
Ringo Starr: At 75, things are coming easy

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"It's peace and love. All we need is more of it," says the Beatles drummer, on tour now.

Fifty years after the Beatles' final tour, on which they routinely played only 11 songs, it's possible to hear more than twice that many of the band's songs on summer tours by Paul McCartney and Ringo Starr.

Starr was best known for his ace drumming, but he also sang on a handful of Beatles recordings, many of which he includes in his tour, including *Matchbox*, "Boys, Act Naturally, I Wanna Be Your Man, With a Little Help From My Friends and one he wrote, *Don't Pass Me By*.

Along with such solo hits as *It Don't Come Easy*, *Photograph*, *You're Sixteen* and *I'm the Greatest*, Starr leaves time for signature songs from current All-Starr band: Todd Rundgren, Steve Lukather, Gregg Rolie, Richard Page and Gregg Bissonette. (Starr has been touring with variations of the All-Starrs since 1989.)

Starr, who turns 76 next month, seemed full of energy as he chatted just before the tour's start, touching on his decades off the road, his recent burst of songwriting, a couple of his pre-Beatles bands, disdain for drum solos and why he started putting his drum set on a platform.

He reminisced, too, about the Beatles' first US concert 52 years ago at the old Washington Coliseum, which is being remade into a shop.

Are you ready to get out on the road for another tour?

I'm already on the road. We had our first rehearsal yesterday, a five-hour one, and we'll play our first show tomorrow. It's fun. I know all these guys, we've been doing this together for four years, so we know all the songs, I'm switching in one — we're doing *What Goes On* — but otherwise it's the show we have been doing. So we're anxious to get out there and play.

You must really get along with this particular group of All-Starrs.

This is the closest I've been with one of these bands. We get on. We have our ups and downs, but we really support each other onstage. That's really important. And we've been playing together so long, I really feel like I'm in the band. I really feel like we can go on together, but that's not the way we do this band. We switch it up. But I'm not looking to do that yet. We'll be touring this year in America, then in October, Hong Kong and Japan, and then next year again.

As much as you enjoying touring now, it must have been hard not to be touring for 20 years after the Beatles stopped.

They were different days. I stopped touring in '66. I played individual gigs in the '70s and the '80s, but not a lot. I was never "on tour." Then in '89, I put the first All-Starrs together, and that's how it is.

You were the most successful ex-Beatle on the charts, with a lot of Top 10 hits. You certainly could have toured in the '70s.

It was different then. I was doing the records, and if you look at the records, I had Dr. John and the Beatles on there, but they all had their own things going on. It's not like we could take this whole thing on the road. Like, we couldn't take *The Last Waltz* on tour, with all those people playing with the Band, though that's what interested me in putting together the All-Starr Band.

You co-wrote all of the songs on your latest album, *Postcards From Paradise*. Are you writing more than ever now?

I'm in the middle of the next album. The record is a totally different thing. Musicians come to the house, they're people I know, and we come up with things. I was in LA with Van Dyke Parks. He came over and I had a track, and we wrote a song around it. I just call people up.

Do ideas for songs come more easily for you these days?

I don't know if it's ideas. I have more energy to do it. And I'll have more time this year. We're only touring June into July. I'll get my rocks off playing, then I'm taking the summer off, do some more on my record, then start touring again with this band. I love this band.

You sing about one of your early bands, Rory and the Hurricanes, on the latest album.

Oh, yeah, they were great. I was in several bands, but this one was so great. I was working in a factory and playing in bands, but with this one, I was making enough money without the factory. I could quit and just play. That's when who-knew-what would happen next.

You're acknowledged as one of the greatest rock drummers. Did you ever have any teachers?

Nobody taught me. That's what it was like in Liverpool — if you had instruments, you were in the band. The very first band I was in, the Eddie Clayton Skiffle band — Eddie worked in same factory as I did, and we got together and played. We all learned together. That was the beautiful thing.

You're one of the few prominent drummers who has shied away from soloing.

No, it's never interested me, drum solos. I understand it, and it gives the drummer the personality to play. Like, John Bonham [of Led Zeppelin] had a great drum solo. But for me, it was never of any interest to do that. I want to play with the band... That's the drum part to me. I'm in the band.

So there's been a lot of great drummers out there. I think listening to, I want to say Motown, but, Jerry Lee Lewis was a big influence. His band was as well. I mean, Buddy Holly. I go back a bit, so the drummer was never really featured in any of those eras, and we got together, and all of a sudden it was *Ed Sullivan*. So I started demanding high risers because I was tired of being on the floor in the back. So I'd be up 10 feet higher than the boys.

Was there a sonic reason for being up on a riser?

I wanted them to see me! I wanted to be part of it. I was in the back. That's what it was about.

Do you remember the first time you played Washington? It was the first US concert for the Beatles, at the old Coliseum.

It was. Everybody remembers, and I certainly remember the rostrum. I think it was a boxing ring, wasn't it? And their part of the stage, the centre part, went around and then mine stopped. The rest of the band were going around, and I'm just stationary.

We laugh now because everybody has so many roadies and people looking after them. I jumped off the damn thing and started moving it myself. Now 20 people would run over and do it... It was pretty far out. But it was great: Live in America! I've said this a thousand times — no one will ever understand how amazing it was for the Beatles individually to come to America, the home of all the music we loved, and it was America.

You know, if you could do it in America, that was the jackpot of jackpots. So we came to New York... We got on the train from New York to Washington, and we found out on that train, which was really exciting, that the press actually came out to kill us, to put us down, really — "another English band." And [at the press conference], we're from Liverpool and they're from New York, and they shouted at us and we shouted back and they couldn't believe it, and that's why they loved us. And I only found it out on that train to Washington. Then we did the gig and we went to Florida. It was just incredible. I don't know if you can understand it, but for me it was just incredible.

Tell me about your annual peace-and-love event.

On the 7th of July [Starr's birthday], wherever you are, just stand there, look at your neighbour — you can be at your desk, you can be on the bus, you can be in the office, you can be onstage — and you can just say, "Peace and love." And that's your birthday gift to me.

Do you think a peace-and-love message is more needed during a divisive time?

I do. Not more. I think it's still needed. It's peace and love. All we need is more of it.
