

The Young London

The Third British Invasion

There's a new wave of U.K artists topping the global charts

What's causing this flourishing of British talent?

There's a new British Invasion happening, people!



One Direction, Adele, Rita Ora, Emeli Sande, Jessie J, Sam Smith, Jess Glynne, Little Mix, Paloma Faith, Ed Sheeran, Florence and The Machine and Ellie Goulding all show that a significant amount of global chart topping songs are coming from British recording artists.

"It's officially a new British Invasion," said Geoff Taylor, chief executive of The British Phonographic Industry in a statement. *"British labels are discovering unique talent and using social media to help build fanbases right around the world, in particular in the U.S., where fans have such an affinity for British music."*

The first British Invasion occurred in the 1960s and describes an era when U.K artists achieved massive success by shattering the American market, thereby landing on a platform of global domination. The Dave Clarke Five, The Rolling Stones, The Kinks, The Who and more symbolically – The Beatles, made up of singers, John Lennon, Paul McCartney, George Harrison and Ringo Star.



The Beatles released 12 studio albums and had 17 chart toppers.



They also induced a psycho-social phenomena called 'Beatlemania', a wave of adoration and hysteria which gripped female fans.

I thought it was interesting to dissect the possible influences of this unique era in Britain and music itself.

I interviewed Theo Assemakis, who was raised in London during the 1960s, to help theorise what ignited the unique transformation of British music.

"After World War 2, Britain was one of the few countries in Europe that wasn't flattened by the Nazi bombers.

In the 1950s, Liverpool was a major port city and was receiving valuable food, textiles and of course – music records from The U.S.A.

The city's youth would get their hands on music produced by Elvis Presley, Eddy Cochrane and Buddy Holly. Liverpool was the first stop, so the city's youth were to the first to adapt the music to their style. From this influence came The Beatles, Cilla Black and Gerry and the Pacemakers".

Some interesting points. I also asked him how old he was and what his reaction was when he first listened to a Beatles song. *"The first Beatles song I heard was 'Love me do' in 1962. I was 11.*

I was at home and saw it on our small black and white TV. When I saw it on the news, which was recorded at their concerts, I was shocked when I saw all girls screaming and wailing. I liked the song because it had a beat. It was happy, energetic and meaningful.

I was falling in love with a girl in my class at the time too and also hoped she would love me".



(Boy George)

A second British Invasion occurred in the mid-1980s thanks to MTV showing British artists' latest hits in The U.K. Airing their songs in America bought them universal popularity. Such stars included Boy George, Iron Maiden, Billy Idol, The Police, Queen, Duran Duran, David Bowie, Paul McCartney, Phil Collins, Annie Lennox, Culture Club and Elton John, all of who rejuvenated the teen hysteria in Britain and particularly The U.S for the first time since *Beatlemania* two decades earlier.

On the 16th July 1983, 20 of the top 40 songs on The U.S charts were by U.K musicians, including 7 of the top 10 singles. This smashes the previous record of 14 chart toppers set in 1965.

One measure of strength for the second British Invasion was that 2 of the top 20 singles were by acts from the first British Invasion, whose careers had enjoyed continuous success.



(Madonna)

The Second British Invasion quickly faded by 1987. Martin Fry of ABC said *“The reality was that Madonna, Prince and Michael Jackson did it better, bigger and a lot more global than British acts”*.

But now! A new wave of superstars have emerged from The U.K. With Jesse Glynne, Ed Sheeran and Ellie Goulding being strong symbols that The U.K’s music industry is flourishing at the moment.



An illustrative example of Adele’s global fame

But in 2010s Britain, there are a number of ways to achieve international fame that past artists could never have imagined were possible.



Reality television is a major influence in the 21st Century for launching singers to fame. Shows such as Pop Idol, Popstars, The X Factor and Britain’s Got Talent have showcased Will Young, Girls Aloud, Leona Lewis, One Direction, Susan Boyle, Ella Henderson, Fleur East and many more.

I sat down with 17 year old Harvey Montague, a music student at The BRIT School of Performing Arts and Technology.

Harvey provided me with his personal experience on how he discovered and fell in love with British music.

“I was about seven years old when my parents bought me two Beatles compilation albums, one red, containing all their hits from 1960-1965 and a blue album, their hits from 1966-1970.

I opened the red album first. I used a pair of really uncomfortable headphones. But I remember, I would lie down in my bed listening to the red album from beginning to end, without a break (It was about two hours long). I loved it so much, I’d sometimes listen to it twice a day. I knew all the words to about thirty something songs.

I was so fixated on this one album that I didn’t even bother opening up the blue album for another month. When I finally did, I had a similar reaction. Listening to these songs in my bed, under the covers made me feel content and excited.

Listening to The Beatles was one of the main reasons I decided to become a musician. I loved what I heard so much I wanted to recreate it and play it for others”.

With Harvey's intimate knowledge of and insight into music, I decided he would be an excellent source to identify the rudimentary influence on the U.K music industry.

"Obviously, The BRIT School has a big part to do with it" he answers smiling to himself and then at me.



The BRIT School opened in 1991 as part of the City Technology College programme, which was part of the educational reform. The project was led by entrepreneurs, Mark Featherstone-Witty, Richard Branson, who influenced The Thatcher Administration to legally pave the way for the school and record producer, Sir George Martin, who managed The Beatles.

The institute was established as a unique school where students could attend for free and learn how to work in performing arts, through BRIT's close links with the creative industry. It is funded by the British Record Industry Trust and receives further financial support from the annual televised BRIT Awards.

Music applicants have to pass a rigorous audition process. Only one out of three students are offered a place, as the institute is searching for potential superstars to gain the school and music industry further success.

Harvey was of course one of the successful applicants.



Students and faculty travel from far and wide to be at BRIT, which has brought us stars such as Adele, Jessie J, Katy B, Rizzle Kicks, Amy Winehouse and many more, including Leona Lewis (who appears to be the only thing shared between the school and the singing competition, The X Factor).

"So much funding goes into the place. Therefore artists with talent are picked up there, and the really good and hardworking ones get scouted and made big. Record producers and managers are actually sent by their bosses to some BRIT concerts to scout for potential chart topping students. That's how Adele, Katy B, Jessie J, Leona Lewis, King Krule, The Kooks, Amy Winehouse and others did it".



Adele

He goes on to say...

"I also think America is taking to a British trend now. It's not just new things coming out of Britain, but America is becoming more open towards British music - causing the "explosion" over there".



Students in the music strand are coached to create their own material and eventually organise their own performances outside of school.



With more of America's talent shows being cancelled every day and itself as a country being too large to acquire all the talent out there for their performing arts schools, it's arguable to say that artists in Britain today have a unique advantage and a stronger platform than their American counterparts, which they can use to reach fame.

Not every single musical teenager will be able to uproot their small town lives over 2,000 miles to the best performing art school in the country.



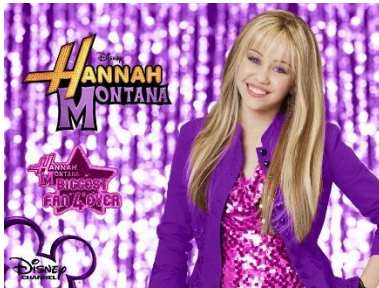
One example of

the journey for an aspiring singer from a random location who wishes to leave home and train as an artist.

Many U.S singers achieved success through connections, talent scouts or at public performing arts schools, such as the Fiorello H. LaGuardia High School and Professional Performing Arts School in New York City, which were attended by the likes of Alicia Keys and Britney Spears.

Disney

However, a dominant source of America's superstars come from the multi-billion dollar entertainment industry, Disney; its television shows that revolve around a child star and their talents.



Disney launched the singing careers of Selena Gomez, Miley Cyrus, Demi Lovato, Justin Timberlake and many more.

However, the curse of the child star is prominent in the industry, as Britney Spears, Miley Cyrus, Demi Lovato and more infamously, the once prominent actress/singer Lindsey Lohan, all infamously experienced intense personal meltdowns, which were glorified by the media.



Former child star, Britney Spears suffering her iconic psychiatric breakdown in 2007

Singers today have a massive advantage – social media. In the past, the person who achieved the most fame was whoever received the best marketing or how the music industry was being influenced at the time.

In the present, singers all have Instagram and Twitter accounts, which allows them to have intimate interactions with their fans.

Platforms such as YouTube, iTunes and Vevo help singers who are out of the mainstream limelight, to achieve enough individual popularity to receive global attention.

This is one of the reasons why singers today (with most of the chart toppers coming from Britain) are immensely popular. Each artist appears to have a significant amount of popularity, thanks to them all having dedicated followers on their social media profiles.

21st Century Britain has a huge advantage in influencing the global music scene - its popular talent shows, theatre schools, big budget colleges etc. (*All the artists having Instagram as well, really helps*).

There is also a growth in the anglophile phenomena (admiration for England and its culture) around the world, particularly in America. A major influence has been Britain's media.

The growth of anglophiles is significantly attributed to British Invasions, as the English songs become part of the delight to foreign senses.



During the original 1960s occurrence, London was experiencing a cultural revolution whilst being at the centre of the world with a youth orientated phenomena that symbolised the new and the modern, provided with an atmosphere of optimism and hedonism. Its media was becoming international, illustrated by the launch of Doctor Who and James Bond.

Today, the continuous growth of anglophiles can be traced to popular shows like Sherlock and Doctor Who, actors such as Benedict Cumberbatch and Kit Harrington and franchises as global as James Bond, all of which are gaining attention from foreign countries.

Now we know of the talent shows and music colleges that have launched the careers of present day artists, we have to ask, how did singers in the past manage their careers? There wasn't any juggernaut reality contests or big budget institutions.

Can you even imagine if David Bowie's career began as a grooming by a fame hungry institution? Or if The Beatles won X Factor?

That would just be...no!

Back then, it was just talent in a studio, with a mike.

Singers from the 20th Century had to perform around the country, taking whatever gig they could manage to get by.

They would need to rely on connections or being in the right place at the right time and hope to be scouted by a music producer in order to get their foot in a recording studio.

It certainly worked for The Beatles, The Rolling Stones, David Bowie, Freddie Mercury, Black Sabbath and Annie Lenox.

The United Kingdom is also renowned for using music to purposely influence change.

Perhaps the most famous example of this was Band Aid, a charity super group organised by singer-songwriters Bob Geldof and Midge Uri in 1984 to raise money for anti-poverty efforts in Ethiopia.



Together with a massive group of the era's biggest stars (from the Second Invasion), such as Bono, Sting, Paul McCartney,

Boy George, Duran Duran, Phil Collins, Spandau Ballet and David Bowie, they recorded the song, "Do They Know It's Christmas?" .

It was released four days later and instantly became number one. The song sold two millions copies and earned the charity \$24,000,000 around the globe.

So, we appear to have learnt the causes of the British Invasions; the 1960s one was generated by the excitement of the baby boomer generation and fed by a post-World War 2 culture that literally fought for peace to prevent another war. The 1980s one was influenced by the launch of MTV and the 2010s one has been a slow build up thanks to the establishment of talent shows and juggernaut institutions in a diversifying interconnected society.

I guess a big question I needed to ask is –

What makes Britain's music so successful?

Mr. Montague added another intriguing statement to shed light on my quest for answers.

"Britain is more accepting of new things – particularly music".

Some examples of this statement can prove Harvey's theory.



When The Spice Girls exploded onto the scene in the 1990s, the era of boy bands, grunge and garage music, nobody expected the wild, girly, cartoonish looking group to become the biggest selling music act of the decade. Their bubble gum pop featured strong elements of disco style beat, R&B, up-tempo dance pop that incorporated elements of hip hop, rap and world music (with some songs influenced by Latin rhythms such as the salsa and samba).

The group aliases, 'Scary, Ginger, Baby, Posh and Sporty' became most widely recognised individuals since 'Paul, John, George and Ringo', creating their own British Invasion. They were the biggest British pop phenomena since Beatlemania.

The Spice Girls achieved nine number one singles, selling a total of 85 million records worldwide and earning the title as the best-selling female group of all time.



They represented girl power and ultimately Britain.



The LGBT band Scissor Sisters, from New York, released their debut album in 2004. The genre was pop glam, nu-disco and electroclash. In an era when Kelly Clarkson, Justin Timberlake, Britney Spears and Jennifer Lopez dominated the international charts, pop appeared to be the only thing people wanted to hear.

Scissor Sisters however found considerable success in The U.K (a country they call their 'spiritual home') where their album reached number one and even accrued three BRIT Awards in 2005.

The U.K is a more accepting society in general terms as well.



England accepted openly gay and bisexual stars as part of their culture as early as the 1970s, such as comedic TV host, Kenny Everett and singers, David Bowie, Boy George, Sir Elton John and Freddie Mercury.



With their shocking outfits, challenging music, flamboyant behaviour and openness to sexuality and other topics, considered controversial for the time, they heavily influenced U.K society and paved way for the next generation of singers to challenge the rest of the world and shape the music industry.

Meanwhile, America is a country that only introduced a nationwide approval of same sex marriage as recently as 2015, and the use of the notorious aversion therapy on minors (attempting to transform homosexuals into heterosexuals) is only lawfully banned in 5 out of the 50 states.

On the topic of American music and culture, Harvey, along with other interviewees gave their answers to my next question.

What do you think the American music scene and its singers do differently, that prevents them from having the same global influence The British music industry has?

Harvey said, "American stars are like American TV. It is very overdone and dramatised. Some people like that. Usually the UK appeals to a more natural tone".

Sebastian Assemakis, 13, who lives a sheltered life in Cyprus, worlds away from British or indeed American culture, provided another interesting insight into the U.S's music industry.

"America continuously tries to recreate the same thing. And people just become bored of it. So singers become less talented over time".

Fair point, (coughs) *Nicki Minaj*

Grace Antoniou, a 17 year old sixth form student from North London, also commented that American stars focus too much on image and not enough on talent.



(Lady Gaga. No follow up needed)

Grace pointed out, "If you look at someone like Miley Cyrus for example, you can see a massive difference in style and performance to someone like Adele".



(A Miley Cyrus performance vs an Adele performance)



(Taylor Swift)

The United States does indeed have some megastars at the moment that are gaining multiple number ones around the world. Artists such as Taylor Swift, Adam Lambert, Lana Del Rey, Fifth Harmony, Kanye West and Eminem.



(Lana Del Rey)

But then again, America has always had an impressive range of attractive superstars topping the charts. And maybe, just maybe, that's why their influence is not as Titanic as The U.K scene.

Perhaps the rarity of a British Invasion induces the wave to be that much more effective. Additionally, with the British record industry and British public innately being open to new music, translates into their non-stop production of influential artists.

Finally, it was time to wrap up the interview with a few thoughts on the future.

Which current U.K artist do you think will have the longest and most successful career and why?

Harvey answered "*Sam Smith – he has a very unique voice.*"

Sebastian hopes "*Ed Sheeran – because he is awesome!*"

Grace thinks "*Adele – because she is an amazing singer with a powerful voice.*"

Theo believes "*Olly Murs _ he is a good singer and is doing lots of different things, like hosting The X Factor.*"

As someone who has attended BRIT concerts, been to The X Factor auditions and visited the musically and culturally significant city of Liverpool, I have a healthy and varied insight into the influential platforms of this nation's music industry.

Combined with these thought provoking theories, learning this new information and collection intimate tales, I can finally start to understand what drives Britain and all of *us* as the *listeners*.

We understand the world more than we ever have before. Our unique and rich environment makes us less terrified of new ideas and the future.

So, we allow the songs to shape our culture and *carry us along to the future*.

Finally, we were left with what we might expect from British music in years to come –

What genre of music do you think the next decade will be shaped by?

Sebastian answered *"I think electronic music, like dubstep and Skrillex will be the primary genre in the next decade"*.

However, Harvey said, *"This decade was heavily shaped by a revival of folk - Ed Sheeran, Jake Bugg, Mumford and Sons etc. Maybe there will be a revival of another old, forgotten genre - glam, rock and roll, country and so on"*.

And that leaves us to ask ourselves -

Will America ever take back the musical crown?

How long will this British Invasion last?

But with our society and culture developing faster than ever before, along with the support of social media, is it even possible anymore for the continuous wave of British musical talent to ever cease?

- Dominic Assemakis, Features Editor – *The Young London*