

THE BEATLES In concert at Red Rocks Amphitheater
photographed by Nicholas DeSciuse Aug. 26, 1964.



PHOTO © NICHOLAS DESCIUSE

THE
BEATLES
AT
RED ROCKS
.....
IT WAS
40
YEARS
AGO
TODAY
BY PETER JONES

*It was twenty years ago today,
Sgt. Pepper taught the band to play
They've been going in and out of style
But they're guaranteed to raise a smile.
So may I introduce to you
The act you've known for all these years...*

— LYRICS FROM "SGT. PEPPER'S LONELY HEARTS CLUB BAND"



ALMOST EVERYTHING ABOUT THE CONCERT BUSINESS HAS CHANGED SINCE THE BEATLES PLAYED RED ROCKS ON AUG. 26, 1964. EVEN THE VENUE IS ONE OF ONLY FOUR FROM THE TOUR THAT IS STILL IN EXISTENCE.

When Ringo Starr performed at Red Rocks 36 years later, he briefly pondered the stage floor and began pacing in circles, while reminiscing about his former band's only Colorado appearance. "I think the show was over in the time I've just been walking around," he laughed.

That was almost true.

Beatles concerts circa 1964 went like this: For less than a half hour, the band would speedily perform its repertoire of hits, politely bow to the audience, and leave the stage without so much as an encore. Whatever music might have been audible on the primitive sound system invariably was drowned out by the shrieks of screaming teenagers.

Not that it mattered much.

"There was just so much excitement about seeing the Beatles," says Ted Scott, who was a University of Colorado sophomore in August 1964 and still lives in the Denver area. "There had been all this hype. It was still really new. I don't think any of us thought about quality of music. We saw the Beatles. We saw them live. That was the big thing."

So big, in fact, that many see the concert as a defining cultural experience, akin to attending Woodstock. "It was the event of my life, I thought," Colorado history author B.J. Murphey-Lenahan once recalled. "And it probably is one of the biggest highlights. I couldn't believe it. I came all the way from southeast Kansas and I was going to go see the Beatles!"

What might be more unbelievable to fans is that, for all its apparent significance, the Red Rocks concert almost didn't happen.

For one, the expense of bringing the band to Colorado was viewed as prohibitive. As a result, the booking nearly fell through several times. In the end, a series of timely interventions spared thousands of area Beatles fans from disappointment.

As strange as it may seem in today's climate of lawsuits and fierce competition among corporate and independent promoters, in the pre-Barry Fey days of Denver the city's untapped concert business was small, informal, and up for grabs by virtually anyone.

Enter the late Verne Byers.

In 1964, Byers was a jazz musician, owner of the Robin's Nest, a live music venue/bar in Golden, and a small-time music promoter accustomed to the likes of Count Basie and Louis Armstrong.

Shortly after 73 million people watched the Beatles on "The Ed Sullivan Show," Byers received an unexpected phone call from Chicago. The latest singing sensation from Liverpool, England, wanted to visit Colorado – if the price was right.

"Well, of course, by then, I'd heard of them a little bit," Byers told Colorado Public Radio in 1996. "I said, 'How much?' Of course, I'm thinking maybe \$3,000, because the big stars were getting \$5,000 at Red Rocks. He says, 'Get a chair and sit down and I'll tell you.'"

Byers was aghast to learn the Beatles wanted \$20,000, twice what they had charged Sullivan for three television appearances. Taken aback, the bewildered promoter came close to turning down the offer on the spot. To turn a profit, he reasoned, tickets would have to cost at least \$6, more than twice the going rate at the time.

Playing it safe, Byers was politely noncommittal. Only after Golden attorney Tom Carney stepped forward as an investor did he finally ink the contract. "Verne didn't have very good credit, to be honest with you," remembers the now-retired lawyer. "We had to make a deposit on Red Rocks and pay the band a partial advance. Verne was not in a position to do that."

But even after Carney signed on, the concert was still less than a sure thing. Byers came close to accepting a \$50,000 cancellation offer from a Kansas City millionaire. That would have allowed the tightly scheduled Beatles to perform in Kansas City the same night instead. "We turned it down," Byers claimed, "mainly because Tom Carney said, 'Let's don't cancel because we know the Coors family is planning on it.' The Coors family had teenage kids."

Carney laughingly scoffs at that anecdote, insisting, if anything, he

— ADMIT ONE —
Admission.....6.09
Federal Tax......51
6.60

In case of rain, event may be moved to Denver Coliseum on the same date. Listen for radio announcements.

**KIMN presents
THE BEATLES
IN CONCERT**

**Red Rocks Amphitheater
Wed., August 26, 1964
8:30 p.m.**

NO REFUND
NO SEATS RESERVED

No 1488



would have been more concerned about the wrath of his own teenagers. "My kids loved it," he says of the concert, insisting he doesn't remember Colorado's first family of beer entering the equation.

As it turned out, Byers was not the only one to suffer from Fab Four sticker shock. Many were dismayed when KIMN, the sponsoring radio station, announced an admission price of \$6.60 (across the country, tickets ranged from \$4 to \$8). In an era that could not have predicted \$500 Eagles tickets, more than a few fans started plotting creative, alternative ways to attend the concert without paying admission.

The Denver date was the sixth of 32 shows on the Beatles' 1964 U.S. tour and one of only two that did not sell out – at least officially. An eventual Kansas City date was the other.

As Carney remembers, the sell-out issue was partly rooted in legal technicalities. In 1964, Red Rocks had lax rules about its general-admission seating capacity. As a consequence, according to Carney, deciding how many concert tickets to print was basically a guessing game played by promoters and local officials.

"The Beatles got the balance of their money on the day of the show," Carney says of the backstage negotiations. "But we printed more tickets than we sold." The upshot was a comparatively smaller payout to the Beatles.

SALES NOTWITHSTANDING, WHEN THE

Beatles finally arrived in Denver they were greeted with the same Beatlemania that had conquered the rest of the world. Hundreds of teenagers awaited the band at Stapleton Airport. Denver police estimate a crowd of 5,000 was on hand when the Beatles arrived at the Brown Palace Hotel.

"You had all the interest diverted to the front," says Tom Baines, a waiter who has worked at the hotel since Dwight Eisenhower was in the White House. "They came in through the back door, went into the kitchen, and from there they took the service elevator." Which briefly got stuck so the weary band then climbed the stairs to the eighth floor to what has since been christened the "Beatles Suite," a luxurious two-bedroom layout overlooking Broadway and Tremont Street. (In recent years, the suite has hosted both Ringo Starr and John Lennon's

widow, Yoko Ono.) The Beatles' entourage included manager Brian Epstein and producer George Martin. Joan Baez, in town for a gig the same week, visited the band in its hotel room.

"I stayed on to see them," she told *Rolling Stone* years later. "I spoke with them after the show, and they talked me into traveling with them for a few dates."

According to the Brown Palace, nothing in its 114-year history, not even presidential visits, has compared with the hoopla of the Beatles' hard day's night at the hotel.

General manager Karl Mehlmann was not thrilled about the band's reservation, having heard such reports as fans climbing up hotel buildings. That didn't happen in Denver, though many creative young women simply walked in the front door and applied for housekeeping jobs.

"I imagine we would have turned the Beatles down if we knew what we were getting," the now-retired Mehlmann says. "The reservations were made under a false name, and we had no idea who was coming in until basically a day or two before they showed."

When they did, Mehlmann was surprised by the way entire families worked to hoodwink hotel staff. "I think most of the ruckus was caused by the parents," he laughs, "because we kept chasing the older people out of the hotel." Their objective: Snap up anything the "pop messiahs" had touched. "We had people actually come here with like a screwdriver and pliers," remembers Baines. "They wanted a doorknob or just something. I had a girl walk up and ask me, 'If you can get me a face towel or a pillow or anything from the Beatles, I'll do anything.'"

The 22-year-old waiter easily could have obliged. Not only did he have broad access to the hotel, he also brought the Beatles their lunch. A Kingston Trio fan, Baines didn't think much about his assignment at the time. He dutifully scurried up to the suite, knocked on the door, and stoically served grilled-cheese sandwiches to Britain's newest hit makers.

DAY IN THE LIFE (Left): Denver photographer Nicholas DeSciose took this shot of the Fab Four in front of an American flag backstage at Red Rocks. (Top): Ringo Starr exits his limo and makes a mad dash into the Brown Palace Hotel. (Bottom): "The Beatles Suite" at the Brown Palace today. (Right): Back in the day, waiter Tom Baines delivered the Beatles grilled-cheese sandwiches and "chips." Baines still works at the Denver hotel.

But he recalls, "One of them lifted the cover and said, 'Bloody Americans and their chips on everything!' So Ringo turned around and said, 'Oh, pay him no never mind. We've been on the road. We're very tired.' And you could see it in the guy's face. I mean, they just didn't look like they'd slept more than about three hours a day."

Once word spread that Baines had rubbed elbows with the "map tops," he was accosted by more teenage girls, a couple of whom swiftly grabbed pens from his pocket, assuming the Beatles must have signed their bill with one of them. They hadn't.

FOUR CU STUDENTS SCHEMED TO CIRCUMVENT THE \$6.60 TICKET COST. "YOU COULD BUY THREE RECORD ALBUMS FOR THAT PRICE," REASONS TED SCOTT, THE THEN-SOPHOMORE WHO, WITH THREE FRIENDS PACKED INTO A PORSCHE, DETERMINED TO CLIMB THE ROCKS AND SNEAK IN.

STEALING BALLPOINTS WASN'T THE

only infraction committed that day. While the Beatles finished lunch and napped, four CU students schemed to circumvent the \$6.60 ticket cost. "You could buy three record albums for that price," reasons Ted Scott, the then-sophomore who, with three friends packed into a Porsche, determined to climb the Rocks and sneak in.

"It took like two hours," he says. "When we got there, there were a lot of people sneaking in. I don't know where the heck they came from. When opening act Jackie DeShannon came on, the crowd let out this big scream. The security wanted to see what it was, so everybody ran forward, and at that point we all jumped the bar and ran to the restrooms."

Estimates vary on how many got in that way. Of nearly 10,000 tickets, fewer than 6,000 were sold. Most agree a lack of public transportation is the main reason, as the concert largely attracted younger teenagers. But many who were there say the venue was packed anyway. Photos published in the Denver dailies seem to confirm those claims.

"It was full. The pictures show how full it was," insists Nicholas DeSciose, a Denver photographer who covered the concert for *Tempo*, a local teen magazine. Scott agrees, "It was probably 90 percent full.

There were no reserved seats at that time at Red Rocks, and a lot of the crowd had moved down closer. You couldn't even walk down there."

When the Beatles hit the stage, that is. Fans were polite for DeShannon and the other opening acts: the Righteous Brothers, the Exciters, and the Bill Black Combo.

"Denver was our last fun night," remembered the late Bobby Hatfield of the Righteous Brothers during one of his final Colorado interviews. "We kicked butt out there. But once we slipped past that Denver border, everything went downhill. The kids were just screaming, 'We want the Beatles.' It was impossible."

On their way to take the stage, the Beatles paused for an impromptu photo for 19-year-old DeSciose. "We were walking down this cavern,"

I SAW HIM STANDING THERE: A BRIEF HISTORY OF COLORADO BEATLES SIGHTINGS

"Been away so long I hardly knew the place..."

"BACK IN THE U.S.A."

ALTHOUGH THE BEATLES NEVER CAME BACK TO DENVER AS A BAND, all four returned individually at one time or another. Sometime Aspen homeowner Ringo Starr even played Red Rocks again in 2000 with his All-Starr Band.

Paul McCartney has performed locally on three occasions since 1976. George Harrison's only solo U.S. tour stopped here in 1974. Starr has been the most frequent visitor, managing no less than six concerts in little more than a dozen years, including



Pierre Wolfe, Paul McCartney, and Jane Asher at the Quorum Hotel

a show at the intimate Fillmore Auditorium last year. John Lennon is the only ex-Beatle to never again play the Mile-High City.

After the Red Rocks show, McCartney was likely the first to return. In April 1967, shortly after completing the *Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band* album, he flew in to rendezvous with his then fiancée, actress Jane Asher. "She was out here on some Shakespeare tour or something," he told KBCO, while in Boulder for a 1992 concert. "I came out to see her and had a few days in the wild out there while she was working."

When Asher's curtain closed, she and McCartney celebrated her 21st birthday with an engagement party at the Quorum, a five-star restaurant across the street from the state Capitol. The Brown Palace had referred the couple to the now-defunct establishment, which was then owned by culinary broadcaster Pierre Wolfe.

"We had a private room, which they liked," the retired restaurateur recalls. "The kids were outside the building trying to storm in. We locked the doors." That didn't stop a local photographer from disguising himself as a waiter and covertly making his way into the private party. Unbeknownst to the famous guests, it was Wolfe who slyly arranged the uninvited ruse. "I wanted a photo of him and myself. I was very selfish," he admits. "It annoyed the mother of the bride-to-be. If I had let him in any other way, she would have been through the ceiling. [McCartney] thanked me and said, 'Don't pay any attention to this woman.'"

The engagement didn't turn out nearly as well as the party, however. In 1968, McCartney and Asher abruptly canceled their marriage plans.

The Beatle later wed photographer Linda Eastman, who would eventually become the critically derided keyboardist for Wings, McCartney's band during the 1970s. In the early 1990s, the couple held a press conference in Denver to promote Linda's line of frozen vegetarian dinners. The McCartneys were also known to occasionally vacation in Colorado during the 1970s.

In 1974, Lennon came to Caribou Ranch recording studios near Nederland to sing background on Elton John's cover of "Lucy in the Sky With Diamonds." During his off time, the ex-Beatle was seen shopping at Morris Alpert's, a former Boulder clothing store.

"He was wearing sunglasses," remembers Cleg Holiman, a Jamestown resident who was then a 22-year-old photographer. "He looked rather nondescript, and certainly incognito might describe his way of behavior. His hair was very short. I was really surprised at how tall he was and how much presence the man had."

A confirmed Beatles fan, Holiman didn't miss an opportunity to shake hands with the musical icon. "He was in one section of the store and this Asian girl was on the other side," he says. "I just simply walked up to him and said, 'Excuse me, are you John Lennon?' He became very circumspect, looking left and right and around his shoulder, and then he affirmed, 'Yes, I'm John Lennon.' I asked him, 'Oh, is that Yoko?' He said, 'No, that's Yoko's sister.'"

Most likely, the young woman was actually May Pang, Lennon's personal assistant and constant companion during an 18-month period now known as his "Lost Weekend." The ex-Beatle was probably being discreet. He and Ono were separated at the time and Pang had become Lennon's de facto girlfriend.

Although Holiman says he had myriad questions he would like to have asked the visiting rock star, he decided to just tell Lennon how much he appreciated his work.

"There's no way that when I was a young boy I could have ever approached you like this and talk with you," Holiman remembers saying to Lennon. "So he said, 'Yes, I would have to agree with that. Times truly have changed.' I said, 'Thank you very much. I won't take any more of your time.' And he shook my hand again, only he reached for mine that time."

Technically, yet another ex-Beatle has visited the area. Last year, original axed drummer Pete Best brought his band to the Duke of Windsor bar in Windsor.

"To Peter Jones," he signed on my copy of *The Savage Young Beatles*, a vintage release of a pre-Ringo recordings.

A Beatle sighting is a Beatle sighting, after all. ▲▲

he remembers. "There was, by this garage door, this enormous American flag. And in my just-teenage-boy mind, [I thought] wouldn't this be funny to take their picture in front of the American flag?"

The young photographer shot five frames before staking out his place next to the stage for the concert.

When he got back to the studio, DeSciore decided to distort the American flag photo. "I tilted the easel when I made the print because I wanted them to be larger than life," he says. In doing so, he wound up creating an image not unlike the cover of the Beatles'

After gasping for breath, the Beatles wound up using the canisters anyway.

There was still one problem, though. Just prior to the band taking the stage, a sound engineer frantically announced, "Ringo's mic is not working!" It was easily resolved, however, as Verne Byers remembered years later. According to the promoter, Starr replied, "Don't worry about it. They're not going to hear it anyway." The audience erupted into a half hour of nonstop screams when the Beatles finally opened with "Twist and Shout."

DUE TO THE ALTITUDE, OXYGEN CANISTERS WERE PLACED NEARBY. MANY YEARS LATER, PAUL MCCARTNEY JOKED AT A PRESS CONFERENCE ABOUT THE GROUP'S MACHO RELUCTANCE TO USE THE CANISTERS. AFTER GASPING FOR BREATH, THE BEATLES WOUND UP USING THE CANISTERS ANYWAY.

Rubber Soul album, released more than a year later. The finished product eventually appeared in *Life* and helped DeSciore land jobs with other magazines.

After inadvertently birthing a photography career, the Beatles approached the stage around 9:30 p.m. to take their cue. "As soon as the drum up on the platform was put there for Ringo, the girls went 'ahhhhh,'" DeSciore remembers.

Due to the altitude, oxygen canisters were placed nearby. Many years later, Paul McCartney joked at a press conference about the group's macho reluctance to use the canisters. After all, this was a band that had once endured grueling eight-hour sets in the smoky nightclubs of Hamburg, Germany.

SOURCES DISAGREE ON HOW MANY

other songs the band performed, with estimates ranging from five to around 10. But because the group kept virtually the same 12-song set list for the entire tour, it is likely that beneath the audience's shrilling the Beatles played "All My Loving," "Can't Buy Me Love," "I Want to Hold Your Hand," and "A Hard Day's Night," among others. They probably closed with Little Richard's "Long Tall Sally."

The Beatles were then whisked back to the Brown Palace. They left Denver the next morning, never again to return as a band.

It is unknown whether ticket sales were the reason the Beatles skipped Colorado on later tours, nor if a sardonic reference on the band's 1967 fan-club Christmas record had anything to do with their

visit. "You've just won a trip to Denver and five others," quipped Lennon, a master of malapropisms, while mockingly portraying a television game-show host.

Regardless of Denver's impact on the Beatles, the band left a sizable impression on the city during the roughly 24 hours they spent here. "To this day, I still like to say I saw the Beatles," boasts concertgoer Ed Wakefield, who, 40 years later, still lives in the area. "People just don't want to believe me." Like hip-swiveling Elvis Presley at the Denver Coliseum in 1956, the Red Rocks event was not merely a historic Colorado concert. More important is what the show still represents to many people. As the oldest baby boomers near 60, the excitement is still palpable in the voices of those who were there. The deaths of Lennon and George Harrison may have only added to a thoughtful, more melancholic form of Beatlemania among the first-generation fans.

Waiter Tom Baines is amazed at the continued interest in his brief encounter with the band. He says, in recent years, an awed fan became emotional and asked to hold his hand when she learned he served sandwiches to the Beatles.

Verne Byers often recalled a prophetic moment backstage while speaking with Beatles manager Brian Epstein: "He said, 'I got news for you. You're making history tonight.' And he was right." ▲

PETER JONES is an award-winning journalist and broadcaster. In his spare time, he's under strict management of his 3-year-old son, David.

TOMORROW NEVER KNOWS

FEW IN 1964 COULD HAVE PREDICTED THAT A ROCK 'N' ROLL CONCERT would still be a source of interest four decades later. But as the anniversary of the Beatles' Red Rocks show approaches, Denver is seemingly primed to get its collective "yeah, yeahs" out.

For those too young to have attended and those who wish to relive the historic event, KBDI-TV is presenting the next best thing, a unique re-creation of it at Red Rocks on Aug. 26, exactly 40 years after the original concert. Filling in for the unavailable Beatles will be 1964, a popular tribute band that duplicates the combo's "Ed Sullivan" period in minute detail — from



vintage costumes and mop-top coifs to classic banter and subtle on-stage mannerisms.

It won't be an exact replication, of course. Tickets run \$15, more than twice what it cost to see the Beatles at the same venue. On the bright side, 1964 is expected to perform at least three times longer than their musical forefathers, who played for less than 30 minutes.

Tickets for the Channel 12 benefit are available through Ticketmaster or by calling 303-830-8497.

Beatlemaniacs who want to take the experience a step further can book a room at the Brown Palace anytime for the rest of 2004. The downtown hotel that hosted the group is offering an overnight package that includes a traditional

room and a lunch of grilled-cheese sandwiches and "chips," the same afternoon meal the Beatles enjoyed there 40 years ago.

Rounding out the \$189 anniversary promotion are a replica concert ticket, a souvenir photo of Ringo Starr entering the Brown Palace, and other Beatles-related offerings. For a few dollars more, guests will have the opportunity to stay in the actual "Beatles Suite."

Reservations can be made by calling 303-297-3111 or by visiting www.brownpalace.com. Finally, the most extreme Beatles fanatics will be able to complete their nostalgia-laden month with a coincidental concert by Joan Baez, who performed in Denver the same week as the Beatles, visited them at the Brown Palace, and wound up following the band for a few subsequent concert dates. The queen of 1960s folk plays Aug. 13 at the Denver Botanic Gardens.

Tickets for that show are sold out. ▲