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# In tune with its viewers

**I**N SOMEONE who didn't know better – a millennial, say, or a nitwit – a cursory glance at **THE STORY OF READY STEADY GO!** (BBC4, 9pm) might prompt little more than a shrug.

What on earth is this? What's all the fuss about? A load of creaky old black-and-white clips from some prehistoric pop show?

It's hardly Ready Steady Cook, is it?

But that prehistoric pop show, which went out on ITV on Friday nights for just over three years, from August 1963 to December 1966, happens to have been somewhat groundbreaking. An



**Mike Ward**  
 previews  
 tonight's TV

hour-long documentary is the least it deserves. To fully appreciate this groundbreakingness – yes, I do know there's no such word, but hey, I'm breaking new ground – you have to see Ready Steady Go! in the context of what had gone before. Which frankly wasn't a lot, at least not in this vein.

Obviously there'd been plenty

of televised music shows, such as BBC1's late-Fifties series Six-Five Special, but these had mostly been quite cosy and light entertainment-based.

There's a Six-Five Special clip that I'll admit is rather shocking, but only because it features Des O'Connor.

The point about Ready Steady Go!, as this fine documentary reminds us, is that it was proudly targeting the kids, back when that was a refreshing idea rather than the stuff of toe-curling cliché.

Early-Sixties British R&B acts – The Who, The Rolling Stones, The Beatles, The Animals etc – were a

huge feature, but it also brought us the likes of Lulu, Dusty Springfield (who originally hosted), plus the first proper exposure on British TV for Motown acts such as The Supremes and Stevie Wonder.

When a raw teenager called Cathy McGowan then came on board, it was as if the final piece of its jigsaw had slotted into place. McGowan was the embodiment of everything the show stood for.

Her youth, fashion sense and genuine love of the music – plus the fact she quite frequently messed up – meant the viewers came to adore her.

As for the presentation of the

performances, take a look at the clips of The Rolling Stones doing Paint It Black, plus The Who doing Anyway Anyhow Anywhere, and imagine Top Of The Pops trying anything even half as bold.

Pioneering director Michael Lindsay-Hogg talks us through what inspired him.

That said, it was Top Of The Pops, launched in 1964, that would effectively sound the death knell for Ready Steady Go!

In the end, a safe, chart-based approach proved the better bet.

Mind you, Top Of The Pops ultimately suffered the same sad fate, didn't it? And only 40 years later.