



The Beatles Discuss Hamburg

Quotes from *The Beatles Anthology*, 2005

Between 1960 and 1962, the Beatles were hired to play in several music clubs in Hamburg, Germany, where young people would come to dance for hours on end. They played hundreds of shows there, developing their talent as a band. The quotes below document some of their reflections on this experience.

(1) George Harrison: Our peak for playing live was in Hamburg. At the time, we weren't famous and people came to see us simply because of our music and the atmosphere we created.

(2) Paul McCartney: We had to actually invite the audience in, because we would be playing to a completely dark and empty club. The minute we saw someone we'd kick into 'Dance In The Street' and rock out, pretending we hadn't seen them. And we'd perhaps get a few of them in. We were like fairground barkers: see four people - have to get them!

(3) John Lennon: It was Hamburg that did it. That's where we really developed. To get the Germans going and keep it up...we really had to hammer. We would never have developed as much if we'd stayed at home. We had to try anything that came into our heads in Hamburg. There was nobody to copy from. We played what we liked best and the Germans liked it as long as it was loud.

(4) Paul McCartney: It was good training...we built a little audience. We would grab two people and do anything they wanted - our whole repertoire: 'You want a request?' (There was only one table filled.) 'Yes.' We would do all the jokes and try to be marvelous and make them want to come back.

(5) George Harrison: We started building a big repertoire of some of our own songs, but mainly we did all the old rock songs. In fact, we did everything... Of course, we had our favorites, which we'd play a couple of times in the night in the main sets when most of the crowd were there. But we got very tight as a band... We just kept playing the rock and roll things and the stuff from records we used to get from [Beatles manager] Brian Epstein's shop before we met him.

(6) Paul McCartney: We never thought to write our own songs over there. There was so much other stuff. I had written a couple of little things but I didn't dare show them to anyone because they were little. There was always a Chuck Berry song instead.

(7) George Harrison: We had to learn millions of songs. We had to play so long we just played everything. So it was all the Gene Vincent - we'd do everything on the album; not just a lazy 'Blue-Jean Bop', whatever. We'd get a Chuck Berry record, and learn it all, same with Little Richard, the Everly Brothers, Buddy Holly, Fats Domino - everything. But we'd also do things like 'Moonglow', which we used to play as an instrumental. Anything, because we'd be on for hours - we'd make up stuff.... Hamburg was really like our apprenticeship, learning how to play in front of people.

The Beatles Discuss Hamburg: Questions

1. What kinds of songs did the Beatles play in Hamburg? Who were some of the artists they covered?

2. How did the Beatles learn how to build an audience?

3. Did the Beatles write many songs in this period? Why or why not?

4. What did the Beatles learned about being professional musicians from their time in Hamburg?

5. Why is spending a lot of time working together important to a group's success?