



British Invasion: The Crosscurrents of Musical Influence (Tempo: A Rowman & Littlefield Music Series on Rock, Pop, and Culture)

By Simon Philo



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Before The Beatles landed on American shores in February 1964 only two British acts had topped the Billboard singles chart. In the first quarter of 1964, however, the Beatles alone accounted for sixty percent of all recorded music sold in the United States; in 1964 and 1965 British acts occupied the number one position for 52 of the 104 weeks; and from 1964 through to 1970, the Rolling Stones, Herman's Hermits, the Dave Clark Five, the Animals, the Kinks, the Hollies, the Yardbirds and the Who placed more than one hundred and thirty songs on the American Top Forty.

In *The British Invasion: The Crosscurrents of Musical Influence*, Simon Philo illustrates how this remarkable event in cultural history disrupted and even reversed pop culture's flow of influence, goods, and ideas—orchestrating a dramatic turn-around in the commercial fortunes of British pop in North America that turned the 1960s into “The Sixties.” Focusing on key works and performers, *The British Invasion* tracks the journey of this musical phenomenon from peripheral irrelevance through exotic novelty into the heart of mainstream rock. Throughout, Philo explores how and why British music from the period came to achieve such unprecedented heights of commercial, artistic, and cultural dominance.

The British Invasion: The Crosscurrents of Musical Influence will appeal to fans, students and scholars of popular music history—indeed anyone interested in understanding the fascinating relationship between popular music and culture.



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Editorial Review

Review

Spearheaded by the Beatles, British musical performers dominated the American pop charts in the middle 1960s. Philo analyzes this phenomenon in a chronological account of popular music on both sides of the Atlantic starting with World War II through the 1980s. After an introductory survey of pop music in Britain during the 1950s, the Beatles dominate the narrative. Other successful early Invasion groups are briefly discussed, but the emphasis is on the musical and cultural impact the Beatles had on American music. American artists Brian Wilson (the Beach Boys) and the Byrds are covered, as is *The Monkees* TV series. The book discusses how important the Beatles film *A Hard Day's Night* (1964) was in spreading British influence. In 1967, the British Invasion shifted into a psychedelic phase (Pink Floyd, Cream) and then to an American roots-inspired sound. The political and social turmoil of the late Sixties was reflected in influential albums such as the Rolling Stones's *Let It Bleed*, the Who's *Tommy*, and the Beatles's *Abbey Road*. By 1970, new acts—Led Zeppelin, the Moody Blues, Jethro Tull, and Elton John—prevailed . . . [T]his is a popular social history . . . VERDICT Beatles fans and baby boomers who listened to the music of the 1960s will find this title appealing. Philo offers a fresh consideration of the British impact on American music during this period and beyond. (*Library Journal*)

Philo offers one of the best treatments to date of the 'British invasion' of popular American music. Beginning with the 1950s skiffle craze in Britain, he takes his study through to about 1970, adding a brief epilogue that looks further. Not surprisingly, the Beatles are at the book's core, with Dylan getting most of the attention on the American side, but many other well-known artists are also discussed. What makes the book exceptional is its strong contextualizing in the socioeconomic conditions of the late 1950s and 1960s, particularly youth culture. Philo makes excellent use of *Billboard*'s charts to demonstrate both the range of popular music in the 1960s and how the impact of British artists was most strongly felt in the US in 1964; after that, the number of British hits, relative to domestic offerings, in the charts declined as American artists adjusted to new tastes. As the subtitle points out, the musical influences went both ways across the Atlantic: British artists responded to American music that was invigorated by British groups, and British groups were then influenced by new American artists such as Dylan and Brian Wilson. Readers will appreciate the fine annotated bibliography and 'further listening' sections. Summing Up: Highly recommended. Lower-division undergraduates and above; general readers. (*CHOICE*)

Philo's analysis is astute, and he makes all manner of useful connections. (*Musoscribe*)

Anyone who enjoys music and wants to learn more about the history of rock and roll will certainly glean lots of information and new knowledge from *British Invasion: The Crosscurrents of Musical Influence*. . . .Overall a well researched book, filled with tons of statistics that any pop culture fan will eat up. A bit of a heavy volume for the average reader but I recommend it to all music fans just the same. (*Scared Stiff Reviews*)

The author's theories and suppositions are supported by plenty of well-researched borrowed quotes from artists and commentators alike...and the whole thing moves along at a pace that manages to lift it out of the realms of listology and into a vivid snapshot of '60s pop's turbo-charged development. (*Shindig! Magazine*)

Like a competent musical surgeon, Philo cuts wide margins in his account, beginning with Lonnie Donegan's 1955 recording of Huddie 'Leadbelly' Ledbetter's 'Rock Island Line,' igniting the British Skiffle movement

which was to eventually bring one John Lennon and his band, The Quarrymen into its orbit. Then the Beatles happened and simply eclipsed the other notable invasion bands that included: (of course) The Rolling Stones, Herman's Hermits, The Dave Clark Five, Eric Burdon and the Animals, and The Who. . . . Philo ends his thoughtful essay with the only thing that could happen next and that was the British import of American artists, in particular, Jimi Hendrix. (*All About Jazz*)

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About the Author

Simon Philo is Head of American Studies at the University of Derby. He has written numerous articles and chapters on transatlantic popular culture.

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