

Nothing's Gonna Change My World



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'I want to be your lover, baby,' came the exquisitely chiselled enunciation, 'I want to be your man'. Every consonant was diamond-sharp. Brian Sewell was reading the Beatles.

The resultant aesthetic frisson was the highlight not just of the week but the whole three-part series of *Nothing's Gonna Change My World*, Phill Jupitus' survey of the Fab Four's legacy. Neither hagiography nor hatchet job (on television there would be no other choice, I suspect), it touched on the group's artistic, financial and social impact: culture in the broadest sense, and made a good job of it.

Which is not to say it wasn't occasionally funny, though not always intentionally. An earnest Finnish university has a Beatles Studies Centre. Composer Howard Skempton confessed himself 'bewitched' by their 'amazing' wit and intelligence, adducing as evidence the way they went 'ooh' after the phrase 'I'll keep you satisfied' (has he ever heard any original rock'n'roll?). Another classical man, Colin Matthews, was sceptical, countering mentions of Berio, Stockhausen and Cage with equally valid references to Pseuds' Corner. And, while it was admitted that most Scouse musicians daren't say they dislike the Beatles, one trenchant Mersey voice condemned 'shoddy work, cobbled together', unfavourably comparing listening to the lads' oeuvre with 'drinking alligator piss' at source.

All who grew up on their music feel enormous nostalgia for the Beatles, and some of their songs are deservedly standards. But an American commentator, who should have known better and claimed there would have been no counter-culture without the Beatles, surely pitched it too high, giving his own nation's trail-blazing upheavals in the 1960s insufficient credit. The Liverpool group were swept along by their times rather than creating them.

It was reassuring to hear they were frightened at being regarded as prophets and pundits. 'Ist das Kunst?' asked a bewildered interviewer of the 'German naïve' who recorded Beatles cover versions on his primitively edited equipment to his own German translations as he didn't understand English. The result was an atonal, *Sprechgesang* mess, Phil Spector meets *Wozzeck*.

Yes, said Klaus, it was art. It's the fate of oracles not to understand what they've started. Almost literally – we ended with 'Habitamus sub vitreo' or Yellow Submarine in Latin.

