

*All I've got to do is Act Naturally": Issues of Image
and Performance in the Beatles' Films*

Submitted by Stephanie Anne Piotrowski, AHEA, to the
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(signed).....Stephanie Piotrowski

Abstract

In this thesis, I examine the Beatles' five feature films in order to argue how undermining generic convention and manipulating performance codes allowed the band to control their relationship with their audience and to gain autonomy over their output. Drawing from P. David Marshall's work on defining performance codes from the music, film, and television industries, I examine film form and style to illustrate how the Beatles' filmmakers used these codes in different combinations from previous pop and classical musicals in order to illicit certain responses from the audience. In doing so, the role of the audience from passive viewer to active participant changed the way musicians used film to communicate with their fans. I also consider how the Beatles' image changed throughout their career as reflected in their films as a way of charting the band's journey from pop stars to musicians, while also considering the social and cultural factors represented in the band's image. Such elements in the Beatles' carefully constructed image reflected youth culture and countercultural thoughts and beliefs. Finally, through a close analysis of the Beatles' musical sequences I have shown how experimentation with artistic synergy enabled the band to produce new and innovative films and lyrics while allowing each member to develop as individual musicians. This experimentation and willingness to undermine traditional film and pop music practices helped to change artists' approaches in the entertainment industries.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

[Acknowledgements.....3](#)