



The Fab Faux brings the music of The Beatles to Northampton

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The Fab Faux will perform on Friday night at the Calvin Theatre in Northampton.

By KEVIN O'HARE

For starters, forget every notion you may have ever had about tribute bands.

The Fab Faux don't weary goofy wigs, they don't get decked out in phony Sgt. Pepper's uniforms and they don't talk between songs with bogus British accents.

But they just might be the most authentic live interpreters of the music of the Beatles on the planet. Well, perhaps other than Paul McCartney when he takes his own band on the road.

The Fab Faux will be playing the Calvin Theatre in Northampton on Friday night in a show billed as "From the Cavern to the Rooftop."

Led by bassist-singer Will Lee, best known for his work in the band on "The Late Show with David Letterman," and singer-guitarist-keyboardist Jimmy Vivino, a longtime member of Conan O'Brien's band, the Fab Faux formed in 1998 and have been drawing raves along with jaw-dropping looks of amazement from audiences ever since.

Lee, whose musical resume reads like a who's who of rock 'n' roll history, spoke recently from his home in New York about the group's background and its goals. He's particularly the right guy for his role in the Faux, in part because he has played with three Beatles (McCartney, Ringo Starr and the late George Harrison) and even played on a track with the late John Lennon as well, but more on that later.

He was talking to McCartney about the Fab Faux before the star-studded 9/11 benefit "Concert for New York" in 2001.

"At the rehearsal I said 'I know you hate Beatle bands, but I have to tell you that I have a band that honors the music that you, John, George and Ringo gave us all...We're trying to bring the records to the stage, that's our goal. We focus more on the latter, heretofore impossible-to-do-live material note-for-note.' And he instantly asked me, 'Do you do "Tomorrow Never Knows?'" And I said, 'Of course, it's one of the first ones we assembled.' (laughs) I was so happy to say that."

Lee first got the band together years back when he was playing in a group with drummer-singer Rich Pagano. He then approached Vivino about the idea.

"I knew we had to get five players," Lee said. "So that we could get the doubled harmonies and the extra percussion and keyboard parts that made the Beatles' records so great. I had seen a lot of these four-piece piece bands that Paul McCartney has a disdain for and I had no interest in that at all. I had no interest in pretending to be anybody else, but I loved the music so much and was looking for like-minded hearts."

Together with Pagano and Vivino he found those qualities in guitarist-vocalist Frank Agnello and singer-keyboardist-guitarist Jack Petruzzelli. Frequently - like during its extraordinary 10th anniversary show before a full house at Radio City Music Hall last year - the group is augmented by the Hogshead Horns and Creme Tangerine Strings.

Still, Lee promises Northampton ticket buyers that they'll be getting a high-quality show from the straight five-piece ensemble.

"We have about 180 songs to choose from in our repertoire and people will get a nice mix of material," Lee vowed, while assuring there will be plenty of latter-day Beatles' work included. "We're actually not specialists in the super early Beatles' stuff anyway because so many other bands do it."

What the Fab Faux truly specialize in is playing many of the songs the Beatles' recorded in the studio but never had the chance to play live on stage after they stopped touring in 1966. So the Faux take on tracks as familiar and as complex as "I Am The Walrus," "Strawberry Fields Forever" and "A Day in the Life," and lesser known but equally complex selections such as "Only a Northern Song," "Doctor Robert," "Within You, Without You," and "Everybody's Got Something to Hide Except For me and My Monkey."

Lee said that playing in the Fab Faux definitely makes him wish the Beatles had stayed together to witness the amazing advances in audio technology that would have allowed them to take their latter-day compositions on the road.

"I often think how sad it is that they were so ahead of the technology," he said.

Along with performing live or in the studio with acts as diverse as Ray Charles, Mick Jagger, Frank Sinatra, Billy Joel, Steely Dan, Aretha Franklin and hundreds more, Lee takes enormous pride in his occasional work with the solo Beatles. Besides playing with McCartney a few times, he played bass on what would turn out to be Harrison's final full length headline concert at the Royal Albert Hall in London in 1992.

When Starr came out to join Harrison during the encore, Lee cart-wheeled back onto the stage.

"I've always been embarrassed by that 'cause my excitement was out of control," Lee recalled. "I regretted it for years, but I got a reprieve from Dhani Harrison, George's son. I saw him a few years back and he

came running across the room and gave me a big hug. He said. 'You played with my dad at Royal Albert Hall. I remember when you cart-wheeled over the stage, and I thought it was so cool.'

Separating the Beatles' fan from the working musician is not always easy when it comes to Lee and the Fab Four.

He recorded "Cookin' (In The Kitchen of Love)" with Starr on the latter's "Rotogravure" album in 1976. Lennon wrote the song and played piano on it but Lee was not in the studio with him at the same time, "so technically we're on the same track but I never actually had the chance to play with John," he said.

That's a definite regret, but one of his few regrets as Lee has made it part of his life's work to bring Lennon's music, along with that of his mates, to audiences across the land.

"If you just love great music and want to be entertained by hands-on musicians who play their instruments 24 hours a day, we're for you," Lee said. "A lot of these other (tribute) acts are made up of weekend musicians. We're a band that's been doing this for 11 years and we take the greatest joy in bringing the records to the stage. It's really just a great rock 'n' roll band that does Beatles' songs."