



The Beatles in Hamburg 1960 - 1962

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 St Pauli district of Hamburg. It was their first official appearance as The Beatles, and the first time their music had earned them any money. This band of youthful amateurs were spurred on by club owner Bruno Koschmider to entertain its somewhat shady clientele with cries of "Mach Schau" - make a show of it! Koschmider also owned the Kaiserkeller club and the Bambi Kino, and the band's first lodgings in Hamburg consisted of two tiny backstage rooms at the Bambi cinema which they immediately christened the "black hole of Calcutta". None of the places the band lived in during their two years or so in Hamburg would be acceptable today, even by the lowest of standards. The "black hole" was windowless, dirty and damp, while their next digs at the Top Ten Club, shared with singer Tony Sheridan, weren't much better - a cramped attic room fitted out with bunk beds. They played 92 days in a row at the Top Ten alone, performing all night long. Here in Hamburg's red-light district, a world of sailors, gangsters, rockers, female mud wrestlers and prostitutes, these musicians who went on to become global stars learned their trade. Although it was a tough environment for the Liverpool boys to live and work in, it was also a

source of inspiration, a place in which to experiment and develop as musicians.

They became close friends with the “Exis”, a clique centred around photographers Astrid Kirchherr and Jürgen Vollmer and graphic artist and musician Klaus Voormann. These young art students were “the first to capture the beauty and spirit of the Beatles” (John Lennon). And they were hugely influential when it came to creating the image of the biggest band in the world – the English boys weren’t just inspired by their friends’ existentialist-socialist lifestyle, they also wanted to look like them, and the mop-top haircut soon conquered the world.

The Beatles played more gigs in Hamburg than anywhere else – with around 300 concerts via five contracts with four different clubs, they performed on the city’s stages for a total of around 1200 hours. It was in Hamburg that they met Ringo Starr, and that they acquired their trademark look.

The Star-Club, which opened in 1962 at Große Freiheit 39, became a home from home for many other musicians besides The Beatles, as 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.

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