

Still young, still selling out in 2005

BEATLES TRIBUTE: The Fab Four lasted a decade. Rain, their doppelgängers, are going strong at 20 years



Rain is so popular the band has had to add shows in many of the cities it's visited.

In Concert

Rain's The Beatles Experience

Where: The Centre in Vancouver for Performing Arts, 777 Homer St.

When: Tomorrow, Saturday and Monday at 8 p.m.; Sunday at 7:30 p.m.

Tickets: \$39.50 at Ticketmaster



Tom Harrison

ON MUSIC

George Harrison examines his schedule for the next week.

"There's a fourth night in Vancouver," he says.

He's talking on the phone from Calgary, where the band has added extra days, too.

It's been that way all along the tour.

"The way that I look at it, the interest in The Beatles has always been there," he says. "It's like classical music. Each song sounds fresh. When you hear a song on the radio, it's like hearing it for the first time."

George Harrison is Joe Bithorn. His band is not The Beatles but Rain, a tribute to The Beatles. The Beatles broke up in 1970 after eight years of recording. Rain has been going more than 20. In fact, Joe remembers his first Vancouver date as George was at The Cave in 1983. Since that time, Rain's show has been finely tuned to incorporate costume changes and multi-media that reflect the history of The Beatles, the '60s and, of course, the music.

"This band has gotten extremely tight over the years," says Bithorn. "I can feel it when we're onstage. It almost explodes."

"The music is performed to the nth degree [of authenticity]. There is a lot of care, a great deal of integrity. We have a lot of fun onstage. We don't take ourselves seriously, but we take the music seriously. We get inside it."

Bithorn keeps his identity separate from that of Harrison, who died in 2002.

"I looked into a lot about George. You see his spiritual side, but he was a funny man, too. You can see that with his involvement in the Monty Python films."

Like the others in Rain — Joey Curatolo (Paul McCartney), Steve Landes (John Lennon), Ralph Castelli (Ringo Starr) and keyboard player Mark Lewis — he prefers to look at the tribute as an upbeat experience.

"We don't want to make the show too emotional, we don't want to take the audience into an emotional side of it. We want to entertain."

As a musician, Bithorn is endlessly fascinated by Harrison's creativity and attitude. The Beatles' songs had unusual, challenging chord progressions and distinctive sounds.

"The studies in tone are ongoing. I'm a tone freak," says Bithorn, whose own playing away from Rain embraces jazz and blues. Rain also has issued a CD primer.

"There was a jazz influence at the time and you can hear that in George's playing. 'All My Loving' has a country feel. You drew from everything you knew and there were no boundaries like there are today. You could mix country, blues and jazz."

With technological advances, Rain can play onstage what The Beatles couldn't. As Beatles records developed, reproducing them in concert became impossible. Finally, The Beatles stopped touring in 1966. With keyboards and guitar synthesizers, Rain does the complete Beatles spectrum.

"It's an exceptional thing when you look and see three different generations out there and they all know the lyrics," says Bithorn,

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A night to pretend for Fab Four fan

SEEING RAIN: Bruce Faulkner has hundreds of Beatles items but never saw band live

Bruce Faulkner remembers his first encounter with The Beatles.

"I was nine years old and I was at Kelly's Sight and Sound with my dad," he recalls. It was early 1964.

"It was two weeks before The Beatles were on Sullivan [the Ed Sullivan variety show that historic February]. There was a big Beatles display, so we went in and asked who The Beatles were and bought their first album. I still have it."

So began a lifelong fascination with The Beatles. Faulkner now estimates he has 200-300 Beatles singles, 600 albums (including the sought after "butcher cover"), clothing, articles and posters "going right back to when I was nine years old."

There was a time when his devotion wavered and he threw a bunch of stuff out, such as the Beatles bubblegum card series.

"I'd pay dearly to get it back."

But the fixation always was there. He learned to play the drums by listening to the work of two drummers — Gene Krupa and The Beatles' Ringo Starr. On a DVD, Ringo displays a drum head that came to him via Faulkner. He has the books, the videos, the DVDs. Playing a Beatles song fills him with satisfaction.

"The Beatles' popularity is never gonna die," he figures. "The copycat guys make a good living. The guys in Rain are a cut above that. That's gotta be a lot of fun. It just seems to come naturally to want to play in a Beatles band."

So Faulkner will be at Rain's tribute to The Beatles. He's seen them all. The *Beatlemania* tribute at the Pantages Theatre in Los Angeles, Rubber Soul, all of them. When Rain last appeared here — at Burnaby's Deer

Lake Park 10 years ago — he took his daughter, Lauren. She, too, became a Beatles fan.

"Being a musician, I look for how perfect they're doing it," he says. "All the guitar parts are in, all the drum parts are there. That's more important to me than the costume changes."

Rain might be as close as Faulkner will get to The Beatles. He never saw The Beatles when they played Empire Stadium, their only Vancouver appearance.

"My father wouldn't let me go because I was only nine years old. So I sat, listening on the radio as they played and [broadcaster Jack] Cullen did his thing."

"It's exciting," Faulkner adds. "It's exciting to see these shows because I never got to see the original Beatles. You just close your eyes and pretend. It's a night of pretending."

— Tom Harrison



Bruce Faulkner got hooked on the Beatles at the age of nine. WAYNE LEIDENFROST — THE PROVINCE