

# THE BEATLES AND THEIR APPLE ARTISTS

## Hot Chocolate – It Started with a Song

In 1968 an unknown cover band led by Errol Brown recorded a reggae version of John Lennon's 'Give Peace a Chance'. Brown had changed some of the lyrics including the shouting of "Rubbish! Rubbish!". Advised that before he could release the song, he needed Lennon's permission, he sent a demo copy to Apple Records. Fortunately, John listened to the demo and liked what he heard. Soon after Apple replied to Brown that John not only gave his permission, but also that Apple wanted to sign the group to the Apple label. Apple press office employee Mavis Smith decided they would be called Hot Chocolate Band which was shortly changed to The Hot Chocolate.



This original version of the band, which was based in Brixton just outside of London, included Brown on vocals backed by guitarist Franklyn De Allie, drummer Jim King, percussionist Patrick Olive, and Tony Wilson on bass. In 1969 they added Larry Ferguson on keyboards and the drummer was replaced by Ian King.

'Give Peace a Chance' was produced by Tony Wilson and released on the Apple label on 10 October 1969 with a B side of 'Living Without Tomorrow'.

Unfortunately for the band, their contract with Apple would prove to be short lived as The Beatles broke up in 1970. Although the single failed to make the charts in both the UK and the USA, their connection with Apple brought them the attention needed to get them another contract with RAK Records where co-owner and record producer Mickie Most tweaked the band's name one last time christening them just Hot Chocolate.



The band's lineup also changed in 1970 with Harvey Hinsley and Tony Connor replacing guitarist De Allie and drummer Ian King.

At first, although they had charted hits, they lacked direction hopping between pop soul, to glam rock, to bubble-gum and hard rock. Eventually Most, learning of Brown and Wilson's song writing ability, suggested they focus on social commentary songs that explored issues like race, suicide, poverty and failure. He also brought string arranger John Cameron into the mix. This combination of changes began an impressive and long-lasting success that included at least one hit song each year from 1970 through 1984 including 'Love Is Life', 'Emma', 'You Could Have Been a Lady', and 'I Believe in

Love'. The Brown and Wilson song writing duo also wrote songs for other artists including Herman's Hermits, Julie Felix and fellow Apple artist Mary Hopkin. In 1973 the band released the racially provocative Top 10 hit 'Brother Louie' which went to number 1 in the USA when covered by the group Stories. As Errol Brown related in an interview with Blues and Soul, "I'm very proud of that song, because it reflected a situation that I grew up in as a young boy in England."

In 1975 the band's make up changed several times. Tony Wilson left the band and briefly that year Brian Satterwhite and Derrick Lewis joined. In the mid-1970s when disco was king, Hot Chocolate became even more popular with the release of 'You Sexy





Thing' which Brown wrote about his wife, Ginette. Unlike his earlier social commentary themed hits, this was a happy song reflecting his appreciation of his wife. Released in 1976, it peaked at number 3 in the charts. Hot Chocolate finally had their first number 1 in 1977 with 'So You Win Again' written by Russ Ballard and a few years later in 1982 'It Started with a Kiss' reached number 5 in the charts.

Proving that they had achieved success in the eyes of the public, Prince Charles and Princess Diana invited the band to attend their pre-wedding reception at Buckingham Palace in summer 1981.

Finally, after a successful 15 years of hits, the band called it quits in 1986 with Errol Brown and Larry Ferguson deciding to leave. Errol wanted to spend more time with his wife and small children. Although he did go on to have a solo career, it was never as successful as Hot Chocolate.

Two compilation albums were released after the band's demise both of which reached number 1 in the UK charts proving the enduring popularity of the band and their hits. A remix version of 'You Sexy Thing' also put the hit song back in the charts for a second time in 1987.

On the heels of the renewed interest in the band, original band members Patrick Olive, Tony Connor and Harvey Hinsley decided to bring the band back. They rounded out the group by adding Greg Bannis (lead vocals), Willy Dowling and Steve Matthews (keyboards, backing vocals). 'You Sexy Thing' was featured prominently in the highly popular film *The Full Monty* in 1997 putting the song back in the charts for a third time. The only other song to chart in three separate decades was John Lennon's 'Imagine'.

Over the years since, membership in the band has continued to be fluid with changes in 1994 and in 2010. Today the band includes long-termers Patrick, Tony and Harvey with Steve Ansell (keyboards, guitar), Andy Smith (keyboards) and Kennie Simon (lead vocals, keyboard).

Although Hot Chocolate were and still are undeniably successful and popular, it is interesting to note that it is their singles that were the hits. Despite decades of singles charting, the only albums to do well were their two greatest hits releases. Only 4 of their 9 studio albums charted at all and none reached higher than number 24 while 14 of their 51 singles reached the top 10. The hits dried up for the band with the breakup in 1986 without Brown and Wilson to write new songs.

Sadly, original front man Errol Brown died in May 2015 in his home in the Bahamas of liver cancer, but his legacy lives on with the band which continues to tour and play the hits that brought them fame. And to think it all started with a song.

