
The Role Of The Album A Hard Day's Night In The Beatles' Legacy

Amidst their growing popularity and the crazed hysteria by adoring fans, the Beatles released their third album, A Hard Day's Night on July 10, 1964. The commemorated opening chord of the album, accentuated by George Harrison's new Rickenbacker 12-string guitar, sets a powerful opening sequence that is followed suit by prominent instrumentation and the Beatles' stellar musicianship. Unlike their prior records, this album consists only of original compositions by the songwriting duo John Lennon and Paul McCartney. The decision to exclude rock and roll covers, that were deep-rooted in the previous albums, led to a new dominant pop sound. The release of this album coincided with the Beatles' release of their feature film also titled A Hard Day's Night, released four days prior on July 6, 1964. The opening sequence of the feature film mirrors the candid reality of the Beatles' success. This film provided cinematic insight of mass hysteria to convey the height of Beatlemania. Although scripted, the portrayal of the insanity surrounding the Beatles, with the rioting of girls and constant screaming, accurately portrays the impact of the Beatles on teen culture.

Unlike the US release, A Hard Day's Night was not marketed as a soundtrack of the feature film. Side one of the record featured songs from the film while side two featured new original songs not included in the film. Similar to the cover notes of an album, the movie gives a person more to think about as they listened to the album. The performances of some of the songs throughout the film establish a visual in one's mind that they can reimagine as they listen to the same song again on the album. While the movie portrayed the frenzy surrounding the Beatles, the album gave the reason why. A Hard Day's Night (album) showcased a transition in the Beatles music, the beginning of an evolutionary process of complexity and maturity that would not be cemented until the creation of Rubber Soul in 1965. It is important to note throughout the album that the Beatles have really evolved in terms of musicianship. The more elaborate guitar work in combination with the use of more eccentric instrumentation adds texture to the songs by adding further layers of music under the vocals. In addition to the traditional drums, guitars, and bass guitar that are a staple of Beatles music, A Hard Day's Night incorporates the harmonica, piano, cowbell, congo drums, claves, bongo drums, and the tambourine which produces variety in instrumentation and affects one's listening experience.

By adding instruments not previously used, we, as the listeners, can hear how the timbre of the songs vary because of the interactions between those instruments and the vocals of John, Paul, and George. This album also captures the attempts of progression at songwriting. John dominated the songwriting in this album and here we see how he begins to add more complex

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emotions into his songs, those of a more pessimistic sentiment. This is not to say that Paul did not improve his songwriting because he also did. Both John and Paul began to introduce and write of issues that complicate matters of love such as Paul's discussion of materialism in "Can't Buy Me Love." In terms of form and structure, the duo also began to create a narrative in their songs (i.e. "A Hard Day's Night" and "Can't Buy Me Love") rather than just focus on emotion. This narrative style of writing would be further inspired by Bob Dylan in the albums following Help! "If I Fell," the third track of the album, is one of the songs that depicts Lennon's progression in songwriting. The lyrics in this ballad express a magnitude of vulnerability whose emotion is unmatched by any other songs. Lennon questions the premise of trust between lovers creating a cynical narrative that stems from having been rejected. This plea for genuine affection is further complicated by the vindictive need for revenge in wanting to make the ex-lover suffer as well. Here, Lennon makes a huge leap in refining his songwriting craft by beginning to write more about issues that come at the cost of love rather than just being in love.

In this album, the Beatles' music and vocals more strongly reflect or emphasize the narrative/feelings conveyed by the lyrics. In this song, for example, the instrumental backing has an acoustic-like sound as the tempo of the song is at a slower pace, contrasting the typical fast-paced "early Beatles" rock songs. This stripped instrumental arrangement emphasizes the vocal work on the song. The low register of John's voice in the first verse creates this somber tone which reflects the gloomy mood of the narrator. When Paul joins John in the following verses, he sings in a slightly higher pitch than John. This harmony not only adds texture to the overall composition of the song but the contrasting pitches can represent the internal conflict the narrator may feel. That is wanting to be in love, but being afraid to be hurt once again. Although not lyrically impressive, the fifth track, "And I Love Her," shows how the arrangement and use of certain instruments can create rhythms that are appealing to one's ear. In fact, this album's popularity bids most of its due to the consistent catchy rhythms and melodies of the songs. In "And I Love Her," the instrumentation is distinctive because of George's new guitar sound and the use of the claves. The guitar riff and guitar solo are unlike those of earlier Beatles songs; George accentuates the guitar sound with a Spanish-like strum that gives off this Latin pop beat. The slow tempo of the song and acoustic melodies create a sort of delicate feeling to the song that reflects the theme. Paul is the only vocalist; his voice is double-tracked throughout the song. This use of double-tracking is a recording technique that adds texture to the song and makes the vocal more distinctive as a single voice would not have been as attention-grabbing. The song itself speaks of love thus the double-tracking almost makes it so the listener feels serenaded.

The album closes with the song "I'll Be Back," a John Lennon composition. Similar to "And I Love Her," the instrumental components and musical details in "I'll Be Back" reinforce the idea behind the lyrics. Here, once again we see John Lennon move away from the traditional "aaba" song form that encompasses the structure of their early songs. There is no distinctive chorus in

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the song so the song unravels in a story-like manner. This makes each verse a pivot in the narrative. Furthermore, the alignment of “I’ll Be Back” blurs the distinction between one section and another section, once again contributing to the story-like feel of the song. The subject of Lennon’s narrative involves heartbreak. The narrator expresses the hurt he has experienced at the hands of his lover but he continues to want her love anyway. When listening to the song, it is imperative to look for the changes in modes within the verses. The modes of a song involve the diatonic scale, that is the major and minor scale.

In “I’ll Be Back,” there are major and minor chord changes. Since the major scale is generally regarded as “happier” while the minor scale is “sadder,” these chord shifts create a feeling of unsettlement because of the paradoxical conflict between the two modes. This, of course, reflects the melancholy emotions of the narrative because of his ambivalent love. This unsettling feeling affects the listener of the album as well since these feelings are left unresolved and the album has ended. The last line is, in fact, “I’ll be back” which in itself leaves a lasting impact on the listeners as they are given this implicit promise that further music is to come.

Beatlemania put the Beatles in the world’s spotlight. With all eyes on them, the Beatles use this album to show their musicianship and prove that they can do more than they had already done. By writing an album that consists of only original songs, using other instruments apart from their traditional guitars and drums, and refining their vocal work with the use of double-tracking and more elaborate harmonies, the Beatles showcase their creativity and their potential to do even more. This album represents not only their definitive peak of success but also the starting point of a more soulful and groundbreaking musical legacy that would follow in the years to come.

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