

INTRODUCTION

A star's image generally reflects the ideals of his or her average audience. It enables the fans to identify with their idol on an emotional and/or intellectual level. The potential of identification with a star can be an important factor for his or her commercial success. Today the music industry actually creates and designs the image of popular musicians according to contemporary fashion and ideology in order to appeal to a mass audience.

Every genre of popular music has its own paradigm of ideology connected with it, ranging from hedonism to aggression. Each of these genres has developed a set of specific dress codes and stereotypical behaviour the audience expects from a performer representing a certain genre. These dress codes and behaviour are often instantly recognizable to the audience and allow a quick categorization of the performer in a known genre. Rock manager Simon Napier-Bell (The Yardbirds, Wham!) points out the importance of a rock group's image and The Beatles' influence on image creation in popular music: "If you think of the Beatles, you think of four faces, because their imagery became so much stronger than their playing. This is rather an insult to the Beatles because they were such fantastic musicians and made amazing records, but you tend to think of the imagery dominating the music and I think that's what's happened ever since, that the imagery of a boy group has become more important than the music" (Geller 2002: 48).

While the contemporary music industry is able to supply custom-made idols to all kinds of audiences through a multitude of media channels, the development of such target-group oriented marketing of popular music was only made possible by the immense success of Elvis Presley in the 1950s and The Beatles in the 1960s. Both, Elvis as well as The Beatles, were supported and promoted by visionary managers who were aware of the importance of appearance and attitude expected by a large segment of a young mass audience.

In the sphere of popular music the visual media have always played a significant role in the creation and reinforcement of a star's image. Ever since Benny Goodman appeared in a number of movies in the 1940s, film has been used as a powerful medium to project certain images of popular musicians. By the mid-1950s television had become the most

popular mass medium and an important platform for pop musicians, as they were able to present their songs to a large, nationwide audience. For instance, in 1956, Elvis Presley's appearance on *The Ed Sullivan Show* in front of a viewing audience of 52 million people contributed immensely to his popularity and his initial commercial success in the United States. In the 1960s The Beatles set out to overshadow Presley's popularity, and again it was Ed Sullivan who enabled them to sing their hits to a mass audience.

When 'Beatlemania' swept the United States in 1964, the band was promoted by an unprecedented marketing campaign which included the audiovisual media to a great extent. For example, The Beatles' first movie features *A Hard Day's Night* and *Help!* supported and promoted stereotypical images of each band member, which are still prevalent in the media perception of the group. Film critic and scholar Bob Neaverson is even convinced that "[p]erhaps more than any other broadcast media, their films were vital in communicating and showcasing the group's ever changing array of images, attitudes, ideas and musical styles. [...] *A Hard Day's Night* helped to disseminate their current visual 'look' to a global audience, and to develop their identities as four individuals [...]" (Neaverson 2000: 152). The semi-documentary style of The Beatles' first movie *A Hard Day's Night* and its intentional characteristic of establishing and distributing a credible image of the band and each individual member has contributed significantly to the confusion of facts and fiction in The Beatles' history and has shaped the way the public has perceived The Beatles ever since. The movie was the first major manifestation of Beatles myths, and its immense popularity and its status as a cult movie have led to a constant reinforcement of certain myths about the band.

In the course of only a few years The Beatles managed to convey their constantly evolving image through numerous different projects, reaching a wide-ranging and varied audience. They performed on numerous television shows all around the world, in order to promote their records and to reinforce their image. ABC-Television even broadcast a cartoon series featuring animated versions of the group members from 1965 to 1969. While this series mainly reached a juvenile target group, The Beatles' self-produced promotional films as well as their experimental television special *Magical Mystery Tour* were deliberately created for a more intellectual, adult audience. These works as well as the group's animated feature *Yellow Submarine* and their documentary *Let It Be* supported The Beatles' reputation as pop artistes and documented the band's break with their self-created 'happy Mop-Top' image.

Whereas The Beatles' influence on popular music is universally recognized, their promotional films and feature movies are often regarded

only as commercial by-products, created to cash in on the Beatles craze at the height of their success. In fact, however, The Beatles and their creative partners were pioneers in the development of the music video, establishing its function as well as its aesthetics. Bob Neaverson's *The Beatles Movies* has been the only notable academic book about The Beatles' cinematic output, while Roy Carr's *The Beatles at the Movies* and Bill Harry's *Beatlemania* offer casual facts and recollections from the people involved in the production of the group's movies. All three works were very helpful for my own analysis, and they are certainly the pioneering books in the field of Beatles film books. However, it was my aim to provide a more thoroughly researched historical background, as well as a contextual interpretation of the movies and their function as projectors of The Beatles' image at different stages in their career. In addition, this project also includes an analysis of all of The Beatles' promotional films and videos, as well as their television cartoon series and their self-produced television special *Magical Mystery Tour*.

Besides The Beatles' feature movies and promotional films, my analysis also contains documentaries, such as *Anthology* and *The Complete Beatles*, as well as dramatizations of the band's history, such as *Backbeat*, *The Hours and Times*, and *Two of Us*. It is my aim to identify the projection of certain images and to contextualize their historic meaning and significance. In addition, this analysis examines the authenticity of such portrayals and describes their contribution to the evolution of popular cultural legends and myths.

The system of reference consists of an extensive bulk of autobiographies, biographies, interviews and documents, with the help of which I attempt to reconstruct The Beatles' history in a comprehensive and, hopefully, fairly objective way. To clarify conflicting information and to advance the specific aim of this project I have had the great pleasure to meet and interview many contributors to The Beatles' history. In addition, the academic writings of Roland Barthes, Seymour Chatman, Simon Frith, Dick Hebdige, Tony Barta, John E. O'Connor, Silke Riemann, and Peter Wicke provided the framework for the contextualization of my own ideas and insights.

