BRITISH INVASION:
RINGO STARR



LOGO BY ESHITHA RAO, CONTRIBUTING ARTIST/THE DAILY CAMPUS

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Now, I know that we're all reeling from the national championship loss, but cheer up! Today on British Invasion, the column about British music history, we're concluding our series on the solo careers of all four Beatles members, leaving the goofiest one for last: the loveable Ringo Starr.

Now, Starr's early solo work was nothing to write home about. His first two studio albums were covers of old jazz standards and a country album recorded in Nashville, Tenn. He also played drums for John Lennon and George Harrison on their early records when needed.

People soon noticed Starr's ascent in 1973 and 1974, when he broke out with two number one hits in the U.S.: "Photograph," and "You're Sixteen."

Co-written by Starr and Harrison in the south of France, "Photograph" is a beautiful little song that looks back on the memories the narrator shared with their partner — in the public's case they might have viewed this song as Starr reminiscing on his Beatles days.

It's a brilliantly produced song, oozing with class from all the little musical embellishes, from the soaring strings and the twinkling acoustic guitar to the castanets hidden deep in the mix.

The second chart-topper, "You're Sixteen," also taps into the nostalgia mines, as it was first performed by Johnny Burnette in 1960 and written by the Sherman Brothers. Starr might have covered this song because he liked it back in his younger days, but a 30-something year old rock star singing about a 16-year-old is not a good look. It's especially painful in the 1970s when there were plenty of other rock stars actually getting into relationships with teenagers. All that aside, the song's not great either.

But I digress. Both songs appeared on Starr's first commercially popular album, 1973's "Ringo," which set the standard for Starr's chart success in the coming years. It also acted as a template for his whole solo career, which was all about seeing what Ringo and his friends could come up with.

"Ringo" and its follow-up "Goodnight Vienna" included contributions from Starr's former bandmates, Elton John and Harry Nilsson. We'll see Ringo collaborate with more stars from the '60s, '70s and onwards, especially after forming Ringo & His All-Starr Band in 1989 — more on that later. It also helped that Ringo was the most relatable out of the former Beatles and his likeable demeanor endeared him to the public.

Unfortunately for Starr, that goodwill was on its last legs; 1976's "Rotogravure" didn't make the splash that his new label, Atlantic Records, was hoping for. The disco-heavy 1977 release "Ringo the 4th" couldn't even make a dent in the charts, as people hated Starr's take on disco and it didn't help that Starr wrote all the songs without the help of his friends.

Starr attributed this decline in quality to a heavy drinking and substance abuse problem during this period. Notably, Starr said he and his friends Nilsson and Keith Moon "weren't musicians dabbling in drugs and alcohol; now we were junkies dabbling in music."

Beginning in the 1980s, Starr started having trouble getting labels to distribute his studio work, but that didn't mean he stopped working; Starr narrated the first two seasons of "Thomas the Tank Engine" and played the character Mr. Conductor in the American spin-off, he performed with his son Zak and was inducted into the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame, among other things.

In 1988, Starr and his wife Barbara Bach attended a detox clinic in Tucson, Ariz., for treatment on alcoholism. The clinic taught him to embrace sobriety and with newfound fervor, he got back to work. In July 1989, Ringo Starr & His All-Starr Band gave their first ever performance in Dallas. A supergroup which consisted of Starr and his fellow friends, the All-Starr band's concerts swapped between Ringo performing his catalogue of Beatles and solo hits along with the other artists' popular work.

There have been 16 different All-Starr band lineups since, with Starr the lone constant between them. Present and former band members have included Steve Lukather of Toto, Colin Hay of Men at Work and Clarence Clemons of the E Street Band. Bruce Springsteen, Stevie Nicks and Paul McCartney have all done guest appearances at shows as well.

In the 21st century, Starr is best-known for his tours with his fellow All-Starrs, but he periodically drops new music here and there — he's actually releasing new material in two weeks, with the country album "Long Long Road."

In 2020, Starr released "Here's to the Nights," which includes guest vocals from Finneas O'Connell — the last two people I thought would work together, but I guess it's a testament to the charm of the ever-lovable Ringo Starr.

That's all she wrote for this edition of British Invasion! Catch up with me in two weeks' time for when I'll have to come up with something different to talk about.



Ringo Starr gives the thumbs up in 1964. The former Beatles member is releasing a new album on the 24th of April.

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