

# 10 TV Sunday

## REASONS THE MONKEES ARE COOLER THAN YOU THINK



By MICHAEL GILTZ

**O**N Wednesday, VH1 airs "Daydream Believer," a TV movie about the heyday of The Monkees.

It's the latest round of attention for a group that seems destined to *not* fade away.

Think the Monkees were a prepackaged joke? Try "a jolly Buddha laugh at hypocrisy." That's what Timothy Leary said about them in 1969 — and he wasn't alone.

John Lennon reportedly compared them favorably to the Marx Brothers.

Respected by their peers, trailblazers on television (where they won an Emmy), musicians who risked (and lost) their commercial success for the chance to make an

**A new movie this week on VH1 brings the Monkees back. If you thought you already knew everything about the pre-fab four — Hey! Hey! think again.**

artistic statement, the Monkees were a lot cooler and more subversive than they're given credit for.

Here's why:

### THEY HAD LONG HAIR

It seems silly today, but four lads in primetime with long hair was a shock in 1966, especially since they weren't depicted as drug-taking, rebellious maniacs a la "Dragnet."

"Yeah, we were nice guys," admits Peter Tork about their TV characters. Some stations still

refused to carry the show at first, but its quick and immediate international success soon changed that.

### JIMI HENDRIX WAS THEIR OPENING ACT

It was the most infamous double bill in rock 'n' roll — and it ended with Hendrix leaving the tour after a few shows.

But few credit the Monkees — who recruited Hendrix themselves after hearing him perform in the UK — with the good



Jimi Hendrix poos old stories that Hendrix took up residence at Tork's

this did him.

The ensuing "bad boy" publicity gave Hendrix a toehold in the U.S., which soon translated into Top 10 success.

Tork poos old stories that Hendrix took up residence at Tork's

They coulda been the Beatles: The Monkees (l-r) Davy Jones, Mike Nesmith, Micky Dolenz and Peter Tork) gave up their goofy TV image and waved goodbye to phenomenal success.

home when visiting America but happily agrees they hung out together.

"We'd stay up and jam," he remembers fondly. "It was Hendrix! Who wouldn't want to do that?"

### THEY WERE THE FIRST BOY BAND TO BREAK FREE

Like Frankenstein's monster, the Monkees soon got away from their creators — namely Bob Rafelson, Bert Schneider and especially Don Kirshner, the music impresario who chose the



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songs and studio musicians that resulted in such huge hits as "Daydream Believer" and "I Wanna Be Free."

The Monkees — who were actors hired to play members of a rock 'n' roll band on TV — quickly decided they really were a rock 'n' roll band.

With Michael Nesmith especially determined to take control, the band soon got its way.

"We just wanted to play on our own records," explains Tork, (whose most recent album is *Two Man Band*, recorded with John Lee Stanley). "But Don took it personally." Now, every time the Backstreet

Boys or NSYNC proudly point to a songwriting credit, every time one of the guys in BBMak talks about how they play their own instruments, they should know that the Monkees did it first.

## THEY SPENT EVERY PENNY THEY MADE

In true rock 'n' roll fashion, the Monkees ended their first massive fling with fame virtually broke. Tork had a classic '60s open-door policy at his California home, and his largesse attracted hippies and hangers-on in equal measures — until the money ran out.

Davy Jones and Micky Dolenz were similarly shafted by lackeys and bad business decisions but started building up a retirement fund in the '70s by touring Japan, where the Monkees' popularity never waned.

Nesmith famously struck pay dirt after his mom invented Liquid Paper.

## THEY MADE THE MOST OF THE '60s

Micky Dolenz wandered through the Monterey music festival dressed as an American Indian.

Little Davy Jones squirmed tall blonde models around town long before Dudley Moore.

Michael Nesmith bought one lavish toy after another, but reportedly saying he would snuff out his desire for material things by having them.

Drugs weren't unheard of. But the Monkees also knew what to leave in the '60s. Tork jokes, "I was a

Here they come... VH1 movie "Daydream Believer" — with four startling Monkee lookalikes — airs on Wednesday night.



vegetarian, but then I got better" and is forthright about being a recovering alcoholic.

But it wasn't all a phase. Tork's well-known exploration of eastern philosophy continues. He reads the *Tao Te Ching* regularly.

## THEY HAD CUTTING EDGE MUSICAL GUESTS

Jimi Hendrix wasn't a

rare exception: the Monkees always used their TV show and tours to promote the artists they liked.

Micky Dolenz directed the final episode of the series and coaxed

singer/songwriter Tim Buckley into appearing. (It was perhaps the only primetime exposure for the cult favorite who died tragically young — just like his son Jeff so many years later.)

Similarly, Nesmith got Frank Zappa to pop in.

"I wanted to get Janis Joplin on the show," says Tork, "but that didn't work out."

## THEY MADE FUN OF THEMSELVES

While the Beatles used movies like "A Hard Day's Night" to polish their nice-boy image, the Monkees used their movie *Head* to mock themselves and

challenge their audience. (The Beatles didn't start their movie with all four band members committing suicide, did they?)

## THEY HAD A SWEATSHOP BEFORE SWEATSHOPS WERE COOL

Long before Kathie Lee Gifford, the Monkees had its own form of slave labor right here in the States — and they were proud of it!

Teenagers would mill outside the studio where their show was filmed, hoping to be one of the few (girls only, please) selected to go inside and plow through the fan mail that was arriving by the truckload.

"Oh, we'd go and visit them," says Tork. "Sometimes we'd even sing for them."

He fails to mention the shocking lack of hourly wages for these child laborers.

## THEY RISKED IT ALL FOR THEIR MUSIC

"We had no desire to destroy the Monkees," insists Tork, who disagrees with anyone who describes the band as walking away from success.

But he readily concurs that they risked (and lost) that success by abandoning the hit-making factory of Kirshner, making the challenging, ahead-of-its-time, antiwar movie *Head*, and — most importantly to them — performing much of their own music from the third album, *Headquarters*.

Tork points out their success followed a rather

straightforward path from immediate, overwhelming popularity (swamping even the Beatles) to a slow decline that probably would have occurred even if they hadn't strayed from the formula that got them to the top.

But making their own artistic statement was more important than playing it safe, right?

"Yes, absolutely," says Tork.

## THEY HAD GREAT SONGS

Mention Neil Diamond (who penned the classic "I'm a Believer"), and Tork quickly responds with more great songwriters

recorded by the Monkees, such as Carole Bayer Sager, Gerry Goffin, Carole King and Boyce and Hart.

"We had the cream of the crop," says Tork.

Long before John Lennon topped Harry Nilsson as one of his favorites, the Monkees recorded Nilsson's song "Cuddly Toy," which gave Harry the financial boost he needed to quit his day job to pursue music full-time.

Jazz singer Cassandra Wilson recently recorded their first big hit, "Last Train to Clarksville," giving a sad, bluesy spin to the song, and... in the process, demonstrating its unexpected durability.



Frank Zappa



Neil Diamond