

RECORD COLLECTOR

BOOKS

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How The Beatles Invaded Hollywood



JIM KAPLAN TALKS TO MUSIC HISTORIAN HARVEY KUBERNIK ABOUT HIS NEW BOOK: IT WAS 50 YEARS AGO TODAY THE BEATLES INVADED AMERICA AND HOLLYWOOD

by Jim Kaplan~

Los Angeles native and pop and rock music historian Harvey Kubernik has been an active journalist for over 40 years, published six books, penned over a thousand articles and has been acknowledged in over 150 books. For the last few years, Harvey has written just about every cover story in Record Collector News. I'm constantly receiving fan letters and emails lauding his work and praising his diligent and factual research evident in his interviews and profiles in our pages.

The book company Otherworld Cottage Industries in February just published Harvey Kubernik's book *It Was Fifty Years Ago Today: The Beatles Invade America and Hollywood*.

In it, Harvey discusses the Beatles and their unquestionable Southern California bond with Clem Burke, Richard Bosworth, Roger McGuinn, Dino Danelli, Chris Darrow, Ram Dass, Johnny Echols, Kim Fowley, Allen Ginsberg, Mark Guerrero, George Harrison, Rodney Bingenheimer, Gene Aquilera, Jim Keltner, Dan Kessel, David Kessel, Paul Body, Albert Maysles, D.A. Pennebaker, Andrew Solt, David Leaf, Ravi Shankar, Don Peake, Phil Spector, Andrew Loog Oldham, John Van Hamersveld, Ken Scott, Doug Fieger, Ringo Starr, Sir George Martin, Giles Martin, Berry Gordy, Jr., James Cushing, and many more musicians, DJ's, writers and pundits.

Harvey's book is a very important look at the Beatles and the band's previously unexamined relationship to the musical heritage of Los Angeles and Hollywood from the late-1950s to mid-'70s.



(L-R) Paul McCartney, Ringo Starr, George Harrison and John Lennon arrive to face a phalanx of reporters at JFK airport on February 7, 1964.

Roy Trakin, contributing editor to *The Hollywood Reporter* and *Billboard* magazine in his February 2014 “Trakin Care Of Business: When I Paint My Masterpiece” column wrote of Kubernik’s book on the Beatles. “This compendium of his four decades as a tireless pop chronicler is kind of like his version of Springsteen’s *High Hopes*, a compilation of outtakes and previously unreleased excerpts that serves as a veritable oral history of the Fab Four’s various connections to Hollywood, along with some nifty reproductions of artifacts of the time. The Beatles’ 50th anniversary celebration may have long since turned into media overkill, but Kubernik’s focused, tirelessly completist approach to the Fab Four’s Hollywood connection offers firm proof how important this town was to their eventual world conquest.”

During 2014’s Beatles’ 50th marketing campaign in America and the recent Apple Corps Ltd./Capitol releases of the box set of *The Beatles The U.S. Albums*, and *On Air- Live at the BBC Volume 2*, distributed domestically by Universal Music Enterprises, I felt it was totally appropriate to discuss the Beatles with Harvey Kubernik and his new book on the lads who changed our world.

THE INTERVIEW

We met inside Tony’s Bella Vista Restaurant & Pizzeria in Burbank, California.

Q: The 13-CD *The U.S. Albums* differed from the band’s U.K. albums in a variety of ways, including different track lists, song mixes, album titles and artwork. Do you have one theory why the Beatles still sell recordings?



Harvey Kubernik

A: It probably comes down to the songs. Great songs make great records. The cover versions done by thousands of recording artists underscore this. Paul McCartney's bass playing really propelled these tunes at us and Ringo truly swung as a drummer. John and George's vocals and musical instruments were also hurled at our ears — a wave of found sound that still splashes.

“During a 1997 interview I conducted with George Harrison for HITS, he explained one reason why the band's studio catalog endures. ‘That was the environment in the band-everybody was very open to bringing in new ideas. We were listening to all sorts of things, Stockhausen, avant-garde music, whatever, and most if it made its way onto our records.’

Q: The Beatles' 2-CD package *On Air- Live at the BBC Volume 2* was issued in late 2013.

A: Ringo Starr said in 1994, “You tend to forget that we were a working band. It's that mono sound. There were usually no overdubs. We were in at the count-in and that was it. I get excited listening to them.’ In my book I asked James Cushing why the Beatles still excite him and how come their recordings constantly sell units.

“In the Beatles Paul's bass playing was supportive and creative; solid and danceable. Always giving an underpinning for the whole song. John Lennon's rhythm guitar playing used to seem buried a bit in the mix on the earlier releases. On the current CD reissues it's up a bit this time around. Instrumentally he served the song. This was a writer's band, not a virtuoso player's band. The contributions of George Harrison tend to get overlooked a bit. I just read something about just how good were the Beatles? Their third best songwriter was awesome. His guitar playing was so economical. Everything was there to serve the song, like a Motown player. Ringo's drum work served the music perfectly. Beat is the first word in their name, after all.

“Paul and John's magic was that they were close. They also grew apart. Which is a paradox of this whole thing, as best demonstrated on the *White Album*. The Lennon and McCartney scope of songs were to become more experimental and built on the fundamental confidence that they always had. They both believed musically they could do anything they wanted to and aided by the belief that never died.’

Q: Why write *It Was 50 Years Ago Today The Beatles Invade America and Hollywood*?

A: I've been actively compiling and conducting interviews the last ten years anticipating this 50 year marker anniversary of the Beatles sonic and fiscal impact in America. In 2004 I did a very short essay on the band's 40th marker for *Goldmine* magazine and spent the next decade preparing for the 50th.

“I had a lot of research over 40 years and photos and visual artifacts of the last 50 years and connections to friends and associates who have provided images to my previous books before.

“Last September Steven Gaydos, the executive editor of Variety saw a very rough draft of a working draft I was preparing for the impending 50th Beatles in America arrival. He did an edit that subsequently ran as a three page spread in Variety and scooped all the 2014 articles and cover stories we’ve read the last few months about the Beatles coming and dominating America in 1964.



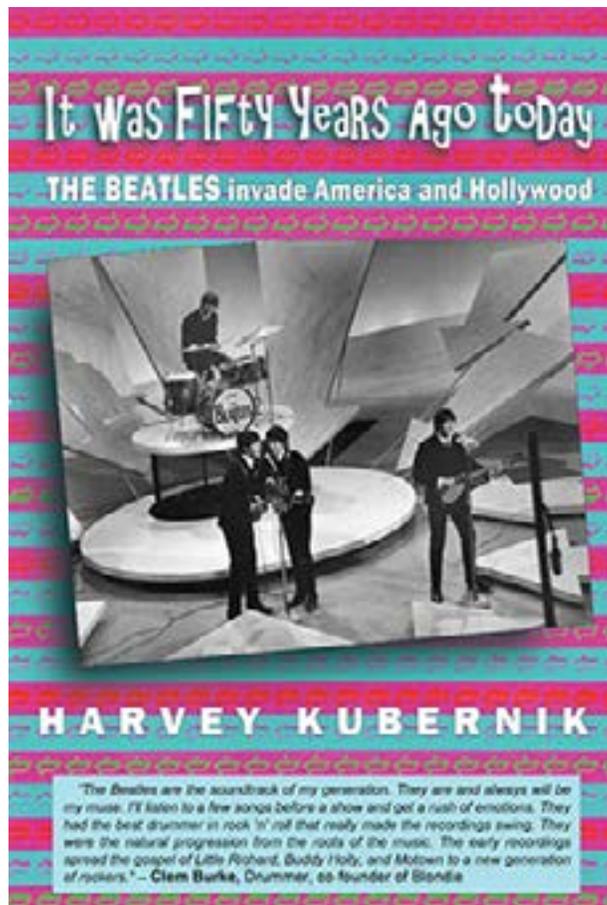
The Beatles with Ed Sullivan in New York, February 9, 1964.

“I also thought I could deliver some back story and never before told insights into the Beatles’ impact on America and the influence of America on them.

“So many music and news publications and previous books on the Beatles mention their appearances on The Ed Sullivan Show so I brought more views into those bookings and February 1964 events. I reminded the readers that the Beatles appeared later on the Shindig! TV series. I had an obligation to let readers into the crucial roles the DJ’s in L.A. and Hollywood played in exposing their initial U.S. records. I also made it a point in my book to involve some New York and New Jersey kids, who later formed bands like the Rascals and Blondie.

Q: One of the terrific things about your work, and this is always on display in Record Collector News, is the implementation of the long form narrative.

A: I like when the people and witnesses who were there from jump street have something new to say we've never read before and they're honest or as close to the truth as possible with me. I trust their memories. I realize my techniques and results make impressions, and, at times, correct falsehoods and errors printed over the decades. So, I'm also part revealing and healing agent. I like to really find the new sources and also get my subjects to tell me something that hasn't been out before. I like to go deep. The readers appreciate my efforts.



Q: You somehow manage to bring so many new pieces of information along with the cinematic aspect of your writing. And you brought some really cool photos of the Beatles into your book never published.

A: When I do a book I really search for visuals to move my story. It's getting a bit easier now, rights holders and filmmakers like Andrew Solt, who owns the Ed Sullivan Show library, supplied pictures and many photographers like Henry Diltz and Ed Caraeff went into their archives for me. Jim Roup, Gary Pig Gold, Harold Sherrick, Charlene Nowak and Gary Strobl were helpful. I'm the photo editor and assemble the visual images around the text.

"I found a couple of dozen pictures and visuals to augment the narrative. Never before glimpsed photos from one of their 1965 Hollywood Bowl concerts. Or press releases that hadn't been viewed in almost 50 years. "I'm in it for the challenge. Undertaking a Beatles book. How many books have been published on them? I knew I had plenty to offer that was never exposed or extensively reported about their ties to my hometown. I delivered.

Q: You met or interviewed all four Beatles and the producers and engineers who worked with them. Does that add some sort of layer to the book?

A: That's only part of it. I made it a point to speak to engineers who were involved in not just recording them, but who mastered their discs and the restoration engineers who created digital copies from analog tapes. I encountered Ken Scott, who engineered numerous recording sessions for the Beatles. So you get both a recording history added to the sociological Southern California mystery lesson. For the 20 years, whenever I would formally interview poets and authors like Allen Ginsberg, Ram Dass, Deepak Chopra, the filmmaker D.A. Pennabaker, Brian Wilson, Dick Clark, Doug Fieger of the Knack, or the Leiber and Stoller team, I would also ask them a subject specific question about the Beatles.

"Ken Scott had a real insider observation about why the Beatles' recordings resonate. 'I also feel that a lot of it is because it's real. They were performances. It's not like it is today, where it's all pieced together.

Yes, we would do punch-ins and that kind of thing, but there wasn't copying one chorus and putting it in every chorus so it's always exactly the same. They had to sing and play everything. And they had this ability of being able to take the audience, their audience, through changes. Without losing them. They always moved just enough that they could pull their audience with them and have the audience grow along with them.'

"I was sort of putting this book together for the last 40 years on some level without any deadline or market idea, except I knew I would be writing something in 2014 about their 50 year association with America. I guess I was building a book in my mind.

"It's also an outgrowth of my music journalism and unique writing style that likes to parade the Q. and A. dialogue and fuse it with narrative. It's quite obvious that I really love most of the music I write about. That might be one of the reasons why people relate to my books. The writing and remarks by pundits and "the collective" join in the pages with me. I spend a lot of time on editing. I think the strength of my books is the combination of text and visuals. However, I know the words and stories could work on their own without pictures.



"Case in point. This happened in March. I just received an email from a DJ who hosts a Grateful Dead radio show. I did an interview with him a few years ago when the book I did with my brother Ken on the Monterey International Pop Festival was published. The DJ sent me an email from a listener:

"I'm blind, but thanks to Kindle, I can listen to all the terrific text in Harvey's book, which you guys featured on Tales a couple years ago. I first bought the illustrated version, which was useless with my scanner that turns print into speech. The text alone is excellent and truly evokes the magical spirit of that event.' That was a very encouraging and inspirational response.

Q: I learned so many new things about the Beatles and their impact in Southern California. I know RCN readers will be interested in all the information you weaved together. Like, finding out about local recordings from Hollywood and L.A. they performed on stage, on studio sessions recorded, but never commercially released. Who knew, according to both Ringo Starr and Kim Fowley, the Beatles at Abbey Road cut a version of the Fowley co-produced and co-published "Alley Oop" originally done by the Hollywood Argyles in 1960.

A: Yes, in my earlier book on Laurel Canyon I cited “Alley Oop” and Fowley’s many roles in the creation of that seminal record. It’s a moment in the Beatles book where you realize just how important the Teddy Bears, the Coasters, and other regional L.A. made recordings had on the Beatles. I was impressed by Fowley’s memory of events around “Alley Oop.” Kim first met the songwriter and then heard his song while living at a gas station in Hollywood. He then secured the initial money to record it and then called his production partner, Gary Paxton.

“Over nearly 40 years I made it a point to meet and talk to a half a dozen people involved with this actual recording: The studio owner, the engineer, the lawyer Walter E. Hurst, who did the legal paperwork and one of the background singers on the session, all whom told me specifics about Kim and the recording. Fowley made the production suggestion to have the lead vocal sung in a more narrative fashion, too. “Maybe 30 years ago, Kim and I were walking on Hollywood Boulevard and Kim introduced me to the legendary multi-instrumentalist/arranger Rene Hall, who filled me in on all the session players Kim phoned for the ‘Alley Oop’ date. Rene’s wife Sugar was Kim’s office manager in the 1960-1963 period. Rene played guitar on the Fowley-produced hit “Nut Rocker” by B. Bumble and the Stingers. So I revealed the story that’s verified by a plethora of sources. Participants who were there, before Ringo and the Beatles even heard the “Alley Oop” record, let alone when they attempted a version at Abbey Road recording studios.

“All this L.A. action in my book on the Beatles, like the saga of ‘Alley Oop’ and other items found in the Beatles’ stage show repertoire, Decca demo tape, and countless BBC radio appearances might lead readers to further discovery about the Beatles’ love of records done locally.

Q: I know you were ground zero when their records happened in America in late 1963 — not someone in 2014 on a magazine assignment or an online blogger born after the CD was invented who tries to write about an era you lived in.

A: I was exposed to live music in the very late fifties and pop and rock acts before I saw the Beatles in 1964 on the closed circuit broadcast of their 1964 Washington, D.C. concert. In 1956 I heard Elvis Presley, the Coasters and Fats Domino on local R&B radio stations. I have some of the same musical influences as the Beatles.

“We have a comical expression that, ‘If you were born after 1959 when the Los Angeles Dodgers won the World Series you really weren’t here when our city was definitely percolating. You came to the party after it was basically over.’

“Some of us were lodged in the tissue and the rest have had to hear it on reissue. Basically, I provide an extra lens inspecting regional pop culture aspects by the simple fact I was present and aware around the eruption. And residing in the epicenter of a thriving musical and radio community that informed the sound the Beatles gave us.

“I create the books for myself. And in the process it connects to others and has worldwide ramifications and results. It’s fortifying knowing my writing about the Beatles really can make some readers and experts on the Beatles learn something new about their magic. Especially about their self-initiated and ongoing links to Southern California previously never documented at length in hardcover forum.

In late April 2014, Harvey Kubernik’s Turn Up the Radio! Rock, Pop, and Roll in Los Angeles 1956–1972 will be published by Santa Monica Press. Eddie Cochran, Barry White, Bobby Womack, Jack Nitzsche, Sam Cooke, Sonny & Cher, Thee Midneters, Chris Darrow, Jerry Leiber and Mike Stoller, Bones Howe, the Byrds, Johnny Rivers, the 5th Dimension, Kim Fowley, Brian Wilson, and influential DJ’s Art Laboe, Dave Hull, the Real Don Steele, and Dave Diamond are examined like never before. www.santamonicapress.com.

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