

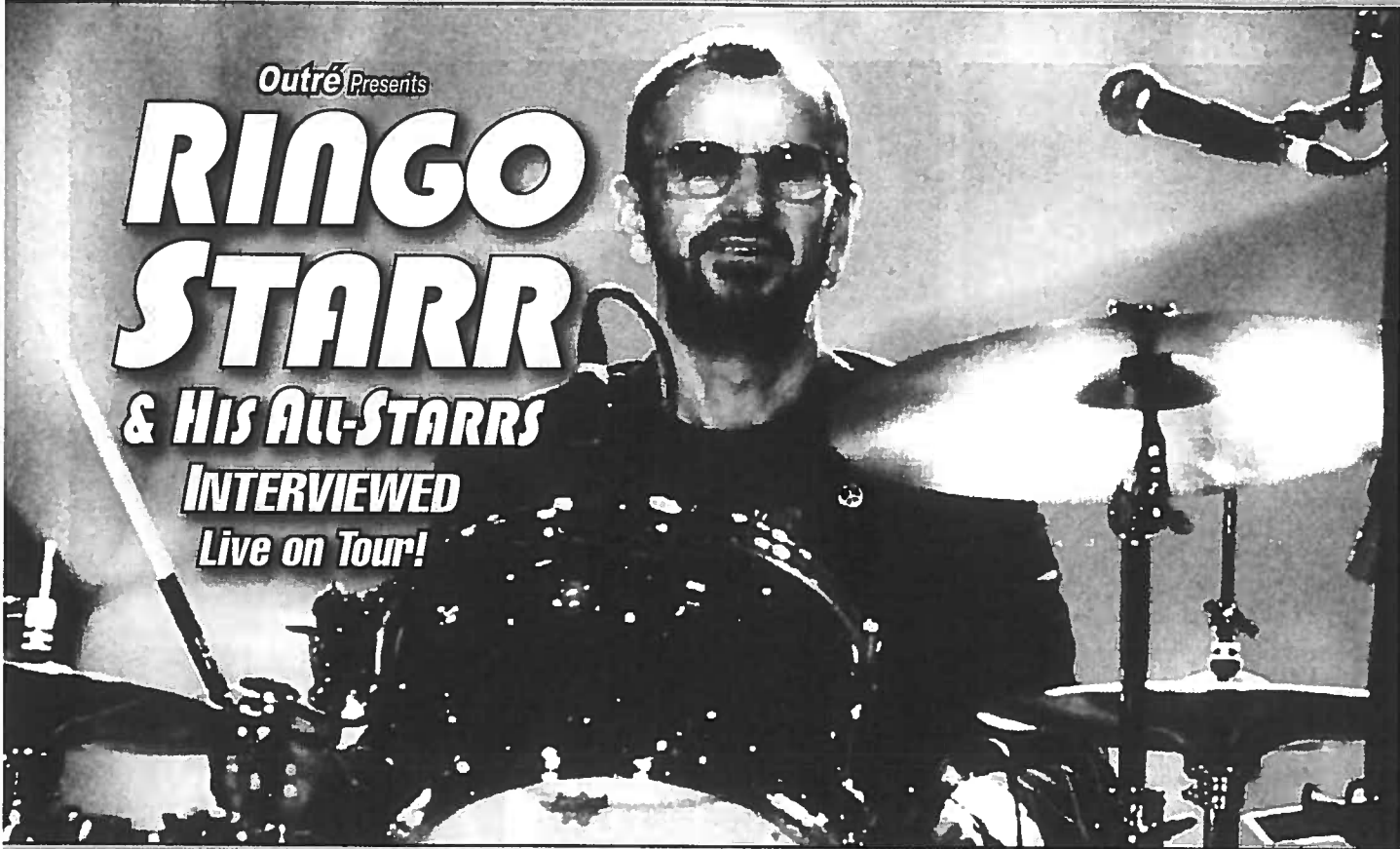
Outré Presents

RINGO STARR

& HIS ALL-STARRS

INTERVIEWED

Live on Tour!



An Evening Under the Stars with Ringo and his All-Starr Band!

Article and Interview by ALAN DOSHNA

THE BREAK-UP OF THE BEATLES SENT SHOCKWAVES throughout the popular culture which they had affected so profoundly, not only musically, but through movies, TV, the media arts in general, and the way the world viewed itself. Even so, as kind of a mitosis effect, each of the four mem-

bers would form their own group centered around themselves: John Lennon with The Plastic Ono Band, Paul McCartney with Wings, George Harrison with the Traveling Wilburys alongside superstars such as Roy Orbison, Tom Petty, Bob Dylan, and most uniquely, Ringo Starr with his All-Starr Band.

The supergroup, which is currently in its 12th (and longest running, since 2012) incarnation, kicked off the first leg of its most recent tour at the Lakeview Amphitheatre in Syracuse New York on June 3, 2016. Featured in this lineup besides the 50-ish looking and energetic Ringo, (just then one month shy of his 76th birthday) were Todd Rundgren (successful as a solo artist and with his power pop band Utopia), Gregg Rolie (Santana), Steve Lukather (Toto), Richard Page (Mr. Mister), drummer Gregg Bissonette, and saxophonist Warren Ham. The 21 city tour was scheduled from 6/3 through 7/2. A press conference was held in the afternoon prior to the two-hour concert which was attended by 4,000 fans, upon which material this article is based.

The All-Star Band, which was formed in 1989, is the co-creation of Ringo and entertainment producer and author David Fishof, who introduced the press conference. Fishof has produced a number of successful concerts and live tours including The Monkees' 20th Anniversary Reunion Tour, Dirty Dancing: The Concert Tour, Dick Clark's American Bandstand Tour, Mortal Kombat Live Tour, and others.

In contrast to the other "Beatle" bands, there would be a revolving membership which, since its formation would include doz-



Ringo signifies the spirit of the Sixties with his trademark peace sign salute.



Ringo is braced on-stage by guitarist-singer Steve Lukather and bassist Richard Page.

ens of members over time including Joe Walsh, Sheila E., Billy Preston, Felix Cavaliere (The Rascals) Eric Carmen (The Raspberries) John Waite (The Babys, Bad English) and many guest performers such as Bruce Springsteen and Ringo's own son Zak Starkey. The line-up's rotation depends on the musician's availability in relation to other projects.

Held together by the good-naturedly humorous "Starr" of the show, the band serves as a revolving showcase for some of the most popular and successful rock musicians of their time, who perform some of their best known and loved hits, or, as Ringo himself put it on his 2003 Tour CD where "everybody is a star in their own right."

Ringo has made a number of appearances in the Syracuse, New York area over the years. Most notable of these was on October 9, 1971 when he attended the first major art exhibition of former Beatle bandmate John Lennon's wife Yoko Ono at the Everson Museum. Titled "This is Not Here," the Avant-Garde exhibition also coincided with Lennon's 31st birthday. Other attendees included producer Phil Spector, poet Allen Ginsberg, and musicians Eric Clapton, Nicky Hopkins, Klaus Voorman, and Jim Keltner.

Most enthralling, however, was when word got out that preparations were being made for a midnight birthday celebration concert at the museum's theater. Rumor was that at least three of the former Beatles would be present for a "reunion" of the group. Although Paul McCartney was then estranged from ex-bandmate Lennon, and George Harrison was not able to make it, the resulting crowd assembling into the Everson necessitated that the concert be canceled.

"I remember absolutely nothing," was the response

he gave to a question about details pertaining to the allegedly planned concert, causing audience laughter: **RINGO:** I'm afraid I haven't got anything to tell you (laughs). I remember more now... but we came anyway, you know what I mean? That's all you've got to enjoy. I can stand here and say...it was like ten o'clock at night...I have no idea what happened.

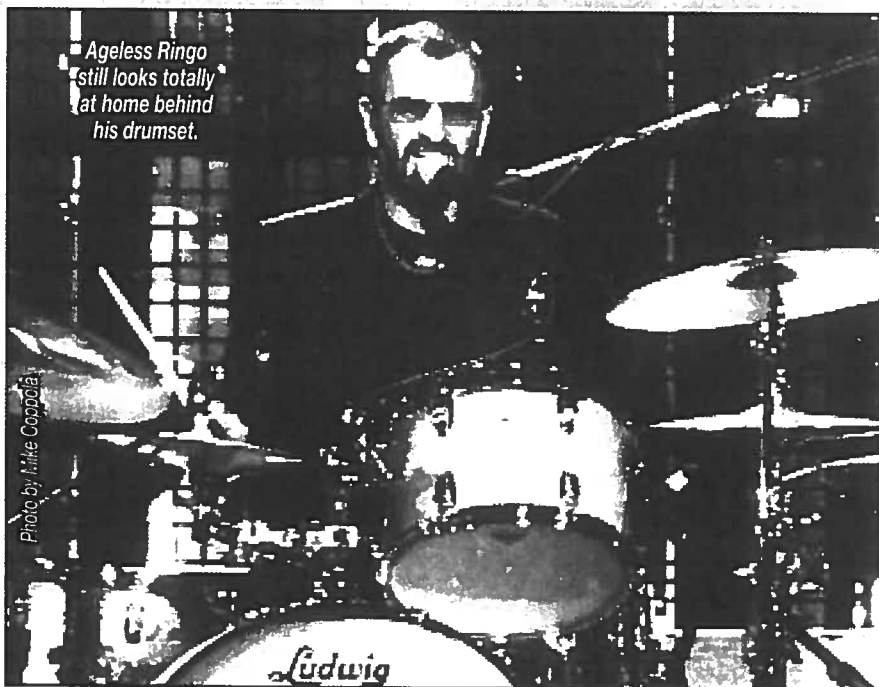
In the intervening years, Ringo has performed with the All-Starr Band at the historic Syracuse Landmark Theater in 2000 and at the Turningstone Casino resort in 2012. He was asked if there was any significance to starting his current tour in Syracuse:

RINGO: Well, you know, it makes our hearts sing to be here again... Really in all honesty, it's a beautiful place. And we happened to get the right weather and the band has been together for going on five years and we know what to do. You know, you're not getting a lot of sheds (covered amphitheater venue) lately. I was really thrilled that it was a shed. 'cause I don't know if this is the newest one ever built...So we're here because it's what we do and it's a great place to start.

Ringo would later joke at the start of the concert: "We're lucky because people built a brand-new venue just to have us."

When asked what makes this band special and why this particular line up was chosen:

RINGO: Why, (laughs) we've only been together actually four years and one week... But we're into our fifth year. We put this together, you know, it was a changeover. I had another band the next year we put this band together and it just worked so well and everyone gets on most of the time and we have a lot of fun and everyone on stage is a great musician and have great songs. And so I was asked like the next year, you know, "Do you want to go on tour? Well, ⇨



Ageless Ringo still looks totally at home behind his drumset.

Photo by Mike Coppola

what about that band?" They were all free, so that's how it started. Now, at the end of the tour this year it's different. We'll be doing the whole month of June and start of July, and then we're off until October, then we're all getting back together again because, you know, I hope they enjoy it as much as I do. (to band) Do you all enjoy it as much as I do? (claps, whistles). I don't know if that answers your question but that's it.

...(A)nd also for the very first time...we actually wrote and recorded a song on my last album. It's the first time I've gotten the All-Starrs to write and perform a song. After all these years that have gone on, since 1989, I've tried it and tried it, but it never worked, but with these boys, what a great time we're having. (Note: Song referred to is "Island in the Sun" from Ringo's 2015 *Postcards From Paradise* CD on which all of the members of the current lineup played, and all of whom received writing credit for the song).

Filmfax/Outre asked Ringo about his acting career, particularly if there was an actor or a film that inspired him as a young boy and which had an influence on his own work:

RINGO: TV influenced me. I loved Ida Lupino, Bridget (Bardot), and all the regulars. [Editor's note: Ida Lupino was a pioneering English-born actress, singer and director, the only woman to have been one of the latter within the 1950s studio system. Her later career as an actress, writer and director was mostly in television including, during the '50s, numerous appearances on *Four Star Playhouse* and co-starring in *Mr. Adams and Eve* with her then-husband Howard Duff.]

And there were some really great movies and a lot of really fine actors. You know, growing up, I didn't say, "Oh, I'm gonna be one of these." And I was 13 when I said, "I'm gonna be one of these," playing drums, and that didn't happen until I was 17. So no, I can't help you for *Filmfan* (sic) magazine. But I never thought I would be like one of them.

When asked how he picks band members for a given line-up:

RINGO: Well, I put great names together, I have a list. Sometimes they've been nominated... asked by their own management. Sometimes I've called them myself. And then you look down and you think "Wow, that's a great song. They're great songs." And so first of all, the band has to have hits. We are the best 1-800 going and we're all onstage together, we don't need 18 bands. We're all playing to support each other.

And, you know, I just pick people I feel I love and who would be great to play with. And 'til the first day of rehearsal, I have no idea if it's going to work. But this one worked



so well and was so supportive, it's just been a dream for me. And I was talking the other night with somebody about it, we're getting longevity as a band now. It's so far out. And I have no plans right now to change it. So if I'm going on tour and they're coming, that would be good for me.

Asked for his personal response to being invited to be part of the band, Todd Rundgren said this:

TODD RUNDGREN: I (have) seen pretty much the entire evolution of the band, because I was like in the third one back in 1993 or something, the first time I was in The All-Starrs. And yes, there is something substantially different about this particular line-up. Ringo's criteria usually is you just have to have three hit records sometime in your career. But nobody gets a psychological evaluation... (audience laughter). And so there's that factor sometimes, you know.

The other factor is that the people have three hit singles and that's the only thing they can play; they turn the volume off on the guitar for the rest of the set. So there's a



Ringo and his 2016 All-Starr Band. From left: saxophonist-percussionist Warren Ham, Ringo Starr, Toto guitarist-singer Steve Lukather, bassist Richard Page, drummer Greg Bissonette.

Ham, Santi
mer Gregi

combination of a certain kind of maturity in all of us and an experience in playing with the other musicians. I think that's part of it, but also we complement each other's material really well in a way that probably a lot of the other lineups couldn't do. Probably everyone can play everyone else's material as well as it can be played. And that's probably what makes us so kind of tight as a group, not just musically but we all realize we're doing our best for each other.

RINGO: And we have very little maturity... (audience laughter). (Asked about if it's still a thrill being active after all this time): I mean it's great. You know, I am a drummer. I need these guys, you know, I couldn't go on without them. It's a dream I had at 13, and I got the drums at 17, I was in a band three months later. And I've been grooving in bands (ever since), that's a joy for me. But playing? I love to play, it's what I do. And I get the opportunity to keep doing it. How great is that? It's a thrill, yeah. I'm playing a bit better than when I started (crowd laughter). It's still a thrill.

Other members of the ASB, all accomplished musicians in their own right, commented on their own personal experiences with the band:

GREG ROLIE: Well, for me it took about two years, every time I'd turn around and see Ringo) I'd say "Holy crap, what am I doing up here?" And then it settled down. But the main thing is, the music itself, it's all so eclectic and different, but somehow because this is a band we make it sound like this band. And as far as playing goes, if I couldn't play the way I play now, I'd quit. It's got to have a feel; it has to feel like something. And all of this stuff does. Everything I've been doing has been that way, or I just wouldn't do it. I'm a pain about that. I'm playing better now than I ever was.

GREG BISSONETTE: As a drummer, (I'm) looking over five feet away and here's my favorite drummer ever, to me the greatest song



Photos by Ethan Miller



Ham, Santana keyboardist-singer Gregg Rolie, drummer-singer-songwriter Greg Bissonette, and guitarist-singer-songwriter Todd Rundgren.

drummer who ever lived, that changed the game of musical drumming. The thrill is every single day. What an honor!

RINGO: Thank you Greg (makes movement as if to place cash into Greg's inner jacket pocket. Audience laughter).

In terms of a personal favorite among his own song repertoire, Ringo had this to say:

RINGO: It's hard, you know, when you write. I mean I love "Back Off Boogaloo." We do "Photograph" (in terms of) my solo singles. I put back into the gig a couple of Carl Perkins numbers (like) "Matchbox." I can't really say, "Oh, yes *that* record." Usually, it's the record you just put out. We did one I was (just) talking about, "Island in the Sun," it's great. But I'm starting a new record and every one is beautiful to me. 'Cause I'm working with other writers, other musicians so I can't really say and if I do say, it'll be held against me for the rest of my life: "Oh, it's *that* one!" (Audience laughs). So I love them all really. I love some of them but there's not one, like, okay, you know, it's not like Rain. That was with the other band. But my solo work... I'm just so grateful I'm still at it. (Note: just before performing "What Goes On" from the classic *Rubber Soul* LP, that night, where the writing credit goes to Lennon, McCartney and Starkey, Ringo whose real last name is Starkey, had a little fun at the expense of his former bandmates: "It should have been the other way, but I'm easygoing").

When asked for his reaction to now-deceased singer, Syracuse University alum and fellow Rock and Roll Hall of Fame inductee Lou Reed's comment that the Beatles were "garbage," Ringo took the high road:

RINGO: I do like Lou Reed (laughs). But, you know, everyone didn't like us. Some of them couldn't understand us, some thought we were worthless. But thank God the majority didn't think like that.

The band was asked for a song that "summed up their lives."

STEVE LUKATHER: Well, the "on switch" of my life was seeing these guys on *The Ed Sullivan Show* and the first song that really got inside me was "I Saw Her Standing There." I never thought I'd be "standing here" right next to him. So it's a great honor for me.

RICHARD PAGE: Too many to name. Of course, I remember as a kid trying to figure out "Day Tripper" on a guitar. I mean, "How did they figure that out?" So I would just say too many to name, but certainly the Beatles would be right up there.

TODD RUNDGREN: I have a soft spot for "Roll Over Beethoven" because it was the first time I ever noticed a bass drum on a



record. I heard it like in a pizza shop that had a big juke box with an 18 inch speaker in it. And it was the first time I ever noticed a bass drum, *his* bass drum. So that was like the transformative moment for me I realized there was stuff down below the guitar actually going on in there somewhere.

RINGO: I can just jump in there. If you listen to the early Beatle tracks, you know we didn't have a lot of room 'cause there were only four of them. Whenever they would lower something to get something else on, they would always lower the bass drum. So on a lot of records, I'm like, "Where the hell is the bass drum?" And the Remasters are GREAT! **GREG BISSONETTE:** For me, "You Can't Do That." People are talking about what a great drummer Ringo is, but he did percussion on so many of these songs. Listen to the cowbell on "You Can't Do That." When it comes in it just lifts up the whole song. That song always resonated with me since I first heard it and that's the one for me.

GREG ROLIE: "Please Please Me." I think I was about 15 when I heard that, before any-

body had ever heard about the Beatles in California where I was. It was on this little clock radio. I had it on and it came... I went to sleep to this thing and it came on the first time... "What the hell was that?" I never heard anything like it. So it's always stuck with me, that song.

WARREN HAM: "With a Little Help from My Friends," which we do in the set. *Sergeant Pepper's* had such an impact on me when I was a kid, so this is a dream come true.

RINGO: You know, the first record that blew my mind was little Richard, "Good Golly Miss Molly" in the '50's. I mean, I couldn't believe that *wild* record. I'm used to being... I mentioned this before, the BBC never played rock and roll and there was a station in Luxembourg, a very small country near Switzerland and they had the biggest antennae in the world. But we got it in England and it was just so great. So at four o'clock every afternoon my friend Roy and I, that's all we did, go and listen to this radio. And we heard Eddie Cochran you know, as I said, Little Richard, Bo Diddley, Chuck Berry, all those people, so you know I can't think "Oh, it's that!" It's like the broad spectrum of what I hear... You know, Ray Charles, Stevie Wonder's first album *On the Beach*. Awh! It's too far out. I love music. Thank you.

Syracuse journalist Katrina Tulloch had this to say about the actual concert that evening: "As a result, Ringo and his "All-Starrs" delivered a fascinating Frankenstein's monster of a show, cobbled together with covers of different rock genres. Somehow, it worked." (Ironically and coincidentally, her comment is oddly appropriate. A number of films Ringo has appeared in have had sometimes prominent references to the Frankenstein monster, such as in *Yellow Submarine* (1968), his "Back Off Boogaloo" music video, *Son of Dracula* (1974), and *Lizstomania* (1975). Although it may now be a hackneyed allusion, it is also probably more true now than it has ever been: "He got by with a little help from his friends." Ω

