

Classic

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DRUMMER

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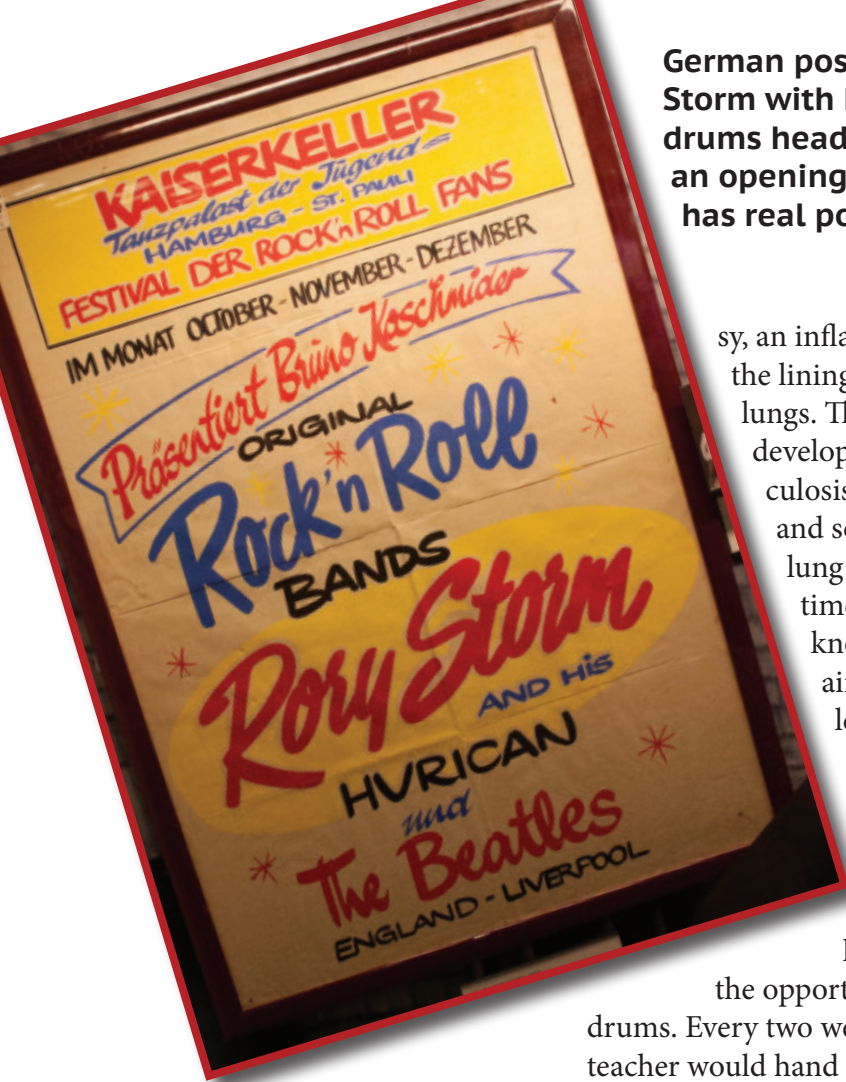
A Starr is Born



The Little Known History of Ringo's Pre-Ludwig Kits

Gary Astridge, recognized as the foremost authority on Ringo's Beatle era equipment, has gotten busier and busier since *Classic Drummer* first began working with him over a year ago. In addition to working with Ringo's team to set up exhibits of some of the most historically significant drums on the planet, he's appeared at Rob Cook's Chicago Drum Show, NAMM, The Memphis Drum Show, the PASIC Convention and more. His workshops and seminars are fascinating, his website is a cool place to visit, and these days he's supporting Ringo and Barbara Starkey's Lotus Foundation charity as the exclusive authorized distributor for limited edition prints of "The World's Most Famous Snare Drum"; Ringo's 1963 Ludwig Oyster Black Pearl Jazz Festival snare drum. Thankfully, Gary has slowed down long enough to share this informative column on Ringo's beginnings as a drummer and his little-known pre-Ludwig, drums along with the music they helped create. Enjoy.

By: Gary Astridge



German poster of Rory Storm with Ringo on drums headlining with an opening act that has real potential.

sy, an inflammation of the lining around the lungs. This condition developed into tuberculosis, an infectious and sometimes fatal lung disease. At the time, the best cure known was fresh air and convalescence that could last as much as two years. It was during this period that little Richy had

the opportunity to play drums. Every two weeks, a music teacher would hand out percussion instruments to the sick children and Richy always preferred a drum over maracas, tambourines and the like. He was released from the hospital in late 1955 and with so much time away from school, it was decided that he focus on a trade instead of education.

During Christmas of 1956, Richy's stepdad, Harry Graves, travelled to Romford, northeast of London to visit his parents for the holidays. While there, Harry sought out and purchased for very little money, a 1930's drum kit for his stepson. He carefully managed to bring his luggage and drum kit back to Liverpool by train and taxi. With Richy and his family living in a two up-two down row house, it didn't take long for neighbors to complain about the noise. Speculation has it that this could be the reason why

Richy never liked to practice alone.

Ringo has been quoted as saying: "My dream, which I had at 13, was to play drums. I remember it so well and I would walk around Liverpool looking in music stores just at the drums. Anyway, my stepdad bought me the first kit of drums which were like \$20, £12 English and that's how it started. I just started hitting them, I had no lessons. It was lucky in those days that if you had the instrument, you were in the band. It's just that I love the sound of them, the depth of them, what they give me, you know? It's just my instrument, you know, that's what I wanted to play."

On April 23, 1958, Richy purchased a new drum kit from Hussy's Music Store in Liverpool. It was an Ajax Edgware single-headed drum kit costing £68 (\$116 as of this writing). The sales agreement described the kit as consisting of a bass drum, toms, a side drum and bongos in a wrap called Black Elegance, which I would call Black Diamond Pearl. Ringo jumped into the deep end of the music scene and joined the Eddie Clayton Skiffle Group and later, Rory Storm & the Hurricanes.

It was in September of 1960 when Richy, now Ringo Starr, decided on upgrading to a Premier drum kit costing him an estimated \$215 in today's money. The color was Mahogany Duroplastic and the kit consisted of a 4"x14 Royal Ace snare drum, a 12"x 8" tom, a 16" x 16" floor tom and a 20" x 14" bass drum. He purchased this kit just prior to leaving for Hamburg, Germany with Rory and the Hurricanes. The trip abroad turned out to be them playing long grueling shifts with The Beatles at the Kaiserkeller.

It's well worth taking a few steps back in time prior to Richard Starkey aka Ringo Starr joining The Beatles to get the full story of his start in drumming and what he used.

At the age of 13 Richy, as he was known, would walk past a music store to and from school and among the guitars and other instruments, he was fixated on one drum. It was expensive and something that he or his family could afford. Strangely enough, this was the time that he decided that drums were the instrument he wanted to play.

Richy was a sickly child and literally came close to death twice. He spent most of 1947 and 1948 in the hospital and in mid-1954, he was hospitalized for pleuri-



Exact replica of Ringo's Premier Kit.

At some point Ringo replaced the Premier tom mount with a Rogers Swiv-o-matic mount. These mounts were popular in the UK at the time and the conversion gave drummers better control over positioning.

Ringo got a lot of use from this drum kit not only with Rory Storm & the Hurricanes but with The Beatles. He officially joined John, Paul and George on August 18, 1962.

Most people never give much thought to the songs that The Beatles recorded with Ringo playing his Premier kit. Not counting the early bootlegs and recordings from Anthology, here's a list of originals that may surprise you:

- Please Please Me
- Twist & Shout
- I Saw Her Standing There
- Boys

- Anna
- Chains
- Misery
- There's A Place
- Ask Me Why
- P.S. I Love You
- Baby It's You
- Do You Want to Know a Secret
- A Taste Of Honey

the vertical seem. That being said, it caused many of the wraps to crack and in some cases, break off the shell.

The overall sound of Ringo's kit was quite good actually. Give Please Please Me a listen, especially the fills before the middle eights.

The last time that Ringo played his Premier kit was May 12, 1963 during a dress rehearsal for Thank Your Lucky Stars at the Alpha Television Studios in Birmingham, England. This is when Ringo took possession of his first Ludwig kit.

Gerry Evans, the Dum City music store manager, drove up to Birmingham from London to deliver Ringo's first Ludwig Oyster Black Pearl kit. As part of the purchase agreement, he took Ringo's Premier kit back to the store to be reconditioned and sold.

"I took his old Premier drum kit from him and brought it back to the store. We renovated it in our workshop, and then sold it. I ripped off the bit of material from the bass drum head where he'd handwritten the Beatles' name and threw it away. Anyway, we cleaned it up and sold it off the same week - and very, very cheaply. It would most likely be a collector's item if we still had it today," said Gerry Evans. Taken from Beatles Gear, Andy Babiuk.

My next article will cover Ringo's first Ludwig kit and some puzzling mysteries.



Gary & Ringo with Limited Edition Print

The Premier drums shells were made of 3-ply Birch with Beech wood reinforcement rings. The rims were made of cast aluminum and the chromed hardware was plated at the same factory used by Rolls Royce Motor Cars in Crew. The application of the Mahogany Duroplastic wrap, sometimes referred to as Root Beer Swirl, is one that I take issue with. I am assuming in order to cut costs, adherent was only placed along the top and bottom edges of the shell and along