

WORD SOUP



**"BUG MUSIC; OR THE
BEATLES AS SIMULACRA"**

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**OR, THE BEATLES
AS SIMULACRA**

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*“Oh look, they got the latest Bug Music!
I just love that swingin’ group: The Four Insects!”*

disclaimer: this will all be incredibly subjective and based on my own perceptions of how other people interpret the beatles (*perceptions of perceptions of perceptions*). the only real gauge I have on this is reading stuff that people have said on the internet. my research for this zine consisted of listening to several playlists with titles like ‘songs that sound like the beatles,’ watching beatles album reactions, lurking on various music subreddits, and so forth. and some of it is just stuff that I remember seeing over the years. I would like to do a more formal survey in the future when I have more time though! okay. now that my disclaimer has taken up an entire page, it is time to go on to the actual meat of the zine.

PT I. ROCK BAND

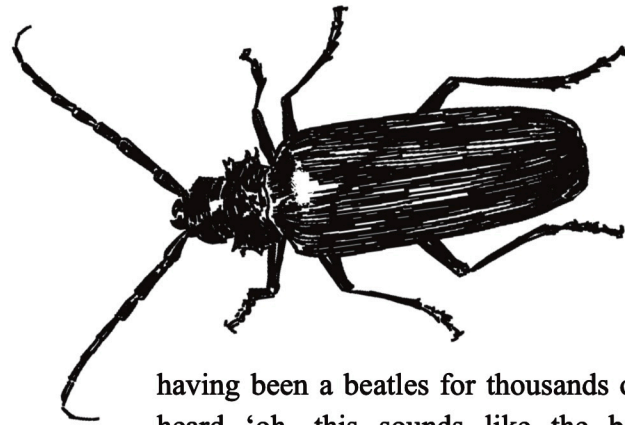
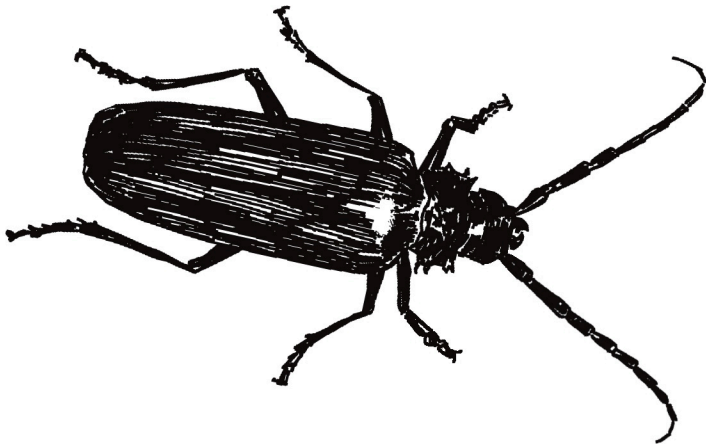


the beatles rock band came out in 2009 and is largely responsible for making me the annoying man* that I am today. I spent so many hours of my middle school life playing the same songs over and over, learning the individual guitar, drum, and bass lines that made up these songs. and I really came to appreciate the way that those individual pieces would come together (ha) to create something that I thought was so magical. I really can’t overstate the influence that the music of the beatles had (and still has) on me. I didn’t really care about music before I started playing that game. the beatles are really the building blocks of my understanding of music. and now I have to talk about panic at the disco.

before the beatles rock band, there was simply rock band. and rock band 2. and rock band 2 featured the song *nine in the afternoon* by panic at the disco, and I thought it was the best song ever.

I really enjoyed *pretty odd*, the album that that song comes from (except *folkin around*, which is a bad song <3). the way that the band incorporated so many different instruments, genres, and time signatures was very cool to me, and something I hadn't really heard before (it should be noted that I mainly listened to disney soundtracks and hannah montana before I was introduced to rock band). but my interest in *nine in the afternoon* and all the other songs on rock band 2 would take a backseat once I got the beatles version of the game.

I didn't return to *pretty odd* for a few years after that, but when I did, it was very obvious that the beatles had had a huge impact on that album. all of the interesting things that drew me to that album were the same things that drew me to the beatles. *pretty odd* is noticeably beetle flavored... whatever that means.



having been a beatles for thousands of years now, I have heard 'oh, this sounds like the beatles,' and similar sentiments, hundreds of times. and most of the time my reaction is 'yeah, I guess so?' but after hearing it pretty recently in relation to *multiple*** songs that I do not think sound like the beatles, I started to think about it a bit more.

what are people saying when they describe something as sounding like the beatles? what sounds or musical happenings lead one to say that a song is beatlesque? how does the general public's perception of the beatles' music influence how we talk about their legacy as a band? what does it mean for the band if the general public's perception is wrong?

**a few of the songs in question are *gravity blues* by geese, *two horses* by black country new road, and *coffee* by chappell roan

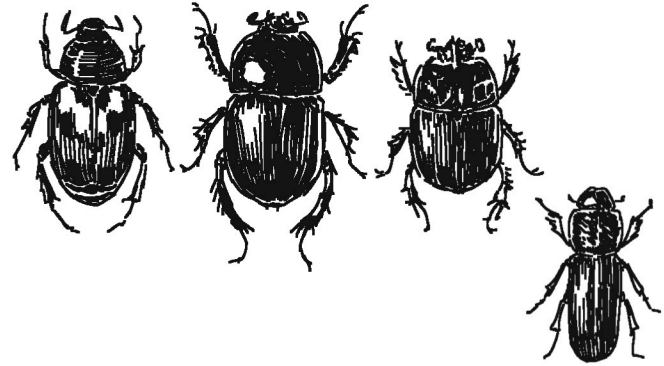
PT III. SIMULACRA

in the simplest of terms, *SIMULACRA* (or *simulacrum*) can be defined as a copy of something that does not exist. jean baudrillard's 1981 treatise *simulacra and simulation* suggests that there are four stages of simulacra, as follows:

1. a reflection of reality
2. reality is masked
3. absence of reality
4. no relation to reality

I believe that the music of the beatles has become subject to the stages of simulacra, leaving the general public with an idea of the Beatles' music that has no relation to reality. this idea exists in the form of a number of sounds, instruments, and sonic tropes, which make up music that 'sounds like the beatles.' this style of music will be referred to as Bug Music.

Bug Music represents a sonic palette that is intended to represent the music of the beatles, despite having no counterpart in reality. I want to try and figure out how this happened, as well as how Bug Music goes on to impact the public's perception of the beatles and their legacy.



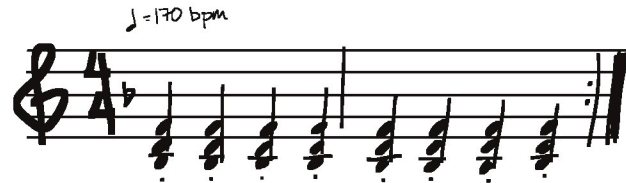
there are dozens of sounds that make up Bug Music; dozens of sounds that might inspire one to say 'hey, this sounds like the beatles.' as few or as many sounds as one desires can be combined to create Bug Music.

allow me to show you the plethora of sounds that make up Bug Music, complete with examples that I have been curating over the past month. these come from 1. playlists featuring songs that 'sound like the beatles,' put together by random people and by music-streaming algorithms, and 2. songs/albums intended to 'sound like the beatles,' as stated by members of their respective bands (ie. in both cases, someone at some point decided that the sounds they were hearing were beatlesque in some way).

PT III. BUG MUSIC

PIANO

during my studies for this zine, there is a certain piano sound that I haven't been able to escape: a bright piano playing staccato chords



any major chord will do. bonus points if they introduce drums or new instruments at the end of the two measures. some notable examples are:

mr. blue sky by electric light orchestra
nine in the afternoon by panic at the disco
joining a fan club by jellyfish
come and get it by badfinger
rainbow sky by transatlantic

me these last few weeks

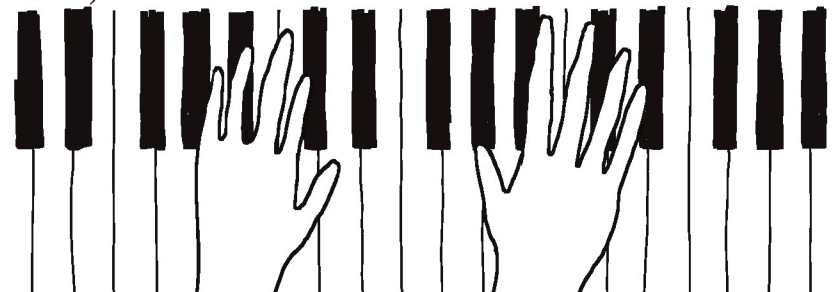


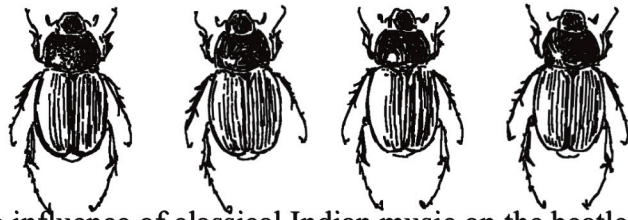
not all songs feature the staccato chords, but many of them have a very similar tone to them (it's pretty close to the piano in *lady madonna*, *good day sunshine*, and *lovely rita*): very bright, often in a major key, ever-so-slightly honky tonk.

but I'm most interested in the staccato chords, as I think they really show off how a single moment in a beatles song can be morphed into something that supposedly is a trademark of their sound.

a day in the life is released in 1967. at 2:16, the song breaks into bright, staccato piano chords for around four measures → in 1968, the kinks release *do you remember walter?*, which opens with four measures of staccato piano chords → electric light orchestra, influenced by the beatles and other british invasion bands, is largely considered the spiritual successor to the beatles → *mr. blue sky* is released in 1977 and is built around staccato piano chords

electric light orchestra are widely considered to be a continuation of the beatles. I think that as a result, their music and their sound have become so associated with the beatles that they have *become* the sound of the beatles. *blue sky* in particular appeared on *every beatlesque playlist that I could find*. this idea will probably show up a few more times in the following pages, since I strongly believe that elo's sound has had a huge impact on the way the beatles are remembered (I'm sure this is exactly what jeff lynne wanted).





the influence of classical Indian music on the beatles is inescapable, ranging from the droning sounds of *if I needed someone* and *lucy in the sky with diamonds* to the full-on instrumentation of *love you to* and *the inner light*. this influence is heard in several instances of Bug Music.

bracelets of fingers by the pretty things
super-sonic by the brian jonestown massacre
california jam by klaatu
who feels love? by oasis
pineapple head by crowded house

these are just a few examples, but it seems pretty common to throw in a random sitar line for a little extra 'beatles' flavor (I'm using beatles in sooooo many quotes there. what stage of simulacra is it when traditional Indian instruments are more associated with a band of white dudes from england than with actual Indian music??).

even though it's easy to see where this correlation comes from, the way that Bug Music incorporates Indian instruments can be very odd. *bracelets of fingers* throws in a random few bars of Indian instruments that have nothing to do with the rest of the song (very similar to the *veruca salt* song from the charlie and the chocolate factory movie). this type of Indian breakdown has no beatles counterpart (*getting better* is the closest I could find, which breaks into a tanpura drone near the middle of the song). I don't think that Bug Music accurately conveys how serious george harrison was about Indian music.

RICKENBACKER



even though the violin bass is more recognizable as 'the beatles' bass, the punchy tone of the rickenbacker seems more sonically recognized (to be fair, it's a very good bass tone).

feels like we only go backwards by tame impala
blood and rockets by the claypool lennon delirium
have you heard the word by the fut
brazil by bros

the bass is usually also played in a paul style, very melodic, lots of hammer-ons. I don't actually have much to say about this aspect of Bug Music; I think that a lot of these examples do accurately depict beetle bass lines (the psychedelic ones at least).

MELLOTRON

the mellotron really seems like it's become shorthand for 'the beatles,' even though it's only really recognized from one song (I know it was used on other songs, but I don't think most people associate the mellotron with the hit beatles song *flying*).

with eyes closed by zeus
go let it out by oasis
the piano knows something I don't know by panic at the disco
saltwater by julian lennon

and if featuring the mellotron (or a bad imitation of one) wasn't enough, most of these songs also use it with the same descending line as in *strawberry fields*. similar to the bright piano, it's weird to see a single moment from one song be seen as a defining part of their sound.



similar to the aforementioned piano tone that shows up everywhere, jangle guitar is also a popular motif in Bug Music. jangle guitar (or the tone you get from a non distorted 12-string rickenbacker) was most popularly used by the beatles in 64 and 65 (think *a hard day's night*, *ticket to ride*, *if I needed someone*), though I've always associated that sound more with folk rock bands like the byrds (*mr. tambourine man*, *turn turn turn*). some songs:

shelter song by temples
benefits of lying (with your friends) by the apples in stereo
define a transparent dream by the olivia tremor control
the veruca salt song in charlie and the chocolate factory

(I am including songs that I think were going for that same tone, even if they didn't actually use a 12-string rickenbacker. they just need to be jangly in spirit). so the beatles *did* feature this sound a few times, but not enough for it to be considered *their* sound. so how did this happen.

theory 1: power pop bands of the 70s, like the raspberries and badfinger, wanted to bring back the pop rock of the early 60s from bands like the beatles, the byrds, and the beach boys. in doing so, they created a sound that heavily relied on happy, jangly guitar, thus creating a very strong association between the beatles and jangle guitar.

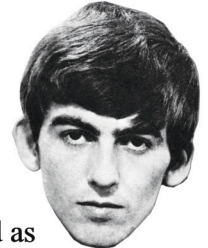
theory 2: it's jeff lynne's fault again. working with the idea that *mr. blue sky* 'became' the sound of the beatles, I think that the clean, pristine production of electric light orchestra *also* became associated with the beatles, specifically with guitar and vocal tones. when I try to hear *nowhere man* in my head, it sounds clean. the guitar is bright and jangly, the harmonies are soft and clear. and in real life, that song does not sound like that. the guitar is very abrupt, and the vocals are sharp and in-your-face. the beatles are assumed to be very polished, despite a lot of their earlier music being very crunchy and almost distorted sounding.

THAT GUITAR

HARMONY

this part might get overly pedantic. I think beatles harmonies can roughly be divided into two categories: pre and post white album. pre-white album harmonies are very direct and close together, with an emphasis on the individual voices that sang each part. this is a very different sound from a lot of their contemporaries, like the beach boys, who styled their harmonies more like a vocal group, where individual voices would merge into one. post-white album harmonies (especially those on abbey road) are a lot more ethereal, with more space between notes. some harmonies deemed beatlesque:

homefront cameo by cotton mather
little thunder by vulfmøn
lemon tree by fool's garden
the good mr square by the pretty things



I've heard so many random harmonies described as being beatlesque (to the point where it seems like the very existence of a harmony makes something sound like the beatles). and I actually think this has a lot to do with both of my guitar tone theories. a lot of power pop bands seemed very fond of big, spacious harmonies that were more beach boys and byrds than the beatles. and then electric light orchestra came in with a *wall* of harmonies that spanned multiple octaves, working to reinforce the idea that the beatles used that style of harmony all the time. *and* I think that this actually influenced future beatles music.

free as a bird, *real love*, **and** *now and then*, recorded 25 and 50 years after the Beatles' breakup, all feature some of the most layered harmonies of their entire discography (not elo level, but still very noticeable). I do think it's possible that the remaining beatles were influenced by their own legacy/public perception, resulting in some choices that may not have been made otherwise

RANDOM XD

so many of these songs don't want to sit still. and by that I mean they are constantly changing something seemingly for the sake of changing something. there's a key change, tempo change, a random bar of 3/4, change the straight notes to swung notes, anything to keep it interesting!

sub rosa subway by klaatu

i wanna prove to you by the lemon twigs

they also tend to feature some kind of orchestra or brass section, which in some cases can verge on sounding more like musical theater or carnival music.

we're so starving by panic at the disco

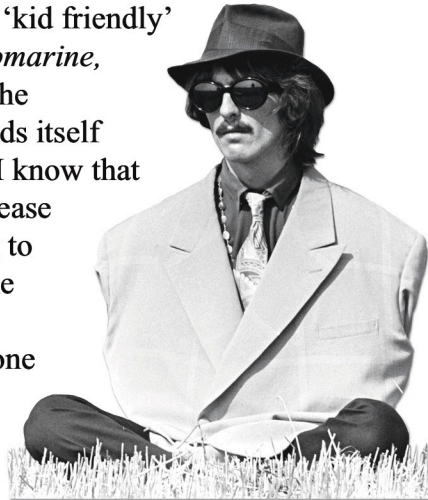
timestuck by strⁿge

y2k by the apples in stereo

we're off you know by klaatu

I was initially very puzzled by the carnival music association. *being for the benefit of mr. kite* is the most obvious correlation, but I think it's more than that. it seems like a lot of the songs that

non-beatle listeners *do* know are the 'kid friendly' ones (*here comes the sun*, *yellow submarine*, *ob-la-di, ob-la-da*). and I think that the association with kid's music also lends itself to an association with circus music. I know that that might seem like a stretch, but please keep in mind that I've been listening to nothing but fake beatles music for the past few months and it's making me unable to think coherently. if I hear one more piccolo trumpet I'm going to scream.



REFERENTIAL

some songs just straight up take a part from a beatles song and put it in their song (I don't mean this in a *SUE THEM* type of way, I just didn't know how else to phrase it. I'm pro stealing from the beatles I think that's fine).

mother nature's child by the mango furs has some extremely similar drums to *tomorrow never knows*

start! by the jam is one of many songs to feature the same bass shape as *taxman*

she's electric by oasis ends with the same vocal line as *with a little help from my friends*

baby britain by elliott smith, *even if you don't* by ween, and *feel too good* by utopia all have the same guitar as *getting better*

look what you've done by jet is interesting in that it references *sexy sadie* in the lyrics (look what you've done / you made a fool of everyone) and in the instrumentation. but also that melody in the first verse is the same as the first verse in *black star* by radiohead, which is unrelated but was fun to realize.



this is just the tip of the iceberg when it comes to what is seen as beatlesque, these were just the most repetitive sounds I heard. I hope it's clear that I don't think the beatles 'own' or invented these sounds, or anything like that. I just compiled the sounds that were most often associated with the band

and now that these individual sounds have been singled out, maybe the simulacra-aspect (simulaspect?) will make more sense.

the beatles were a band that made a lot of different types of music over a short amount of time. over the years, certain sounds from individual songs/albums have been picked out as being representative of the band. these sounds are then combined by other bands to produce a song made up of beatle sounds. the song is labeled as being beatlesque (even though the song includes a combination of sounds that were never featured together in an actual beatles song). these new songs are further transformed by newer bands who make beatlesque songs based off of the beatlesque music. you end up with songs that are still labeled as beatlesque, but the

references within the songs have been translated so many times that they no longer bear any resemblance to the original thing. this is Bug Music.



Stage One:

Initially, the sign (image or representation) is a reflection of basic reality.



Stage Two:

The sign masks a basic reality. The image becomes a distortion of reality.



Stage Three:

The sign marks the *absence* of basic reality. The image calls into question what the reality is and if it even exists.



Stage Four:

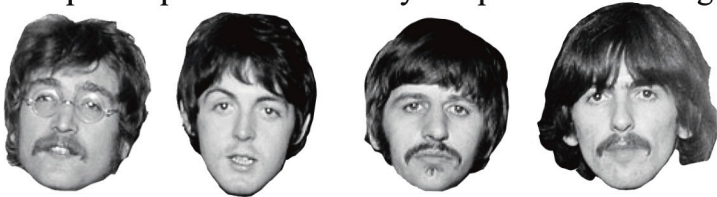
The sign bears no relation to any reality whatsoever; it is its own pure simulacrum.

PT IV. WHO CARES

none of this matters in the real world; I don't think there are any important connections that I can spin together to make a well-rounded conclusion. I'm not sure if I made any points at all actually.

I only really started this project because it makes me a little sad when people immediately write off the beatles, calling them boring, old, or whatever. I had such a fun time getting to know their music as a kid. it felt like watching someone reinvent the musical notes over and over again. that's what makes something beatlesque to me; when an artist is able to show me the same notes in a way that makes them seem brand new. it doesn't matter how many beatle sounds you throw on something, it just matters that you have a good song to build it all on.

but isn't it weird that you can be one of the most popular bands in the world - where your name is so well known that some people are annoyed at just the mention of it - and the majority of people don't even know what you sound like? the real moral of this spiel is to always do your own research, find things out for yourself, and never listen to anyone. and if someone says that they don't like your favorite band, you can just make a zine based around a hard-to-understand philosophical treatise to try and prove them wrong.



this issue took a lot of time and effort to put together, and I'm not sure if I came out of it with a super clear point. but I do know that I had a lot of fun listening to music so so loud in my room, which is sort of all that I can ask for.

these are some songs that I think have a beatley feel to them (some actually do sound beatley, others are on here for reasons I can't explain).

don't quite belong by dodie
populonia by mattiel

lots of nirvana songs. *about a girl* is the most well known, but I think that most songs on nevermind have very beatle melodies underneath all the grunge.

why did you go, why did you leave me? by labi siffre

strawberry jam by FIZZ

sweet adeline by elliott smith

come around and see me by raspberries. sounds like they went in paul's brain and took this out. it sounds like a song they'd play during the get back sessions, the kind that would make george quit again.

my zero by ezra furman

sam's town by the killers

date night by father john misty. fjm's music has a very solo john sound to it, especially god's favorite customer (the album).

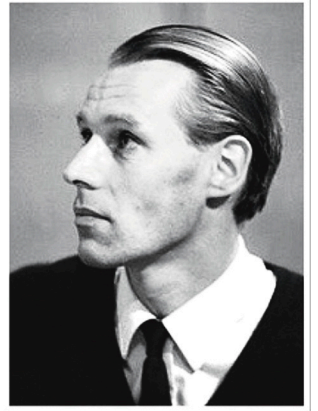
easy way out by elliott smith

tiergarten by rufus wainwright

who needs you by queen

how it's going to be by gerard way

arms & opinions by skating polly



thank you for
listening byeeee