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Strawberry Fields ... AND THE BEATLES FOREVER



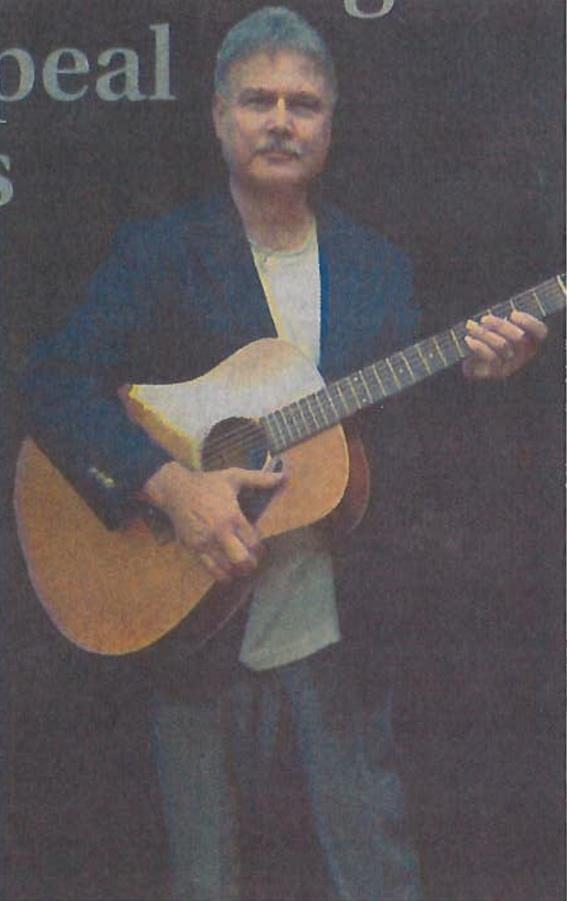
Lecturer, musician gives insight into the enduring appeal of the pop innovators

Nancy Johnson | The Gazette

While the Beatles were mired in legal disputes during their protracted break-up in the late 1960s, George Harrison found a quiet spot in Eric Clapton's garden where he wrote the uplifting song "Here Comes the Sun" for the landmark album "Abbey Road."

This is just one of several little-known Beatles facts musician and lecturer Rick Iacoboni brought to the Medina library with his "Behind the Music of the Beatles" multimedia presentation on Saturday.

Brecksville resident Iacoboni said watching the Beatles' first performance on the Ed Sullivan Show on February 9, 1964, when he was 8 years old changed his life.



See BEATLES, A2

“I decided that’s what I wanted to do — I wanted to play music,” he said.

Iacoboni played plenty of music during his presentation.

Seated before a screen showing images of the Beatles during various stages of their careers, Iacoboni told behind-the-scenes tales of some of the band’s most popular songs.

He illustrated the stories with instrumental versions of their songs, strumming either a six-string or 12-string acoustic guitar, before a library audience.

John and Paul

“In the beginning the Beatles would come into the studio and producer George Martin would help them shape their ideas into commercial songs,” Iacoboni said. “Later it was a collaborative effort. The Beatles were the whole package. Unlike many artists, they wrote, recorded and performed their own music.”

The first song The Beatles performed on Ed Sullivan was the John Lennon/Paul McCartney composition “All My Loving.” According to Iacoboni, Sullivan had requested an upbeat opening number.

“The song was recorded in 13 takes,” said Iacoboni, “Paul McCartney wrote it as a love song for his then-girlfriend Jane Asher. Her brother, by the way, was Peter Asher of Peter and Gordon fame. He later became a well-known music producer.”

Peter and Gordon’s single “A World Without Love,” penned for the duo by Lennon and McCartney, shot to the top of the U.S. charts exactly 50 years ago this week, on June 27, 1964.

By then, the Beatles had already established themselves as chart-toppers in their own right. In April of that same year, 12 Beatles songs occupied Billboard’s Hot 100 chart, including the top five positions — an unprecedented feat that has never been repeated.

One of those songs, “She Loves You” was partially written on a tour bus by John Lennon. Lennon and McCartney finished the song at McCartney’s home in Liverpool where his father, Jim McCartney, scolded the boys for using the slang term “yeah, yeah, yeah.” Mr. McCartney suggested the boys change the lyrics to “yes, yes, yes,” a suggestion the songwriters thankfully ignored.

“She’s a Woman” was written by Paul McCartney to emulate the music of Little Richard. The band recorded the song the same day McCartney wrote it.

“The way Lennon and McCartney worked was whoever wrote the majority of the song would also do the vocals on the recording,” Iacoboni said. “For instance John wrote most of “ ‘Ticket to Ride.’ ”

The song, Iacoboni said, was a nod to the ladies-of-the-night the band met while playing the red light district in Hamburg, Germany, during the early years of their career.

“You’ll never look at that song the same way,” he laughed. Although in the early years the Lennon/McCartney songwriting team penned mostly love songs, over time and largely influenced by Bob Dylan’s work, Lennon moved to writing more personal, introspective songs.

“Nowhere Man” was one of Lennon’s first autobiographical songs, along with “You’ve Got to Hide Your Love Away” and

“Norwegian Wood.” Iacoboni said the latter was Lennon’s take on a secret affair he’d had while still married to Cynthia Powell, the mother of his older son, Julian.

The Story of Yesterday

Paul was living with the Asher family when he woke up with the melody to “Yesterday” in his mind. He promptly sat down at the piano and began crafting the lyrics in the early hours of the morning. The song’s working title was “Scrambled Eggs,” probably a paean to McCartney’s anticipation for breakfast.

The song had come so easily to McCartney, he was afraid he had plagiarized it.

“Yesterday” became the Beatles’ most popular song. The original recording has been played on radio more than 7 million times. The song has been recorded by more than 3,000 different artists.

Beatle 1sts

According to Iacoboni, the Beatles introduced many innovative ideas and unconventional instrumentation through their music, which in turn changed the face of popular music.

As an example, he cited “Hey Jude,” which was the first single that — at more than seven minutes long — broke Top 40 radio’s typical “three-minute-song.”

The band was the first pop group to add strings to their recordings.

When George Harrison discovered the sitar while filming the movie “Help,” the instrument appeared for the first time in popular music.

And instead of editing out accidental guitar feedback from a recording, the Beatles turned the jarring sound into the opener to “I Feel Fine.”

“They used so many different sounds that manufacturers began making special effects pedals, which most bands use today,” Iacoboni said, “Their songs had unique tempo and key changes, too, making a seemingly simple song much more complex.”

During the Beatles early years, vinyl singles were usually released with an A-side and a B-side.

“The B-side was never a great song,” Iacoboni said, “but the Beatles had more great songs than they knew what to do with,” which led to the music industry’s unprecedented double-A-side single.

“They backed ‘Penny Lane’ with ‘Strawberry Fields,’ ‘Help’ with ‘I’m Down’ — all hits,” he said.

“Penny Lane,” written by McCartney, and “Strawberry Fields,” written by Lennon, were both odes to Liverpool. The two were surprised they had both come up with songs about their hometown at about the same time.

“Each song is an excellent example of the different writing styles between the two,” said Iacoboni.

George and Ringo

Iacoboni also paid homage to George Harrison, who joined the Fab Four at the age of 17. Known as the quiet Beatle, Harrison grabbed the other Beatles’ attention when he brought Eric Clapton to the studio to record “While My Guitar Gently Weeps.”

“As Harrison matured, his songwriting matured,” said Iacoboni, citing Harrison’s solo triple-album release “All Things Must Pass” as the embodiment of Harrison’s enormous talent.

Drummer Ringo Starr was given time behind the microphone for at least one song per album. Although his vocal range was limited, Ringo’s renditions of “Yellow Submarine” and “I Get By with a Little Help from My Friends” are considered Beatles classics.

In 1967 the Beatles performed “All You Need Is Love” in a live worldwide satellite broadcast. George Martin brought in a 12-piece orchestra and the band lined up friends like Mick Jagger, Keith Richards and Keith Moon to sing with them. The legendary broadcast was seen by more than 140 million viewers in 26 countries, unprecedented numbers at the time.

Iacoboni said the Beatles have remained a relevant musical force. They have sold more than 600 million lifetime units, with more than 30 million sold in just the past 10 years.

In 2010, their long-delayed iTunes debut netted 450,000 digital album downloads in the first week alone.

And although Lennon and Harrison have passed away, McCartney and Starr are separately still making music in the studio and on the road.

“They contributed so much to music,” Iacoboni said, “the list just goes on and on.”