

THE BEATLES *NOT* FOR SALE

The Beatles NOT For Sale is a new series looking at Beatles items in institutions such as museums and in private collections. We are encouraging our members to search out Beatles goodies in their local museums and contribute that information to this series.

Located in the Victoria & Albert Museum's Rock & Pop collection are two surviving pieces of arguably the world's most famous album cover, Sgt Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band. They are the portrait heads of the writers Edgar Allen Poe and Oscar Wilde. Their authenticity is attested by the fact that they were given to the V&A in 1980 by Robert Fraser, art dealer, gallery owner and friend of Paul McCartney.

Whether it was on a flight coming back from Kenya or from the United States (as Paul has stated both places), Paul McCartney's idea for a fictitious band was borne out of his desire to keep The Beatles together after the band had stopped touring in August 1966. Through the personae of 'Sgt Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band', the band would be free to indulge in creating whatever music they wished to create and to appear in whatever form they wished. The choice of a military band was Paul's idea and was inspired by the brass bands he would have seen performing in his youth in the bandstand in Sefton Park in Liverpool on Sunday afternoons. From the beginning, Paul McCartney wanted something special for the cover of Sgt Pepper. He has reminisced about his youth describing what it was like to get someone's album and to take it home on the bus, studying all the details on the cover (hard to do with modern downloads!).



Paul's initial idea for the cover of the new album was to commission the Dutch design collective, 'The Fool'. They duly came up with a psychedelic gatefold cover with a fairy-like day-glo landscape.

Paul took this artwork to his friend Robert Fraser ('Groovy Bob') in London. Bob rejected the artwork as yet another psychedelic work that will be forgotten about in the near future (quite prescient I would say). Instead, Bob suggested commissioning two of his current artists, Peter Blake and Jann Haworth.

Paul was inspired by an old photograph of his father's band mates which showed his

dad kneeling in the front row with the rest of the band standing in rows behind. Jann Haworth picked up on this idea and suggested that the 'band members' in the background be The Beatles' heroes. Haworth stated: "It was my idea that the front row be three-dimensional with The Beatles, behind them mannequins and full-size fabric dolls that I crafted, and behind those a two-dimensional flat frame filled with celebrity faces." Peter Blake, Jann's husband at the time, also has taken credit for this idea, for a "magic crowd of friends". Blake and Haworth asked the Beatles to draw up lists of their heroes but in spite of their enthusiasm for the project, The Beatles only submitted relatively few names between them. John's suggestion of Jesus Christ, Hitler and Ghandi was rejected, George's three gurus were included, Ringo suggested Issy Bonn, the music hall entertainer, and Paul came up with less than ten names. The bulk of the "magic crowd of friends" was selected by Blake and Haworth.

Once the persons in the crowd were selected, Mal Evans and Neil Aspinall were despatched to local libraries to find images and copy them. The enormous task of achieving permission from each of the living people selected has often been credited to Brian Epstein who was tasked with the project and took credit for it but in reality he rang up and pleaded with his ex-secretary who was the one who achieved this. Blake and Haworth enlarged the images, pasted them onto cardboard backings and then tinted them as needed. The final product is as you see here with the V&A's two heads.

The military uniforms were made by Berman's, the theatrical costumiers in the West End. The Beatles specified their own material and choice of colours. Paul said that they were trying to get almost an 'anti-uniform' look by picking bright psychedelic colours. John said that people were already wearing vintage uniforms on the King's Road (Chelsea, London) and all they did was to make that look famous. Ringo loved the colourful look and George, well, he just wasn't into the role-playing but he must have enjoyed it in the end as he kept his uniform all these years – it was displayed in the V&A's recent exhibition *Revolutions: Records & Rebels 1966-1970*.



Paul has stated that it was due to him that the band started sporting moustaches, perfect for their Sgt Pepper's personae, because, after a moped accident, he started growing one to cover his cut lip. However, George Harrison started growing one in India in September 1966 on the advice of Ravi Shankar, suggesting it would disguise him as even in India he was well known. Paul didn't have a moustache until November.



Michael Cooper, friend of Robert Fraser, was the photographer for the cover shoot.

It has become Beatles legend that Peter Blake and Jann Haworth were only paid £200 for the Sgt Pepper cover. The whole story is that Robert Fraser charged The Beatles just under £3000 for a finder's fee and rental of his studio for the cover photo shoot. Out of that, Fraser paid the artists £200. It is unknown how much he paid the photographer Michael Cooper. Fraser also waived any copyright fees so the artists are not benefitting from any reproductions. So, Peter, complain to Groovy Bob!

Terry Bloxham

Museum archives hold invaluable background information on the objects in their collections. For advice on how to research museum collections, email membership@britishbeatlesfanclub.co.uk

Beatles NOT For Sale is not intended to be a vehicle for people to offer their collections for sale. The fan club provide that service elsewhere in this magazine. Please contact treasurer@britishbeatlesfanclub.co.uk for further information.