and say that the absence of "good" music, progressive and innovative, leads young music lovers to look for favourites elsewhere, among the music of bygone decades? Is the "stagnation" that Reynolds speaks of the reason for this return of youth towards the "oldies"? Can we even speak of a more general tendency, stating that youth today look for more ways of getting closer to their parents than did the youth of the 1960-70s? Why do some youngsters reject contemporary music that their close friends listen to? Why chose such distinction? Is music from the past few decades really as superior in quality to contemporary music that these young fans prefer not to share a musical taste with their friends and even be judged having a "strange" taste, than listen to contemporary music? According to Reynolds, yes: "The decade [1960s] set the bar impossibly high" (2011: 411).

As our study showed, young Beatles or "oldies" fans today are well conscious of their choice and that their passion for this music may be seen as "strange" or "unusual" by their immediate entourage or the elder generation. At times, they instantly engage in explanations of their musical taste, other times they simply would rather not discuss it. This usually leads them to prefer listening to The Beatles in more solitary contexts. But, they continue looking for other Beatles fans, even trying to "convert" their friends, not to feel alone or "strange" in their passion. Without always succeeding in this search for others, these young fans often remain more or less alone in their love for The Beatles, or the "oldies".

We would thus like to conclude by leaving the path open for future research centred around youth "retromania" today. Why do some youngsters now claim, as one of our interviewees, that "like many people, I feel I was born too late"? Many more questions remain to be answered and more reflection to be driven around this wider phenomenon of which "New Beatlemania" is only one example.

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