

*Classic*

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# DRUMMER

Home of Music's Most Influential Drummers

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# MULTI-MILLION SELLING RECORDS FROM A MULTI-MILLION DOLLAR KIT



## Gary Astridge on the Life and Times of Ringo's Original Ludwigs

By Steve Bryant

Over the past couple of years our readers have gotten to know Gary Astridge thanks to his authoritative Classic Drummer series on the Beatle era drums of Ringo Starr. As historian and curator, he is recognized as the world's foremost authority on these instruments and their histories.

When Gary submitted the concept for his latest article he also shared some stunning news. Ringo's first Ludwig kit was to be offered for auction in early December of 2015 along with a variety of instruments from his Beatle and solo careers.

Along with Jeff Chonis, Ringo's longtime drum tech, and Scott Robert Ritchie, Barbara Bach's and Ringo's personal assistant, Gary began the process of organizing the instruments for auction.



Gary has been kind enough to share some insights from this historic experience with Classic Drummer and a variety of industry publications. His words tell the story best:

“Prior to my first trip to Beverly Hills, there were plenty of phone calls and emails and I was given basic descriptions and photographs to work from before actually seeing all of the drum gear firsthand. Nothing would or could have prepared me for what I was getting into. Not much of what Ringo had in England had been organized or documented.

On the first day, Jeff and I were both surprised to see a large room scattered with drums, road cases, all types of stands, cymbals and other percussion equipment. We quickly developed a plan where I focused on drums from the 60s through the 80s and Jeff organized the gear from 1989 forward. There was no need to worry about Ringo's first Ludwig Beatle kit because that project was completed earlier in the year.

One memorable moment for me was going through Ringo's Beatles trap case. It was like an archaeological dig. Inside was an old well used 13" Weather Master drumhead, an assortment of cymbals and stands (dating from the early 60s through the 70s), partial Olympic and Ludwig cymbal stands, one complete

and the bottom of a WFL snare stand, the base and center post for a Ludwig 1400 model cymbal stand, the pedal from a Speed King, and one of the coolest items, the original dual tom mount post from Ringo's Maple kit. All truly priceless items. Ringo was excited about these finds and he seemed to be particularly happy about the Olympic cymbal stand because it was something that he used with Rory Storm and the Hurricanes as well as the Beatles. None of these items were included in the auction.

It was amazing to be the one to have complete access to the drums of Ringo's life. At one point after my basic job was complete, I had a conversation with Ringo and he thanked me for what I had done.

***He began playing the beginning of Come Together and Ringo laughed when he saw me smiling and said “You caught that” to which I said, “Yes I did.”***

Interestingly, based on my research, Ringo said that he learned some things that he didn't know and better yet, he remembered things that he had forgotten.

As part of the marketing campaign for the auction, I had the task of setting up six drum kits in a large room of the lobby at the Beverly Hilton, including the first Ludwig Beatles kit. The plan was for Ringo

to be photographed and videotaped as he talked about each of the kits. With only five people in the room for the shoot, I was there to rearrange the gear if required to accommodate the photographers and to offer historical information if needed. When Ringo arrived he was in a great mood, very playful and funny. He worked his way over to the Beatles kit and sat down behind it. I had placed a set of sticks on the floor tom thinking that he might want to hold them as props. I was surprised when Ringo picked up the sticks and started playing the kit. I was standing a few feet in front of him with an astonished look on my face. He began playing the beginning of Come Together and Ringo laughed when he saw me smiling and said ‘You caught that’ to which I said, ‘Yes I did.’ The last time Ringo played that kit as a Beatle was 51 years and nine months ago, truly a magical and historical moment.”-- Gary Astridge

The black oyster pearl Ludwig Downbeat kit that Gary references went on to auction for \$2,110,000. Welcome to the authoritative story of those remarkable drums as told by the man who has studied them, organized them and now helped sell them.

**Photo Credit pg. 18: Julien's Auctions | Summer Evans**



# Ringo's First Ludwig Oyster Black Pearl Kit

By Gary Astridge

Over the past 50 years several stories have been published regarding Ringo Starr's acquisition of his first Ludwig drum kit. In April of this year Ringo gave his personal account regarding the day he selected them, however the passage of decades has rendered his recollection short and sweet. There is more to the story and I'll do my best to fill in the blanks...

By the end of April, 1963 Brian Epstein (The Beatles' manager) was looking to finish his upgrade of The Beatles' stage gear and Ringo's drums were next. Epstein had already dealt with Sound City Ltd., owned by London businessman Ivor Arbiter, who also owned Drum City Ltd., which specialized in percussion instruments. Among their inventory was a variety of English drum manufacturers including Trixon, Olympic, Premier and Ajax, and Arbiter had recently secured an agreement with the Ludwig Drum Company to be the first in England to offer this American-brand. Naturally Epstein took his drummer there.

According to Ringo, it was as the two of them approached the Drum

City shop that he actually saw his soon to be drum kit through the store window for the first time. "Look at that kit!" he told Brian. He loved the color and the fact that the drum kit was made in the US, so they both walked into the shop to make the purchase. Ringo remembered a store employee wanting to remove the Ludwig decal from the front bass drumhead and he immediately said that he wanted it left on because it was American! Ringo just loved the sound of the kit, its Oyster Black Pearl finish and that it was made in the US.

The drum kit that had captured Ringo's interest was a 1963 Ludwig Downbeat model. The catalog described the kit to include a 20"x14" bass, 12"x8" tom, 14"x14" floor tom and a 14"x4" Downbeat snare drum.

Brian and Ringo spoke with the store manager Gerry Evans, who recalled Epstein was looking for a deal and asked if he and Ringo could meet directly with Ivor Arbiter, who had worked deals with Epstein previously at Sound City. Ivor remembered their meeting in his office, especially Ringo looking

through swatches of new Ludwig drum colors sitting on his desk. He noticed that Ringo really liked the Oyster Black Pearl finish. Apparently both Evans and Arbiter discussed other drum makes and models with Epstein and Starr, but Ringo would not be deterred; he wanted that Ludwig kit in Oyster Black Pearl he had seen on the way in. The foursome then discussed additional items that would be needed such as hardware, cases and cymbals. A deal was then made for the Ludwig Downbeat kit with a Speed King bass drum pedal (model 201), a flat base cymbal stand (model 1400), a flat base hi hat stand (model 1121) and a flat base snare stand (model 1363). Also included were travel cases and a new set of Paiste cymbals, according to Gerry Evans. Ringo chose to keep one of his Olympic cymbal stands and from photographic evidence we know that his Walberg & Auge bass drum anchor (model 1304) came later. Part of the agreement also included Ivor taking Ringo's used Premier kit in trade.

At this point the Ludwig logo on the bass drumhead was brought up, which led to the idea of including

“The Beatles” on it. The band had no professional logo at the time and Ivor said that he took a piece of paper from his desk and drew the actual Beatles logo right on the spot, with an enlarged “B” and a dropped capitalized “T” to accentuate the “beat” in “Beatles.” Dave Golding, an employee of Drum City who spent most of his time in the workshop unpacking merchandise, preparing items that were sold, doing repair work and refurbishing trade-ins, told me that Mal Evans, The Beatles’ roadie, then went back and forth between Drum City and The Beatles to verify the final logo design. Dave said that he had a piece of white cardboard, approximately 3”x12” with four similar logo designs created by Eddie Stokes, a freelance sign painter that did work for Drum City on occasion. It makes sense that the boys would have had some input regarding their new logo, especially John, because of his art background. For years, Dave had that piece of cardboard with the sketches on his workbench and somehow over time, it was lost! He said to me, “Can you imagine what that would be worth if I still had it?”

A curious and unexplained part of the deal involved the snare drum. A Ludwig Downbeat drum kit typically came with a Downbeat snare drum but Ringo’s kit included a Jazz Festival.

As part of Ludwig’s manufacturing process most drums had a date stamp reflecting when the shell was manufactured. In the case of this

new kit, the only drum with a date stamp was the snare, stamped APR 18 1963, only 25 days before Ringo took possession. It’s possible that Ringo may have special ordered the Jazz Festival to change up from his current 14” x 4” Premier Royal Ace model snare and the 14” x

4” Downbeat snare that came with the Downbeat kit.

The kit was delivered to Ringo at the Alpha Television Studios in Birmingham on Sunday, May 12, 1963. The Beatles were there to perform on Thank Your Lucky



Photo Credit: Scott Robert Ritchie



## *... this 1963 Ludwig Oyster Black Pearl Downbeat drum kit was used on more than 200 live performances and over 180 studio recordings from May 12, 1963 through February 4, 1964*

Stars. There are photographs that show Ringo playing his Premier kit with the cloth Beatles "bug" logo on the bass drum during the rehearsal and his new Ludwig kit with the first "dropped T" bass drum head for the show.

1963 and early '64 was a very busy and aggressive time for The Beatles and this Ludwig kit was used extensively as the band criss-crossed the UK, playing in England, Scotland, Ireland and Wales, as well as on the continent in Sweden and France.

Here are some key moments in its history:

- It was played at the last appearance by The Beatles at The Cavern Club on August 3, 1963
- It was seen on close to 20 television performances including the aforementioned Thank Your Lucky Stars (May 12, 1963), Ready, Steady, Go!, Sunday Night At The London Palladium, the Royal Command Performance from the Prince of Wales Theatre, the Morecambe And Wise Show and Juke Box Jury from the Empire Theatre in Liverpool
- It was recorded on over 20 studio recordings officially released by The Beatles, of which three became Number 1 hits. They are:

1. She Loves You (# 1 Hit)
2. I'll Get You
3. You Really Got A Hold On Me
4. Money (That's What I Want)
5. Devil In Her Heart
6. Please Mr. Postman
7. It Won't Be Long
8. Roll Over Beethoven
9. All My Loving
10. I Wanna Be Your Man
11. Little Child
12. All I've Got To Do
13. Not A Second Time
14. Don't Bother Me
15. Hold Me Tight
16. I Want To Hold Your Hand (# 1 Hit)
17. This Boy
18. Komm Gib Mir Deine Hand
19. Sie Liebt Dich
20. Can't Buy Me Love (# 1 Hit)

- It was heard on over 160 songs in 28 different broadcast episodes of BBC Radio shows like Saturday Club, Pop Go The Beatles and From Us To You. Many of the recordings can be found on The Beatles' Live At The BBC, Volumes I & II as well as on bootleg recordings.

In summary, this 1963 Ludwig Oyster Black Pearl Downbeat drum kit was used on more than 200 live performances and over 180 studio recordings from May 12, 1963 through February 4, 1964. Ringo's ultimate decision to

purchase this very kit lit the fuse for the Ludwig Drum Company, while the actual explosion would take place on Monday, February 10, 1964, the day after The Beatles' legendary first appearance on the Ed Sullivan Show.

I wanted to mention a couple of details about this drum kit as it is today; The original Ludwig Rail Consolette tom mount was never replaced with a Rogers Swiv-O-Matic. In place of the standard hex nut to secure the rotating bracket for the L-arm, a brass wing nut was used in its place. The top of the bass drum had strips of black gaffers tape placed on the drum between the Keystone badge and the rear top two lugs and remained there for years. The tape was carefully removed but over the years, the tape glue reacted with the OBP wrap leaving the surface rough, though not discolored. The bass drum interior has a natural finish while the tom, floor tom and snare have white interiors. All but the front bass drum head is original and the replica head was created by Russ Lease, noted Beatles drum head authority. The original Beatles drop-T head, front hoop, T-rods and claws are no longer part of this kit and are believed to be in the possession of Sir Paul McCartney.

In my next article I will delve into the most famous snare drum in the world, Ringo's Jazz Festival.