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Through his continuing Classic Drummer series, Gary Astridge reveals little known facts and exclusive insights into the Beatle era instruments of Ringo Starr. As historian and curator for the Starr organization, Gary has been provided unprecedented access to the historic instruments he has spent decades researching and documenting.

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# RINGO'S '64 SUPER CLASSIC KIT

HISTORIC INSTRUMENT, ICONIC MUSIC, INCOMPARABLE ARTIST

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BY GARY ASTRIDGE



Photo: Scott Robert Ritchie

Of the six drum kits used by Ringo during his career with the Beatles, his 1964 Ludwig Oyster Black Pearl (OBP) Super Classic model was the true work horse. These drums can be heard on a majority of the group's recordings, seen in the movies *Help* and *Magical Mystery Tour* not to mention numerous promotional films. It was also used on all but one (1965) of their world tours. During its use, this drum kit was adorned with two distinctive Beatles logo bass drumheads in addition to the yellow and orange Love head and the solid orange drumhead seen in the *Revolution* promo film.

On May 31, 1964, Ludwig Drum Company's UK distributor, Drum City, had a new drum kit ready for Ringo, compliments of Ludwig. In addition to the drum set were also two snare drums, a matching 5"x14" Jazz Festival and a 5"x14" 400 Supraphonic. Note: Neither of those two snare drums could be found in Ringo's inventory.

Prior to delivery, Drum City removed and replaced the factory installed consolette tom mount with a Rogers Swiv-O-Matic and the front bass drumhead was swapped for a new Beatles logo drumhead, once again painted by Eddie Stokes. (This is Beatles logo drumhead # 4, if you're counting.)

The question of why Ringo switched from the smaller sized Downbeat model kit (8"x12" tom, 14"x14" floor tom, 14"x20" bass) to the larger Super Classic (9"x13" tom, 16"x16" floor tom, 14"x22" bass) was answered by Dick Schory, VP and director of marketing for

Ludwig at that time. Mr. Schory worked directly with the Beatles manager, Brian Epstein and Drum City owner, Ivor Arbiter to help determine what was needed for the upcoming tour. In my conversation with Mr. Schory, I was surprised to learn that leading up to the kit being sent, there was some experimenting going on. Ringo had tried using a 24 & 26-inch bass drum before deciding on the standard 22-inch. Overall, the Super Classic kit provided more volume and punch than the existing Downbeat model being used by Ringo. While the Downbeat was well designed for jazz combos, it was not at all suited for the larger venues that the Beatles were scheduled to play. Keep in mind that in 1964 the group was entering uncharted waters, performing in front of thousands of screaming fans, which was totally unheard of at the time.

Though this new kit was sent for the Beatles first world tour, which started June 4th in Copenhagen, Denmark, it was immediately put to use when the group performed two shows at the Prince of Wales Theatre in London. Ringo continued to prefer his trusty 1963 Jazz Festival snare drum with this kit.

Besides the other three Beatles having access to playing Ringo's Super

Classic, there is one other person that you may not think about until I mention his name. Jimmie Nicol played this drum kit on the Beatles' first world tour. On June 3rd, 1964, Ringo became ill and was hospitalized with tonsillitis. This was a serious problem because the following day the Beatles were scheduled to start their world tour. George Martin pitched an idea to Brian Epstein to consider using a session drummer. Jimmie was immediately phoned and brought into the EMI Studios to rehearse. There are photos and a video of him seated behind Ringo's Sullivan kit with John, Paul and George. After a short but intense rehearsal, Nicol was told to go home to pack for the tour. Jimmie's time as a Beatle replacement lasted thirteen days after which Ringo returned.

In the four short years during which Ringo used this kit, he would creativity express a rainbow of sound



Left: Example of logo head #x.  
Below: Example of logo head # y







Removal of the 9"x13" heads revealed the card of Dave Golding who installed its Rogers Swiv-O-Matic mount.

personalities by means of high and low tuning, miking and muffling techniques along with his signature drumming style.

This expressive and innovative sound palette can be appreciated by listening to following songs:

- "I'm Down"
- "Here There & Everywhere"
- "Tomorrow Never Knows"
- "I Want To Tell You"
- "She Said She Said"
- "With A Little Help From My Friends"
- "Lovely Rita"
- "A Day In The Life" and so many more . . .

As I began a physical inspection of these drums I made discovery that blew me away. Upon removing the top head from the 9"x13" tom, inside the shell, held in place by a washer was the business card of Dave Golding (photo above). He was a Drum City employee that worked at the shop from 1963



through 1967. Imagine, finding someone's business card inside the drum of a Beatles kit fifty years after it was put there.

Doing my job, I managed to locate Mr. Golding and gave him a call. At the time, he was 78 years old and still living in the London area. He shared some fascinating stories. For instance, it was Drum City and not Mal Evans as was previously assumed, that installed the Rogers tom mounts on three of Ringo's Ludwig kits. He also suggested a totally different version of how the first Beatles logo drumhead came to be, but that's a story for another time.

Mr. Golding even has lineage to The Who as the drummer prior to Keith Moon. He shared his first-

“As I began a physical inspection of these drums I made a discovery that blew me a way . . .”

hand account regarding the night Keith first played with Pete Townshend, Roger Daltrey and John Entwistle.

During the recording sessions for The Beatles, commonly known as the White Album, a transition took place with this drum kit. As Ringo continued to expand his creativity, he added a Rogers dual center post mounting bracket to the bass drum. The 8"x12" tom from his Sullivan kit was positioned in front of his Jazz Festival and the kit's 9"x13" tom was placed to Ringo's right, virtually giving him a 5-piece set up. The songs that he may have used this set up on are not known, at least from the information that I



Example of "All You Need Is Love" head.

was able to find. Ringo would soon transition into using his 5-piece maple kit fulltime, as was evident in the Let It Be movie.

Though very little is known about the use of this Super Classic kit during the post Beatle years, it did make a surprise appearance in George Harrison's music vid-

eo "When We Was Fab". Ringo is shown playing his trusted work-horse as a 5-piece drum kit, the way it was earlier described.

On April 8, 2015, I was sent to the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame in Cleveland, Ohio to set this drum kit up for display. Eleven days later, Ringo was formally inducted into

the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame's class of 2015. As of this writing, the drum kit is still on loan to the museum. If you'd like to see this iconic piece of Rock history, make plans to visit the museum sooner than later. It's a rare opportunity and the kit is not on permanent loan.

A rare Ringo's eye view of his first Super Classic kit.



Photo: Scott Robert Ritchie