

# The Gainesville Sun

## A tribute 'faux' a good cause



The Fab Faux with, standing from left, Jimmy Vivino and Will Lee, and, front row, from left, Rich Pagano, Jack Petruzzelli and Frank Agnello, will open the Chords of Color for a Cause series on Friday with a performance of Beatles songs. (COURTESY OF THE FAB FAUX)

By Bill Dean  
Entertainment editor

***Published: Thursday, July 21, 2011***

Bassist Will Lee has played on more than 1,700 albums, and he's spent nearly 30 years in the band backing David Letterman on his late-night TV shows. He also grew up as the son of the music school dean of the University of Miami, where he formed his first band at age 12 after seeing The Beatles on "The Ed Sullivan Show."

Put all of that in a blender and it helps explain the painstaking approach and near obsession with detail that Lee's Beatles-tribute band, The Fab Faux, takes in replicating the songs and sounds of the real Fab Four onstage — as the New York group will do Friday at the Phillips Center and has done in weekend concerts for nearly 14 years.

How painstaking? Lee once spent 22 days examining and scripting out "Revolution 9" to be performed by the five-piece Fab Faux, an experience he jokingly says nearly cost him

his new marriage before his wife switched her bringing-the-food-tray-duties to help him finish the process in his laboratory.

Add the additional years of experiences of the other Fab Faux members — a group of New York musicians that also includes guitarist Jimmy Vivino (who's been Conan O'Brien's guitar player for nearly 20 years over three different programs), drummer Rich Pagano, singer/guitarist Frank Agnello and multi-instrumentalist Jack Petruzzelli — and it becomes apparent that a hard-day's century worth of talent has come together to work out and perform a beloved catalog of songs with the care and attention the players feel they deserve.

“There is so much magic in those [Beatles] records that it seemed to me the reason to have a band at all would not just be to be another ‘Beatle band’ but to actually bring those records to the stage,” Lee says in a recent phone call from New York.

The decision to do the songs justice upon the group's formation in 1998 led to two key realizations: That it would take five core members, not four, to accurately perform the songs live and that the members also would focus solely on the music instead of trying to be a “lookalike” band.

Having settled those questions, Lee, Vivino and the others then turned their attentions to figuring out the parts “that made this music so magical,” Lee says.

“A lot of times because of the limitations of recording that those guys had back then, they had to cram everything onto one or two tracks in a way that made certain sounds very mysterious, and you couldn't really pick out what instrument was exactly playing which part,” Lee says. “So some combination of two instruments might make a third new sound that was a hybrid that you didn't really know how to get to.”

Virtually every weekend, The Fab Faux performs one and sometimes two shows in concert halls and venues around the country — often in return performances after having won fans over the first time. And the group has racked up an impressive list of accomplishments internationally including in Liverpool, England, where The Fab Faux has performed many times in the city's annual Beatle Week events and once played on a giant, Yellow Submarine-shaped stage in front of 35,000 people, Lee says.

They also have performed virtually every original song written and recorded by The Beatles, and are known for doing acclaimed performances of entire albums such as “Rubber Soul,” “Revolver,” “Abbey Road” and “Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band.”

Lee says that Friday's performance in Gainesville, in which the band will kick off the Chords of Color for a Cause series featuring performers who have an experience with cancer (Lee's mother died from pancreatic cancer, Pagano's father died from lung cancer), will be more of an “introduction” concert by the band, however.

“A lot of times, we'll want to give people more of a taste of what we're about. So introductorily, we'll come out and play a really nice variety of old and new stuff,” Lee says.

While Friday's set list hadn't been finalized, Lee said it would likely include “While My Guitar Gently Weeps” (“We have such a great guitarist that we don't want to leave that out of the set,” he says) and “Penny Lane” — since the band is bringing its four-piece horn section and two-piece string section from New York (“When you have a real piccolo/trumpet player, you've got to play that,” Lee says).

Over his career, Lee has met and performed with three of the four Beatles: Paul McCartney, Ringo Starr and George Harrison (Lee was living in New York when John Lennon was killed in 1980 but he hadn't performed with him).

And during the 2001 “Concert for New York” organized by McCartney after Sept. 11 — in which Lee played in the band that backed McCartney — Lee says he told the Beatles songwriter and bassist about The Fab Faux.

“He sat there listening, and I was trying to like, hem and haw, because I know that he doesn't like Beatle bands,” Lee says. “So I was already setting him up to get him past that for a second, to hear me out, by saying ‘Look, we have a band and we do the music of you and John and George and Ringo, and it's not a dress-up band but we try to do the stuff that was heretofore thought impossible to pull off live.’

“And the first thing he says was ‘Do you do ‘Tomorrow Never Knows'?’” Lee says.

The song from “Revolver,” which is almost never performed by Beatles tribute bands because of its complexity, holds enough of a special place in McCartney's heart to serve as a barometer, Lee says.

“That was his baby,” says Lee, adding that the answer is, indeed, yes.