

Scholars speak on influence of Beatles

Researchers examine band's tremendous legacy

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By [Roxna Irani](#)

A crowd of spectators packed Kresge Auditorium yesterday evening to relive the 1960's through conversation about a band that created "the best music ever."

McGill University

Psychology Prof.

Daniel Levitin,

UMass-Amherst

English Prof.

Nick Bromell and

moderator

Stanford

Associate Music

Prof. Jonathan

Berger — all

three Stanford-

educated scholars

who have

dedicated time to

researching the

Beatles — spoke about the influence of the band.



#gallery <http://daily.stanford.edu/image/full/8610>

JOHN SHEN

Stanford-educated scholars discussed the significance of the Beatles before an audience last night in Kresge Auditorium. The researchers pointed to the lasting appeal of the band's music and the impact the group had on American culture, both in the 1960's and the present day.

"Beyond just the quality of voice and production, there is something inherently unique in everything they sing," said Berger, co-director of the Stanford Initiative on Creativity and the Arts.

The event was organized by the Aurora Forum and was co-sponsored with the Stanford Humanities Center. Enthusiastic Stanford parents on campus for Parent's Weekend formed a large majority of the audience, reliving their youth of growing up with the Beatles.

"Asking someone to name a single great Beatles song is simply a wrong question," Levitin said. "The sheer breadth that encompasses Beatles songs is what makes them special. The Beatles were constantly pushing at boundaries of their space and didn't allow themselves to be defined by any musical constraints.

"It is because so many present day musicians are trying to subtly imitate their style that they have transcended time and are loved so much even today," he continued.

But Bromell had a slightly different opinion about the relevance of Beatles music today.

"Music is inseparable from its cultural context; we therefore need to go back to the 60's to recover their true meaning," he said. "However, I also believe that the 60's aren't over yet; the 60's are here in the sense that cultural wars are continuing, which is the medium through which the Beatles can live on today."

The speakers proposed that the era of political and cultural turmoil had a major emphasis on Beatles songs.

“The 60’s were a schism in American history that still hasn’t healed,” Bromell said. “The Beatles incorporated this cultural setting into their long, chaotic, eclectic album and thus managed to induct their audience into their world.”

“Songs like Blackbird were metaphors for racial inequality and the hopeful rise of African Americans,” Levitin added. “The Beatles were conscious of what was going on and put together meaning in their songs but address[ed] pressing issues metaphorically to convey a larger idea.”

The speakers also commended the Beatles’ commitment to musical ability and technology as “outstanding.”

“Their ideas in music far surpassed their abilities as musicians and [were] much larger than any physical medium they could be expressed through,” Levitin said. “They would squeeze five ideas into one song when other bands would have been stingy and written five separate songs out of it.”

“From a technological point of view, their quality of sounds stood above most others, as they created music in a way that one could hear and appreciate and love no matter what medium one heard it though,” he added.

Aria Florant ‘10, member of the campus a cappella group Mixed Company, enjoyed the forum.

“The talk was extremely interesting, but there wasn’t enough time to explore in detail the implications of a racially charged 60’ s era on Beatles’ music,” she said. “I would have liked the speakers to expand more on the influence of social and cultural happenings on their songs.”

Zack Wettstein ‘11 was surprised by the low student attendance at the event.

“There is such an immense potential to explore the Beatles because there is so much about them that is applicable to music of today as well as of the future,” he said. “The fact that this talk is taking place on our campus is great, although it would have been nice to see a larger student participation in the event.”

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