



MEDIA INFORMATION



NO HAMBURG, NO BEATLES: THE HISTORY OF THE FAB FOUR IN HAMBURG

From the evolution of the Hamburg Sound to today's club scene

On 17 August 1960, John Lennon, Paul McCartney, George Harrison, Stuart Sutcliffe and Pete Best played their first gig at the Indra Club in the legendary St Pauli district of Hamburg. Mark Lewisohn, the acclaimed Beatles author, aptly commented "No Hamburg, no Beatles". The Beatles, some of whom were still minors in the beginning, spent two years in Hamburg, with only a few breaks in between. Here, they laid the foundations for their global career. Following their debut in 1960, the Beatles played in Hamburg more often than anywhere else in the world – with 300 concerts, five contracts with four different music clubs, and about 1,200 hours spent on Hamburg stages. John Lennon once said "I grew up in Liverpool but I came of age in Hamburg", and this is arguably the story of the Beatles in Hamburg in a nutshell.

It all began with a shock. When The Beatles got their first engagement in Hamburg on the **17th of August 1960**, they were full of anticipation. The Hanseatic City was considered to be the perfect place to make good money by gigging. And the Reeperbahn was the incarnation of adventure for those naive from Liverpool. Where nowadays countless cutting-edge music clubs line the neon bright streets, back in the day, the audience craved for all night entertainment – especially for exciting music, such as Rock'n'Roll and its British exports. Derry & The Seniors very successfully performed here, as did Rory Storm & The Hurricanes and Tony Sheridan & The Jets. Hamburg, which is widely known nowadays as the live music capitol of all northern Europe, was just about to become the German hotspot of the international music scene. And The Beatles wanted to be close to the action.

Just a couple of days ago they had got themselves a drummer to meet the conditions of their contract. So John Lennon, Paul McCartney and George Harrison as well as their then bassist Stuart Sutcliffe and their new member Pete Best entered the **Indra** for the first time on the evening of the 17th of August – and were amazed. While Hamburg's Reeperbahn has become an entertainment boulevard during the last 20 years, hosting exciting live music, theatre shows, big musicals, delicious restaurants and lots of subculture, during the Sixties its offering was mainly comprised of sex for sale and pubs for sailors. No cool music club awaited The Beatles, rather a seedy strip joint. Their audience did not consist of hip night owls or enthusiastic music fans but of prostitutes and their punters. And they themselves were not the main attraction of the programme, but the stopgaps between the performances of the strippers. When **Bruno Koschmider**, owner of the Indra, finally thrust their contract into their hands, they were shocked. On weekdays they were supposed to play four and a half hours, during the weekend even six. Ignoring the fact that their repertoire could fit barely one hour and rehearsals with Pete Best hadn't even begun.

The following two and a half years passed with **281 gigs** played. Nowhere did The Beatles play more often during their whole career than in Hamburg – laying the foundation for what this band was to become: a blueprint of pop music. The harsh working conditions on the Reeperbahn contributed essentially to the evolution of the „**Hamburg Sound**“. They forced The Beatles – like all the other bands grinding away on the Reeperbahn – to permanently grow artistically. In the beginning they prolonged their two minute cover versions of well known Rock’n’Roll songs by 20 minute guitar solos, helping them to become better musicians. Then they started to write more original material, which widened their repertoire. Finally Bruno Koschmider’s daily demand: „Macht Schau, Engländer!“ (Put on a show, Englishmen) inspired the boys who repeatedly stood on the stage like frightened rabbits to break their mould and come out of their shell, encouraging a bigger and loyal following.

The Beatles found out very quickly how to withstand Hamburg’s wearing nights, as there was simply no chance to ever get enough sleep. Bruno Koschmider had put them up in his cinema **Bambi Kino** just around the corner of the Indra. In two tiny windowless rooms without heating and shower, just behind the flickering movie screen and the blasting speakers. This was when they got to know Preludin, slimming pills which have long been banned. Combined with alcohol, they produced a high and the whole Reeperbahn was taking them instead of speed. The Beatles used to call their new home at the Bambi Kino „The black hole of Calcutta“.

In 1960, after seven weeks, the episode at the Indra came to an end, as neighbours constantly complained about the infernal noise. After that for nearly 40 years not a single concert took place at the Große Freiheit 64 until the Indra was brought back to life in 1998. But the show went on seamlessly: Bruno Koschmider unceremoniously uprooted and moved The Beatles to the **Kaiserkeller** which he owned as well. Like the Indra the Kaiserkeller is a regular stage for live-music until today – nowadays as part of the famous music club Große Freiheit 36. At the entrance of Große Freiheit 36 a historic poster announces the Beatles as supporting act of Rory Storm & The Hurricanes whose drummer happened to go by the name of **Ringo Starr**. „Those guys had to practice for another year before I was interested in joining them“, he joked later on.

But somebody else was spontaneously attracted by them: the designer and musician **Klaus Voormann**. He dragged his whole circle of friends into the Kaiserkeller, including **Astrid Kirchherr** and **Jürgen Vollmer**, both photographers and like Voormann members of the „Exis“, Hamburg’s existentialists. They styled the Beatles with their typical hairstyle, which later on became famously known as the mop top. Astrid Kirchherr freed them from their pink checkered jackets and caps and introduced them to the Lederdschungel (leather jungle), a leather shop in St. Pauli’s Thadenstraße, where the Beatles bought their first custom tailored skintight leather suits. Astrid herself sewed Stuart Sutcliffe a collarless jacket, which the whole band afterwards chose as their stage outfit. Klaus Voormann designed the cover of the Beatles album „**Revolver**“, published in 1966, which he was awarded a Grammy for. Later on he played on several of John Lennon’s, George Harrison’s and Ringo Starr’s solo records. Astrid Kirchherr shot the first professional photos of the Beatles, including classics like the Beatles on the Dom (fun fair) on the Heiligengeistfeld, or Paul McCartney in front of the air-raid shelter in the same location. Jürgen Vollmer photographed John Lennon standing on the stairs of the entrance to a brick house in **Jägerpassage 1** in St. Pauli, while Paul, George and Stuart pass him by as shadowy figures. An image, which Lennon in 1975 chose for the cover of his solo record „**Rock’n’Roll**“.

Back then, in the beginning of the Sixties, the Beatles helped two more of Hamburg’s musical institutions to hit the big time. In 1961 during 92 nights in a row they played their biggest continuous guest slot in the brand new **Top Ten**. Where nowadays the Moondoo tempts sultry

dancers with Black Music and House Tracks, in previous years the Hippodrome attracted large crowds by showcasing naked ladies riding horseback in the ring or playing tag in the mud.

1962 saw Manfred Weißleder opening the legendary **Star-Club** at Große Freiheit 39. His sensational programme presented lots of international acts, many of them soon-to-be stars or even already established. This job is nowadays very well done by the tiny but very creative Molotow at Spielbudenplatz 5. Bands like The White Stripes, Vampire Weekend, LCD Soundsystem or Blood Red Shoes have played there, usually before the rest of the world had discovered them. Weißleder relentlessly lured away all the attractions of the Top Ten when he opened the Star-Club, of course including the Beatles. They gave three extended guest performances in Hamburg's newest stage and during the first their new manager Brian Epstein sent a message which read: „Congratulations, boys. EMI requests recordings!“. During the second Astrid Kirchherr was commissioned to shoot the Beatles in their new plain suits. And during the third, their first single „Love Me Do“ reached number 17 in the british pop charts. The Beatles themselves got never tired of stressing the importance of their apprenticeship years in the music metropolis Hamburg with John Lennon confessing: „I was born in Liverpool, but I grew up in Hamburg.“ During those times, Hamburg made The Beatles stars and the St Pauli neighbourhood reinvented itself as a world centre of rock'n'roll: Bill Haley, Jimi Hendrix, Fats Domino, Little Richard, Jerry Lee Lewis, Ray Charles, Cream and Ozzy Osborne were just some of the stellar names that played there, attracting fans to Hamburg from all over Europe.

Until today Hamburg continues to be a popular hot spot for live music experiences for every taste – be it the vibrant live club scene of St. Pauli or the unique music festivals taking place in the metropolitan region of Hamburg, like Wacken Open Air, Hurricane or ElbJazz to mention only a few. The annual **Reeperbahn Festival** is the largest club festival in Europe. Hosted each year in September, the festival features more than 400 bands at over 90 concert venues – providing an ideal environment for newcomer bands from across the globe, some of them to perform on the very same stages where the Beatles used to play back in the 1960s.