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### **“We hope you will enjoy the show”: *Sgt Pepper* as camp entertainment**

This paper discusses The Beatles’ *Sgt Pepper’s Lonely Hearts Club Band* (1967) album in relation to Richard Dyer’s concept of entertainment in *Only Entertainment* (1992). Dyer’s perspective (gay, based in film) provides a useful alternative to music-based interpretations (eg rock criticism but also much scholarly comment) which either stress the album’s artistic unity and its counterculture resonances (eg drugs), or dismiss it as a “shallow” parade of special effects, a baroque indulgence. Dyer can be used to critically address such “art” readings by recuperating style and surface as essential to popular culture.

*Pepper* broadly conforms to Dyer’s definition of entertainment: “a string of short items, [characterized] by popular and vulgar reference, implicit sexuality and open sentimentality... [developed] from pubs and clubs patronized by the urban working class. [It has also] been fed by traditions of bourgeois amusement - operetta, musical comedy, parlour songs” (13). This “variety show” format itself gives a kind of unity to the proceedings – not deep, but presentational. *Pepper*’s significance (if that is the right word) resides in its glittering surfaces, not its hidden depths. Through the notion of non-representational signs, Dyer produces camp and Utopian readings of entertainment. More broadly, the paper recontextualises Elijah Wald’s thesis in *How the Beatles Destroyed Rock’n’Roll* (2009) to exhume the album from the rock canon and “re-root” it in mass media entertainment popular in 1960s Britain, from TV spectacles to the kinds of “kitsch” music popular on such shows – MOR crooners, novelty songs etc.

Roots?

Keywords: The Beatles, entertainment, camp, 1960s, British popular culture, variety

Nope!