
Best of

THE BEATLES

*In the early '60s, photographer Harry Benson
toured with the Fab Four as Beatlemania took over
the world. He shares with us images from his new
book, a collection of unseen negatives*

*Photographs:
Harry Benson*

1. On Sunday, February 9, 1964, The Beatles made their first live appearance on American TV with The Ed Sullivan Show, performing a string of hits that began with All My Loving. Even the screaming girls in the audience could not drown out the energetic performance, watched by over 73 million Americans. "It was their first appearance on The Ed Sullivan Show in New York," Benson recalls. "They were very respectful and called him Mr Sullivan throughout."
2. As well as music, The Beatles launched a very successful film career, beginning in 1964 with A Hard Day's Night. Directed by Richard Lester, the black-and-white mockumentary followed the group over several days as they went from Liverpool to London for a TV appearance. Part of the journey was by train, and it was here, in a break between filming, that Benson found Paul McCartney deep in thought. "Paul was drinking tea on the train riding in and out of London while they filmed," he says.
3. Benson recalls how much of his time with the band was spent in hotels, and this shot was taken after a concert in Paris in 1964. Manager Brian Epstein had walked in to say that I Wanna Hold Your Hand had gone to Number One in America. The group were elated, and Benson suggested a pillow fight to celebrate. "What can I say, the Beatles pillow fight is my favourite photograph," he says. "They were young and happy and the most popular band in the world."
4. In June 1964, The Beatles were due to begin their world tour in Denmark – while Ringo Starr didn't make it due to a bout of tonsillitis, Benson did, and captured this shot of the band with their replacement drummer, Jimmy Nicol, in a hotel room. Nicol served with the band for 12 days until Ringo was well again. "Ringo was sick and didn't go to Copenhagen," Benson confirms. "The drummer filling in got a taste of Beatlemania."
5. Part of that first US tour in 1964 also saw The Beatles meeting up with a young underdog fighter by the name of Cassius Clay, as he prepared for his February 25 heavyweight title bout with champion Sonny Liston. The whole set-up, taking place at a back street gym in Miami, was good publicity for both parties – as well as a lot of fun. "It was before Cassius Clay became Muhammad Ali," says Benson. "He picked up Ringo and shouted, 'I'm the greatest, I'm the prettiest.' Everyone laughed."
6. The group's rise to the top wasn't without controversy, and a quote from John Lennon given to an English newspaper in 1966 that The Beatles had become 'more popular than Jesus' escalated in the States to the point that records were burned and threats made, all on the eve on an American tour. A press conference was called for Lennon to explain himself – a stressful time perhaps, but one where Benson saw an opportunity. "John was unhappy in his Chicago hotel room after his press conference to apologise," he says.



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