

## Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Heart

Over a 129 day period ending in mid 1967, the musical masterpiece, *Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band*, was conceived, produced and release by four good looking, highly successful, incredibly talented musicians from Liverpool. The Beatles seemed to have everything, and every one, they could possibly want in life. However, a careful look back at this classic album reveals song after song about characters who have, for various reasons, failed to find true happiness – they're lonely – they have a hole that needs fixing. But, what kind of hole could it be?

A search of the Internet for the phrase "A God Shaped Hole", will produce numerous hits. *Google* returned 1150 matches, *All The Web* found 1450, and *Yahoo* found 811. The surprising aspect is the number of historical figures, theologians, Christian Apologists and the like, who were listed as having originated the quote. Names such as Plato, C. S. Lewis, Blaise Pascal and others appeared repeatedly in the lists. What isn't surprising is how many learned individuals agree with the concept – that somewhere within the human makeup, is a hole, a "Lonely Heart", that can not be filled or satisfied by anything short of God.

The opening song on the *Sgt. Pepper's* album begins with the lyric "*It was twenty years ago today...*", and sets the lonely tone found throughout the remainder of the collection. Reminiscing is nearly always a way of saying you miss something. We all know "the good old days" were never really as good as we like to think they were. Something was missing even back then. And, of course, *Billy Shears* reminds us of this in the very next song, *A Little Help From My Friends*, where the best he can do is to "*get by*".

In his book *Sacred Thirst* (the title expresses another way to describe the "God Shaped Hole" concept), author M. Craig Barnes invests a great deal of space discussing the biblical story of "The Woman at the Well" - where Jesus spoke with a Samaritan woman about her insatiable thirst.

Married five times and living with another man at the time of their meeting, the woman has unsuccessfully tried to fill a void in her life. She may be able to "get by", but her midday visit to the well is a clear indication that her life is clearly less than perfect. Samaritan women of that day would not carry heavy jugs of water in the noon sun unless there was a reason. Most likely, she was not accepted by the other women who gathered at the well in the cool, early morning hours. Nevertheless, Jesus knew what she needed, what she thirsted for - "Living Water" – satisfying in a manner only He could provide.

Back on our turntable, we find an interesting volley taking place. A pattern of searching and failing repeats itself a number of times. First, there is *Lucy in the Sky With Diamonds*, which unquestionably describes a failed attempt to escape the harsh realities of life through drug induced euphoria. Then, things seem to improve a bit in the song *Getting Better*, but we also get a glimpse of what was wrong in the first place - uncool teachers, too many rules, anger, abuse, and other symptoms of an lonely, incomplete life. However, since LSD didn't work, maybe psychotherapy will do the trick. And, in *Fixing a Hole*, we hear about the struggles of letting people past our "door", to help us discover when we're "wrong" or "right", and how to stay focused so we can keep our "*mind from wandering, where it will go...*". But, just when we think we're getting somewhere, the song

*She's Leaving Home* lands painfully on our ears with the line "Something inside that was always denied for so many years." At which point the cycle repeats in the next couple of tunes, *Being for the Benefit of Mr. Kite!* and *Within You and Without You*, where filling the God shaped hole is, once again, attempted. This time with outlandish parties (Oprah are you listening?) and false religions (Sorry all you New Age Mystics – it's not "all within yourself no-one else" – it's a God shaped hole that's "within" us.).

Eugene Peterson, in his book "A Long Obedience in the Same Direction", comments on Psalm 121, where he translates verses 1 and 2 as, "I look to the mountains; does my strength come from mountains" No, my strength comes from God, who made the heaven, and the earth, and mountains." He goes on to explain that at the time this Psalm was written the mountains around Palestine were covered with pagan shrines where all sorts of rituals were performed, priests and priestesses worshiped, and spells and enchantments were performed to protect people from the perils in life's journey. However, Peterson points out that the Psalmist knows it isn't the spells or amulets or magic formulas that will protect the traveler. It is God, the creator of the mountains themselves, who protects you from evil and provides the strength to complete your journey. No parties or self-help programs can fill the God shaped hole in our souls.

Once again, we look to the Beatles' tale of woe, where when all else fails, we see the character begin to look to those around him for comfort. In the song *When I'm Sixty Four* the question, "Will you still need me, will you still feed me?" is posed. Fear and worry about the future eat away at our spirit and soul. They cause us to question what will become of us when we're old and grey. So we start looking around for someone to fill the void. But, alas, as in the song *Lovely Rita*, she may have "got the bill and ...paid it", but the character reminds himself he only "nearly made it" with her. At this point in the search for fulfillment

depression can set in. Sometimes we can't even get out of bed. When we play the tune *Good Morning, Good Morning*, we're startled by the lyric "Nothing to do to save his life...". And then, before you realize it the line "... you're on your own you're in the street" chimes in as a reminder that others cannot fill the hole for you, either.

Finally, a brief look at yester-year is included in the reprise of the "Sgt. Pepper's" theme, but it's not enough to cure a lonely heart – to fill a God shaped hole. No, rather than seeking the One in whose image we are made – the One who fills that hole perfectly – the closing song to this classic recording, *A Day in the Life*, speaks of ending the struggle with the line "He blew his mind out in a car". None of the solutions our society proposes work. Nothing within us is enough. No one else can fill the hole.

But that doesn't have to be the end of the story. The Bible is filled with accounts of God's love, compassion and mercy poured out on people like you and me. He filled them in a way nothing else could. He provided a second chance to the woman caught in adultery. He healed a boy of violent convulsions after the boy's father prayed "I do believe; help me overcome my unbelief!" He gently restored Simon Peter at what had to be the lowest point in his life, with three questions and one command, "Do you truly love me more than these?", "Do you truly love me?", "Do you love Me?", "Follow me!" Peter followed.

Jesus promised to give us His peace. "Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid." (John 14:27) Follow Him and he will provide that inner sense of completeness and contentment you are seeking, and your Lonely Heart, Your God Shaped Hole, will be filled to overflowing.