

Back to the Future

By Wayne Robins

LET'S GET INTO the wayback machine with Sherman and Peabody. Our journey begins about 16 years ago with the cartoon dog/history buff and his pet boy, well known to viewers of the animated adventures of Rocky, Bullwinkle and friends.

Peabody meant to set the wayback machine for 1886, to do some firsthand research into the first term of President Grover Cleveland. But something has gone awry. Peabody has misdialed a digit. It is 1986.

Things get even more perplexing. In a record store, Sherman discovers that the Monkees, a quick-back prefabrication of the 1960s designed to cash in on the Beatles, have five albums on the charts and a new hit single, and have been on one of the most successful tours of the year. (They did Jones Beach and Pier 84 over the summer; they'll be back at Westbury Music Fair at the end of September.)

Sherman has discovered that a group formed in 1970, ELP, has a new album and is filling arenas in 1986; though it's now Emerson, Lake and Powell rather than Emerson, Lake and Palmer, the sound has remained virtually the same.

Genesis, formed in 1968, gave its first concerts in 1970, but the group is scheduled for three nights at Madison Square Garden, and still has hugely successful records in 1986. And Genesis' former leader, Peter Dinklage, is also in the Top 10.

He has found that Elton John, who first topped the charts in 1970, can still pack Madison Square Garden for three nights (beginning Thursday). Bob Seger, Neil Young, Stevie Wonder, the Moody Blues, and Smokey Robinson, all stars of the 1960s, continue to thrive, with autumn tours. The Everly Brothers, stars of the 1950s, are back with a successful tour.

Flashes in the pan from the 1960s, such as the English guitarists Alvin Lee and the San Francisco guitar band Quicksilver, have new albums out. Even the Beatles, who had already split up by 1970, have a hit again with a reissue of "Twist and Shout," a song they first had a Top 5 hit with in 1964.

Sherman is perplexed. "It does seem a little odd," says Peabody, the professorial canine. "We seem to have gone back to the future."

This is indeed an odd period in



The Monkees reunited: Davy Jones, Peter Tork and Micky Dolenz

pop music: Everything old is new again. It's not nostalgia, although there is plenty of that for those who revere the street corner harmonies of doo-wop music, which is featured in concerts every few weeks this fall. It's just that nothing really seems to have changed.

Except for the hit single "That Was Then, This Is Now" and a new version of "Kicks," the old Paul Revere and the Raiders hit, Arista's "Then & Now... The Best of the Monkees" is your basic greatest-hits compilation package. (Rhino Records has also released the original Monkees albums.)

Though the Monkees were scorned as the creation of marketing executives rather than a bona fide band (they played no instruments on their first two albums), they at least delivered a quality product.

The Monkees songs were written by the best pop composers of the day and given state-of-the-art, if lightweight, productions. That explains why so much original Monkees music sounds respectable after nearly 20 years. Carole King and Gerry Goffin wrote the still-appealing "Pleasant Valley Sunday" and "Take a Giant Step"; Tommy Boyce and Bobby Hart, who produced many of the early tracks, composed staples such as "Theme from the

Monkees," "Last Train to Clarks-ville" and the uncharacteristically hard-rocking "Valleri." Neil Diamond, about to make the transition from Tin Pan Alley tunesmith to solo star, wrote "I'm a Believer" and "A Little Bit Me, A Little Bit You."

"That Was Then, This Is Now" was written by Vance Brescia of the Mosquitos, a Huntington-based group that has everything a successful band needs — good songs, tight playing, fine stage presence — except a record deal. Maybe that will change now that one of Brescia's songs is a proven, rather than theoretical, hit.

Emerson, Lake and Powell, who'll be at Madison Square Garden and the Meadowlands this month, are smart enough not to tamper with what was a good thing, financially. "The Score," which opens their new album, "Emerson, Lake and Powell," is virtually a reprise of Emerson, Lake and Palmer's 1974 theme song, "Welcome Back, My Friends, to the Show That Never Ends."

Though the band split up in 1979, it's tough to keep a bad idea down. With drummer Carl Palmer gone (he was one of the founders of the abysmal but popular retro-rock band Asia) and replaced by journeyman Cozy Powell, the new ELP album continues the tradition of bombastic "classical" music tied to

a big beat. Keith Emerson, the keyboard player, has developed no more restraint over the years, while bassist Greg Lake's lyrics remain as ponderous as ever.

By contrast, the Everly Brothers, who will be at Westbury Music Fair in October, sound like they believe the title of their latest album, "Born Yesterday." With the English rocker Dave Edmunds offering modern yet sympathetic production, the Everlys have managed to update their style while maintaining their intimate harmonies. The choice of material here is sensational, from little-known Bob Dylan ("Abandoned Love") and Mark Knopfler ("Why Worry") to quality songs by the Kinman Brothers of Rank and File ("Amanda Ruth"), Ian Sutherland ("Arms of Mary") and Larry Raspberry ("Always Drive a Cadillac").

Raspberry's song is a minor masterpiece that takes a good gimmick — a line written in a 1963 high school yearbook — and develops it into a concise, emotionally honest essay on the cost of success and the value of love.

There must be someone out there buying "Invisible Touch" by Genesis, thinking: These guys are Phil Collins clones. But in an era when pop singers leave their long-established groups at the first whiff of solo success, it's nice that big-shot solo star Collins should continue with the group for which he was once merely the drummer.

Perhaps because the group never split up, Genesis has grown with the times. "Invisible Touch" is slick and polished, but never trite or superficial. Engineer and coproducer Hugh Padgham gives the band a resonant, high-impact aural presence: Collins' drums and vocals are especially vivid. No wonder Paul McCartney went to Padgham for coproduction on his new album.

Though Collins, Tony Banks and Mike Rutherford share all the composing credits, the Collins touch is evident on both romantic ballads, such as "In Too Deep," and on rollicking, rhythm workouts, such as "Anything She Does."

Perhaps because they were never superstars in the 1970s, Genesis has successfully resisted the mummification that characterizes all too many of this fall's coming attractions. Sherman and Peabody might not recognize this version of Genesis at all, but then again, they have been so busy trying to figure out what Sigue Sigue Sputnik is that they hardly have time to notice. **■**