

# LIVING A ROCK 'N ROLL

# FANTASY

For one Long Island boy, recording in Abbey Road fulfills a life-long dream.

by BARRY SIMON

**If I had been told** as a young man in the throes of Beatlemania that I would one day sit in the same studio at Abbey Road Studios where The Beatles recorded, I would have said “yeah right—in my wildest dreams”!

As the Art Director of Trump magazine since its inception, I have had the opportunity to attend celebrity-filled parties, an Apprentice themed cruise and other luxury-themed events. Nothing however, could compare to the opportunity to attend Rock n Roll fantasy camp for one week in London and Liverpool!

Like millions, I was enthralled by The Beatles on Ed Sullivan in 1964. I followed the Beatles record releases religiously and was inspired by their every move. I came pretty close to wearing out the grooves on my copy of Rubber Soul. I took up the drums at 7 years old to emulate Ringo and never put the sticks down.

The camp would consist of forming a band with an assigned rock star, practicing songs at the legendary John Henry rehearsal studios in London and playing a Battle of the Bands concert at Abbey Road. Each of 7 bands would have 3 recording sessions in Abbey Road Studios. A bonus day would be a trip north to Liverpool where campers would have the opportunity to play at the Cavern Club—the club where The Beatles made their mark. It being the 40th anniversary of the release of Sgt. Pepper's made the trip even more special. Each day another rock star would drop in on the bands, have a chat and and sit in with the band.

The camp is owned by David Fishof, whom I met at his offices in Manhattan. When I saw a Marshall amp and an electric Epiphone guitar signed by Levon Helm (the drummer for The Band) in his office I knew I had arrived. After our conversation he said “this trip will change your life”—I thought that was a stretch.

David started out as a successful sports agent, but gained notoriety by reuniting The Monkees and later creating the All Starr Band around Ringo Starr.

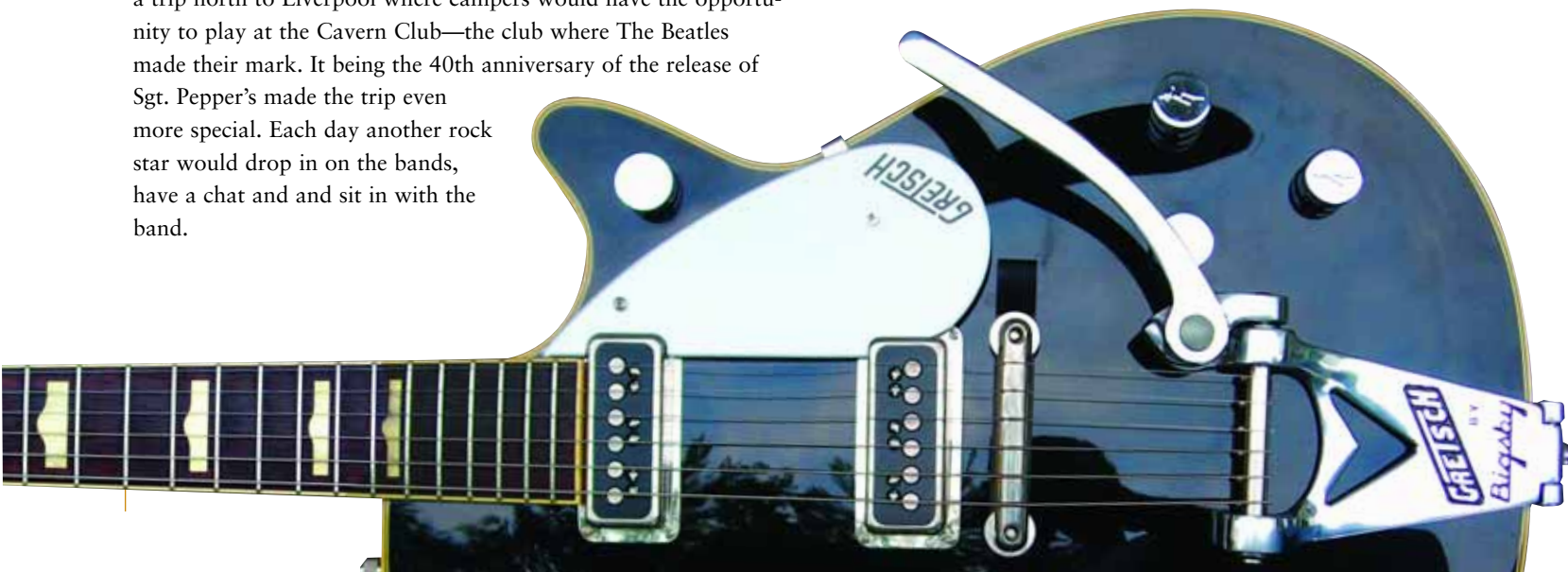
He started the camp back in 1997 but it really took off in 2001, when Roger Daltry of The Who popped in for a visit and wound up staying for 3 days.

Some of the celebrity rockers who have participated since include, Mickey Hart (Grateful Dead), Mark Farner (Grand Funk Railroad), Dicky Betts (Allman Brothers), Nils Lofgren (E Street Band) and Brian Wilson (Beach Boys).

This year there was a camp in Los Angeles, followed by London, then New York in August and Las Vegas in October. He has also expanded the camp to include corporate events



How do you get to Abbey Road? Practice!





**Abbey Road's famed studio #2**

Queen, Bruce Kulick of Kiss, Jamie Moses of Mike & the Mechanics, Mick Ralphs and Simon Kirke of Bad Company and Free.

The auditions were held on a stage at John Henry studios. The equipment provided was top-notch. Gibson guitars was a sponsor and they offered everyone an assortment

where attendees can work on self confidence and team building while getting up on stage to jam with rock stars.

**DAY 1—AUDITIONS & JACK BRUCE**

I was lucky enough to fly out of New York in business class on Maxjet. I was already feeling like a pampered rock star as I was handed a warm towel while playing with my handheld digital tv device. The legroom went for miles as I lay back to enjoy the ride.

The cost of the camp was by no means cheap—\$16,000 included a room at the very plush Mayfair Hotel on Green Park. Meals and the train trip to Liverpool were also included.

At the opening reception, I talked to a chap who I thought was a camper. I asked him what he played and if he was ever in a band. He said he played bass and used to be in a band called “Whitesnake.” oops..I just met Neil Murray, a camp counselor and he could not have been nicer about my faux pax. Then I met my pre-assigned counselor—Spencer Davis—known for his

60s hits with Stevie Windwood on “Gimme Some Lovin” and I’m a Man”. Before we arrived Spencer had emailed us a list of songs to learn ahead of time for our audition—but we did not know which one we would audition with.

Other counselors were Spike Edney of



**Bad Company's Mick Ralphs helped out during auditions.**



**John Henry studios provided top-of-the-line equipment.**

of basses and guitars to use for the week.

There we met our assigned band mates for the first time. My band mates were Joel, an Attorney from New Jersey (guitar), Wes, a Verizon IT Manager from Tampa (guitar), Craig, a detective from Sacramento (bass), Janet, a talent coordinator from Los Angeles (keyboard), Eric, an Attorney from Westchester (vocals) and Justin, a talented young musician from Jacksonville who won the trip through a



Pauls “Let It Be” piano

Guitar Center contest (guitar).

At the last second we learned that we would be auditioning with the Beatles “Norwegian Wood”. Seeing video cameras everywhere did not ease my stage fright. Our audition went well and soon after we went into a rehearsal room and worked on Spencer’s “Gimme Some Lovin” and the Stones “Honky Tonk Woman”. During this practice we were able to size up everyone’s experience level pretty quickly. When Joel asked how to play an “E” chord—I worried.

We were told to come up with a name for the band. Options that came up were “The Neurotics”, “Geriatric Pacemakers” and “Squatting Ovation”. After seeing a copy of Cream’s “Fresh Cream” on the floor—Spencer suggested “Sour Milk”—and everyone agreed.

As we were practicing we were treated to a visit by Cream’s Jack Bruce. He willingly posed for photos and signed autographs. My band mate Eric had brought photos he snapped at a Cream concert in New York in 1968. Jack was genuinely touched by the gesture. He then



Bill Wyman with Spencer Davis

took his custom fretless Gibson bass out and suggested we play “Sunshine of Your Love”. I was in total heaven as I played

drums with Cream’s bassist. After we finished, we were so dumbfounded that there was an awkward silence. I yelled out “I can die now and be happy!” Jack quickly said, “Well I tried that a couple times and I don’t recommend it!”

After lunch Jack did a sit down Q&A. He talked about the early days and joked how “Ginger Baker was born looking old”. He mentioned that after jamming with Jimi Hendrix, Eric Clapton started trying to play like him. He said it was a good thing he gave up and kept his own unique style. He also casually told an AP reporter that Cream was getting back together to play more gigs in the Fall. By the end of the day that news was on the web and all over the world.

## DAY 2—ABBEY ROAD & BILL WYMAN

In the morning we took a bus to Abbey Road Studios. As we debarked there was a fan with a camera waiting to see what rock stars were getting off the bus. Oh well, only us! We were told not to take photos in the hallway—only in the studios. We were then given a quick tour of the fabled facility. There were old antiquated tape machines, organs and mixing decks lining the halls. No doubt much of it used by the Beatles.

We went into studio #3 and were introduced to Chris Bolster, our engineer for the day. We were given headphones and quickly began recording. After recording we sat in the control room and sweetened the mix. I was in nirvana as I began to think where we were. Later when using the men’s room,

I couldn’t help but think to myself—I’m peeing in the same urinal that John Lennon did. What an odd thought.



Jack Bruce playing with Bruce Kulik and Simon Kirke

We then went into Studio 2 and had a Q&A with the Ken Townsend, the man who ran Abbey Road for 25 years, now retired. He had some amazing stories to share. One day The Beatles were in the control room asking him up to say they had a huge complaint—he arrived terrified and was told by John that the toilet paper is inadequate—it has EMI stamped on each sheet and was very rough! Later that day they went out and changed the paper in the whole building.



Randy Bachman with David Fishof

We then went back to rehearse at John Henrys. In the middle of learning “Honky Tonk Woman”, Bill Wyman the former bass player for the Rolling Stones showed



Engineer Chris Bolster at the helm

up. He joined us for a version and as I sat 2 ft. away from him while playing, I started to feel like Charlie Watts! I could not get the grin off of my face! We then had a Q&A with Bill. He talked about how the Stones met and formed with Brian Jones. He also mentioned that his favorite Stones albums are Exile on Main St., Beggars Banquet, Sticky Fingers and Let It Bleed. Naturally he is on all of them.

In the evening “Master Classes” were set up with the counselors. I sat in on a class with Mick Ralphs—he was in Mott the Hoople and wrote “All the Young Dudes” as well as all the hit songs for Bad Company. I also attended a drum clinic with Simon Kirke. When Simon asked if anyone wanted to come up and play drums with him, I yelled “I’ll have a go!” This was incredible—but more amazingly when I finished he asked “are you a lefty playing righty?” I said “yes—how did you know that?”

### DAY 3—GARY BROOKER & RANDY BACHMAN

I was already getting used to the drill: breakfast, off to the studio by bus to practice, a visit by a famous rock star, lunch, Q&A session, more practice, dinner, jam sessions. We were visited by Gary Brooker the organ player of Procol Harum and known for writing and singing the classic hit “Whiter Shade of Pale”. After he listened to us playing “Gimme Some Lovin” he made my week by saying to me “nice drumming kid!” Later we were surprised with a visit by Randy Bachman—of Bachman Turner Overdrive. His hits included “American Woman”, “You Aint See Nothing Yet” and Taking Care of Business”. He gave a great talk about song writing and what it takes to make it in the business.

### DAY 4—ABBEY RD STUDIO #2

Each day kept getting better and better—but this day topped all others as we were brought into Abbey Roads studio #2. This



The Battle of the Bands at Abbey Road

is where the Beatles recorded Sgt. Pepper, Let It Be, and so many others as well as “Dark Side of the Moon” by Pink Floyd. I saw the piano that Paul played “Let It Be”



on and actually sat down at it to play. In the corner is the upright piano that Paul played “Obla Di Oblada” on.

Here we worked with the engineer Robin Black who has worked with Black Sabbath, Pink Floyd, Paul Simon and many others. We recorded 3 songs including “With a Little Help from My Friends”. At this point I was having an out-of-body experience.

Back at John Henry’s to practice our songs, John Lord of Deep Purple came by and played “Gimme Some Lovin” with us on the keys.

We suddenly learned that the band who wins “best original song” would get the song included on a compilation CD. So we decided at the last minute to drop a Spencer Davis song in favor of

one of our own. After much drama and head banging we decided to go with one of Justin’s originals. In about an hour we had an arrangement down. We decided on our 3 songs for the concert. “Norwegian Wood”, “Gimme Some Lovin” and Justin’s “Sweet Surrender”. We were ready.

### DAY 5—BATTLE OF THE BANDS AT ABBEY RD

There were around 200 private invitees standing in the cavernous studio #1 at Abbey Road. The huge stage was set with the finest equipment, monitors and drums on a platform. Cameras were everywhere for the main event. The judges included Paul Rogers of Free and Bad Company and Kiki Dee, known for her recordings with Elton John. Luckily, Simon Cowell was nowhere to be seen.

We were the 2nd band up and after



A fantasy fulfilled—the author recording in Abbey Road



**Spike Edney of Queen leading a jam of Beatles songs on the train to Liverpool**

being introduced “Lady’s and gentlemen “Sour Milk”—I fiddled with the drum kit and the sound was enormous. One kick on the bass drum and the room thundered. What a thrill! Unfortunately nerves got to Eric our lead singer and he skipped the 2nd verse of “Norwegian Wood”—but we quickly recovered and made the best of it. Our remaining tunes kicked serious butt. When the awards were announced we won “Best Original Song” (every band won something). We were thrilled that we got that tune together at the last second!

**DAY 6—LIVERPOOL & THE CAVERN**

Last night was the climax for some campers but 40 of us were lucky enough to take a train in a 1st class cabin up to Liverpool. After Spike Edney led a Beatles singalong en route, I talked to him about how Ringo was my inspiration. He reminded me of John



flat and the house where George was born.

Finally we were dropped off on Matthews St.—home of The Cavern where we would prepare for our big finale concert.



From 1961 to 1963 the Beatles made 300 appearances at the Cavern. The club closed in 1973 and unfortunately was demolished. It was remodeled and reopened in the same spot in 1984.

But it wasn’t until the 1990’s that the club once again became a live music venue. In Dec 1999, Paul McCartney returned to play a show and gave the club further legitimacy.

During the show, I was lucky enough to get up and play “You Cant Do That”, “I Am the Walrus”



and “While My Guitar Gently Weeps”. Getting the chance to play at the Cavern with real rock heros was a highlight of my life!

**IS IT WORTH IT?**

The camp takes the rock star fantasy only so far. There was an no trashing of hotel rooms, no sex, drugs or groupies, at least not for me. This is not your usual vacation.

The rehearsals are long and the campers and counselors take it seriously. There is little time for shopping or sitting in the spa. Miss a rehearsal and you will hear it. But there’s no question we were treated exceptionally well

and experienced some amazing moments together. Our amps “went to 11” and were treated to the best equipment available. The counselors were all extremely knowledgeable, talented and helpful. And as for David Fishof’s promise that it would change my life—I couldn’t agree more. 📺



**Campers and guests enjoying the concert**



**The British campers proudly display their awards**