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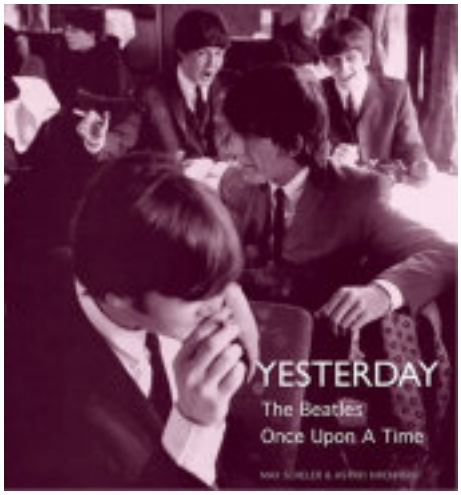
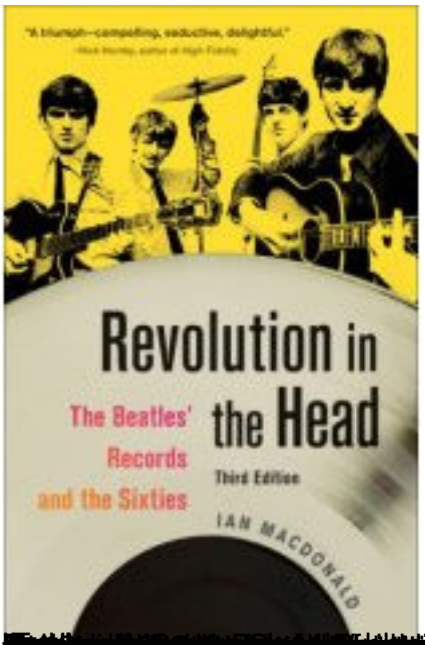


With so many recent pop albums offering up only one or two decent, memorable songs and top-selling artists taking years upon years between mediocre releases, it's no surprise that music continues to slide into nothing more than computer files shared between MP3 players, personal computers, and 10-cent blank CDs. Not to sound like a crusty ol' curmudgeon, but sheeeee-it, I can feel my cerebellum shake when I think that over the course of 28 months, from August of 1965 to November of 1967, the **Beatles** released *Help!, Rubber Soul, Revolver, Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band,*
and
Magical Mystery Tour
. Imagine my joy, when my teenage son's pals' Christmas wish lists are yearning for "real" copies of
The White Album
or gift certificates to buy "classic" used vinyl LPs at the ever-dwindling local record store. Wanna save American youth? Pick up any working turntables you might come across at yard sales, and place them at the feet of the next generation.

Not too late as a stocking stuffer to prime the pump of the young and musically malnourished, or as a treat for you to rev up the old engines of days gone by, a quartet of new books on the original Fab Four and their legacy has mellowed my savage, annoyed breast. The mighty Hal Leonard imprint has offered up *Fab Four FAQ*, a terrific starting point for new fans to connect the dots of politics, myths, friends, and foes that surrounded the band. The 500-page paperback by Stuart Shea and Robert Rodriguez breaks it all down in 50 chapters ranging from the band's myriad record labels, 10 acts that bumped the boys off the number-one chart positions, songs written by others about the Beatles, and the stories behind their iconic photo sessions. More than just the melody of "Scrambled Egg," I got a kick out of the originally conceived titles for a handful of songs, and tracks that slyly feature the lads trading instruments and roles with each other.

If *Fab Four FAQ* is the high-school text on the band, then the revised third edition of *Revolution in the Head*
by Ian MacDonald is the graduate-school tome, bursting with 500 pages of critically analyzed information. Subtitled "The Beatles' Records & the '60s," the Chicago Review Press' newly released paperback is awash with academic footnotes and savvy fly-on-the-wall wonderment. Don't take this one on holiday as a soft, nonchalant read, as you'll most likely ache to be within reach of your stereo system and a stack of original albums to play in real time. These pages of session details, harmonic intellectualism, intricate signature-key analysis, and other passionate dope demand some serious headphone commitment. Pick a favorite Beatles song. Do you think you really know it? Plug what you think you know into the depth of description and connective tissue MacDonald brings to the table, and you'll swear the book literally vibrates in your hands. Most fascinating, the decade's history in the UK is broken down chronologically over 70 pages, cross-referencing the Beatles' month-by-month development, the British pop charts, political affairs across the globe, and cultural touchstones in fashion, fiction, poetry, science, and the stage.


"A triumph—compelling, seductive, delightful."
Revolution in the Head
The Beatles' Records and the Sixties
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[redacted]