60s Music Facts

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The '60s was an era of bell bottoms and go-go boots. During this time, rock music emerged as a major medium for expressing and defining the new hippie life-style combined with colourful, swirling imagery. With this music branded as "psychedelic," plus the emerging hippie popularity, and big, afro hairstyles, it truly was a distinct period in the history of music. (Placeholder1)

## Early '60s

The late '50s started to give way to the '60s, but the most popular stars of the '50s—such as Elvis – were still doing big business. Instrumental surf groups like the Surfaris and Crossfires started to emerge, while a band called the Beach Boys gave a vocal twist to the popular surf-and-drag sound. Other artists such as Brian Wilson and Phil Spector ventured into discovering new sounds. Meanwhile a record label from Detroit called Motown helped popularise black performers, including Marvin Gaye who was the first to take over his own artistic career.

## Mid '60s

Popularly called the "British Invasion", the mid-'60s was dominated by one of the most popular bands in history: the Beatles. Their popularity escalated to such a level that at one point, they were said to have occupied the uppermost five records on the Billboard 100 hotlist. Soon after they invaded the shores of America, many other American bands emerged trying to mimic the sound and attitude of the British band. These groups were the likes of the Knickerbockers, Sir Douglas Quintet, Buckinghams, Beau Brummels, and the Turtles.

## Late '60s

After the Beatles announced that they would no longer be touring and focused on full-time studio recording, Brian Wilson of the Beach Boys also started experimenting with new sounds. This period then saw the release of Sgt Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band, a new album from the Beatles, and Smiley Smile from the Beach Boys. The emerging songs became more and more a personification of the hallucinogenic vibe, with artsy music, odd effects, and songs filled with strange statements.

Then, in the later years of the sixties, other groups emerged with less experimental sounds, an unravelling of the earlier psychedelic vibe.

## Influences

The music of the '60s was influenced by a variety of factors. The early '60s was dominated by surfing and the beach scene, which became evident in the music. This was followed by more radical themes, which was in tune with the growing use of psychedelic drugs. Many of the popular artists used drugs for recreation, popularised by Timothy Leary. This resulted in many breakdowns such as that of Brian Wilson, and many deaths in the late '60s. During this period, British influences can be attributed to the Beatles, whose attitude, clothes, and even accent became the trend.

## Bestselling Artists

Most notable of the era was the Beatles. The Beach Boys and the Rolling Stones were two other well-loved bands whose songs persisted even through the decades after the sixties. The Motown sound also managed to prevail, with a band called Miracles hitting the top two spot in the Billboard Hot 100.

## Number ones

The first UK number one of the 1960s was "What Do You Want to Make Those Eyes at Me For" by Emile Ford and the Checkmates and the last UK number one of the 1960s was "Two Little Boys" by Rolf Harris. The most weeks a song spent at number one in the UK was 8 and that accolade was shared by "It’s Now or Never" by Elvis Presley, "Wonderful Land" by the Shadows and "Sugar Sugar" by the Archies.

## The Beatles

It is impossible to talk about 1960s music without mentioning The Beatles. They had 17 UK number one records during the 1960s and are arguably the most famous band of all time. Their first number one was "From Me to You" in May 1963 and their last number one was "The Ballad of John and Yoko" in June 1969. The Beatles split up in 1970 and never got back together again.

## Biggest sellers

The biggest selling single of the 60s was "She Loves You" by the Beatles, which sold more than 1.89 million copies. The Beatles had four of the five biggest selling singles of the 60s; along with "She Loves You" were "I Want to Hold Your Hand" at 2, "Can’t Buy Me Love" at 4 and "I Feel Fine" at 5. Total dominance by The Beatles was only prevented – incredibly – by Ken Dodd’s "Tears." The Beatles dominated the albums chart too with "Sgt Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band" at number 1 and they had seven of the top ten albums of the 1960s. The three remaining places were taken by soundtracks with "The Sound of Music" at number 2, "South Pacific" at number 5 and "West Side Story" at number 10. The next album that was neither by The Beatles nor a soundtrack was "Bookends" by Simon and Garfunkel at number 14.

## Radio 1

The BBC used to play popular music as part of "BBC Light Programme", which started in 1945, but the corporation felt pop music needed its own station. In 1967, The BBC Light Programme, which became Radio 2 and Radio 1, was launched to compete with pirate radio stations for pop music listeners. Tony Blackburn was the first DJ to broadcast on Radio 1 and the first record he played was "Flowers in the Rain" by the Move, followed by "Massachusetts" by the Bee Gees.

## Rock festivals

The 1960s saw the start of the rock festival as a live venue for bands and artists. Undoubtedly the most famous of all was Woodstock, which was held in a 600 acre dairy farm near Bethel, New York. Richie Havens was the first person to sing at Woodstock, just after 5PM on Friday 15 August 1969. A plethora of famous names played the venue, including the Who, Santana, Grateful Dead, Creedence Clearwater Revival, Jefferson Airplane and Joe Cocker, and Jimi Hendrix closed the concert at approximately 11:10 AM on Monday 18 August 1969. There were big festivals in the UK too. Perhaps the most famous were the Isle of White Festivals of 1968, 1969 and 1970 featuring Bob Dylan, Tyrannosaurus Rex, the Band, the Pretty Things, the Who, Bonzo Dog Doo-Dah Band and Jefferson Airplane amongst others. These festivals became icons for the hippie movement, which was predominant at the time.