

# THE LIDDYPUDLIANS

## A BIT OF HISTORY

Like millions of other people, I was floored when the Beatles first appeared on The Ed Sullivan Show in January of '64. I was 9 at the time and had just started playing guitar. Before the show, on a Sunday night (the TV was on in our rumpus room), my sisters Cynthia and Rosy were going teenage bananas. I thought they were just being kooky, but as soon Ed announced: "*THE BEATLES!!!*", and all the girls in the audience started screaming at deafening levels, and Paul counted off the first tune and sang the lyrics "Close your eyes, and I'll kiss you..." ,

I fell over backwards, and was hooked for good. I put together a band called the Beatles (what else?) for the fourth grade assembly (Sleepy Hollow School, no longer in existence). The band consisted of a couple of friends and me. One friend played my extra guitar with no strings, and the other played my guitar case. I was the only one who knew the chords. When a cute fifth grade girl (Kris Ackerman, RIP) whistled with two fingers on each hand, I thought, hey, this is for me!

Cut to a few decades later...

I was having coffee in San Anselmo at the old Roasters with my friend Jack Young. I shared my persisting dream, as I had many times before, of playing Beatles songs in Creek Park, faithful to the original recordings, complete with horn and string sections... exactly how I had wished the Beatles had toured. This little dream of mine was mostly inspired by the Beatles live film of the band performing "All You Need Is Love" with full orchestra, which headlined the BBC's (and the world's) first ever live satellite broadcast in '67 (Might have been '66).

(In the early '90s I had also done a Beatles show with middle schoolers. One of the parents objected to the use of Lucy in the Sky with Diamonds. The kids of course were curious as to why, so they found out. A couple of 8<sup>th</sup> graders were subsequently busted for

robbing their mommy's purses, renting a stretch limo, and buying 100 hits of acid in the Haight. When they were busted, there were two hits left.)

Another story, a local conservative coffee shop owner showed her disgust over the local summer rock concert series attracting free spirits with the quote "the night of the living dead".

Hey man, we're just old hippies!

This led to me thinking of a martial arts movie. The drama would unfold as me and a full orchestra performed Lucy, and the cops shut us down, culminating in a battle-royale with a cast of characters including evil coffee shop owners on flying coffee-carts, working for evil aliens, and me and my kung-fu good-guy buddies on flying ice cream bicycles...

(I was working as a tricycle peddling ice cream dude at the time, at age 40, 1994... never had legs in good shape, let alone tan! All the girls loved the ice cream dude. I kept a diary. Book someday maybe... Anyway...),

... working for the good aliens, against warlock cat killers, neo-nazis (both being a thing at the time. Jeez. Kids.), and the coffee cart lady, ideally played by Raquel Welch. You had to have been there.

I digress...

Back to Jack (R.I.P.)

The idea consolidated into the idea of just getting a band together (again inspired by the All You Need Is Love BBC first satellite broadcast of 1966).

Jack one day said, "I'm sick of hearing about it, and you not doing anything about it. Quit talking about it, just do it!"

One thing led to another, and I was fortunate enough to get together (several years after the Lucy incident) with David Lusterman (Acoustic Guitar/Strings Magazine, which had a built-in string quartet, with which I test drove a couple of Beatles charts. I worked there as well.) and (Mayor at that time) Kay (Coleman) to discuss the idea. I had suggested it to Kay to no avail. It was David's idea to present the concert as a benefit for the town (of San Anselmo... he was acting as "agent"), and Kay was kind and generous enough to "green-light" the project (as "club owner"... or in that case, lawn owner... one of my favorite shows "Lawn Owner... or as we like to say at the house, "Lawn Odor").

(Kay had to convince the powers that it was her idea. You know... musicians... 2<sup>nd</sup> class citizens).

That was 2002.

It was 20 years ago today.

:)

Actually 17 (it's now 2019, but who's counting?).

(There is a dispute over what year it was started, with some thinking 2001, but it was *after* 9/11, not before. That's part of why I did it, and partly why it was so popular, I think.)

The Sunday summer concert series, Music in the Park was already well underway, organized at the time by Guy Meyer. And yes, Beatles in the Park. (The Liddypudlians, or "Liddies" was the kick-off event to the summer concert series.)

After 12 seasons, it was time to say we'd done our bit (we'd done a dozen shows "au gratis"... with some additional concerts at other venues... one of which was in '07... the 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the

Summer of Love concert at the Monterey Pop Festival, as well as the 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Sgt. Pepper. I was hired by The Sun Kings, arguably the premier bay area Beatles tribute band at the time, to bring horns, strings, Tom Holmes, the tabla player from the White Album Ensemble, whose name escapes me, and myself, down to the Monterey Fairgrounds to perform Pepper in its entirety. And of course we crushed it!), (Back to the story)

and made a ton for the town (of San Anselmo)...

and let's just say that music and politics sometimes just don't mix.

But the event (Beatles in the Park) itself is still going strong!

So from my end, it was a labor of love, a dream that was literally decades in the making!

I spent probably 400 hours the first year preparing the charts and hand-picking the band and the set list. I was (and am) blessed to know and to be friends with so many great and talented musicians, singers, and people that I'd known from decades of rock and roll and the local theater circuit (I've been a musical director in Marin for children's and community theater since 1978, and a rock 'n roller longer than that), and even more blessed that they all said yes!

They are part of the incredible talent pool that is Marin County! And it was a bonus to have their incredible talents shared.

Ultimately it was an homage to the most beloved band ever, but also to their genius producer/arranger, Sir George Martin.

After the first year, I spent maybe 100 hours a year preparing etc., always with the intention of outdoing myself and the set from the previous year, adding new songs, inviting a guest musician or two, always wanting to impress, blow minds, while keeping it family friendly and good fun!

I had the distinct fortune and pleasure of having great musicians and artists join in the fun over the years, notably, Tom Finch (Big Brother and the Holding Company), Bernie Chiaravalle (Michael McDonald band), Mario Cipollina (Huey Lewis and the News), Don Novello (Father Guido Sarducci, who fortuitously and hilariously warmed us up one year), Doug Morton (phenomenal piccolo trumpet solos!), Tara Flandereau (Former Music Department Chair at COM and violinist extraordinaire!), Tim Cain (Sons of Champlin), Revolver the band (Barry Blum, Michael Budash, Dan Durkin... who really took it to another level! Check out their new bands Petty Theft, The Illegals, and The Last Call Troubadors), and others, Ted O'Connell (R.I.P. way too early!), Frank Bohan, Bonnie Hayes, Suzie Davis, and of course our inimitable front men, Tom Holmes and Leon Bristow, (and countless other beloved and talented brother and sister performers)... all dear local buds!

There was concern the first year whether or not anyone would show up. I borrowed the motto from Field of Dreams: "If you build it, they will come". About 100 people came the first year, that number doubled the following year, and by 2013 something like 1500 (some from around the globe: Australia, Germany, East Coast) were packing the lawn, bridge, and trees! Since most of us rarely play for more than 5 people (except the extremely fortunate actual successful musicians), it was a fantasy, trip, elation, whatever extremely positive emotion you can muster, to experience all the joy that was shared. From a marshal art or meditation point of view, there was a lot of chi! Always going for what the Grateful Dead referred to as "the magic goodie!".

My favorite trick was to say, just before the encore, "and as we come to a close", to which the audience would respond with a collective groan, "but don't worry, as like Return of the King (or whatever was popular that year), we have 11 encores!" or some other joke to that effect.

The sheer enthusiastic numbers was of course a delight and surprise. While everyone came for the family picnic, and to hear all these

talented folks playing these beloved arrangements, we, band and audience alike, all felt so good by the end of the evening, in my mind, it really became somewhat of a group meditation. (Hey, for a reunion, let's just all grab some uke's and go for a sunrise on Haleakala!). It was a real blessing all the way around. Still is. Those were (and are) timeless moments (and memories). Best time of my life, and the accomplishment of which I am most proud, and the response and participation for which I am the most grateful. Of course, I can't take all the credit, the four lads from Liverpool and their genius producer had something to do with it. And yeah, we were pretty cool I guess, but the audience is really what made it!

I still hear to this day "Oh we miss you, and them horns! I want "my" horns! When are you coming back?" But, you know, every good thing comes to an end, sometimes it's just time to go. Like that.

But not without the deep appreciation. It was a mutual admiration society for sure.

Also consider the miracle of talking 25 or more talented musicians to do this incredible thing... for free... for 12 years. Kind of like Tom Sawyer getting his friends to help whitewash his fence.

It was time.

Central to the audience's inclusion was the "revolving" door of our delicious and full of wild abandon Liddypudlian chorus. They really became kind of a community access point, which helped all fifteen hundred (and 25) of us feel like one big happy family! Hearts were opened!

So yeah, just the fact that we built it, and that they came, was a good surprise. The one-inclusive-community-family feeling is the biggest takeaway and delight and surprise that I still take with me... and will always take with me, "you know I will". Sorry, I'm a sucker for Beatles lyric puns.

Oh, and a double rainbow during Lucy in the Sky with Diamonds certainly stands out! Auspicious!

Yes, I'm from Marin.

That 111 degree day was another standout. Never phased me I was having such a good time!

Another definite magic ingredient was the "room" itself, Creek Park.

The package: strings, horns, chorus, ringer Beatles players and singers, guest stars... and that "room" and town... and the audience!!!  
Magical!

Though the success of the event was and continues to be a delightful surprise, between super-talented local folks, a great and faithful audience, a beloved repertoire, and the park itself... what could go wrong? For a couple of years we ventured off to other venues as well, but nothing compared to the magic of the Creek Park event.

(Our band name The Liddypudlians is a play on words. Liddypol is a common affectionate term for Liverpool, dating back to at least 1950's British comedy, as well as to John Lennon's witty writing style. Other band names considered: Pepperland Tribe; Pre-Fab 24; Kumbaya with horns, Grateful Dead with horns... The Liddypudlians (Liddies) stuck, though no one could pronounce it. Heh.

The Liddies consisted of a 5-piece rhythm section, two lead singers, 5 horns, 4 strings, with a dozen or so in the chorus.)

Our... The Liddies... farewell concert was in 2013.

Joe Bagale and friends picked up the torch the following year. The word is that they are fab!

All You Need Is *LOVE LOVE LOVE!*