

THE FINE ART OF THE FAB 5

Tributes are all the rage. Particularly when it comes to the kings of the British Invasion: The Beatles. One Houston-area band has kept their fan flame burning brightly for years, with little sign of slowing down. Meet these Beatles, and feel the passion that's driven their success for two decades.

By Dave Muscari

On any given night in in Houston performance halls, you can likely catch a band paying homage to their rock heroes.

One of the best known tribute-groups is The Fab 5. The Texas-based Beatles band has played the mop tops' timeless pop music for years, faithfully recreating their songs down to the very last chord.

Five talented players sport authentic Carnaby Street fashion and vintage Hofner, Rick-enbacker, Gretsch and Ludwig instruments, VOX amplifiers and all the trappings that separated the band of from the rest of the day's British musical invasion.

Joe Baiardi sings and plays bass and guitar in the group. The native New Yorker knows the territory well: He played in high school bands before forming a Beatles tribute band, Rubber Soul, back in 1979.

He moved to Houston in 1988. In 1999, he was offered the role of Paul McCartney in a Beatles tribute act, Come Together, which toured nationally. The gig led to performing with the cast of Beatlemania, as their McCartney fill-in for original cast members. Baiardi joined The Fab 5 in 2003.

We caught up with the landmark Houston band for their side of the story.

"The Fab 5 was started by the love of performing 1960s music back in 1990," says Baiardi. "There were no tribute bands in motion at that

time, especially in Texas."

Ironically, the Houston group has lasted longer than the Fab Four's career ever did.

So is there a secret to playing music together so successfully for so long?

Baiardi puts it like this: "You must have the spirit to play this music, and not just play the music."

"It takes a lot of discipline, work and drive to be accurate in recreating the music, and we were lucky to have players who excelled at this."

For some fans, it seems like they think the guys *are* The Beatles.

"Sometimes, they do," says Baiardi. "We constantly get comments from fans telling us that we sound just like the recordings. After all," he adds, "that is the highest compliment in being in a tribute band. With us it is also a treat as we perform songs that The Beatles could never perform live in the 1960s due to a long list of technological issues."

Is there a preferred Beatle, or maybe even a definitive period of music for The Fab 5?

"Our favorite would be 1966-69," says Baiardi, which includes influential recordings such as "Revolver," "Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band," "Magical Mystery Tour," "The Beatles" (otherwise known as "The White Album") and more. "It was the most challenging with orchestration, yet the most melodic," he adds.

For the guys in The Fab 5, seeing the real band members perform is always a pleasure. Baiardi says he's seen Paul McCartney three times and Ringo once.

He also met John Lennon in 1977 on a New York street.

"I attended a McCartney sound check on November 14, 2012," he recalls.

"When Paul asked over the microphone, 'How did it sound?' I shouted, 'It sounds great,' to which Paul replied, 'I wasn't talking to you, I was talking to the sound man.'"

Nevertheless, he was happy all the same. "Hey, a Beatle spoke to me," he laughs.

On July 21, The Fab 5 is set to play the House of Blues, a special "anthology" show, and again on August 12 with the Texas Medical Orchestra Center at the Miller Outdoor Theatre.

"It's basically three sets of Beatles music," explains Baiardi.

"First, it's songs from 1963-66, or the 'early black suit set,' then, the 1967-68 'Sgt. Pepper' set, followed by a 1969-70 set from the 'Abbey Road'/'Let It Be'-era."

Is there an expiration date on The Fab 5?

"Hopefully, it will go on forever," he says, maybe half kidding.

"All you need is love ... and The Fab 5."

Don't miss The Fab 5's summer performances on July 21 & August 12. For more information, visit www.TheFab5.net.



Art: Autumn Beckman and Tim Green