

Reliving Canada's Inaugural Beatles Concert

By Greg Gazin

While February 7, 1964 was the day The Beatles crossed the big pond to conquer America, it was on August 22, 1964, the day before the legendary Hollywood Bowl Concert, that The Beatles made their first appearance north of the 49th Parallel. The concert was held outdoors at Empire Stadium in Vancouver, British Columbia, on Canada's west coast.

Rock and Roll Hall of Fame 1994 inductee DJ Red Robinson has met the likes of Bill Haley and Buddy Holly. It was on that night that he emceed the show and introduced the four lads on the same stage where seven years prior, in 1957, he introduced Elvis, the King himself.

Unbeknownst to Robinson or the Fab Four, their appearance in Vancouver 40 years ago, would go down as an unforgettable date in Beatles' history.

Robinson, 27, was the Program Director & DJ at CFUN Radio in Vancouver. "It was a great day," says Robinson as he described the Stadium, it was a football field on the site of the Pacific National Exhibition (PNE) that was built in 1954 for The British Empire and Commonwealth Games. It was there and then that Bannister and Landy broke the 4-minute mile. Empire Stadium was also the home to the BC Lions football club.

The performance area was a makeshift stage at the north end of the field. There were no seats on the grassy area, which Robinson describes as, "not really ideal" - commenting that fans and performers should be in close proximity to each other. The concept of using stadiums for concerts was quite novel and he chalks the poor conditions up to lack of experience with these types of venues.

That night, 20,261 fans paid between CDN \$3.25 and \$5.50 for tickets to witness the Fab Four. Thousands more who couldn't



Photo by Owen Coppin - from the private collection of Red Robinson.

get tickets stood outside the perimeter of the stadium. As expected, the crowd was noisy and loud.

The fans were, "mostly 'Teeny Boppers'" Robinson explained, adding that the college crowd hadn't yet discovered the Beatles. "I felt sorry for The Beatles. They had those funny amps... and the speakers were in front of the band and they really couldn't hear anything."

Robinson is proud to have two rare colour photographs of The Beatles playing that night on stage. "A police officer friend of mine had a colour camera in 1964 ... people had them, but colour photos were very expensive to process."

The concert was described by the media the same as they reported every other Beatles' concert of the time, but that night was a little different. Part way into the show, "All hell broke loose," Robinson said. "Things were getting out of hand and the kids were out of control."

Author Larry Kane described the scene in his book *A Ticket to Ride* (Running Press, 2003) as, "bloody lips and noses, bruises, welts, abrasions and contusions."

Robinson recounted in detail how both Vancouver's Chief of Police and Brian Epstein ordered him up on stage and told him, in no uncertain terms, to interrupt The Beatles and tell the crowd to calm down or The Beatles would stop playing.

Robinson, who'd been in the business since the age of 16, was, by this time, a veteran at his trade and took the whole thing in stride.

"I've experienced this (rowdiness) before, I had my car ripped to shreds during a Ritchie Valens concert," he said.

Regardless, Robinson was extremely reluctant to interrupt the performance, knowing that if he didn't, the Police would pull the boys off the stage. So he made an attempt.

John saw Robinson getting up on stage and immediately shouted, "Get the F— off here,

nobody interrupts The Beatles!" "The noise and the screaming was so loud, you had to shout at each other to be heard," Robinson said.

He had gone over to talk to Lennon, and as a sidebar said jokingly to me, to have his picture taken at that moment. He continually pointed to the side of the stage where Epstein and the Chief were standing. Epstein was frantic, waving his arms, yelling, "Leave him go! Let him talk!"

Once John realized what had happened he calmly said in his Lennonesque way, "Sorry mate!" After that, Robinson chuckled, and they were all good buddies.

After only 11 songs, fearing for their safety, the lads were whisked directly off to the Vancouver Airport.

"It was an interesting evening and the show lasted only 22 minutes," concluded Robinson.

40 Years Ago Today – Almost

While Empire Stadium no longer exists (it was torn down during the Eighties), the PNE is home to a 17-day annual exhibition. This year is a special year for the PNE. It's the 50th year of Rock and Roll, the 50th year of the Stadium and the 4-minute mile, and the 40th anniversary of The Beatles' Empire Stadium concert.

To commemorate the Beatles' 40th anniversary, *Rubber Soul – The Beatles Experience*, (www.rubbersoul.ca) from Alberta, Canada have been selected to perform on the opening night of the PNE, August 21, 2004, just one day shy of 40 years, to recreate and relive the magic moment. To add to the authenticity, Robinson has agreed to emcee the show and introduce the band as he did 40 years ago.

The show will give those who never had the opportunity to see the lads from Liverpool a second chance to witness The Beatles experience.



Concert set list

Twist And Shout
 You Can't Do That
 All My Loving
 She Loves You
 Things We Said Today
 Roll Over Beethoven
 Can't Buy Me Love
 If I Fell
 Boys
 A Hard Day's Night
 Long Tall Sally

This was a typical set-list for the Beatles first American tour. However, for this particular show, there was a notable absence of *I Want To Hold Your Hand*, which was typically played after *If I Fell*. The Beatles would sometimes open with *I Saw Her Standing There*, omit *She Loves You*, and close with *Twist And Shout*.

About Rubber Soul

Rubber Soul – The Beatles Experience, Recaptures the magic and excitement of The Beatles.

The members of *Rubber Soul* are talented, versatile musicians who bring years of experience as fans of The Fab Four to the shows they lovingly create. The show is enhanced by the use of authentic instruments along with uncanny resemblances to the original Beatles. From Liverpool accents to the refreshingly humorous on stage dialogue, they perfectly capture The Beatles' magic with an incredible look, act, and sound-alike show that is knocking out audiences wherever they perform.

Rubber Soul have played to thousands of enthusiastic Beatles' fans from ages five to eighty, becoming a top attraction in theatres and live music venues alike. They were the featured performers for the Provincial Museum

of Alberta's opening night gala of the Canadian premiere of the 'SIXTIES' exhibit. This exciting event featured photographs from Linda McCartney as well as the world premiere of *The Beatles, Backstage and Behind the Scenes* that featured previously unseen Ed Sullivan performance photographs and others from the CBS television archives. The exhibit was the largest of its kind ever staged in North America.

"While lightning can't really strike twice," says Robinson, he's confident that between himself and *Rubber Soul* the moment can really be felt, captured and recreated and he is excited to relive it.

"I've heard (their) disc," says Robinson, referring to *Rubber Soul's* CD *Live at Festival Place*. "I think it's terrific."

All the members of *Rubber Soul* are proud and excited to participate in this incredible historic opportunity and are equally excited to meet Red Robinson.



Rubber Soul–The Beatles Experience are...

ROB MACKROTH (JOHN): vocals, rhythm guitar, keyboards

GARY BOYLAN (PAUL): vocals, bass guitar, keyboards

JIM HARRISON (GEORGE): vocals, lead guitar

KEITH McTAGGART (RINGO): drums, vocals

With: DAMIEN JOHNSON: off-stage percussion, guitar, stage production

"We are honoured to keep the Magic, Music and everlasting charm and the Love of the Beatles alive!" says Jim Harrison, *Rubber Soul's* 'George.'

Rubber Soul will perform a one-hour concert on the PNE Bandstand on Saturday August 21, 2004 at 8:30 PM PST. www.pne.bc.ca/fair/att_bandstand.htm

Greg Gazin, is the Business Manager of *Rubber Soul - The Beatles Experience* and has been a devout Beatles' fan and collector since he can remember. His first recollection of the Beatles was *A Hard Day's Night* (the cartoon) at the age of 5. Greg can be reached at rubbersoul@telus.net. **BM**

