

PULSE RECORDS LTD in association with BILL ELMS presents

**MISSING FOR 60 YEARS... NOW WORTH
MILLIONS TO WHOEVER FINDS IT!**

LENNON'S BANJO

A new comedy stage play by
ROB FENNAH

Directed by
MARK HELLER

Based on the novel
'Julia's Banjo' by
Rob Fennah & Helen A Jones

PRESS PACK

(Spring 2018)

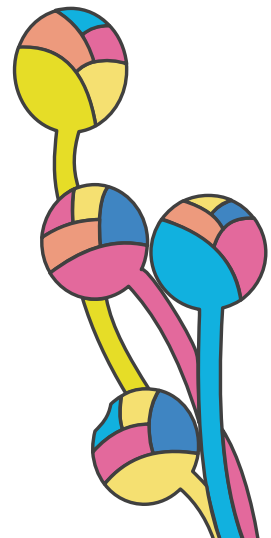


LENNON'S BANJO

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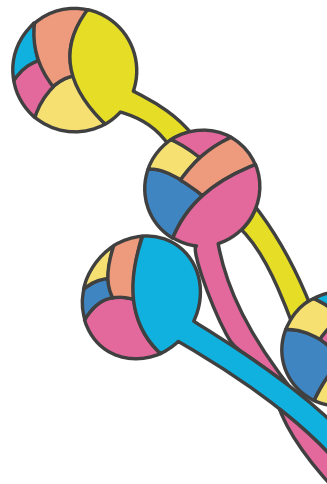


Synopsis of Lennon's Banjo

When Beatles tour guide and Fab Four nerd Barry Seddon finds a letter written by John Lennon, he unearths a clue to solving the greatest mystery in pop history – the whereabouts of Lennon's first musical instrument which has been missing for 60 years. But Barry's loose tongue alerts tourist and Texan dealer, Travis Lawson, to the priceless relic.

In an attempt to get his hands on the letter, and the clues within it, Travis persuades his beautiful wife Cheryl to befriend the hapless tour guide and win his affections. The race to find the holy grail of pop memorabilia is on!

So where do the facts end, and the fiction begin? Everything will be revealed in this fast-paced comic caper.





THE HOLY GRAIL OF POP MEMORABILIA WILL IT EVER BE FOUND?

by Rob Fennah

It is always difficult finding something new to say about the Fab Four; after all, hasn't everything already been written? Well no, not quite...

It's common knowledge the first instrument John Lennon ever learned to play was his mother's banjo. John gave many a heart-warming account of how his mother, Julia, spent hours teaching him to play Buddy Holly's classic, That'll Be The Day, "sitting there with endless patience until I had worked out all the chords." It was Julia who turned John onto rock 'n' roll and actively encouraged him to pursue his musical ambitions much to the disapproval of his Aunt Mimi with whom he lived.

Julia Baird, John's half-sister, who witnessed their mother teaching him said: "I can see John so clearly, concentrating intently on the mother of pearl backed banjo that belonged to his grandfather, who had brought it back from a sea trip and then left it to our mother." It's fair to say, therefore, that without Julia Lennon's banjo there wouldn't have been a Beatles and, without them, everything we know today would be different.

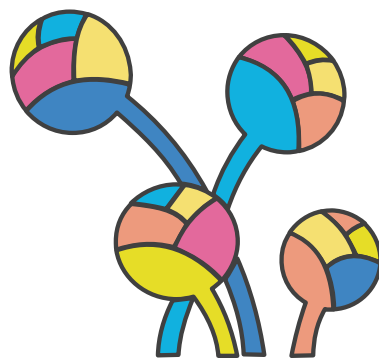
So where is the Holy Grail of pop memorabilia? Well that's what this is all about; shortly after Julia Lennon died in 1958 the banjo went missing and no one has set eyes on it since. Remarkably, neither John's family, nor any of the numerous Beatles experts, have been able to shed light on its whereabouts or what may have become of it. John never revealed what happened to the priceless relic and it remains the greatest mystery in pop music. However, one thing is certain; if it did resurface, the lucky finder would no longer have to worry about working for a living. In 2000, a Lennon piano went under the hammer at Sotheby's for 1.5 million pounds which gives some indication as to what the banjo might be worth. Some argue it would fetch millions more, not just because it was the first instrument the greatest rock 'n' roll legend learned to play; it was the catalyst that changed the world!

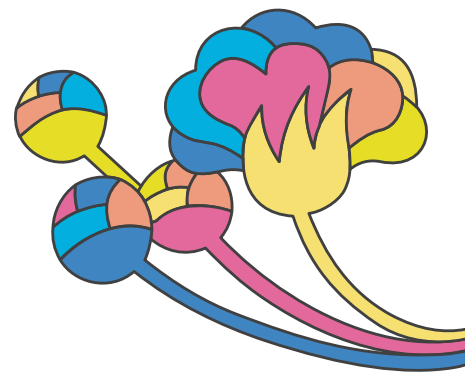
But before we all start searching our attics and cellars, we must first overcome a major problem. Other than being banjo-shaped, what does the illusive instrument actually look like? Does it have any distinguishing marks or features; something to confirm its provenance? There are no photographs of John playing the banjo so how could it be authenticated? Julia Baird's description does provide us with a couple of important clues; the banjo originated from overseas, circa 1930s, and it had a mother of pearl back. Research suggests this decorative feature only appeared on expensive banjos and helps rule out the notion that it might have been scrapped (beautiful old instruments are seldom destroyed and are kept for their aesthetic and ornamental value). More importantly, a mother of pearl inlay is rare and drastically reduces the list of possibilities by eliminating those banjos that don't possess it. That said, it would still leave numerous contenders to choose from and that's where the search would inevitably grind to a halt. Or would it?

Alright, so John Lennon's signature might not be emblazoned across it but with today's forensic technology it would certainly be possible to confirm provenance if John or Julia had left behind, say, a fingerprint or perhaps a strand of hair. Although this idea may seem a little far-fetched, it is not as outlandish as it sounds. Lennon's Gallotone Champion acoustic guitar was authenticated, prior to its sale at Sotheby's in 1999, by a drop of his blood! Original Quarrymen member, Rod Davis, recounts: "John took the skin off the edge of his index finger while playing at St Peter's Parish Fête in Woolton (1957). I remember seeing the bloodstain inside Lennon's guitar while I was changing one of the strings. When Sotheby's contacted me about authentication I told them about it and, although faint, the bloodstain was still there."

The mystery surrounding Lennon's missing banjo is still relatively unknown but as the news filters out no doubt hundreds will crawl out of the woodwork claiming to possess it. Could it still be out there having been stashed away for safe keeping and then forgotten about? Of course it could; that's what happens with memorabilia; hey, we've all watched the Antiques Roadshow!

So, with that in mind, let's raise a glass to Julia, John and the banjo that made it all possible. Without them, the world would have been a much quieter place.





Rob Fennah

Writer – Producer – Musician

Born September 1958, Rob Fennah joined his first band, Buster, in 1974. Two years later the group signed to RCA Records and had numerous hits in Japan, Europe and Australia. By the age of 18, Rob had written his first hit and received a gold album and a number of best-seller awards. He has performed at some of the world's most prestigious venues including: The Sydney Opera House, Australia and The Budokan, Tokyo.

In 2014, The British Embassy in Tokyo published a list of the most successful top 25 UK bands in Japan since the Beatles. Rob's band, Buster, was one of them. In 1984 Rob teamed up with his brother Alan and formed a new band, Alternative Radio. They were the first artists to sign to EMI's re-launched Parlophone record label (made famous by The Beatles).

A meeting with author Helen Forrester in 1992 resulted in Rob's adaptation of her most famous work, *Twopence To Cross The Mersey*. As a musical it grossed over 2 million at the Liverpool Empire Theatre and the recent smash-hit stage-play version has been touring the UK.

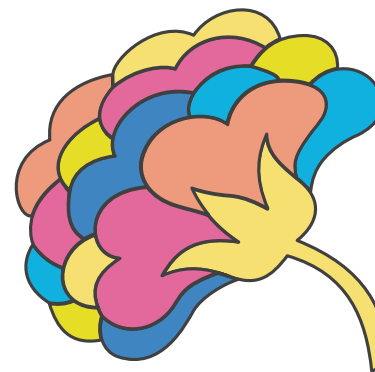
Rob's new stage play, *Lennon's Banjo*, tells the story of a Beatles fan who unearths a clue to solving the greatest mystery in rock history - the whereabouts of John Lennon's first musical instrument which has been missing for 60 years. The play is adapted from the novel 'Julia's Banjo' by Rob Fennah & Co-Author Helen A Jones.

Rob is currently working on the stage sequel to *Twopence To Cross The Mersey*. Entitled, *By The Waters Of Liverpool* it will premiere at the Liverpool Empire Theatre in October 2018.

www.lennonsbanjo.com

www.twopencetocrossthemersey.com

www.bythewatersofliverpool.com



Bill Elms

Producer

Bill Elms has worked in the theatre industry both locally and nationally for over 25 years including a 10-year position as Head of Sales and Marketing at the Liverpool Empire Theatre, in August 2008 Bill set up his own Marketing and PR Company based in Liverpool city centre. Bill Elms Associates Ltd has grown from strength to strength into the region's premier communications company specialising in the arts, live entertainment and ticketed events, successfully managing the marketing and PR for many high-profile events, festivals and venues.

Clients include (past and present) ATG Theatres, The Lowry, Storyhouse Chester, Epstein Theatre, Capstone Theatre, St Helens Theatre Royal, Hope Mill Theatre, Manchester Palace and Opera House, Liverpool Carnival Company, Liverpool City Council, Liverpool Pride, DaDaFest, Liverpool Arab Arts Festival, Physical Fest, Winter Wonderland Manchester, St George's Hall, Tmesis Theatre, Qdos Entertainments and Scarborough Open Air Theatre to name but a few. National tours have also included Let It Be and Lord of the Dance.

Company Director Bill Elms has also successfully entered the world of theatre producing with a growing portfolio of productions, collaborating with artists, directors, producers and theatre companies. Bill has co-produced successful productions such as: Epstein: The Man Who Made The Beatles, Helen Forrester's Twopence to Cross the Mersey, The Ruby Slippers, a series of theatrical events at Liverpool's St George's Hall called Lovehistory Loves and Tales From Haunted Liverpool. Concert performances of Frankenstein and Ghost Stories: A Night Opera.

Bill is currently co-producing Lennon's Banjo (Epstein Theatre), Helen Forrester's By The Waters of Liverpool (Liverpool Empire), Blood Runs Deep (Unity Liverpool) and working on a new musical titled The Big Day.

Bill is a director of Pulse Records Ltd, Break A Leg Productions and Associate Producer with Regal Entertainments Ltd (touring). Bill Elms Productions Ltd has also been set-up to commence on future solo projects.

www.billelms.com



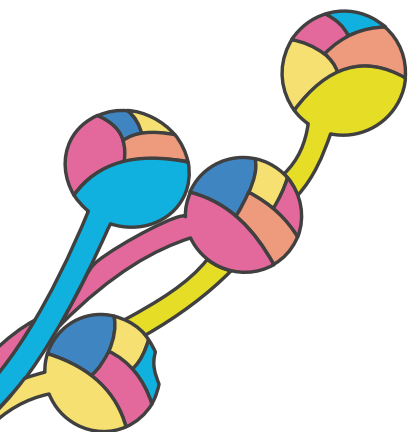
Mark Heller

Director

Mark originally trained as an actor but, after several years working on stage and screen, found his passion behind the camera and transitioned into directing. He directed a number of plays in London's fringe theatre, including *The Diary* at the Tabard Theatre and *Writers Block* at the Players Theatre. Mark then moved to Los Angeles where he directed *Fiddler On The Roof* and *Let It Snow* at the Beverley Hills Theatre. He directed his first feature film, *The Passage* starring Stephen Dorff (*Blade*) in Morocco, and was selected for the new directors Discovery Category at the Toronto Film Festival.

After the successful reception of his first film, Mark went immediately into directing *Star Crossed*, starring Luke Mably (*28 Days Later*), a foreign language modernization of *Romeo And Juliet* which was filmed in the city of Porto in Portugal. Following the multiple award-winning film *The Mulberry Tree*, a drama that centred on a young man's relationship with a convicted murderer who is dying of AIDS, Mark moved back to England from LA and directed *Justice* for the BBC starring Robert Pugh.

Mark has returned to his first love of theatre directing the successful run of the new play *The Ruby Slippers* at the St Helens Theatre Royal and is currently due to start rehearsals for a brand new stage play entitled *Lennon's Banjo* which opens in April 2018 at the Epstein Theatre, Liverpool.





Eric Potts

Doctor Who's Eric Potts has been a regular face on our TV screens for more than 20 years.

Along with his time with the Time Lord, the Scottish-born actor has trodden the cobbles of Corrie, the streets of Yorkshire in that great trilogy of Tyke telly Heartbeat, The Royal and Last of the Summer Wine, added Emmerdale to his CV, and still had time to don a dog collar to play a priest in Hollyoaks.

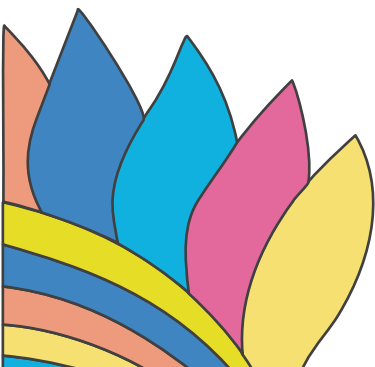
On stage, the Bristol Old Vic-trained actor has played Touchstone in Shakespeare's As You Like It, Sir Toby Belch in Twelfth Night and Falstaff in The Merry Wives of Windsor, taken on the roles of Oliver Hardy and Les Dawson, starred in Brassed Off, Footloose and Charley's Aunt, and has an impressive panto pedigree as both a writer and performer. Oh, and he says he's highly skilled at both badminton and stage combat.

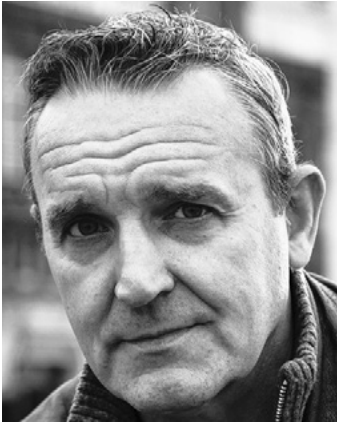
Follow him on Twitter: @comedypotts

Eric Potts is playing.... Barry.

Happy-go-lucky Barry is caring, enthusiastic, irritating – and lovable, but lives for just one thing. The Beatles. His love for the Fab Four is all consuming and probably the main reason he has never had a girlfriend.

Oblivious to ridicule by his workmate, Sid, and so-called friends, Joe and Steve, he has only one true admirer, Brenda.





Mark Moraghan

Mark Moraghan cooked up a storm, along with kedgeree for 200 hungry soldiers, on his way to reaching the finals of *Celebrity MasterChef*.

Elsewhere on TV the Liverpool actor's roles include medic Owen Davies on *Holby City*, Brookside's Greg Shadwick, London's Burning, *Doctors*, and most recently, appearances in *Coronation Street* and *Emmerdale*.

He's also the narrator of children's show *Thomas the Tank Engine*.

Theatre credits include *Twopence to Cross the Mersey*, *You'll Never Walk Alone*, *Eric's*, *One Night in Istanbul*, *Priscilla Queen of the Desert*, *My Fair Lady*, and *Macbeth*.

Oh, and he's a handy singer too, coming second in BBC singing competition *Just the Two of Us* and co-writing an album with radio presenter Nicky Campbell.

Follow him on Twitter: @MarkMoraghan

Mark Moraghan is playing... Joe.

Liverpudlian Joe is over-cautious, level-headed and pessimistic.

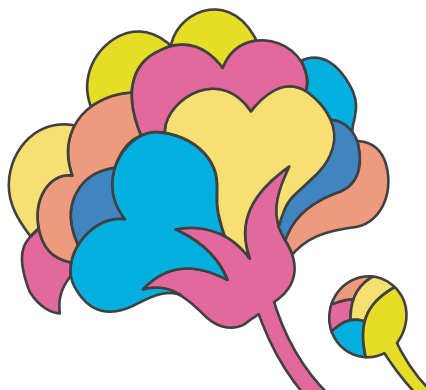
Joe is the older brother of Steve. Both ex-dock workers, Joe harbours a nagging sense of guilt for persuading Steve to go into partnership with him and buy *The Beatles Store*.

After 20 years in the shop, all his hopes and dreams of a better life have long since evaporated.

Mark is also playing...

Texan heavy Wayne, sidekick to bully-boy Carl, and somewhere near the bottom of the pecking order when brains were being handed out.

Additionally, you will see him take on the role of an unnamed man.





Jake Abraham

Jake Abraham became a household name 20 years ago when he appeared in Guy Ritchie's *Lock, Stock and Two Smoking Barrels*.

He has an extensive list of film and TV credits to his name stretching back three decades, including *51st State*, *Game of Thrones*, *Justice*, *Red Dwarf*, *G.B.H* and *Moving On*.

Jake recently played Manuel Noriega in a TV mini-series titled *America's War on Drugs*, and was once cast as 'seedy bloke' in Steve Coogan's black comedy *The Parole Officer*.

On stage, his credits include *On the Ledge*, *You'll Never Walk Alone*, *The Ale House*, *Two-pence To Cross The Mersey* and *Council Depot Blues*.

Meanwhile when he was 13 he appeared in Brian Jacques' *Brown Bitter*, *Wet Nellies* and *Scouse* at the Liverpool Everyman alongside Mark McGann, John McArdle and Noreen Kershaw. Cartoonist Bill Tidy designed the set.

Follow him on Twitter: [@jakeabraham1](https://twitter.com/jakeabraham1)

Jake Abraham is playing... Steve.

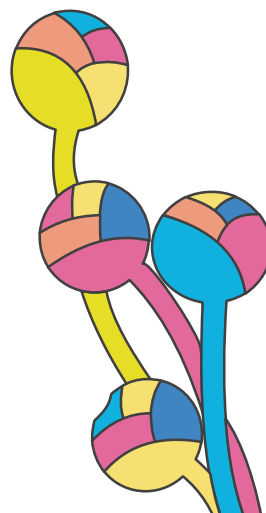
Liverpudlian Steve is angry, caged, ambitious....and hopeful.

He resents working in *The Beatles Shop* and misses the camaraderie of his old workmates.

He feels his life is wasting away and craves for a more glamorous existence.

Opening a bar in Tenerife is his ultimate goal.

Jake is also playing... An armed guard.





Lynn Francis

Lynn Francis is a regular on the Liverpool theatre stage. She has recently appeared in two runs of *The Royal* at Royal Court Liverpool. Other credits include *Ladies Day*, *A Nightmare On Lime Street* and *The Salon*.

Screen roles include Anne in *Reds & Blues: The Ballad of Dixie & Kenny*, and *Charlie Noades RIP*.

When it comes to acting, it's a family business in the Francis household. Not only is Lynn married to Michael Starke, but their two daughters, Hayley and Jamie Hampson, are also professional actresses.

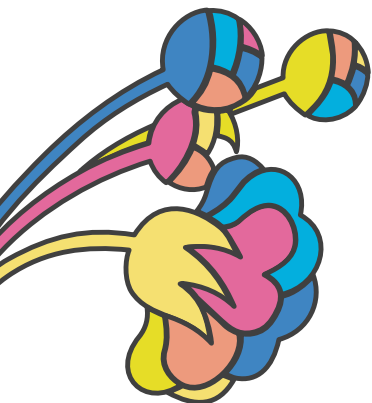
Follow her on Twitter: [@lynnfranc65](https://twitter.com/lynnfranc65)

Lynn Francis is playing... Brenda.

Work-weary, downtrodden, but positive and caring, Northern pub landlady Brenda has clearly been through the mill. But underneath her dull appearance there still remains an attractive woman crying out for love.

Unimpressed by loud-mouthed admirers like Sid, Brenda has her eyes set on a much gentler soul...Barry.

Lynn is also playing... A curator and a security officer.





Danny O'Brien

Danny O'Brien started his career as a builder, which would have come in handy for one of his most recent roles playing hunky Paddy in *The Royal*.

His other stage credits include *Lost Soul*, *Stags and Hens*, *Noises Off*, *Pharaoh Cross the Mersey*, *Rita, Sue and Bob Too*, *Rainbow Connection*, *The Salon*, *One Night in Istanbul*, *Night Collar*, *The King of Edge Hill*, *The Long Shot*, and *Arthur in The Star* at the Liverpool Playhouse.

Danny's screen appearances meanwhile include *Good Cop*, and Nickelodeon's *House of Anubis*.

Follow him on Twitter: @DannyDannyo28

Danny O'Brien is playing... Travis.

Texan Travis is bold, brash, over confident and charming.

He's not afraid to risk everything if it means making a fast buck. But underneath the bravado lurks a gentler character.

Despite causing his wife no end of grief with all the wheeling and dealing, he desperately wants to be a winner and make her proud.





Stephanie Dooley

Northern girl Stephanie's stage credits include the recent run of Rita, Sue and Bob Too at St Helens Theatre Royal, and leading lady roles in pantomimes nationwide including Peter Pan, Snow White, Cinderella, Dick Whittington, and Jack and the Beanstalk.

Meanwhile TV appearances have included Emmerdale, The Royal, and Casualty and, most recently, Mrs Peterson in the BBC's Creeped Out. She has also appeared in recent feature films The Hunters Prayer and Name of the Game.

Stephanie is an accomplished blues and jazz singer and made her stage debut as a teenager playing Liesl in The Sound of Music.

Follow her on Twitter: @StephDOfficial

Stephanie Dooley is playing... Cheryl.

Despairing, tetchy and emotional, long-suffering Cheryl does her best to stand by her husband Travis.

She is the common sense in the marriage and tries to rein him in whenever she feels he's getting over ambitious. She rarely succeeds.

Stephanie is also playing....

Nancy, Cheryl's kindly grandmother who house-sits for the couple while they are away in Liverpool and unwittingly gets caught up in the fallout from Travis's wheeling and dealing.





Alan Stocks

RADA-trained Alan Stocks's screen credits include *Doctors*, *Moving On*, *Wire in The Blood*, *The Bill*, *Heartbeat*, *Drop the Dead Donkey*, *Auf Wiedersehen*, *Pet* and *EastEnders*. A regular on the Liverpool theatre circuit, he has appeared in shows including *Scouse of the Rising Sun*, *Night Collar*, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, *A Streetcar Named Desire*, *Twelfth Night*, *Dirty Dusting*, *Tartuffe*, and *Flint Street Nativity*. Credits with the RSC include *Merchant of Venice* and *Measure for Measure*.

Alan Stocks is playing... Sid.

Loud-mouthed Northern know-it-all Sid is a throwback to the 50s teddy boy era. He fancies himself as a ladies' man, but in reality, women wouldn't touch Sid with a barge-pole.

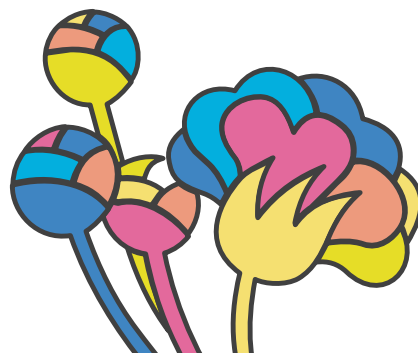
Always on Barry's case, he sees the tour guide as an easy target and enjoys winding him up at every opportunity.

Alan is also playing...

Tough guy Carl, a Texan henchman who thrives on his role as a hired bully-boy and has a passionate hatred for Travis.

Also, furtive wide-boy and Mancunian wheeler-dealer Billy, a throwback to 90s 'Madchester' with shades of Liam Gallagher thrown in for good measure.

And not forgetting, Pete Best, The Beatles' first drummer.





Roy Carruthers

Roy Carruthers' stage credits include O'Farrell in *Twopence To Cross The Mersey*, *Ladies Night*, *Funny Money*, *Night Collar*, and Arthur Miller's *The Price*.

Meanwhile his screen appearances include *Good Cop*, *Longford* and *Sparkle*.

He's also in demand as a voiceover and radio artist – playing the Grim Reaper alongside Alan Stocks as Adrian Henri in playwright Lizzie Nunnery's *Death on Upper Duke Street*. And he appeared with Joe McGann in a special service to commemorate the centenary of the sinking of the RMS *Lusitania*.

Follow him on Twitter: @rjcruthers

Roy Carruthers is playing... Tony DeVito.

Smug, conniving and sleazy, Tony DeVito oozes the confidence of a successful businessman. Never seen without a cigar hanging from his mouth, the Texan is used to getting what he wants. DeVito's bravado is propped up by his hired muscle, Carl and Wayne.

Roy is also playing....

Sinister and controlling Italian-American loan shark Danny Bakula, whose reputation precedes him. Danny's very presence puts the fear of God in to those unfortunate enough to cross him.

He is also playing a policeman.





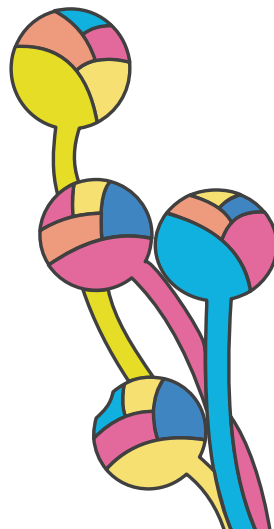
Pete Best

Pete Best is playing... himself.

Pete Best was The Beatles' drummer between 1960 and 1962, playing more than 1,000 live performances including nightclubs and dance halls in both Liverpool and Hamburg. He recorded 27 songs as a Beatle, and he also played in The Beatles' very first show in Liverpool at the Casbah Coffee Club.

Pete was portrayed on screen by Scot Williams in *Backbeat* and Ryan Michael in *Birth of the Beatles* but played himself in a 2008 film called *The Rocker*, starring Emma Stone, Bradley Cooper and Christina Applegate.

He will play himself in three performances – two on April 25 and one on May 5. Alan Stocks will play the role at all other performances.



LENNON'S BANJO

Questions & Answers

Pete Best Q&A

From drummer to actor. How did that come about?

I read the novel, Julia's Banjo, a few years ago and thought it was a great mix of fact and fiction. It made me smile; a really enjoyable read. When Rob Fennah told me it was being adapted as a stage play, and asked if I wanted to be in it, I thought why not. It's something new; something I've never done before.

What role will you be playing?

The show is set present day and I will be playing myself. I've had a few small cameo roles in films before but nothing like this. In Lennon's Banjo I have my own lines and the part is quite substantial.

What do you know about the missing banjo?

I know John's musical heritage came about because of it but it's a complete mystery as to where it is now. It's out there somewhere.

Why did you have to leave The Beatles?

There have been many conspiracy theories. I think that's the best way to put it. The honest answer is I don't know. I think the only person who could really answer that question is Paul. Whether that ever comes to light or not, who knows.

Have you ever heard from Paul or Ringo?

Not since 1963-64. But if we did ever get together we wouldn't be talking about any of the negative things; it would be about the fun times we had together and what it's like to be grandparents. We may even talk about John's missing banjo!

Any regrets?

As far as I'm concerned karma has taken me in another direction. Yes, it was lovely to have been part of The Beatles; it was a bitter sweet blow that happened many years ago. But life has moved on.

Julia Baird Q&A

Julia Baird is the eldest daughter of Julia Lennon and John 'Bobby' Dykins, and the half-sister of John Lennon.

She grew up with her younger sister Jackie in Blomfield Road, Allerton, and was 11 when her mother was killed in an accident while crossing Menlove Avenue in Liverpool.

Julia, a retired teacher, has written about her childhood in her book *Imagine This – Growing up with My Brother John Lennon*, and is also a director of the Cavern Club.

Can you describe your mother's banjo?

It was mother of pearl backed and that was quite unusual. My mother loved mother of pearl – we had shells with mother of pearl in, all shiny.

And the back of the banjo was just coated in this mother of pearl. I don't know if it was genuine.

Is it true that it originally belonged to your grandfather George Stanley.

Yes, he brought it back from sea. It could possibly have been from America, I have no idea. He brought it back from sea and he could play it really well.

He taught my mother how to play it and then my mother taught John how to play it.

It sounds like a musical family. Did your aunts play too?

No. Mater (Elizabeth – one of Julia Lennon's four sisters) had a baby grand piano. She had a very grand house in Murrayfield in Edinburgh, and she did have this grand piano, but I never saw her playing it. I'm not saying she couldn't tinkle around on it, but she didn't say 'listen to this' or anything. We always had a piano in the house because my mother did play it. An upright piano.

Your mum also played piano accordion didn't she?

Yes. She played anything. She was extremely artistically talented I would say. She could dance, she and my father used to go Latin American dancing, and she could draw, really draw, and encouraged John to draw, because he had that talent. I haven't got it, Jackie my sister hasn't got it, but John did.

And my youngest son has it. He could draw a line drawing of you and someone could look at it for two seconds and know who it was. It's just there. I think it's like singing. I do believe go for anything you want to go for. But what I don't believe is you can be the best soprano in the world. Yes, you can be very good, but there's just something else isn't there?

It's like talent scouts looking for swimmers, they see them in the pool, have they got the right body, the right muscles? They're not going to go for the person who's jumping in, knees up to the chest, drowning everybody in the pool are they?

My mother was very talented. John inherited it, definitely.

Were her talents encouraged or do you think she was a frustrated artist?

I think she was a woman out of her time. Only now is the patriarchy starting to wake up, and only because they're forced to. I think she wouldn't have been a housewife. Now I'm not saying she didn't want to be, it's a derogatory term nowadays, it wasn't then. She wouldn't have just been at home which was absolutely expected of all women in those days.

Do you remember watching her and showing John chords?

Yes. In my book I painted this picture of my mother teaching John, leaning over him, and how she played the piano accordion. I've painted that picture as clearly as I can to show the atmosphere he was growing up in. (In Julia's book she describes how her mother "would stand behind him, leaning over his shoulder, and raise the neck of the banjo high. She would place her hands over his, their left hands on the neck of the banjo and right hands in the strumming position over the hole, and notes would happen...They would roar with laughter and he would be delighted with himself.")

Was the fact your mum passed on her love of music to John, something you could hear as he was playing and as time progressed?

Yes. And I used to look at him and think, I wonder what you are thinking of... particularly when he touched the piano, because that was a later thing. We had our fairy stories. Bears in the wood would be accompanied by boom, boom, boom on the piano to frighten us. By my mother. Silly voices and all the rest of it.

So what do you think happened to the banjo?

God knows. The big problem was that the night my mother died, here today, gone in a second, my dad refused to stay one more night in the house. He moved out immediately, and I think a lot of things went. And where the banjo went, I do not know.

My father went and did a council house exchange, it was compassionate. There was an exchange with relatives of people who lived next door to us in Springwood, and it was in School Lane in Woolton. A very nice house, much smaller because Springwood was a big traditional house, bigger than any semi you get built now. As big as Mendips.

Now when Jackie and I went there, and John spent a lot of time there with Paul in that house in Woolton, the beautiful pink dress with silver stars on that was my mother's one and only ballroom dress, was hanging in the wardrobe. And the navy blue spotted dress that she wore a lot, that had come. So, where the banjo went, je ne sais pas. The piano didn't come, or the piano accordion. Things disappeared.

He wouldn't have abandoned it. I'm not saying he wouldn't have sold them, but I can't see it because my mother's sisters would have been there like a flock. I honestly don't know. We lived in all their houses and I never saw anything like it. It would certainly be valuable if it ever came to light. It was the first stringed instrument John played.

The dream team started out as John and Paul, Paul left-handed, playing the guitar upside down, he didn't realise you could restring the things, and John on the banjo.

And when they were first playing, when John's guitar string broke, when they were the Quarrymen, sometimes he'd have to put one of Rod's (Davis) banjo strings on it – rush to the back and put in another string, and it would be another banjo string.



Eric Potts Q&A

Eric Potts has enjoyed a 30-year stage and screen career since leaving the Bristol Old Vic Theatre School, including roles in Doctor Who, Coronation Street, Emmerdale and Holbyoaks, and in plays from Shakespeare to Alan Ayckbourn.

He's also the nation's Mr Panto, appearing in many Christmas shows, including Dick Whittington with Dame Edna Everage, as well as writing around 10 scripts for shows nationwide each year. Now he's taking the leading role in Lennon's Banjo.

You're playing the lead character Barry in Lennon's Banjo. How did it all come about?

I played the part of Barry in the film trailer that was made by Rob Fennah a few years ago. And the director of that, a lovely man called Neil Alderton, who was one of the directors at Coronation Street when I worked there, had suggested me I think for that role.

So that's how I got involved.

And then obviously when they brought it to the stage I'm very grateful I was in their mind. I was really pleased, because I remember thinking at the time, not only was the stuff that we filmed very good, but the whole story, the actual basis of the story, was really good, it was great screenplay material. I was really glad it had metamorphosed into something else and had another shelf life.

Tell me about your character.

He is this very geeky, shall we say, but absolutely Beatles-obsessed, man who takes tours on the sort of Magical Mystery Tour route around Liverpool, he's a tour guide on that.

He's a bit sad in that he is on his own. I think he's regarded by others as a bit of a loner. I think people like him but are always relatively happy to say 'bye' to him and get on with their own life.

Can you relate to his love of the Beatles? Were you or are you a fan?

I am. I think I came to The Beatles a bit late, and it wasn't until I was in my teens that I suddenly became aware of all these fantastic songs, and I didn't obsess over them, but I was always looking for the next one that I hadn't heard before. And certainly the 'blue' album I became very fond of and played over and over and over.

I loved the music and was interested in the band and where they came from. They did become a significant part of my teen music, but that was almost heading towards the 80s really.

Can you understand obsessive personality? Do you collect things or have obsessions?

I have hobbies that I'm passionate about. I don't know if I'm quite as obsessive as Barry. And I totally understand where he's coming from in that sometimes I think it would be rather nice to have the time to be obsessed about something, but I don't. I just wish I had that time to devote to something so passionately. But I can see where it's coming from and how it's become such a big part of his life. As it is for millions across the world, The Beatles are still the one thing that matters most in their lives.

So what are your hobbies and passions?

Well, obviously I love my job and the history of theatre, I and do a lot of reading about that. I suppose my biggest passion, in that it's something I travel the world following, is circus. And I got to Monte Carlo every year, to a huge circus festival, and Budapest, to circus festivals there. And again, I love the history and traditions of that, so I read a lot about that. So maybe that's my biggest passion. My good lady wife makes sure it remains a passion and doesn't become an obsession.

Is it a joy to be the first to play a character, and make it your own?

You can bring your own nuances to it, and in theory you can potentially influence how it's seen in the future – hopefully in a positive way – alongside the writer of course. When we filmed Julia's Banjo, Rob was there and was able to say: 'I see him a bit like that'. Of course, going from the small screen version of Barry to the stage version, there is going to be a technical transition performance wise. But I'm looking forward to taking him further than I did the last time because I really liked him as a character, and I think he will grow, not only technically in the different space, but also as a character – we'll find other little idiosyncrasies and nuances, and a little bit more of his history.

You've enjoyed an extensive stage and screen career, including Doctor Who – and attend conventions.

It really was an experience, it was great. And it's an example of an obsession along the lines of Barry. I did the storyline, the episode, it was great. And then I'm friends with Colin Baker who played the sixth Doctor, and he had said come and do some of these conventions. I didn't really know a great deal about them, but they just kept on coming, and going all over the place doing signings, and all that, you realise just how big a part of some people's lives the programme is. It matters a great deal to lots of people. They know every detail, certainly more than I did in early conventions, about my character and all my history.

You're well known for writing and appearing in panto. Will you be writing your 2018 scripts at same time as appearing in Lennon's Banjo?

Yes. To be honest it's kind of started already. I finish panto, and normally the week after that is when I go to Monte Carlo, have a week there with my friends, and then kick back in. But this year I've gone straight back in to rehearsals for a production of Hamlet at the Bolton Octagon. I'm playing Polonius.

I'd never moan about it. I get tired sometimes, but then when I get my breathe back, I think, I'm doing what I always wanted to do and I'm very lucky to be doing it.

What would you have done if you hadn't become an actor/writer? Weren't you going to study law? Yes. I had a place at Glasgow University. I had the grant in place and everything, pre-loan days. I was all set to do it, but I had then perhaps a passion, possibly verging on the obsession, for drama, for acting, I'd done so much amateur stuff up in Scotland where I was born and bred, that I just thought – am I going to spend the rest of my life saying what if? I thought, I don't want to do that. I discussed with my mother and grandfather, how can I give this a go? And they were so supportive, and we talked to the head of the course at Glasgow and they said they'd keep the place open for one year for me. I went away and auditioned for a few drama colleges and got in to the Bristol Old Vic. And the rest is history apparently!

Do you still have roles you'd love to play?

I'm actually ticking off quite a few Shakespeare roles. I've done Bottom in A Midsummer Night's Dream. I've done Falstaff.

I'd like, if the opportunity arose, to pop back in to Corrie for a little while as Diggory (Compton – the Street's eccentric baker). They've asked me back twice, and I just couldn't do it, I was busy doing other things, which is a bit of a shame.

Unless I go on some wonderful crash diet and keep the weight off I'm not going to get to play Lear I don't think! A few older comedy roles I'd maybe like to have a go at, but I'm fully aware of how lucky I am in that I am managing to tick a few boxes. It's slightly alarming that I'm actually old enough to play Polonius now!

Finally, I'm sure your character Barry has several, but do you have a favourite Beatles song?

Am I allowed two? I think my favourite song is probably *Penny Lane*. It's just such a lovely song. But if I need cheering up I always go to *Maxwell's Silver Hammer*.

Mark Moraghan Q&A

Toxteth-born actor Mark Moraghan is a well-known face to both Liverpool theatre audiences and the TV-watching public, with a long list of shows to his name including *Holby City*, *Emmerdale*, *Dream Team* and *Harry Enfield and Chums*.

He's also the most recent Liverpudlian to voice the adventures of *Thomas & Friends*, following in the footsteps of Michael Angelis and a certain Sir Richard Starkey.

Mark is playing cautious ex-docker Joe who is co-owner of The Beatles Store, as well as Texan heavy Wayne.

What attracted you to Lennon's Banjo?

The fact it's a new production. It's always nice to be the first to be involved in a show like that. And Rob (Fennah) had got in touch with me and asked me whether I'd be interested, having done *Twopence to Cross the Mersey* in the past. I like the way Rob writes, I think he writes good dialogue. When he sent me the script, I thought the dialogue was really well written. I could see he was putting a good cast together, and it was just a good opportunity to work with friends again.

Who in the cast have you worked with before?

I worked with Eric Potts on *Brookside* many moons ago. Jake Abraham, we finished playing best friends in *You'll Never Walk Alone* at the Royal Court last year. I did *One Night in Istanbul* with Danny O'Brien in Liverpool and Ireland. I worked with Roy Carruthers on a farce, *Funny Money*, at the Royal Court, and with Lynn Francis in *A Nightmare on Lime Street*. I think Stephanie (Dooley) is the only one I haven't worked with. And, of course, Pete Best. I think it's really interesting that he's going to be doing a few guest appearances.

Who are you playing and how are you preparing for the roles?

I'm playing two characters, Joe, Jake's character's brother, and I'm also playing a Texas heavy called Wayne who's one sandwich short of a picnic. I'm looking forward to it and obviously I want to make Wayne as different to Joe as possible, try and give him a different walk and a different pace to the way he speaks, so there's quite a lot of work involved to make the differentiation between the two.

Does it make a difference when you're the first actor playing that character?

You've always got to try and find something unique and put your own stamp on things. We're going in with a clean canvas really, so it's up to each individual actor to bring what they've got to the table. I think if you take care of the small details the rest takes care of itself.

One of the things you're best known for is narrating Thomas the Tank Engine. You're the third narrator who has given him a Liverpudlian voice.

It's from Ringo Starr really, because he was such an iconic person. He didn't do it for that long either, only a couple of years, so I think it's the fact his voice was so recognisable. And then when Michael Angelis took over, he did a bit of a Ringo impression, and it just stuck. I did it for America and Canada as well, all the English-speaking territories, so there's really only me and Ringo who have done that.

When I auditioned for it I sort of did an impression of Michael Angelis doing an impression of Ringo Starr! Then once I got the character, I tried to make it my own.

It's forty years since you auditioned for Lies (part of the Scene series) while you were still at school. Did you always want to be an actor?

It started when I was in primary school, and Harry Surr, my old teacher, still comes to see me when I'm up in Liverpool. He comes with his wife to the shows, and it's lovely because he cast me in Peter Pan when I was seven or eight. I was Peter Pan in tights! I got the bug very early on and then when I went to secondary school, Peter Casey, who used to be on the board of the Everyman, was my drama teacher and he saw something in me and encouraged me. And it was him who put me forward for Lies. And it went from there.

You've certainly paid your dues in panto since Peter Pan.

I did Bournemouth last Christmas. I work a lot with UK Productions, they keep giving me jobs every year. I love panto, it's great for the kids to come and see. It's one of the few jobs where your kids can come and have a good time.

Your character owns a Beatles store. Were you a Fab Four fan growing up in Liverpool?

I remember my mother had Twist and Shout as a single. We had a couple of early Beatles singles which I loved. Twist and Shout was one of my favourite tracks as a kid. But our house was all Motown, Marvin Gaye and the Four Tops and Stevie Wonder.

That was the music I was into. I did like the Beatles, but I was never a massive fan. It's only as I've got older, and I got into the John Lennon stuff, that I started to appreciate them more, and I've revisited them, funnily enough, quite recently, even before I got offered this job. I've got a new-found admiration for them lately which I never had as a youngster.

What's your favourite Beatles song?

Penny Lane is one, and Michelle, which is another one my parents had. It just takes me back to childhood really.

In the show, Barry is obsessive about the Beatles. You're a well-known Liverpool fan – would you call that an obsession?

In terms of Liverpool, I've kind of been there, done it, got the T-shirt with them. I went to Istanbul, I've been all over the world watching them and I've been lucky enough to see some of the great cup finals. I've kind of done everything. I'm very lucky to have grown up when I did, watching a great Liverpool team.

The obsession is my dad's fault. He supported them when they were in the Second Division in the 50s and they were rubbish, and then Shanks came along and the rest is history.

I was indoctrinated very early on. My grandad tried to make me an Evertonian, and my dad would take me to Anfield. So alternate weeks I'd be at Goodison and at Anfield. It was always the atmosphere of the Reds that drew me in, and Bill Shankly, and that was it.

It is an obsession with me. But it's one I'm not sorry about! It's such a rollercoaster ride supporting them these days it's never a dull moment.

Music is probably a passion as well. Steely Dan are one of my all-time favourite bands. I don't understand anybody who doesn't appreciate their music, and I am obsessed with anything to do with Steely Dan or Donald Fagen. I got in to them when I was 14 or 15. A friend of mine, Marty Santos, at the bottom of our street on Lodge Lane, I used to go and get the Echo for my dad from the corner shop, and every time I walked past Marty would be blasting Steely Dan. He got me in to them.

Do you collect memorabilia? And would you have a 'holy grail'?

I went to the England v Germany match in Germany and we beat them 5-1. My match ticket was signed with the goal scorers, which were three Liverpool players, which is a nice piece of history, but it's stuck in a box somewhere. I get people doing stuff like that, but it's not really me.

Lennon's Banjo is a chance to perform in your home city. Do you look forward to coming home?

I don't need much of an excuse to come home really. When I lived in Liverpool, all the work was in London. And as soon as I move down south, I keep getting jobs in Liverpool!

I catch up with family, I see mum and dad and my two older girls, and my grandkids.

And I love working in Liverpool, the crowd is so appreciative – the best audience around I think.

John Lennon timeline

Wednesday, October 9, 1940: John Winston Lennon is born at Liverpool Maternity Hospital, Oxford Street, the child of Alfred 'Freddie' Lennon and his wife Julia, nee Stanley.

1940-45: John spends the first few years of his life living with his mother at 9 Newcastle Road and, for a time, at 120a Allerton Road.

1945: John goes to live with his Aunt Mimi and Uncle George Smith at 251 Menlove Avenue, Woolton, which will be his home until the early 1960s.

Mary 'Mimi' Smith was the eldest of the five daughters of George and Annie Stanley – Mary, Elizabeth, Annie, Julia and Harriet.

November 1945: Five-year-old John goes to Mossfits Primary School in Wavertree.

1946-52: John becomes a pupil at Dovedale Primary School, just off Penny Lane, where classmates include Pete Shotton and Jimmy Tarbuck.

1952: John passes the 11+ and starts at Quarry Bank school.

June 5, 1955: Uncle George Smith dies suddenly from a haemorrhage of his liver, aged 52.

1955/6: The teenage Lennon is taught how to play banjo chords by his mother Julia at her home in Blomfield Road, Allerton. Early songs he learns include That'll Be The Day. She later teaches him the piano accordion.

September 1956: John forms the Quarrymen, enlisting fellow students Pete Shotton, Eric Griffiths and Rod Davis.

1957: Julia Lennon buys John his first guitar, a Gallotone Champion acoustic costing £5 10s. John writes his first song, Hello Little Girl, later recorded by The Fourmost.

July 6, 1957: The Quarrymen play at Woolton Church Fete, where mutual friend Ivan Vaughan introduces John to 15-year-old Paul McCartney.

August 7, 1957: The Quarrymen play the Cavern for the first time. During the performance, owner Alan Sytner tells John to 'cut out the rock'.

October 1957: Paul McCartney joins the Quarrymen. And after a dismal showing in his O Levels, John is accepted by Liverpool College of Art, based next to the Liverpool Institute in Hope Street, where he meets Cynthia Powell in 'lettering' class.

March 1958: George Harrison joins the Quarrymen after being introduced to Lennon by McCartney.

July 15, 1958: Julia is killed when she's struck by a car in Menlove Avenue on her way home from visiting her sister Mimi. The driver is an off-duty policeman.

August 29, 1959: The Quarrymen – in the incarnation of Lennon, McCartney, Harrison and Ken Brown – play at the opening night of The Casbah Club, Mona Best's new basement club in West Derby, opened after son Pete asks for somewhere for himself and his friends to meet. The Quarrymen also help to decorate the venue, although short-sighted John accidentally uses slow-drying emulsion instead of gloss paint.

1960: John starts sharing a flat with fellow Liverpool College of Art student Stu Sutcliffe. In May, Sutcliffe, who has been persuaded to buy a bass guitar, joins the then-named Silver Beetles.

August 1960: The newly-named Beatles hire Pete Best as a permanent drummer and on August 17 they arrive in Hamburg to take up a residency at the Indra Club and later the Kaiserkeller.

February 9, 1961: The Beatles make the first of 292 appearances at the Cavern. The line-up features Lennon, McCartney, Harrison, Pete Best and Stu Sutcliffe.

November 9, 1961: Brian Epstein is introduced to the group at a lunchtime session at the Cavern.

January 1, 1962: The Beatles audition for Decca, but are turned down. Three months later they are hired by George Martin at Parlophone, part of EMI.

August 15, 1962: Pete Best makes his final appearance with the Beatles before being sacked and replaced by Ringo Starr.

August 23, 1962: John and a pregnant Cynthia marry at Mount Pleasant register office.

October 5, 1962: The Beatles' first single, Love Me Do, is released, with PS I Love You on the B-side. It reaches 17 in the charts.



Beatle memorabilia at auction

From autographs to musical instruments to teeth – yes, teeth – anything connected with The Beatles is big business, and can earn its owner a pretty penny.

While money can't buy you love perhaps – it can buy you a slice of Fab Four history, such as John Lennon's Steinway piano on which he composed Imagine, and which cost the late George Michael a cool £1.45million at auction in 2000, and which was loaned to The Beatles Story to display for some time.

Each year, a special memorabilia valuation day is held by The Beatles Story and Julien's Auctions, and even nearly 50 years after The Beatles split up, hitherto unseen items are coming to light.

In 2016, a letter written by John Lennon to the Queen and explaining why he was returning his MBE, was discovered and valued at £60,000. It had been tucked in the sleeve of a record bought as part of a £10 job lot at a car boot sale in the 1990s.

And last autumn, a set of 26 negatives of the ex-Beatle, taken in 1970, were brought along and estimated to be worth around £10,000. The days prove so popular, and unearth so many Beatles gems, they're even going transatlantic with a special Discovery Day planned for New York in May.

Darren Julien, president of Julien's Auctions, which has been responsible for many of the major sales of Beatle-related memorabilia, says: "The market just continues to increase. I remember when George Harrison guitars used to sell for £200-300,000 and now you'd be looking at £800,000. "There aren't a lot of things on the market, and it's rare for really historic items to come up for auction. "Beatles memorabilia is really the holy grail."

Here are some other Lennon and Beatle-related items which have been sold at auction over the years:

- Ringo Starr's Ludwig drum kit: \$2.2m (£1.55m)
- John Lennon's acoustic guitar: £1.45m
- John Lennon's psychedelic Rolls Royce: £1.4m
- Handwritten lyrics to All You Need is Love: \$1m (£706,530)
- George Harrison's Gibson guitar: \$567,000 (£400,600)
- The original contract between the Beatles and Brian Epstein: £240,000
- A signed copy of Sgt Pepper: \$290,000 (£204,900)
- A lock of John Lennon's hair: £24,000
- One of John Lennon's teeth: £19,500
- Detention sheets from Quarry Bank High School labelling Lennon a nuisance and class clown: £8,000 each





Images:

- 1) The Beatles at the Cavern Club 1961 - Photo Courtesy of: The Cavern Club
- 2) The Beatles 1962 - Photo Courtesy of: Roag Best
- 3) Pete Best 2017 - Photo Courtesy of: Roag Best

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