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Sgt. Pepper's Album Cover Military Jackets

Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band was released by the Beatles on 26th May 1967 in the United Kingdom. The Beatles 8th album was an instant critical and commercial success, remaining in the top parades for 27 consecutive weeks in the UK and the USA. The album innovated in graphic design, rock music production, and conceptual art, representing the 1960's counter-culture generation. The album cover was created by Peter Blake and Jann Haworth with insights from the Beatles themselves. Paul McCartney had a concept of reinventing the Beatles, McCartney also wrote most of the songs in the album. According to Rolling Stone magazine, the album cover is considered of one the best

ever created. The album proposed a new style and musical exploration for the band and also represented a shift in the Beatles image, until then the Beatles had a more commercial “Teddy boy” image, marked by the famous mop-top haircut, clean cut black suits skinny ties and slim pants, designed by Pierre Cardin. The Sgt. Pepper album cover depicts the Beatles standing with iconic celebrities and historical figures under new alter egos, members of the imaginary Sgt. Pepper’s Lonely Hearts Club Band, all four Beatles members appear duplicated, in their previous more conservative looks, and also appearing again but dressed in bright lysergic shades of satin military suits. It’s been 54 years since its release, and to this day it is still considered edgy to perform in an altered military jacket. The colourful military suits had an important role in warning that a change was about to come. Sgt Peppers marked the transition to rebellious, psychedelic visuals and experimentation phase of the Beatles, a phase that they weren’t as close as before, they were each going in the own directions, George Harrison was into yoga, there were tensions between John Lennon and Paul McCartney that were beginning to show in the lyrics, and according to Philip Norman, in 1967, Yoko said to John Lennon that “he didn’t have to be in the band if he didn’t want to”. The band ended 3 years later in 1970, besides the huge commercial success, the Beatles never toured together to promote the album Sgt. Pepper’s Lonely Hearts Club Band.

“Now just look at the time-lapse of the Beatles from that moment they’re in those matching suits and the mop-tops and they begin to hit the swinging ‘60s. And they take psychedelic drugs and they start to wear brightly coloured clothes. Then they begin to get into mysticism [...]. Just look at those four guys. You can see something somewhat normative becoming transgressive, becoming psychedelically lit from the inside by the drugs, becoming spiritual and withdrawn.”And that’s the story of the ‘60s as it heads into the ‘70s.”

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-Joe Levy for Rolling Stone Magazine
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According to the Financial Review newspaper article “Telling tales on the creation of the Sgt. Pepper's cover design”, the commitment to innovate was such that the album broke some records in monetary terms, “At the time, it was easily the most expensive record sleeve ever produced (costing £3000 in artwork, compared to the usual £100). It was one of the first "gateway sleeves" (opening like a book). And it included not only the complete song lyrics but an insert with eccentric cardboard cut-outs (one of which was a Sgt. Pepper mustache).” Part of the album cover production expenses were also image licensing fees, a total of 58 people appear in the album cover collage. Chosen by Jann Haworth the graphic designer there were six females, Mae West, Marlene Dietrich, Marilyn Monroe, Bette Davis, and Shirley Temple, chosen by George Harrison there were three yogis Sri Yuktswar Giri, Sri Paramahansa Yogananda, Sri Mahavatar Babaji, chosen by John Lennon the occultist Aleister Crowley instead of Hitler as he initially suggested, the comedian Lenny Bruce, the German composer Karlheinz Stockhausen, actor W.C Fields, Carl Jung, actor Fred Astaire, painter Richard Merkin, writer Edgar Allan Poe, Bob Dylan, Sir Robert Peel, poet Dylan Thomas, the communist Karl Marx,

Marlon Brando, Oscar Wilde, Lewis Carroll, Albert Einstein, among others. These were people who influenced the Beatles and the 1960's generation and the album marked the decade. The historical context of this album release **in 1967 specifically** was the hippie's era at its height which included the deliberate use of drugs and psychedelics, the Vietnam war taking place, the tension of the Cold war, Communism versus Capitalism, the space race between the Soviet Union and the United States to be the first country to land on the Moon, lots of innovation and new alternative ways of thinking; culturally Sgt Peppers marked 1967 artistic scene. The 60s produced timeless artists, Jimmy Hendrix, Janis Joplin, The Doors, and the Beatles. What was considered alternative was also a heightened awareness, stronger aesthetical, emotional, sensual, and spiritual expressions, leading to a heightened presence, individually and collectively, an intoxication in several respects.

The Beatles loved fancy dress party and at the time all four were dropping acid, the Financial Review article tells the story about how they found the military suits: "Lord Kitchener" look was already street fashion in Chelsea, they went to Berman's, a leading London theatrical costumier, choosing the brightest colors and had them made to measure. They did not want vintage pieces for the album cover, Paul McCartney recalls "Did we want Edwardian or Crimean? We just chose oddball things from everywhere and put them together." The "bright psychedelic colors, a bit like the fluorescent socks you used to get in the Fifties (they came in very pink, very turquoise, or very yellow)" were picked to be explicitly garish, to "go against the idea of a uniform." John Lennon borrowed the WWII medals they accessorised with from ex-Beatles drummer Pete Best — they'd belonged to his dad." The Beat article "The Cultural Impact of the Beatles - The Fashion" explains "Once the Beatles wore their Edwardian collarless suits to concerts, it became a

staple with the mod youth of the '60s." and in 1967 after the release of Sgt. Pepper's Album was no different, the Beatles were trendsetters of the hippie movement. "The Beatles defined the psychedelic, peace and love movement of 1967. Known as the "Peacock Revolution" men began to dress with a more flamboyant nature, which included floral shirts, velvet jackets, bright colors, and paisley scarves." Rock came from blues which was an American thing but it took a bunch of Brits to shake the foundations of post-WWII society, counterculture, the teenager buying power the sexual revolution, second-wave feminism and rock royalty all exploded at the same time.

The cool status of the military jacket never faded, after the Beatles, Jimi Hendrix and Eric Clapton, were seen in military tailoring allure of the swinging London's flea markets. The article "50 years after Sgt. Pepper, the Beatles' retro military continues to inspire" by Clare Press, explain how Jimi



Cornet Henry John Wilkin, a British Hussar from the Crimean War, 1855.

got his jacket: "Jimi Hendrix, who found his famous Hussars' jacket in the Chelsea Antiques Market, was roughed up by thugs in the street who thought he was disrespecting the armed forces. "He knew he was being subversive, but he also just really liked to dress up," Regarding the origins of the Hussar jackets, the article "The story of the military jacket" by Alice Payne Lecturer in Fashion, Queensland University of Technology, Queensland University of Technology explains "One of the most enduring of military

jackets is the elaborate regimental dress uniform with its rows of horizontal gold braid across the front and gold tasselled epaulets on the shoulders. Its origins are the 18th-century [hussars](#), the Hungarian light horse troops. Their pelisse, or braided outer coat, was high-collared with fur cuffs and fur lining. Although [designed for pomp rather than combat](#), this uniform became the model for many forms of the military dress uniform.”

Later on, Michael Jackson adapted the military jacket to full pop star style in sequin. It became a trademark of his, some fashion items used by the stars became so iconic that managed to stay in our heads. The altered military jacket is an item that was considered edgy and still is, brought to light by the Beatles in the unforgettable album cover, the military jacket manages to stay a staple in a fashion wardrobe. Gucci, [Saint Laurent](#), [Isabel Marant](#), and most famously, Balmain all had collections redesigning military jackets. Rihanna and Chris Martin from Coldplay used



as stage wear. Festivals recently made the jacket even more popular, people who attend Burning Man are driving military jacket sales up. Redesigning is necessary to keep this trend alive, since the vintage pieces are quite limited, due to after the 1940's real military uniforms becoming much less embellished and more utilitarian; leaving the grittier forms of redesigned the military uniform to be seen as an anti-establishment protest, subversive, or pure rock-star hedonism.



Jimi Hendrix and Balmain runway



From top down: HarmoniaCostumes.com, Burning Man and me in 2010

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