

PAUL McCARTNEY ROCKS QUEBEC CITY!

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The Day John and Paul Met

A Beatles fan and artist recreates one of the most important moments in rock 'n roll history

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The Day John and Paul Met



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The sixth of July in 1957 was uncommonly cool for a midsummer day, but just right for a bike ride through the small, tree lined town of Woolton. With a guitar strapped over one shoulder and trying not to let the rushing breeze ruin twenty minutes of meticulous coiffing of his near perfect DA, the fifteen-year-old stops his bike alongside a massive oak tree on the grounds of St. Peter's Church. Dismounting, he leans the bike against it. Alongside the tree are four other bikes that seem to have found their way to the same resting spot. After a brief look around for a familiar face, he readjusts his guitar strap and checks his hair in the reflection of a car window he passes as he walks through a small parking area. He makes his way to the festival thinking that if he just keeps walking towards the crowd, he'll eventually run into a mate or two or, more specifically, the friend who had invited him. The promise of cute birds and live skiffle was enough to get him out of the house on an otherwise lazy Saturday. He arrives late in the afternoon. The large field behind the church is full of tents, picnic tables and, most of all, people. The air is filled with the sound of children laughing, people chatting, game barkers and of distant music. The festival is a yearly happening for the little Merseyside village, bringing the locals together for a day full of games, food, socializing and music. The

music ranges from marching bands to something geared more toward the younger set.

As he walks, the teen begins to veer towards the music, drawn to it like a moth to a flame. Approaching the stage, Paul McCartney recognizes the song as one of his favorites, but this version is a little different. A crude version of Gene Vincent's "Be-Bop-A-Lula" is being belted out like an auctioneer without a microphone trying to be heard in the back of the room. One guy is scratching on a washboard. Another is on a makeshift bass – a wooden tea chest box with a broom handle stuck into the top. Two other guys are on guitar. One of them, the lead singer, is playing only three strings and making up most of the words. A fifth player sits behind a serviceable but modest drum kit, its bass skin emblazoned with the words "Quarry Men".

Before the song ends, the observer hears his name being called out from behind. "Hey, McCartney!" Paul turns around to see his mate from school coming towards him. Ivan Vaughn is a very likeable sort, always ready with a joke or a laugh. He has always been one of Paul's best friends, having both gone to The Liverpool Institute together. He feels a particularly special kinship with Ivan because they were both born on the exact same day. Ivan remarks, "It's about time you got here. Did you get lost?"

As they talk, the Quarry Men finish up their last set. The two friends start to walk around the festival eyeing the cute girls and taking in the spectacle of the activities. After a while, Ivan says, "Let's go back over to the stage and you can meet the guys in the band". They learn that the band has adjourned to the St. Peter's Church Hall, an auxiliary building used for social gatherings located just a short walk away across Church Road.

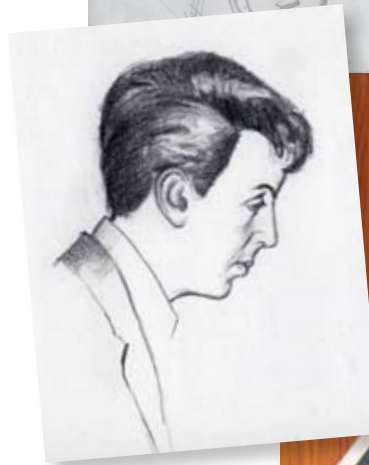
The pair cross the street and walk through a side door in the Victorian building. Walking into the long room, they see all kinds of activity. A few church workers are moving tables and chairs. Others are decorating the walls with streamers and balloons. The late afternoon sun stretches across the parquet floor. The hall has the look of a well-worn living room, a warm inviting room where many things take place. It has many functions, from schoolroom to playhouse to party room to town hall meeting place. As the two young men take in all the activity, they spot the Quarry Men sitting around in chairs in front of the stage at the far end of the room. They approach the band. As Paul and Ivan walk up, there is a pause in the conversation. Ivan walks up to one member of the group and says. "Paul, this is John, John Lennon. John, this is my friend Paul McCartney..."

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Fast-forward 11 years. I am eight years old and lying on my bed, drawing the usual pictures of football players, monsters and racecars. There is no radio in the room. Radios and music were things adults, older teenagers or at least my sisters paid attention to. I was just too busy being a kid. Music was sort of a background noise that came from my sister's room. We shared in those days what was called a "Jack and Jill" bathroom. A bathroom stuck in the middle of two bedrooms with equal access from both sides. The bathroom doors on both ends were always open, and gave me access, whether wanted or not, to all the noise and music from their room. It was during this typical setting that I noticed the music was a little louder on this day. I took note of the song that was playing and the chorus of "Nay, Nay, Na, Na Na Na Na, Hey Jude." It was very catchy and really caught my attention. It seemed to go on forever, so I started singing along. Later that afternoon, I heard it again and asked my oldest sister who it was. She showed me the new 45 RPM single she had just bought. Of course, I knew the Beatles. I did actually like *Paperback Writer* from a couple of years earlier, but listening to *Hey Jude* really set the hook.

At about the age of thirteen, I started becoming more serious about drawing and painting. By this time, I was a full-fledged Beatle Freak. Listening to their music and drawing their images became a natural progression for me. The Beatles just seemed to have something different. Obviously great music, but it was so much more than that. Something you just couldn't pinpoint. They seemed so all-knowing, seemingly above all other groups. It was as if they knew something about the world no one else knew. The Beatles were more than just a pop group. They were part of us and they seemed to belong to everyone individually. Even to this day, every Beatle fan seems to have their own personal relationship with them, as if they're singing just to them alone. I am one of these people. The Beatles quickly became my favorite subject to paint. Once I became a professional painter, I carried this passion over into my work. Painting images of the group became the easiest yet the most challenging subject for me. The passion has always been there, but the challenge became personal. It meant so much for me to get the image just right, so that the viewer could see through my eyes.

In the summer of 2007, I was visiting with my Dallas Beatle buddy (and *Beatology* writer) Mark Naboshek. We were discussing the fact that the 50th anniversary of the first meeting of Lennon and McCartney had arrived and that the Quarrymen were going to be at The Fest for Beatle Fans that August to commemorate it. We talked about how amazing it was that Lennon's Quarry Bank High classmate Geoff



An array of reference material Eric used to research his painting, including archival photographs of images from that period (top). Eric's linear sketches (right) used to determine the composition of the figures and peripheral elements.



Rhind had taken an image of the band on that very day when Lennon and McCartney first met — the iconic Woolton Fete photo. Mark and I wondered what it would have been like if Rhind had followed Lennon and The Quarrymen with his camera all afternoon and taken a shot of the meeting between John and Paul on that fateful summer day in 1957. We talked about how the meeting had been described in detail in magazine articles and books for decades, but there had never been an image of it. In 2000, an NBC television movie called *The John Lennon Story* had beautifully recreated the meeting, actually filming it in the church hall. Even so, neither of us had ever seen it illustrated in any way.

Then Mark said, "You know, that would be a great painting for you to do. No one has ever seen that actual image." I knew right then that it

would be a major undertaking, but the notion excited me. I would literally have to start from scratch like a Rockwell — just an idea. Norman Rockwell has always been my artistic hero. I have loved his work since I was a kid and once I became a professional painter/illustrator, I really started to appreciate him even more — his work ethic, his commitment to a subject and how diligently he put together a painting from scratch. I thought this might be fun to approach it as Rockwell would have approached it. I began

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the enormous undertaking imagining how they might be sitting around in the church hall passing the time, waiting for their next show. So I just started doodling, just simple shapes. Rockwell used to start every painting the same way, with a doodle of a lamppost. "Hey, you got to start somewhere," he would say. Soon, the lamppost might have a drunken sailor on shore leave leaning against it. That would lead to a sailor darning his own socks or getting another tattoo of another girl in another port. My doodles turned into a rough sketch, progressing along enough that it was now time to make some real decisions about the composition. I had to begin really fleshing out the picture.

As far as the approach, composition and angle to use, I wanted to create a feeling of being there. I wanted the viewer to be like a fly on the wall, as if they were fortunate enough to see this legendary moment in time actually take place – as if we were clairvoyant and knew it was going to be a colossal moment in history. Not to look away, not to dismiss it as if it were just a bunch of teenagers milling around with guitars. I added the table and the guitar in the foreground to create a feeling that you are sitting there, watching this take place. Rockwell

used this visual trick a lot. It gives a painting a personal feeling and it gives the picture depth.

I used a little artistic license with the lighting. The meeting would have happened in the late afternoon after the second set outside. The church hall had these great tall windows at the far end of the room, the opposite end from the stage. However, I changed the angle of the light in order to create drama and visual appeal with long late afternoon shadows that stretch out across the floor. Doing this would also help create a visual flow to the focal point.

I compiled most of my visual references from the book *The Day John and Paul Met* and the *John Lennon Story* movie and found facial images of the young Quarrymen in a number of books and in Mark's original Quarry Bank and Liverpool Institute class photos from the 1950s. I also spent some time at the 2007 Chicago fest talking to the Quarrymen who were present that day (Len Garry, Rod Davis and Colin Hanton).

This is, in my humble opinion, the most likely scenario of the meeting. The Quarrymen are in between sets, having a seat, relaxing a bit in the hall they will play in later in the evening. After finishing the set outside and knowing they

will play inside the church hall in a few short hours, they move their equipment. While they sit, they have some refreshments. The drinks were most likely tea or soda but not the adult variety. As Quarrymen banjo player Rod Davis told me at the fest: "There was no beer. There was no way we could have snuck in a pint past that Vicar. I knew him from going to school at one point in that church hall." This, of course, counters the age-old McCartney recollection that a drunk Lennon came up behind him as he played his guitar, breathing down his neck with his beery breath.

I thought this painting needed to tell a story. With all the components in place, the painting is like a jigsaw puzzle. The pieces are lying there for the viewer to use to put the picture together. It's much more fun for viewers to solve the puzzle on their own – as opposed to being handed a completed puzzle.

One version of the story claims that they met behind the stage in a dressing room. Another states that they met in the church hall during a break (as I have depicted). Even one more has them meeting in a Boy Scout tent outside in the fairgrounds. It's almost impossible to get everyone to agree on one

version. The scenario I have used has the most backing and seems to me the most logical anyway. I showed the finished sketch to the remaining members of the Quarrymen and no one seemed to question it. Of course, this may have been just polite English manners and not a confirmation. The definitive account *The Day John and Paul Met* also corroborates this story. But still there has never been an actual visual image of the meeting.

After deciding on the composition and lighting, I started thinking "well if they are a band relaxing in between sets, what would be around them and what would they be doing?" I started jotting down a list: ciggies, paper cups, tea cups, plates, etc. After I had established this main image in mind and on paper, I recruited some teenagers around the same age from my church to pose as models. I collected the props together with some typical metal church folding chairs. I admittedly used a little artistic license here because I wanted to depict those beige metal folding chairs typically found in churches all over. I wanted to help give the St. Peter's church hall that same familiar feeling.

I made one request of my models as part of their preparation for posing. I asked them not to wear baggy bellbottoms or tennis shoes and to wear a button-up long-sleeve shirt that we could roll up since all the members in the Quarrymen are wearing shirts like that in the Geoff Rhind's famous photo from that day. I brought along a plaid long-sleeve shirt so the boy posing as Lennon could roll up his sleeves (as John did in the Rhind photo).

Attracted by the promise of pizzas and sodas, the teens all showed up at the church at the designated time. I arrived armed with five large pizzas and a twelve pack of soda and they arrived wearing exactly what I'd told them not to wear – baggy t-shirts, bell-bottoms and tennis shoes! Despite the fashion faux pas, I was able to position them and shoot some photos of the assembled group from the second step on a stepladder. This offered the perfect viewpoint for the whole painting. I let them sit there and chat for about twenty minutes. I wanted to attain a natural feel, with their postures, their expressions and their overall interaction casual and loose, just like it had been with the Quarrymen fifty years earlier. Not all the shots worked out and, consequently, I had to take more shots later with the correct clothing using my friend (and Beatles collector) Steve McNutt as the model for every figure in the painting – seven in all! I then had to put the separate images together, using Photoshop to create a single, workable composition. As the sketches got more and more developed, I began adding more detail. The hymnals, the bulletin board, and the church workers were all incorporated to give clues to the picture and to help tell the

story. One detail led to another. Most small town church halls are used for a variety of things including lower level grade school, town meetings, recitals, parties and the like. I wanted to imbue the hall with a real sense of importance to the community.

One particularly tough challenge was finding historically accurate facial images of Paul and the Quarrymen – images true to their age and appearance on the day of the Woolton Fete. Now I had to put the real faces on the models I'd used. On the day they met in July 1957, Paul was fifteen and John was sixteen. I had to find shots of them from that approximate age and then find reference shots of them from their early Beatle years (which were readily available) that displayed the expressions I wanted. I would then have to morph the two together and literally turn back the clock through many sketches and trial and error.

Paul's image has the look of someone who is confident in his abilities, but a little apprehensive being introduced to a group of guys that seem older, even if only because they're in a band. Paul's figure is a little separated from the rest, hands in his pockets to show an ease about him, but standing up straight to seem older and more mature than he is. Paul recognizes Quarrymen tea chest bass player Len Garry because they're classmates from the Liverpool Institute. The Quarrymen are all sitting around in a relaxed position talking, strumming on guitars, etc. John's expression is one of nonchalance, as if he's saying "Oh now who's this guy, then?" He also has a look of curiosity on his face because Paul looks a bit like Elvis — with the distinct look of a rocker. The lone banjo belongs to Rod Davis. Rod has long admitted that he can't really remember the legendary meeting, maintaining that he must have been in the loo or gone home for dinner. As it happens, I needed an empty chair in the composition to give it a real-life feel. So it was just the right fit. His banjo is there representing the absent Davis while also providing the presence of a quirky instrument one might find in a skiffle group. A washboard or a tea chest bass would be too obvious and create an accidental focal point. But a banjo fit perfectly, filling two roles. It represented Rod as well as a typical instrument from a non-typical form of music.

When people ask me how long it took to complete the painting, the technical answer is that it took about six to eight months – from my initial doodles to signing my name on the finished canvas. The real answer is that it took me about forty years – starting at the age of eight, when I first heard their music all those years ago in my bedroom. Everything I do artistically is a culmination of all I've done and feel about a subject and its meaning is how I relate it to my life.

On July 6th, 1957, Paul McCartney and John Lennon met for the first time in a small, unassuming church hall in Liverpool, England. Together they became heroes of an era, poets of a generation. Like all heroes and poets, they both reflected and expressed the spirit of their time. They were two friends that challenged and encouraged each other in life and in music. Even to this day it's hard to separate the pair. When you hear the name Paul McCartney, it's hard not to think of John Lennon, and vice versa. They will always be associated with each other, like two sides of the same coin, peanut butter and jelly, yin and yang. They were brothers, collaborators, rivals, equals, opponents and best friends – two young men who captured our attention and imagination and created a music revolution that would change the world forever.



Special Thanks

To Mark Naboshek, who without his encouragement and support this painting might never have happened. Mark was able to keep me pointed in the right direction and focused, when I found myself in the weeds from time to time. He also was able to lend his considerable talent for the written word, in clean up duty for this article.

To Steve McNutt, who came through for me in the clutch, by pinch-hitting with the modeling on more than one occasion without complaint. Steve discovered that being a Beatle, or in this case two Beatles, isn't all it's cracked up to be. **BM**

Eric Cash is a commercial artist and Beatles collector from Dallas, Texas. To see more of his art visit his website at ericcashillustration.com. He can also be contacted for commissions by phone at 214-341-8761 or by email at cash.e@sbcglobal.net.

To order limited edition prints of Eric's painting, visit www.beatology.com and click the painting on the main page to go to the order page.