

## **Articles, Reviews, and Interviews**

Wirral Globe, March 12, 2014 - Neil's on tour with part of the Pre-Fab Four

Yorkshire Post, April 18, 2014 - Brand on the run are back on the road

South Wales Evening Post, April 24, 2014 - Two Rutles, Neil Innes and John Halsey, will get back to the backbeat in Swansea

Birmingham Mail, April 25, 2014 - Stranger than fiction: The true story of the Prefab Four

Western Morning News, April 12, 2014 - Neil Innes and pals presents songs of pastiche band The Rutles

Sounds And Motions, May 26, 2014 - The Rutles - Farnham Maltings, 23rd May 2014

LIVERPOOL ECHO APRIL 30, 2014 - Neil Innes on The Rutles song that John Lennon didn't like

BUZZ – South Wales Culture, May 14, 2014 - THE RUTLES | LIVE REVIEW

ultimatedclassicrock.com, February 24, 2014 - The Rutles Announce 2014 U.K. Tour

Southport Visiter, May 27, 2014 - Preview: The Rutles In Liverpool

The Telegraph, May 23, 2014 - The Rutles, O2 Academy Islington, review: 'still going strong'

The Birmingham Press, May 23. 2014 - The Rutles – history in the re-making

Birmingham Mail, May 22, 2014 - Review: The Rutles, Birmingham Town Hall

Lancashire Telegraph, May 22, 2014 - The Rutles spreading a little silliness along the way

Blastocyst, May 20, 2014 - Neil Innes and his Elvis Connection: the Rutles 2014 tour

Nottingham Post, May 19, 2014 - Review: The Rutles, Rescue Rooms

Neon Filler, May 19, 2014 - The Rutles- The Rescue Rooms, Nottingham (May 18, 2014)

MusicRadar.com, May 16, 2014 - Neil Innes talks Bonzos, Beatles, Rutles and more

Louder Than War, April 30, 2014 – Interview: Rutlemania – Douglas T Stewart Talks To Neil Innes

**Wirral Globe March 12, 2014**

## Neil's on tour with part of the Pre-Fab Four



10:51am Wednesday 12th March 2014 in [NewsBy Craig Manning](#), Chief Reporter



Neil Innes

NEIL Innes - the seventh member of Monty Python who later co-created Beatles spoof The Rutles - returns to Liverpool as part of a national tour celebrating the band's 36th anniversary.

He is at the 02 Academy in Hotham Street, Liverpool on May 31 with a show featuring music from his Rutles days.

The Pre-Fab Four as they became known were created 36 years ago when Monty Python's Eric Idle persuaded Neil to join him in a comedy series for BBC Two called *Rutland Weekend Television* about a spoof TV station.

A year later, such was the enormous pressure on the Beatles to get back together again, that a oneoff clip was shown in America – on NBC's satirical programme *Saturday Night Live*.

The show's parody of the Beatles' story, *All You Need Is Cash* starred American comedians Dan Ackroyd, John Belushi, Bill Murray, Michael Palin and ex-Beatle George Harrison.

Joining Neil on tour is John Halsey, who played Barry Wom in the film.

Neil told the Globe: "It's all gathering speed. After we've done the shows in May we're off to Japan, which is amazing.

"The thing about the tour is it's not a career move, we're doing this purely to have fun."

Neil played Ron Nasty in the film and wrote and produced all the songs.

Parts of the film were made in Wirral.

On returning to Liverpool, Neil said: "It's my second home; used to spend a lot of time there, stayed at home of Roger McGough. I think the people have a great sense of humour."

Asked how The Beatles re-acted to the Rutles, Neil said: "John loved it, Ringo was being tactful, but Paul was put out by Eric's portrayal of him in the film. He's always good natured about it, though.

"I think, above all, George Harrison just wanted to put The Beatles in the cupboard and move on, but then decided to go for it."

Neil's career in entertainment began with the Bonzo Dog Doo Dah Band. Their early hit - I'm the Urban Spaceman topped the UK charts in 1968. It was produced by A C Vermouth - better known as Paul McCartney.

In 1969 Neil was asked to join BBC comedy series *Monty Python's Flying Circus* - which also featured the late Graham Chapman, John Cleese, Michael Palin, Terry Jones and Terry Gilliam.

The London-born musician worked on their albums, films and concert tours.

Their second film, *Monty Python & The Holy Grail*, which featured his songs *Brave Sir Robin* and *Knights Of The Round Table*, has been turned into a stage musical *Spamalot*, which is enjoying success on Broadway and The West End.

Apart from music, Neil has also presented a wide variety of children's television programmes, including *Puddle Lane*.

A second Rutles album, *Archaeology*, was released in 1996.

The remaining members of *Monty Python* have reunited for a series of shows at the O2 arena in London later this year.

Asked if he will be joining them, Neil said: "They haven't asked me and to be honest I don't think I really want put my hand up and ask. There's no reason for me to do it.

"Why should they need me? They have got Arlene Phillips doing choreography, so why would they want an idiot on a piano to spoil it?" he joked.

# Yorkshire Post – April 18, 2014

## Brand on the run are back on the road



**The Rutles are back with their unique blend of music and humour. The irreverent songwriter and satirist Neil Innes talks to Chris Bond.**

THE RUTLES have probably had more comebacks than the great Frank Sinatra, although according to the [band](#) this really is it. “Last time was just the last time. This time it really is the last time.”

For the uninitiated (where you have been all this time?), The Rutles are an affectionate, and at times hilarious, pastiche of The Beatles conceived by Monty Python star Eric Idle and Neil Innes for Idle’s comedy series *Rutland Weekend Television* during the mid-1970s.

What started life as a one-off sketch turned into an hour long TV special, *All You Need Is Cash*, and spawned two albums as well as a touring schedule that’s still going strong today. Charting the career of Ron, Dirk, Stig and Barry (Innes, Idle, Ricky Fataar and John Halsey) the 1978 “rockumentary” featured cameos by luminaries like Mick Jagger, George Harrison and Paul Simon.

*All You Need Is Cash* predated *This Is Spinal Tap* and paved the way for the torrent of tribute bands that have flooded the music scene in recent years. It also made The Rutles overnight stars and next month they embark on their latest UK tour which takes in Fibbers in York and Leeds City Varieties.

The line-up has changed over the years, only Innes and Halsey are still involved, but the band still has a loyal following. "We did a farewell gig in Glastonbury about five or six years ago and I never thought we would do it again but here we are. It's not a career move it's just a lot of fun and we like doing it," says Innes. "It wasn't planned it just happened, but I still get young people coming up to me today and saying they got into The Beatles because of The Rutles."

It all started in 1975 when Eric Idle persuaded Innes to join him in a comedy series for BBC 2 about a spoof TV station churning out cheap programmes on a shoestring. "I thought it would be fun to do a spoof of *A Hard Day's Night* speeded up like a Benny Hill kind of thing, where we'd put on wigs and tight trousers and run around in a field. Eric liked that and he said he had a sketch about a man making a documentary who's so dull the camera runs away from him."

But what started out as an irreverent bit of fun soon took on a life of its own. The Beatles had split up five years earlier and already there was mounting pressure for the band to reform (given the fact the Bay City Rollers had the biggest selling UK single that year it's perhaps not surprising).

But it wasn't until the following year when the clip was shown in the US on the hugely popular *Saturday Night Live* show that they realised they'd tapped into something. Idle then came up with the title *All You Need Is Cash* and the story of the Pre-Fab Four and The Rutles were up and running. Everyone seemed happy to be in on the spoof. "It was George [Harrison] who got it. He had a real sense of mischief and he asked Mick Jagger and Paul Simon to get involved," says Innes.

They were happy to play along, as were the likes of Bill Murray and John Belushi, but with the back story in place what they needed now were some songs. "I remember sitting in an office in New York and being asked if I could write 20 more Rutles [songs](#) by next Thursday lunchtime. I said I would try," says Innes.

During the 60s he'd been a member of the Bonzo Dog Doo-Dah Band which parodied and subverted just about every musical genre going, something that stood him in good stead. "With the Bonzos we would go looking for strange records like *I'm Going To Bring A Watermelon To My Girl Tonight*, we were just after the silliest songs we could find," he says.

But when it came to writing songs for The Rutles he didn't want to trawl through The Beatles' vast back catalogue for inspiration. "I knew I couldn't just listen to their [songs](#) and pick them apart, it would have ruined them for me. So instead I started thinking back to my own memories of being a teenager in the early 60s and listening to songs like *I Want to Hold Your Hand*.

"The psychedelic stuff came quite easily and was a lot of fun, but I had to be quite disciplined and not be too silly because I had to write songs that could be played on the piano or guitar. But they're

not really Beatles songs in any way that you can put your finger on, they just capture the sound of that period.”

So what did the former Beatles themselves make of it? “John and Ringo really liked it and John sent us a message saying the songs were great. Paul was impressed with the music but didn’t like what Eric did, which was maybe a bit over the top.”

Sending up a band like The Beatles, arguably the greatest rock ‘n’ roll band of all time, could very easily have backfired but The Rutles are more of a homage than a satire. “The Beatles were phenomenally successful and what The Rutles did, and what George really liked, was it told this story without all the hysteria. They were just four guys who happened to be very good at what they did and who liked to have a laugh, and this sometimes gets overlooked and we tell this side of the story.”

But while Rutlemania might not have sent screaming girls into paroxysms of delight like the mop tops famously did, they still have a loyal following. “People who come along to the shows are in on the joke and in many ways it’s more like a Bonzos tribute evening than a Beatles tribute evening,” says Innes.

“The Rutles are more real than a lot of stuff that’s pretending to be real, it’s all about the absurdity of life and blowing a raspberry at it.”

# Two Rutles, Neil Innes and John Halsey, will get back to the backbeat in Swansea

By Kate Clarke



Neil Innes

The Beatles reunion can never happen, but two Rutles, Neil Innes and John Halsey will get back to the backbeat at Swansea's Garage on May 25.

Kate Clarke talks to Neil, aka Ron Nasty, about being very nearly fab.

HE is responsible for such rock 'n roll classics as The Doughnut in Granny's Greenhouse, What Noise Annoys a Noisy Oyster and Blue Suede Schubert, and he successfully sued Oasis for ripping off one of his own Beatles pastiches.

Neil Innes, sometime member of the Bonzo Dog Doo-Dah band and another member of the original prefab four, The Rutles, will do their off-centre thing in Swansea next month.

And while The Beatles were thoroughly cheesed off with being The Beatles, by the time they packed it in, The Rutles, says Neil, is a continuing pleasure for him.

"We don't do it often, so when we do get together it is a lot of fun. We did 8 shows last August and there was such a conspiratorial feeling to things. We enjoyed ourselves and I still found it all very funny.

"In fact with the Bonzos, The Beatles used to come and see us play, and there was some envy there because somehow we were allowed to muck about. We did exactly what we wanted and got away with it. The Beatles had to be The Beatles."

The Fab Four might not have always had fun, but they did change the face of pop music forever, and they were the epicentre of the most exciting time in British social history. Even if you weren't there it's easy to be nostalgic for 1960's Britain.

Neil says he is aware how lucky he is to have been there.

"I do feel blessed to have been young in the 1960s. It was a golden time - probably because we had just come through a horrible world war and there was no counselling for those people when they came home. The older generation was trying to maintain this Britishness and their old way of life and the younger generation felt they wanted something else now - We felt we could create something completely new. The Beatles were such a big part of that. They were a phenomenon, on a primal level. It was dangerous in a way. "Young people loved them, old people loved them - what is that saying?: 'men go mad in herds but they recover by themselves.'"

Being at the heart of that enjoyable foment, as Neil and his muckers in the Bonzos and The Rutles were, led to some surreal encounters.

"I met John Lennon a couple of times, just to exchange banter. I was at the Apple records Christmas party and my 3-year-old son had wandered off. I found him on a Hells' Angel's knee, being fed beer from this guy's little finger. "Johns was there, lying down with Yoko.

"And we had worked together on Magical Mystery Tour. There is a camaraderie among people who have shared a van and a dressing room. You can't pull the wool over each other's eyes."

Perhaps that's why the acerbic Lennon put up with Neil playing him in The Rutles, as Ron Nasty. John was very much on the Rutles bus, says Neil. "I heard somebody went up to him in New York in the street and asked 'what do you think of the Rutles?' And he started to sing the Rutles song Cheese and Onions to them."

Those years may have passed, but Neil has by no means lost touch with his rare gift for silliness. It is a talent that saw him pen 100-plus episodes of the Raggy Dolls, a show which appealed to his sense of the value of the undervalued.

"The story of seven little reject dolls helping each other out really appealed to me, and that was one of my favourite projects. "I love writing for children.

"What I love about my grandchildren is that when they laugh, they laugh from the toes upwards. And there is no more joyful sound than that of a child really laughing," says Neil.



## Birmingham Mail – April 25, 2014

### Stranger than fiction: The true story of the Prefab Four

The Rutles started as a parody of the Beatles - but along the way took on a life of their own



The Rutles in full finery

Everybody (of a certain age) knows the story – it's a rock and roll legend.

It's the tale of four lovable cheeky moptops from Liverpool who discover their voice in Hamburg, come home to find fame and fortune, provoke fan hysteria and revolutionize pop music before splitting up amid tales of excess and girlfriend troubles.

It's the history of the Prefab Four – The Rutles – Ron, Dirk, Stig and Barry, creators of timeless classics such as Cheese And Onions, I Must Be in Love, Piggy In The Middle and Let's Be Natural.

Oh, wait – that’s almost the real story, but not quite.

Originally conceived as a quick TV sketch poking gentle fun at the legend of the Beatles and the fatuousness of rock documentaries, the story of The Rutles is one that truly does deserve that much over used label “stranger than fiction”.

Stand aside Simon Cowell. Hang your heads in shame Stock, Aitken and Waterman. The Rutles were the ultimate manufactured band.

Formed for a joke, they were embraced by the biggest stars in the world and created a TV movie featuring some of the greatest names in comedy history before disappearing for decades only to resurface as a real band with real songs and something to say.

In the words of co-creator and driving force Neil Innes: “We started as a gag. We weren’t real – but now we’re on the road and playing better than ever. We’re more real than some real bands.”

They’re so real that The Rutles are now coming to Birmingham, playing a gig at the Town Hall for their legion of adoring fans.

Let’s go back to the beginning. If you wanted to create The Rutles, Neil Innes was the perfect man for the job.

In the sixties he was one of the creative geniuses (with Vivian Stanshall) behind the Bonzo Dog Doodah Band, a combo which managed to mix jazz, pop and comedy together with great success.

The Beatles loved them so much that they asked the Bonzos to appear and perform in their Magical Mystery Tour movie. And Paul McCartney was such a fan that he produced their single I’m The Urban Spaceman.

TV also loved the Bonzos. They became the house band on Do Not Adjust Your Set, a ground-breaking comedy show featuring the early work of Eric Idle, Michael Palin, Terry Gilliam and Terry Jones of Monty Python fame.

“It was a great time,” says Neil. “The Beatles, the Bonzos and Monty Python – we were all on the same wavelength. We all lampooned the artificiality of the consumer society, the hype. Urban Spaceman was about people in adverts – too good to be true, all shiny and happy.

“We deconstructed it all – we were all in it together.”

But by the mid seventies everything changed.

The Beatles and The Bonzos went their separate ways and Monty Python's Flying Circus disappeared from TV screens.

Eric Idle filled the void before the Python movies by reuniting with Neil Innes for a new BBC comedy series set in a fictitious low budget TV channel in Rutland (then the UK's smallest county) called Rutland Weekend Television.

Neil recalls: "The joke was to make everything as cheap as possible and a running joke was that many names in it would be derivative of the word Rutland."

Neil had written a song I Must Be in Love that sounded very Beatlesy and came up with the idea of doing a spoof of A Hard Day's Night. Eric had the idea of a boring TV documentary maker being followed around by a camera. The Rutles – and A Hard Day's Rut – were born.

In 1976 Eric Idle appeared as a guest host on the legendary American comedy series Saturday Night Live and showed the Rutles sketch as part of the programme. The reaction knocked everybody's socks off.

"The response was amazing," says Neil. "Everybody enjoyed the joke and the mailbags were enormous. The producer, Lorne Michaels, suggested we make a full length movie and that's where we got the money."

The Rutles: All You Need Is Cash told the full story of the rise and fall of The Rutles. Neil Innes (Ron Nasty) was John Lennon, Eric Idle (Dirk McQuickly) was Paul McCartney, Ricky Fataar (Stig O'Hara) was George Harrison and John Halsey (Barry Wom) played Ringo Starr.

The fifth Beatle (Stuart Sutcliffe) was Leppo, played by Ollie Halsall.

The film also featured appearances by comics Dan Ackroyd, John Belushi, Bill Murray and Michael Palin, along with Rolling Stones Mick Jagger and Ron Wood, Paul Simon and even George Harrison himself.

"Everyone wanted to be in it," recalls Neil. "The stars loved it. It was a great laugh.

"And the public loved it – they all got the joke. We were filming scenes of Rutlemania on the streets of Liverpool and everyone knew what to do. They went crazy – we were worried people would get hurt."

All You Need Is Cash lovingly recreated the Beatles story visually and musically. The film was packed with great performances, the audience got the joke, the film had celebrity pulling power – how could it fail?

“We died,” says Neil with a chuckle. “I take pride that the film was shown at prime time against an episode of Charlie’s Angels and we came nowhere. One of the lowest rated shows ever.

“But who remembers that episode of Charlie’s Angels now?”

The reaction of the Beatles was also mixed. George Harrison had been aware of the project from the beginning and liked the joke. Ringo reportedly enjoyed the happier scenes but found the sadder section as the band fell apart struck a little too close to home.

“John Lennon loved it,” adds Neil. “When a Beatles fan stopped him on the street in New York and asked him about it he replied by singing (Rutles song) Cheese And Onions.

“Paul was a little upset with Eric though. He went over the top a bit playing him. But Paul’s always been fine with me – he’s always been a lovely bloke.”

And that should have been the end of The Rutles.

“No one was batting for us. We were a comedy routine – the show was over,” says Neil.

But people loved the music and refused to let The Rutles die. There was a sound-track album, songs appeared on Beatles related bootlegs, and the film received repeated showings on TV stations around the world.

“I was at Beatles Fest in New York in 1994,” recalls Neil. “And it was just crazy. I was there for three days and spent four hours a day signing Rutles albums. I couldn’t believe it was so popular.

“And then The Beatles started putting together their Anthology documentary and albums and people kept asking me ‘What are The Rutles going to do?’ I couldn’t get my head round it.

“So I went to see George Harrison and asked ‘What do you think about more Rutles?’

“George had a very black sense of humour. His first question was ‘Which one is going to get shot?’

“But he loved the idea. He said ‘It’s all part of the soup’.”

The Rutles responded to Anthology with their own album Archaeology.

“Have you heard it?” asks Neil ruefully. “Hardly anyone has – it’s criminal.”

Archaeology was a fine album of Neil Innes songs, very much in the spirit of The Beatles, but as the music was no longer an obvious pastiche of individual Fab Four tracks and as it was released at the height of Britpop it did not receive the attention it deserved.

Featuring original Rutles Neil Innes, Ricky Fataar and John Halsey, Archaeology is very much a bittersweet collection, with many of the songs examining, yet again the artifice of image and fame, and the lost promise of the sixties.

In a striking parallel with The Beatles and their Anthology collection, the album also featured unused guitar and vocal recordings of original Rutle Ollie Halsall, who had passed away in 1992.

Eric Idle had never really been a part of The Rutles musically, and was no longer involved.

On the back of the album The Rutles began to tour for the first time and they have been hitting the road sporadically ever since.

“Archaeology was a good album to make and I’m very happy to be on the road and the band playing these songs – they sound fantastic. I couldn’t be more pleased – we’re playing some amazing things,” says Neil.



The Rutles - A Hard Day's Rut featuring (from top) Neil Innes (John/Ron), Ricky Fataar (George/Stig), Eric Idle (Paul/Dirk) and John Halsey (Ringo/Barry)

“A band is the sum of its parts and we’ve got a great drummer in Barry Wom (John Halsey).

“We’re hitting all the harmonies and having a laugh. We’ve got a long history now – most of it fake – but now we’re more real than many real bands, who these days are just image and marketing. We don’t wear Beatles wigs and wear tight trousers, but we play the songs – it’s not a career, it’s just fun.

“After the shows we do a meet and greet with fans.”

And as if to stress the fact – and with a genuine sense of pride, he adds again: “We’re real.”

Neil is delighted to be playing Birmingham, as he holds a real affection for the city.

“I love playing Birmingham – the Bonzos’ favourite gig was always a show that we did at Mothers (the legendary Erdington club).

“Brummies have got some of the best comedians around – Birmingham and Liverpool have the quickest wits out there. When I mucked up a song at Mothers someone – quick as a flash – shouted ‘Play something you know!’”

Neil also produced the album of the TV series Tiswas – he and Rutles’ John Halsey and Ollie Halsall (along with Morgan Fisher from Mott The Hoople) provided the musical backing for Matthew Butler’s rendition of Bright Eyes, where he was dressed as a rabbit on the legendary Saturday morning show.

Neil still laughs at the memory. “That poor kid in the rabbit costume. It was wonderful – inspired.”

And what does the future hold for The Rutles? There’s a live album in the works featuring a 30th anniversary number called Imitation Song, and there’s this tour. And then?

“We never say no, but this could be the farewell tour,” says Neil. “We don’t tend to plan things. We don’t do this as a career – we’ll never be halftime at the Superbowl. But we are doing two nights in Tokyo.”

Whatever happens Neil will certainly be keeping busy.

“At the moment I’m working on my audio memoirs,” he reveals with delight. “It’s going to be a cross between The Goon Show and Breaking Bad!”

# Neil Innes and pals presents songs of pastiche band The Rutles

We're all familiar with John, Paul, George and Ringo, but what about Dirk, Nasty, Stig and Barry?

While the first quartet were, of course, The Beatles, the latter were the members of The Rutles, a pastiche created for the fictional no-budget Rutland Weekend Television, years after the Liverpool fab four had parted company.

The parodies began life in 1975 as a spoof television sketch – a madcap collaboration between Eric Idle of Monty Python's Flying Circus and Neil Innes of the Bonzo Dog Doo Dah Band.

"My job was to come up with music ideas for the fictitious TV station Rutland Weekend Television," explains Neil, who is bringing the 2014 incarnation of the band out on tour. "I thought we could do a spoof of A Hard Day's Night and have us guys in wigs and tight trousers running around a field."

"Eric said 'I've got a sketch about a man making a documentary who's so boring, the camera runs away from him'... so that was the start."

They could never have predicted the reaction to the short initial film they made in speeded-up black and white. Fans were so desperate for the Beatles to get back together that the clip was picked up and shown on NBC's flagship Saturday Night Live in the States.

It was a sensation, with thousands of people writing in. Everyone got the joke and producer Lorne Michaels believed the whole Beatles story could now be told as "The Rutles". NBC agreed and gave him the money.

"I can clearly remember it all," says Neil. "I was sitting to one side, on a window sill in an executive office, high up in the Rockefeller Centre in New York, listening to all this when suddenly everyone started looking at me. Lorne asked if I could write 20 more Rutles songs by next Thursday lunchtime. I said I would try!"

Eric Idle came up with the title – All You Need Is Cash – the story of the Pre-Fab Four – and George Harrison, Mick Jagger, Paul Simon, Bill Murray, John Belushi and Dan Ackroyd all jumped on board.

And by popular demand Neil (Nasty) put together an actual touring and recording group which included drummer John Halsey (Barry Wom in the film). Beatles fans became Rutles fans.

Then it all went underground until a second album, Archaeology was released in 1996, to tie in with The Beatles' Anthology.

"That album was much, much better than the first," asserts Neil. "Its songwriting is more of a homage the Beatles – this great, tight, little rock and roll band. I think it's the music business's best kept secret!"

Every now and again, over the year, Neil is persuaded to pull the songs out of storage, rustle up a posse and air them in the live arena.

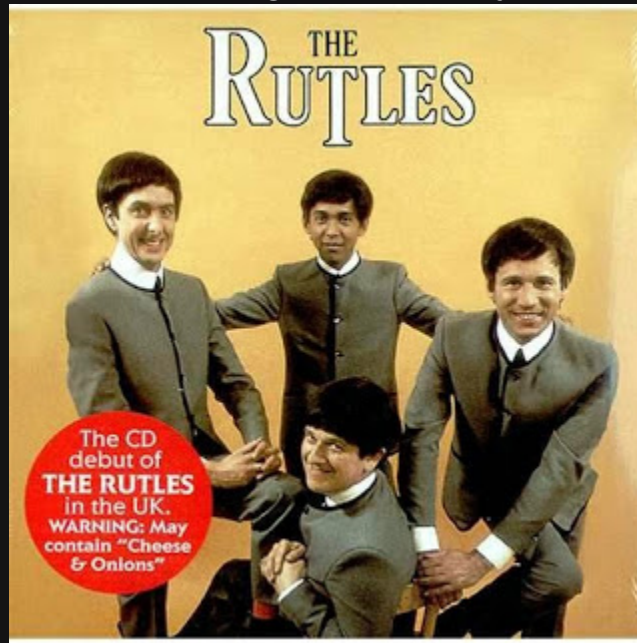
"It's not a career move; we just having a jolly good time," he says. "Every time we do it we think, well that was fun! The audiences are very clued up. They're all mad as teabags; they know all the words and sing along."



“And we always say this is going to be the last time,” adds Neil, 69, who is still a member of the Bonzos and also The Idiot Bastard Band comedy musical collective with Ade Edmondson. “This is the last time,” he concludes.

Sounds And Motions – May 26, 2014

## The Rutles - Farnham Maltings, 23rd May 2014



**The Rutles was a spoof span out of Rutland Weekend TV, itself a spin-off of from Monty Python's Flying Circus.**

What lifted it above a lot of music 'spoofs' was Neil Innes' (sometime of the Bonzo Dog Doo Dah Band and various other projects) remarkable gift for crafting songs which so closely resemble Beatles songs that you sometimes find yourself wondering if you're listening to a Beatles song or one of his.

At the time "The Rutles" was aired, I was a huge Beatles fan (even though I'm a generation too old to remember them in their heyday) and, such was the skill of the song writing and performing and clear affection for the originals, I loved "The Rutles".

I bought the album at the time and a few years ago I picked up a VHS copy of the TV programme, but I was amazed when I saw an email saying "The Rutles" were performing at Farnham Maltings as part of a small tour.

I was a bit sceptical at first, wondering if this was a 'tribute' band, but, no, Innes was front (along with the drummer, John Halsey - AKA Barry Wom) and centre of the project, so I snapped up a ticket.

The audience wasn't huge, although nearly all the seats at the back were taken (An indication of the average age there, I suspect), with a smattering of people standing at the front.

The band arrived and, if I'm honest, it really bought home how long ago The Rutles was, as Neil Innes is, dare I say it, quite portly and shaven headed these days, I expected the trim handsome chap I remembered.

Still, no matter, I was quite different back in the day too and as soon as they started playing the years rolled away.

They started with "We've Arrived" and then rattled through a good number of the tracks from the original TV programme/album and the later, possibly cleverer, Archaeology, which had been released to coincide with the Beatles "Anthology" TV series and album.

The band were all gifted musicians and Innes and Halsey introduced "Rutles" like humour to the event, with their "Sponsors' jingles" and banter.

As things went along, both the band and the audience seemed to warm up and some of the tracks were absolutely epic with "Piggy in the Middle" (Clearly 'inspired' by "I am the Walrus") being particularly good, but I struggle to think of a duffer either in the original material or the on-the-night performance.

Paul McCartney's certainly not this good any more!

Barry Wom (or "Wom.I.Am" as he apparently likes to be known now) also got to perform ("make Mouth noises", as Innes described it) his hits of "Living in Hope" and "Rendevous" (You'll know what they parody if you listen to them - and very well they do, too).

There was a short interval (none of us is getting any younger) following "Love Life" (another cracking performance) and then they returned to give us "Shangri-La", with it's very "Hey Jude like ending, where Innes asked us all to get out our mobile phones and wave them 'lighter like' ("no matter what the house rules, say!"), "Double Back Alley" and then a few "Rock 'n Roll" numbers from the "Hamburger Years", including "Goose Step Mama" with the immortal line "You've got nothing to eins, zwei, drei, fear".

They finished on "Get up and Go", the song, apparently, that Lennon thought was a 'little too close to the real thing' and didn't originally feature on the album (although not at Lennon's request, according to Neil Innes) which was a great track, but really is VERY close to "Get Back".

There was no pretence of leaving and coming back "It's all too exhausting", but Innes asked if we wanted one or two more songs and was cheered to the rafters (Farnham Maltings *really* has rafters!).

The 'encore' consisted of George Harrison's "All Things Must Pass" (following a touching tribute to the Beatle, who had helped the TV project considerable, getting talking heads like Mick Jagger and Paul Simon involved), Eine Kleine Middle Klasse Musik (very apt in Farnham) and finishing on the nostalgic "Back in '64", which was probably the perfect way to end a brilliant night.



We'll never see the Beatles again and, I suspect, this tour may well be the Rutles swangsong (not least because Innes has so many other projects), but they certainly didn't go out with a whimper.

A great evening's entertainment - Thanks Dirk and Wom!

Setlist from Newcastle, but I'm pretty sure it's the same:

We've Arrived! (And to Prove It We're Here)

It's Looking Good

Hold My Hand

I Must Be in Love

Good Times Roll

Absurd Reductions At Fiasco

Cock A Doodle 'Tatoes

Four In One Hand Floss

Major Happy's Up and Coming Once Upon a Good Time Band

Rendezvous

Questionnaire

With a Girl Like You

Ouch!

Lonely-Phobia

Another Day

Piggy in the Middle

Living in Hope

Love Life

Absurd Reductions At Fiasco  
Four In One Hand Floss  
Shangri-La (including Cock A Doodle 'Tatoes)  
Doubleback Alley  
Goose-Step Mama  
Hey Mister!  
I Love You  
Easy Listening  
Cheese and Onions  
Joe Public  
Eine Kleine Middle Klasse Musik  
Get Up and Go

Encore:  
All Things Must Pass (George Harrison cover)  
Let's Be Natural  
Back in '64

**LIVERPOOL ECHO APRIL 30, 2014**

## **Neil Innes on The Rutles song that John Lennon didn't like**

**Founder of Beatles pastiche band talks about the origins of the group ahead of their UK tour next month**

The Rutles will set out on a UK tour next month, calling at Liverpool 02 Academy 2

ORIGINALLY a short sketch on BBC's series Rutland Weekend Television, The Rutles was an affectionate parody of The Beatles which has taken on a life of its own.

Rutland Weekend Television was the brainchild of Eric Idle of Monty Python fame and was about the smallest television station in the country.

The Rutles concept came about during a discussion between Idle and Neil Innes, the man behind some of the Python's music and formerly of The Bonzo Dog Doodah Band.

"Eric asked me to do some TV with him, and this was Rutland Weekend Television," Innes tells me. "He usually worked alone and I was handling all the musical items.

"Then I suggested a take-off of The Beatles' A Hard Days' Night and he liked the idea."

The idea was a success and other people thought there was mileage in this.

"About a year later," Innes continues, "Sidney Bernstein was trying to get The Beatles back together on the US show Saturday Night Live, George Harrison had been on and he offered him \$3000.

"Then Eric said he could do it for \$300."

The sketch was shown which included a group not unlike the Fab Four and the mailbag was huge – everybody got the joke.



The Rutles

The idea of a spoof documentary came up and Innes was asked to supply the music.

“They asked me to write 20 more songs for The Rutles and I said I’d try.”

The resultant film *All You Need is Cash* was shown to great acclaim and spawned a spin-off album.

It told the story of The Pre-fab Four: Ron Nasty, Dirk McQuickly, Stig O’Hara and Barry Wom, played by Innes, Idle, Ricky Fataar (ex-Beach Boys and now with Bonnie Raitt) and John Halsey as The Rutles (Idle wasn’t involved in the music and the playing of his music was by the late Ollie Halsall).

There were cameo appearances from the likes of John Belushi, Dan Ackroyd, Michael Palin, Mick Jagger, Eric Clapton and even George Harrison.

“The early songs were the most difficult to write,” says Innes, “and I had to channel my teenage angst.”

George Harrison loved the result and a copy of the finished album also went to John Lennon.

“He said he thought it was great, but to watch out for the track Get Up and Go, which he thought was a little too close,” recalls Innes. “He wouldn’t make any trouble, he said, but we took it off the album (but it’s on the CD version).”

Innes was surprised at the success of the film and album.

“Yes, very surprised, but everybody knew The Beatles and the world was ready for a joke.”

Years later when The Beatles released the Anthology album, The Rutles returned to the studio to make Archaeology.

**“John Lennon said to watch out for Get Up and Go, which he thought was a little too close... He wouldn’t make any trouble, he said, but we took it off the album.”**

Sadly, like the Liverpool band, The Rutles didn’t tour much, but Innes and John Halsey have reunited to tour and bring their music to the auditoria of the UK this month.

“We’ve got a really tight band to go out on the road,” explains Innes. “First of all, there’s Micky Simmonds on keyboards (who also appeared on Archaeology). He’s played with the likes of Joan Armatrading and Mike Oldfield; then on bass we have Mark Griffiths and Ken Thornton on guitar.

“Ken plays just like Ollie Halsall, so that should be OK.”

Innes says that it’s going to be just a Rutles concert. “It’s tempting to do other material, like The Bonzo’s stuff, but we are hoping to play pretty much all of both records.

“And with Micky’s keyboards we can do them just like the records and sing the tricky four-part harmonies.”

And the audiences really get into the joke.

“There’s a part in All You Need is Cash when the band are drinking tea (this parodied The Beatles’ alleged drug taking), and some audience members keep slipping us tea-bags as though they were drugs,” he laughs.



“The songs have now got a life of their own and, a bit like The Monkees, the manufactured band has become real.

“It’s grown-up fun.”

And just in time for the tour, there is a live recording being released that contains many Rutles songs.

“Yes, it’s pretty live and raw and has terrific energy; plus Barry Wom’s drum solo is a good laugh,” says Innes.

“I’m proud of the album on behalf of everyone else, and it was engineered by Steve James, who is Sid James’ son.”

And for the future?

“I’ve quite a few projects on the go,” Innes states.

“We’re off to Tokyo as The Rutles and I have another band that I play with, but no Bonzo’s at the moment.

“I never say never, but we’re not getting any younger.”

**The Rutles UK tour comes to Liverpool 02 Academy 2 on May 31**

**BUZZ – South Wales Culture**

# THE RUTLES I LIVE REVIEW

## THE RUTLES I LIVE REVIEW

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*The Globe, Cardiff, Fri 9 May*

“We’re not a real band,” says Neil Innes, referring to The Rutles – or The Prefab Four, as they were known back in the day. Those of you who are too young, or were too preoccupied, may not know that the Rutles – Dirk, Stig, Nasty and Barry – were once bigger than God and have a long history that parallels that of The Beatles. I’d forgotten about their importance on the music scene but as soon as Innes picked up his guitar and began to sing, “*Hold my hand, yeah, yeah...*” I laughed out loud.

The intimacy of The Globe proved to be just the right setting for the pioneers of the ‘Rutland Sound’ on the Cardiff leg of their 2014 tour. The only original members taking part in this venture are Neil Innes (aka Ron Nasty) and drummer John Halsey (aka Barrington Womble or Barry Wom), but it is Innes that the spotlight falls on – without him there would be no *Get Up And Go*, *Piggy In The Middle*, or *Ouch*. The venue was (nearly) packed with people who were obviously fans and knew all the lyrics – although I wish the hecklers would have shut up and stopped drowning out the witty banter from the stage.

The Rutles were created in 1970 by Innes and Eric Idle (Monty Python) as a short sketch in Idle's UK television comedy series *Rutland Weekend Television*. Innes' songs are more pastiche than parody and were endorsed by the late George Harrison who even had a cameo role in the Rutles' 1978 film *All You Need Is Cash* (remade in 2002 as *Can't Buy Me Lunch*). Hits, such as *Doubleback Alley* (a slanted version of *Penny Lane*) and *Good Times Roll* (almost *Lucy In The Sky...*), were interspersed tonight by 'contractual advertising' for *Fiasco Express*, the 'sponsors' of the gig.

Innes (formerly of The Bonzo Dog Doo Dah Band as well) is a mad genius, and The Rutles, for a band who wilfully stretch the definition of 'realness', provide very real entertainment. The tour continues around the country until the end of the month – see [www.neilinnes.org/live.htm](http://www.neilinnes.org/live.htm) for dates.

# Paul McCartney On The Run Blog

## ultimateclassicrock.com

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martes, 25 de febrero de 2014

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### The Rutles Announce 2014 U.K. Tour

martes, 25 de febrero de 2014

The Rutles Announce 2014 U.K. Tour

ultimateclassicrock.com

Beatles Parody Band The Rutles Announce 2014 U.K. Tour

by Dave Swanson

February 24, 2014

The Rutles, aka the Pre-Fab Four, pioneers of the 'Rutland Sound,' have found their "get up and go" and are returning to the concert stage. They will play 19 dates — listed below — across the U.K. in May.

Of course, the Rutles were born from the minds of Neil Innes of the Bonzo Dog Band, and Eric Idle of Monty Python fame. In 1976, the duo created the Rutles as a send-up of the Beatles for part of their BBC2 sketch show, 'Rutland Weekend Television.' Ultimately, the spoof led to a full-length movie, 'All You Need Is Cash,' which was broadcast on U.S. television in 1978. It featured note-perfect pastiches like 'Ouch!,' 'I Must Be in Love' and 'Cheese and Onions,' and even a cameo from George Harrison.

In typical Neil Innes fashion, a press release regarding the upcoming European tour states, "It is hereby agreed that, in as much as two of the Artistes heretofore and informally known as 'The Rutles', 'The Pre-Fab Four' or 'Dirk, Nasty, Stig and Barry', shall be appearing live and in person as 'Themselves' (namely Neil and John) and whilst they are appearing as 'Themselves' they do so solemnly and without prejudice hereby undertake to use their best endeavors not to make frivolous use of any former silly name, no matter whomsoever, whatsoever, whenever, for ever and ever."

In other words, the only 'original members' taking part in this venture are Neil Innes (aka Ron Nasty) and drummer John Halsey (aka Barrington Womble, shortened to "Barry Wom"). Taking a jab at the question of who actually owns the rights to the Rutles name, Innes said on his website, "Those songs are mine – I wrote them! Why can't we just go out and sing them?" "Maybe we could call it 'Rutalot,'" proposed Halsey, a jab at Idle's Broadway hit, 'Spamalot.'

The connection between Innes and the Beatles goes back to 1967 when the Bonzo Dog Band and the Beatles became fast friends, even appearing in the 'Magical Mystery Tour Film.' Paul McCartney also produced their single, 'I'm The Urban Spaceman' under the pseudonym of Apollo C Vermouth. The film also features cameos from Mick Jagger and Paul Simon among others.

The tour announcement continues, "However, and nevertheless, they reserve the same human rights as any honest Ticket Holder to be free, and at liberty, to make use of any of the aforesaid names as they see fit – in so far as, and provided that, any such said Ticket Holder, or person of wisdom and taste, is deemed to be at all times within the boundaries of the Public Domain or any other such place, area or location as defined by the Real World."

The Rutles 2014 U.K. Tour  
5/7 – Exeter Phoenix



**WB Records**

**Southport Visiter**

# **Preview: The Rutles in Liverpool**

**Neil Innes chats to Martin Hutchinson**

The latest line up of The Rutles

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"He usually worked alone and I was handling all the musical items. Then I suggested a take-off of The Beatles' A Hard Days' Night and he liked the idea."

The idea was a success and other people thought there was mileage in this.

"About a year later," Innes continues, "Sidney Bernstein was trying to get The Beatles back together on the US show Saturday Night Live, George Harrison had been on and he offered him \$3000. Then Eric said he could do it for \$300."

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George Harrison loved the result and a copy of the finished album also went to John Lennon.

"He said he thought it was great, but to watch out for the track Get Up and Go, which he thought was a little too close. He wouldn't make any trouble, he said, but we took it off the album (but it's on the CD version)."

Neil was surprised at the popularity.

"Yes, very surprised, but everybody knew The Beatles and the world was ready for a joke."

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Neil says that it's going to be just a Rutles' concert.

"It's tempting to do other material, like The Bonzo's stuff, but we are hoping to play pretty much all of both records.

And the audiences really get into the joke.

“There’s a part in All You Need is Cash when the band are drinking tea (this parodied The Beatles’ alleged drug taking), and some audience members keep slipping us tea-bags as though they were drugs.” He laughs.

“The songs have now got a life of their own and, a bit like The Monkees, the manufactured band has become real.”

“It’s grown-up fun.” He says.

And just in time for the tour, there is a live recording being released that contains many Rutles’ songs.

“Yes, it’s pretty live and raw and has terrific energy, plus Barry Wom’s drum solo is a good laugh. I’m proud of the album on behalf of everyone else, and it was engineered by Steve James, who is Sid James’ son.”

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# The Telegraph

## The Rutles, O2 Academy Islington, review: 'still going strong'

**The Rutles – the Beatles tribute band founded by a Python – play to an adoring crowd in Islington**

★★★★★

The Rutles rocked the O2 Academy Islington

**By Gary Slater**

4:42PM BST 23 May 2014



[4 Comments](#)

Perhaps the greatest band of all, **The Beatles**, was the inspiration behind The Rutles, one of rock'n'roll's best tribute acts. Except that The Rutles aren't exactly a tribute band at all - they don't actually play any Beatles songs.

They are, in fact, a parody act, with a rock family tree tracing back to 1975 and a back catalogue that most modern bands would die for. Anybody who feels just a little bit cheated that they missed out on the energy and excitement of Beatlemania in the Sixties because they were born too late would have loved The Rutles concert at the O2 Academy Islington.

Fronted, as ever, by unofficial seventh Monty Python member Neil Innes – who created the band with Eric Idle – The Rutles rocked through two sets separated by a generous interval. After all, Innes is now 69.

In the band's early days they were known as the Pre-fab Four, and Innes assumed the role of Ron Nasty – a John Lennon-type figure. They also included Dirk McQuickly (an alternate universe Paul McCartney), Stig O'Hara (a clone of George Harrison) and a drummer named Barrington Womble, or Barry Wom to his friends.

Dirk and Stig have faded from the scene but Barry (real name John Halsey) is still going strong, and even found time to take a phone call midway through his drum solo in the classic Good Times Roll.

The first set also included more Rutles favourites such as It's Looking Good, Hold My Hand, Ouch! (which is every bit as good as Help!), Another Day, Piggy In The Middle and Love Life.

Innes also claimed that the latest tour had only been made possible because of generous sponsorship from a well-known high street supermarket called Fiasco, a company which had a strangely familiar logo.

Innes is said to be considering legal action against the Python team for alleged unpaid royalties arising from the West End stage show Spamalot, but there was no mention of that or of Python's upcoming dates at the O2 Arena here. Instead, the band played and the fans cheered.

Act two started – rather than finished – with the singalong anthem Shangri-La (Innes said they just wanted to get it out of the way) and included the tour-de-force which is Cheese and Onions.

The big finish featured four tracks from The Rutles' 1996 comeback album Archaeology – an affectionate send-up of The Beatles' Anthology series – before Innes sang George Harrison's All Things Must Pass, in tribute to the Beatle who was the biggest Rutles fan. The Rutles also performed a sort-of encore. They didn't actually leave the stage though. That, Innes explained, was all too tiring and tiresome.

After their UK tour, The Rutles head to Japan. The publicity for their concerts over there says "All You Need Is Ticket". That sounds about right, along with – of course – a sense of humour.

# The Birmingham Press

## The Rutles – history in the re-making

Birmingham Press / 23 May, 2014

**The awesome foursome, the pre-fab four, Ron, Dirk, Stig and Barry, yeah, yeah, yeah, it's the Rutles, putting the backbeat back into Birmingham – lock up your grandmothers baby! Steve Beauchampe reports.**

51 years since Ron, Dirk, Stig and Barry were besieged inside the Town Hall by hordes of screamagers during the Birmingham leg of a national pop package tour that also featured such Rutlandbeat legends as Gerry and the Peacemakers and Swinging Blue Jean – a highly liberated and foul-mouthed comic chanteuse – the Rutles returned to the second city to remind us what made them the biggest and most forgettable band of all time.

For it was here in June 1963 that the group had to be smuggled into the building disguised as policewomen (and smuggled out again afterwards dressed as usherettes). Well, not exactly here, in Row D of the stalls where my seat is tonight, but a few yards away round the back of the building at the stage door. In the fevered atmosphere of that late spring day excitable fans smashed a dressing room window and there were repeated attempts to charge the stage during each of the Rutles two near-inaudible sets. But speakers and PA systems have improved a lot these last fifty years meaning that the audience can now hear the group without being forced to join them onstage in order to do so.

And what a collection of classics the band serves up. During an almost two hour-long set the Rutles trawl through their entire career, from the formative Hamburger days of Goose Step Momma to the rooftop rock finale that was Get Up And Go (immediately following which they got up and went from the roof of Rutle Corps, first to their respective lawyers, then off into history, hasbeens in limousines).

After 44 years, during which time Ron Nasty and Barry Wom have been spied but fleetingly, Stig O'Hara not at all and Dirk McQuickly incessantly, it's good to report that although Ron and Barry may have filled out a little, their trousers are still as tight and pleasingly contoured as they ever were. Dirk and Stig meanwhile are almost unrecognisable from their 1960s personas, although their trousers are holding up remarkably well too. The band is augmented, not by session keyboardist Billy Chorley, who joined them for several tracks on their final two studio albums, Let It Rot and Shabby Road, but by multi-instrumentalist Mickey Simmons, his presence allowing the Rutles to perform many of their later period tracks which were previously thought impossible to reproduce live, especially by people who had never heard of orchestras and brass sections.

Chart toppers such as It's Looking Good, Hold My Hand and I Must Be In Love formed the soundtrack to Rutlemania, but the band aren't afraid to throw in regular offerings from their mid-1990s Archaeology project of previously unreleased material. They even open with We've Arrived! (And To Prove It We're Here), the quality of which leaves one open-mouthed at quite how Nasty and McQuickly were capable of writing such material, but also grateful that they held back from releasing it for three decades.

Good Times Roll features what is surely one of Barry's best ever drum solos, but With a Girl Like You really drives the fans wild as they croak along, throw tea bags and wave their walking sticks above their heads. You can quite understand why Town Hall officials have closed off the entire circle and balcony, lest fans topple over the edge in their excitement (or simply lose their balance due to infirmity).

Ouch! sounds even better tonight than it did on the Live At The Hollywood Bowls Pavilion album and leads into a mid-period Rutles section, including material from the Rutle Soul and Revolve Her LPs, along with Living In Hope, Barry's country-tinged homage to unrealistic optimism.

Another Day is the type of song that Dirk McQuickly once used to knock out in his tea break and it's followed by Piggy In The Middle from Tragical History Tour; possibly the Rutles most ambitious song, Nasty is thought to have written it whilst reading Lewis Carroll upside down and backwards whilst listening to Val Doonican's cover of the Byrd's Eight Miles High.

"We've been through the 60s and we're going through them again now." quips Nasty, attired in a white suit not dissimilar to the one that he famously wore on the Shabby Road cover. They breeze through Love Life, Shangri-La (though it lacks the recorded version's four minute chorus and fade out) and Doubleback Alley.

But it's Cheese and Onions, the inspiration and principal lyrics for which Nasty famously got off a crisp packet during a heavy PG Tips drinking session one evening at Stig's house, Get Up And Go, All Things Must Pass (a song Stig wrote while lying in bed suffering from gallstones) and Back In '64 that brings down the curtain on proceedings, though fortunately not on the band, Barry being nifty enough to dive off his stool just as a metal rail lances his skins.

The lights go up and I look around; women are sobbing, men are reduced to jibbering wrecks, sound engineers twiddle knobs randomly as their eyes glaze over, roadies are lovingly caressing guitars and staring at the heavens. Was it the music? The effects of the tea? Perhaps it was the trousers? Who knows and who cares, it was the Rutles man...sure, they didn't play my personal favourite, A Day in the Lifeboat, but as veteran dog loving DJ Murray the Canine might say: "They're (still) what's happening baby!"

Birmingham Mail

# Review: The Rutles, Birmingham Town Hall

**Nostalgia, pastiche, heartfelt songs and a few jolly good laughs - what more could you ask?**

The Rutles

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The Rutles

It was one of those rare moments when fiction and reality blur and you're no longer sure which is which.

The Rutles - a fake band created by Neil Innes and Eric Idle for a comedy sketch forty years ago which spawned a star-studded TV movie - came to life for a room full of adoring fans.

Original members Neil Innes and John Halsey slipped in and out of their Rutles characters (Ron Nasty and Barry Wom), adding to the sense of the unreal as the band switched between the Beatles pastiches which made their name in the seventies and the more thoughtful and individual songs from their sadly-undervalued nineties album Archaeology, all linked by a stream of gags.

With keyboard virtuoso Mickey Simmonds filling out the sound as the Rutland Symphony Orchestra, the band launched into the old All You Need Is Cash favourites including Piggy In The Middle, Doubleback Alley, Living In Hope, Love Life and - of course - Lennon favourite Cheese And Onions.

But it was with the Archaeology songs that the band really came into their own. Melodic and jaunty they may be, but these songs can pack a real bite. Songs

such as Questionnaire, Joe Public Shangri-La and Eine Kleine Middle Klasse Music sounded fantastic live and carried real emotion - who is the fake now?

The show was wrapped up with a touching tribute to The Rutles' greatest fan and champion - a certain George Harrison - as the band played a heartfelt rendition of All Things Must Pass, followed by their answer to When I'm Sixty Four (Back In Sixty Four) which was sometimes achingly poignant in its wistfulness.

Innes has suggested that this might be the last hurrah for The Rutles, but it would be a shame if they were put to rest now - just when they have really come to life.

# Lancashire Telegraph

## WHAT'S ON IN LANCASHIRE

### The Rutles spreading a little silliness along the way

The Rutles as they are now

NEIL Innes is convinced that too many people involved in the music business are far too serious.

And for more than 40 years he's been on a mission to bring some fun back, both as a solo artist and with the likes of the Bonzo Dog Doo Dah Band and The Rutles, who come to Clitheroe's Grand Theatre next week.

"Oh, musicians can be way too serious," he said. "People are all individuals and need to find themselves and what works for them."

"The music industry treats the music-buying public as a mob, happy to accept what's thrown at them without questioning."

"I'm afraid I've never been able to accept that concept. For a start, there's no room for silliness."

The Rutles have become a cult, beloved by music and comedy fans alike.

The original idea was for a sketch on Rutland Weekend Television, a TV series in the mid 1970s featuring Monty Python's Eric Idle. Neil had the idea for a spoof of The Beatles' Hard Day's Night, which became a five minute sketch on the show.

That routine was later shown on the American comedy show Saturday Night Live and audiences across the States loved it.

This in turn led to the full spoof documentary, All You Need is Cash, which actually featured original Beatle George Harrison, and a cult was born.

"George got it straight away," said Neil. "And John Lennon loved it. Paul McCartney was really the only one who took exception to it at the time."

Now The Rutles are back on the road — the band performed live for the first time in 30 years back in 2008 and have played a series of shows ever since.

"We are a really tight band," said Neil. "It's fun to do and we all really enjoy getting out and seeing an audience react to all our songs."

"The music is totally affectionate towards any band from Liverpool you might be thinking of."

Alongside Neil in the band is John Halsey, who featured in that initial TV sketch.

"We're just enjoying having a bit of fun with the tour and at the end of travelling around the UK we're off to Tokyo," said Neil.

"The Rutles are massive in Japan. It's like having a big family there."

One thing Neil won't be involved are the Monty Python reunion shows, even though he wrote many songs for the inspirational comedy team.

"It's no secret that Eric Idle and I don't really get on and he's producing the reunion shows," said Neil.

"But I'm very happy just too be doing what I'm doing and if I can spread a little silliness along the way, so much the better."



## Blastocyst

### Neil Innes and his Elvis Connection: The Rutles 2014 tour

May 20, 2014



By [Jonathan Brick](#)

Neil Innes, one of Britain's best-loved songwriters, speaks to me on an April afternoon in pain.

"It's very difficult to get the Rutles message out there," he says, which is where I come in. Don't scroll down just yet but there's a really good Elvis factoid in this

piece.

The Rutles are one of the greatest rock bands Britain has produced, legends in their own lunchtime and an influence on bands from Manchester who peddled rock songs in around 1995.

"The Rutles are a semi-official way of telling the Beatles story," Innes tells me as he babysits a grandson using his iPhone. That story called *All You Need is Cash* – "That's Eric's title! It was funny at the time. All I did was write the songs" – was named the best Beatle movie by Mitch Benn in his brilliant show '...is the 37th Beatle.'

Neil was a few places ahead of him as the 34th or 35th Beatle: the man who knew the band in the 1960s and a close friend of George Harrison.

"George got the footage of Anthology [the official Beatles documentary from the 1990s] which Eric and I looked at while the film was being assembled and that was the template for The Rutles film. George really wanted it made!"

The band was "a real social glue" for the country whose people did not want them to split up.

In the 1970s the pain was all around in Britain. Sid Bernstein was offering them stupid sums of money, twenty million dollars (in 1970s prices!) to reform, while George was offered \$300,000 on Saturday Night Live to get the old band back together.

In the meantime, Innes and Eric Idle released their soundtrack album to accompany the movie, freely and lovingly available on a video-sharing website and on DVD. I cherish my vinyl copy of The Rutles which contains some of my favourite ever tracks, all of which take elements of Beatle and create something new.

Doubleback Alley is on that vinyl. It references Penny Lane, Paul McCartney's most nostalgic tune. "When I first heard Penny Lane," Neil told me, "I thought it was moving songwriting into a new level. For my one, I mentally went back to newsreels so it was like a movie for me. "

The Beatles and Neil Innes' band, the Bonzo Dog Doo-Dah Band, "were kind of peer group. When we met on Magical Mystery Tour, they were four guys who had been in the van and we were six!" The Bonzos toured for five years, as did the Beatles before they jacked it in and retreated to Abbey Road and changed recorded sound.

I Must be In Love was the first song Innes wrote for what became The Rutles project, written for the Eric Idle show Rutland Weekend Television. The song's middle eight takes his ditty to a more interesting place. "It's basically a list song, it's one of George's favourites.

"I didn't want to listen to Beatles songs because I knew I'd be overwhelmed, so I went back to my life! I Love You is more or less how my wife and I met."

I put it to Neil that he has more singalongs than those of one of Neil's heroes, Woody Guthrie, and more than some Mancunian chap influenced by Neil and, more infamously, by The Beatles.

John Harris once said that the career of Noel Gallagher was a school play about The Beatles, but Neil is having none of this. "I don't want to get into that area, and it's nothing to do with the lawsuit...I am ever so glad Noel was influenced by How Sweet to be an Idiot [for which Neil settled after Noel used the chord sequence for his super hit 'Whatever']. It means I can keep having holidays!"

Returning to The Beatles, I ask about some of the members of the band and what set them apart. Without them, The Rutles would not be touring 40 years after their initial success.

“John was reviled, almost, in the later days for trying to do a worldwide advertising campaign for peace! You don’t get anywhere from nodding and being polite.

“Paul is a brilliant musician and his heart’s in the right place and he’s quite funny. George was funnier, he was more detached from showbusiness. He said it’s all very well being famous and rich, but you’ve still got to work out *who you are*.” After The Beatles, George embraced spirituality and film production, while another Beatle had produced something of Neil’s.

“The Bonzos had a hit record [I’m the Urban Spaceman, written by Neil]. We didn’t need one, we got enough money, and we didn’t feel the need to be in the charts. Paul McCartney produced it, and it got to number 17 on its own! We didn’t want to put his name on the record [they put Apollo C. Vermouth]!” When the fact got out, it leapt to number five, and Neil still plays it fifty years on.

Neil turns 40 (and a bit) this December – “I shall be 70!” – so I asked which celebrity friends of his would give him a call or go to his party. He calls me out on my shameless attempt to make him drop some names. (Elvis coming shortly....)

“I’ve never been that high profile, you have to work quite hard and I’ve never wanted to. I play with the toys of showbusiness – filming, hitting my mark, working with other musicians.”

Not just that, but without Neil’s songs, one can argue, that long-running cartoon series The Simpsons might not be as fun as it has been.

“I met Matt Groening in Los Angeles. The girls who run NeillInnes.org put the gig together when I was on the way to Melbourne. We did a couple of songs and Matt found out about it, bought his own tickets and turned up. These people were filming [the documentary The Seventh Python] and we met him.

Groening went 'aww shucks' to Neil's praise for him but received a reply which made him do the same: "He said, 'I couldn't have done anything without the Bonzo Dog Doo-Dah Band!'" Mutual admiration and modesty was the order that day.

When I watched the Rutles film in summer 2008, I knew most of the Beatles story but not all of it. Having watched it since, with more Beatleknowledge, it seems that, like The Simpsons, the more you know, the more you get out of it.

Talk turns to Neil's other life as an ecowarrior, "defending self-esteem. We don't know what we do, who we are, why we're here. That doesn't mean to say we can't water the plants and sing a few songs."

Imagine no possessions? "Exactly! It's been going on for thousands of years, saying wealth not by how much we have but by how little we need."

"We are incapable of making the world a better place," he concludes, but does concede the heroism of Tim Berners-Lee and the power of social media.

I ask about the reunion of the year (Rutles aside) which is happening in London in summer involving some funny old men. "I have been told that Eric is thinking of ending [the Python reunion show] with Bright Side of Life on his own." The two are not as close as they used to be, but Neil does wish the chaps luck with their japery.

"This will irritate Eric..He asked me what was wrong with Bright Side of Life – he knows this but he denies it – and I said it needs whistling. I gave him his hook line!"

"The Pythons are doing whatever they need to do. If it's because Eric Idle is an idiot...in my book, he's nice actually. It is sweet to be an idiot."

Mention of books prompts me to ask whether we expect a memoir from Neil soon. "Oh no, I get invaded by adjectives!

"I'm a microphone man," he adds, so the memoir will go out on Radio Noir, half-hour shows, containing ongoing serials and say some of the things about life in general. "It'll NEVER be commissioned!"

Nevertheless, Neil is content with his lot and is also planning his solo show called The Art of Hopelessness.

“People know what I do. I don’t need the adoration of millions. I had a happy childhood! The way things are I couldn’t have it better.”

Ah yeah, that Elvis factoid:

“A friend of mine, researching a book on Elvis, sent me an email saying some US researchers were saying that in Elvis’s cinema [the Jungle Room at Graceland] he used to watch Monty Python and the Holy Grail. He knew every word and he could do all the voices.

“So that makes me one of the very few people on the planet who have been impersonated by Elvis! That’s me done...I’m IMMORTAL.”

**Nottingham Post**

## **Review: The Rutles, Rescue Rooms**

BEATLES spoofers, and the true inspiration for Oasis, Neil Innes' well-worn musical prank was a surprising delight in concert.

The joke harks back to the 1970s, when former Bonzo Dog member Innes and Monty Python's Eric Idle cooked up the idea of telling the story of The Beatles through the prism of Rutland's imaginary greatest band of all time. It was a hoot, but Innes' songs - often so close to the originals you'd have trouble telling them apart on a foggy night - proved the parody was an affectionate one.

George Harrison loved it - persuading Mick Jagger and Paul Simon to join John Belushi, Dan Aykroyd, Bill Murray and Michael Palin in the TV film - and most of the Fab Four agreed with him. Now Innes has formed a great band and taken the show the road.

On the records, the tracks are funny but the close similarity to the real thing always makes me want to just stick the Beatles on. Live, it's a different matter. From the moment they kicked off, with jaunty Back In The USSR knock-off We've Arrived! (And To Prove It We're Here), they had the musical ability to match their considerable wit.

All the old favourites - Hold My Hand, Good Times Roll, I Must Be In Love, Piggy In The Middle and the mighty Cheese And Onions - sounded better live, with stunning guitar from Ken Thornton and faultless keyboards from Mickey Simmonds. Later on, a more acerbic edge crept in with a biting Lennonesque snarl on Eine Kleine Middle Klasse Muzik.

Innes has an urbane wit - saying the differences between men and women boiled down to one thing: "Women generalise. Men don't" - and there were jabs at Ukip and the corporate sponsorship of live music, but he was challenged for man of the match by legendary drummer John Halsey.

Now 69, Halsey played on Lou Reed's classic Bowie-produced Transformer album. He's also been Rutles drummer Barry Wom (nowadays, wom.i.am) from the start. Everything he did was hilarious - taking a lengthy call on his mobile in the middle of his drum solo, talking about his career in such films as Dirty Barry and When Barry Met Sally, and ending the night by ripping up a newspaper on stage to provide a rhythm track, to deserved and enormous applause.

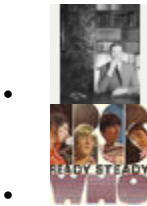
But not all the tears were of laughter. Paying tribute to Beatle George, Innes - on ukulele - led the band through his old friend's masterpiece All Things Must Pass. Like the gig, it was a fitting tribute to four Liverpool geniuses who changed the world.

### 3 comments



[FixedGrin](#) | May 20 2014, 9:50PM

Aye a lovely night, the band was splendid and the audience was nicely turned out an all ( makes a change eh? )



[Jack\\_Hughes](#) | May 19 2014, 2:01PM

Many thanks to Mr. Innes & co for providing an evening's worth of knock-out entertainment - I hadn't laughed so much in

## NEON FILLER

### The Rutles – The Rescue Rooms, Nottingham (May 18, 2014)

Posted on 19 May 2014 by Arthur Hughes

To people of a certain demographic Neil Innes is a great British Institution. As a founding member of 1960s act The Bonzo Dog Doo-Dah band he went on to work with the Monty Python team and was a regular on British TV in the 1970s through shows such as The Innes Book of Records and the 1980s through children's TV.



Neil Innes

He was also the man behind The Rutles, a Beatles pastiche act that ended up creating songs as good as, and at times better than the fab four themselves. Created for the 1970s TV show Rutland Weekend Television the pre-fab four ended up stars of their own mockumentary, *All You Need Is Cash*, which had the full backing of George Harrison and cast Innes as the John Lennon like lead singer Ron Nasty. They became and remain a cult sensation, with Innes's wonderful ear for a tune and close affinity with The Beatles ensuring their songs live long.

For this latest outing, billed as the Tragical History Tour, Innes was joined by a couple of original members and delivered a fantastic, crowd pleasing display of Rutles classics such as *With a Girl Like You*, *I Must Be In Luv* and *Major Happy's Up and Coming Once Upon a Good Time Band*'.



Their Hamburger years, in reference to the Beatles early days in the clubs of Hamburg, were also revisited through the excellently tongue in cheek Goose Step Mama.

The crowd were clearly enraptured, holding up mobile phones instead of lighters, dancing in the aisles and repeatedly shouting for the psychedelic classic Cheese and Onions.

The Rutles also donned pig masks whilst playing 'Piggy in the Middle' another Beatles classic.....ooops, sorry I mean, The Rutles classic. Innes also put on his Lennon pink shades and 'ban the bomb' pendant as the Rutles psychedelic era continued, as they crowd sang along to lyrics such as "Revolution's in the Air, I'm dancing in my underwear."

For the encore there was a genuinely touching cover of George Harrison's All Things Must Pass. Innes and Harrison were great friends, sharing the same humour, as shown by the former Beatle appearing in a cameo in the film.

The Rutles finished off with 'Back in 64', a play on words from The Beatles song 'When I'm 64.' It is 50 years since the Beatles first emerged but their legacy clearly has a good few decades left in it yet judging by the continued affection this crowd has for the band that lampooned them so well.

# Neil Innes talks Bonzos, Beatles, Rutles and more

**"Off we went, exploding grandfather clock and all."**

[Rob Power](#) May 16, 2014, 15:45 GMT

**He's been a Bonzo and a Rutle, appeared on film alongside Pythons and Beatles, written everything from kid's TV shows to hit singles, and kept a sense of humour throughout it all.**

Neil Innes has had the sort of career that could never have been planned, and has been all the better for it. We caught up with Neil to talk everything from appearing in Magical Mystery Tour to the knowledge of the ancients, the birth of The Rutles and the importance of finding the fun in everything you do...

**What drew you to music initially? Were you from a musical household?**

"My dad used to amuse us with a guitar, and sing terrible old Scottish songs about dead horses. You know, 'there's a bridle hanging on the wall,' or 'don't go down the mine daddy there's plenty of coal in the bin.' They were wonderful, they've stuck with me all my life.

"Then I got piano lessons when I was seven, and I was quite interested with that. There was a critical day when I had to play something different with my left hand to my right hand, and I declared at the age of seven that it was impossible. I had this really gentle teacher, he was a German guy because we lived in Germany – my father was in the army – and he said 'well, if you observe me closely, you will see that my left hand is doing something different to the right hand!'

"So I knew I had to apply myself. I really did, and I got quite decent at it. But then at 14 when I was playing Chopin, reading the dots and all that, I suddenly thought 'who am I working for? Every time I finish a really difficult piece they give me a harder one!' So I rebelled and got a guitar for thirty shillings. It was terrible, more like an egg slicer than a guitar. I met somebody later who had a real guitar, a Hofner, and it was really easy to push the strings down. That's how we all start, I think."

**Music was presumably a hobby at that stage – when did you start thinking about making a career of it?**

"Well, I had a twin interest which was painting and drawing. That was winning the race as it were, and so I ended up going to London Art School. When I was in London, and living in the house with Vernon Dudley Bohay Nowell on the floor below, he came up and said I've met these blokes called The Bonzo Dog Dada Band, you'd really like them and they need a pianist. And I thought ok, I'll give it a go.

"So I went up to the Royal College Of Art every Tuesday night and started thumping out these silly old jazz songs. That was the first time I'd used chord sheets. I quickly worked out what to do. I learned more about composition from chord sheets than from reading sight music."

**Had you played in bands before? Because that sounds like quite an introduction to playing with others...**

"But it wasn't really a band! It was a bunch of enthusiasts, some came, some went, but it was just a chance to have a good laugh. The Bonzos in the early days was just a bunch of art students having a laugh. Vernon and I, because it was a long way from where I lived in Blackheath to South Kensington, we found this pub in Forest Hill call The Bird In Hand, and it was a big room.

"We asked if our band could play in there, and they didn't mind. It was empty! We turned up and we started playing, and we passed the hat round. By the end of the evening the place was heaving! The bloke there said 'can you come back next week, we'll give you twenty five quid.' Whatever we were doing, it was brilliant drinking music."

### **The Bonzo Dog Doo-Dah Band**

**How did Vivian Stanshall become involved, and how did that change things?**

"He used to live with Rog, and then he sort of became a merchant sailor, and so they separated for a bit. Then he went to Edinburgh and worked with Linsey Kemp. It was when he came back from Edinburgh – I mean he was huge, he was a big bloke with a big red beard - and he decided to go all slim. He did it one summer by huffing boxes of fish. Then he came back, and so when we had The Bird In Hand he joined in because there was a bit of money. But he was the first person to start putting on a show as it were. He started being the frontman, and he was brilliant at it.

"I think more and more people came to see him. Because when you saw Vivian, in the early days, it was *dangerous*. It was just brilliant, but we tried to keep him off the instruments as much as possible. We ended up playing five or six pubs a week. Then there were about nine of us in the Bonzo Dog Doo-Dah Band, then about seven, and then six."

**The Bonzos had this kind of improvisational, anarchic sensibility, but it had steel in the walls - you were serious musicians as well. It made for a very interesting mix.**

"It was a mix. Some of us could really, really play, and some were more enthusiastic! But it was fun driven. There was one chap who used to play a thing called a helicon, which is like a sousaphone light – it wrapped round him. All of a sudden one evening he decided he was going to do a magic trick, so he rolled a newspaper into a cone and then poured a pint of beer into it. And it went all over the floor. It made us laugh! And it didn't matter. That was the atmosphere we were in.

"The pubs were full of trad bands who were trying to play proper trad jazz. But they weren't looking for stupid songs. We looked over the junk shops for stupid titles, like 'I'm Gonna Bring A Water Melon To My Girl Tonight, Hunting Tigers Out In India, Ali Baba's Camel. So we were finding novelty songs and having a laugh. Then we developed the idea of having comedy speaking balloons cut out of hard board which we would hold over people's heads.

"It was a very visual thing we did. So we became very notorious. By the time we finished college, it was a no-brainer. We were offered some work up north and we decided to take it. We set off in Vernon's Daimler Ambulance, with no back seat – we had ordinary chairs in the back! - and off we went, exploding grandfather clock and all."

**It's a noticeable theme of your career, you always seem to have followed the fun. There doesn't appear to have been any cold, calculated approach to finding success.**

"No, it's never planned. We used to surprise each other, pull tricks on each other, and it was like that on stage. We did a bit of work to get a good forty five minutes, but it was all based around that from then on! If anyone wanted to do anything new they did it, and it got a laugh it stayed in. Then because we had to make albums, we had to write new songs, but most of the stuff we recorded we couldn't actually do live, so we did different kinds of things. We didn't have the stuff you have nowadays. When we do The Rutles, Mickey's virtually a symphony orchestra with the keyboards. So we did what we could and mucked about, and it was good fun."

**But it was pretty successful too. Was it a surprise that it got so bit?**

"Yeah, but we weren't counting! It was just happening. We worked for five years all together, without a holiday, and we bought off three managers. So we must have been doing quite well! Rick Wakeman pointed out the other day that the Bonzos were the first band to go over £200 a night without being in the charts. We were one of the top paid bands in the country. It was on reputation alone. Of course when we did have a hit record, it was even more – in a way, we became the kind of thing we were sending up."

**But it's an enduring success with the Bonzos – they seem to gather fans as the years go by.**

"There was a reunion in 2006, and that was forty years since the first single, My Brother Makes The Noises For The Talkies. I was against it at first – how are you going to replace Vivian? You can't. But they said 'some people would like to try,' and I said 'who?' Well, Stephen Fry, Adrian Edmondson, they all came and they were word perfect. We can't do Vivian, but we can enjoy the songs."

**Magical Mystery Tour and I'm The Urban Spaceman**

**The Bonzos were, of course, involved in Magical Mystery Tour. How did that come about? Was it a surprise to be asked?**

"No, not really, we just took it all in our stride. We'd heard that The Beatles used to come out and see us in the days when they wore false beards in order not to be recognised. We also kept bumping into Mike McCartney, Paul's brother, and he suggested the Bonzos to Paul when he heard that he was making this funny film. We then heard that he wanted us to do it, so we had to think about what we wanted to do."

"We'd just made Gorilla, so we sent Paul a copy which he listened to, and he chose Death Cab For Cuties as the one for the strip club. It was nice, because he said to me how much he'd liked Music For The Head Ballet, so he listened to it all. We sort of bonded actually. John and Ringo were there, filming the stripper with their own cameras. I said 'what are you doing?' and they said 'we're doing the Weybridge version!' But you know, the bond was it was guys in a van, going out and doing gigs. There's no side, you all know what it's like and you all laugh at the same thing. They were laughing at us doing backing singers with terrible plastic masks on, and we just had a good time."

**What was the recording like? Was the set up of Magical Mystery Tour as loose as everyone thinks it was?**

"We were in one day, we weren't on the bus, so we went to Raven's Revue Bar – that was the location – and we did it to playback. That was it, a day's filming! We always thought it was rather amusing because when it came out and the credits came up, there was a big credit, Bonzo Dog Doo-Dah Band, because it's alphabetical! Although it should have followed The Beatles, but there you go."

**You went on to work with Paul McCartney later on to do I'm The Urban Spaceman as well.**

"Well we did have a hit. But we couldn't get enthusiastic about having to make a single, we liked making albums. I'd written the song, and I don't know how it happened, but Viv used to hang out a lot at The Speakeasy and places like that, and he often hung out with Paul and John. He was with Paul one night, moaning about the fact that Gerry Bron, our manager and producer, said that nobody takes more than three hours to do a track.

"Viv was moaning about it, saying we can't get the blighter off the knobs, we've got these ideas and can't ever do them, and so Paul said 'well, I'll come and produce it.' So we went back to poor old Gerry and said we'd do the single, but we don't want you to produce it. And he really fell right into it, saying 'and who do you think you're going to get?' Well, we're going to get Paul McCartney! He couldn't believe it.

"The day came and Paul came in saying 'oh, I've just written this,' and started playing Hey Jude, which takes forever as you know. I thought he was winding Gerry up, because it was taking forever, wasting studio time playing this dirge, but he really had just written in! None of The Beatles had heard it, probably!

"So eight and a half hours later, Viv said 'I think I'd like to play my hose pipe.' 'What's that Viv?' A length of garden hose with a trumpet mouthpiece and a plastic funnel at the other end. The engineer said 'you can't record that,' and Paul said 'yeah you can, just put a microphone in each corner.'

"But of course the cruelest thing of all, right at the end when Gerry said, 'at least we've got Paul McCartney's name on the record,' we said we didn't want his name on the record. We didn't want any success on somebody else's coat tails. We were asked what we were going to call him, and somebody said Apollo C Vermouth. Paul thought it was a great name, so he said 'yeah, I'll be Apollo C Vermouth.'

**It's another great example of your way of embracing something but not being cynical.**

"Well I think we wanted to be outside the swim of things. The fact that we were the Dada band, we just wanted to question everything. Dada came out of the First World War, showing how awful it was. The young men wanted to examine what they were doing as people. I was quite into that as a serious thing. I liked the fact that they were exhibiting urinals and drawing moustaches and beards on the Mona Lisa. I wanted to rebel in a creative way, to say I think that we can re-think the way we're thinking. I *still* think we could re-think the way we're thinking."

**So Duchamp and people like that were key to your way of thinking?**

"Absolutely. But we were the Bonzo Dog Dada Band, and changed it to Doo-Dah because we got fed up with trying to explain what Dada was!"

**Ideas like Dadaism are well known now – were they more fringe at the time?**

"The art school community were right there, they were really keen on it as well. The fact that there's a bit exhibition at the Tate Modern now of Richard Hamilton, he actually re-made some of Marcel Duchamp's things. He was a bit like Socrates, sentenced to death for impiety and corrupting the young – I can't think of anything better to do!"

**Do Not Adjust Your Set, Monty Python**

**Talking about corrupting the young, let's talk about Do Not Adjust Your Set. Was that where you first met Eric Idle and some of the Pythons? Or did you know them already?**

"No, that's exactly how we met. Humphrey Barclay had been tasked with making a children's program. He came from Cambridge so he knew Eric [Idle], and he's also seen the work of Michael [Palin] and Terry Jones. They were already in children's television writing stuff, and he liked them so he got those three together. He found David Jason, so he was quite a talent spotter. We circled each other a little in suspicion, but in the end we made 26 programs which are still legendary in many ways.

"And they were the test run if you like for Python. In the second series, Terry Gilliam joined us, so if there was ever a demo of what Python was going to become... They knew they didn't have to end a sketch in the normal way, they could suddenly go into animation and then, now for something completely different! And that's refreshing. That's all the Bonzos ever wanted to do, to say that there's another way! It doesn't have to be corny and the same old all the time. Python was in a similar mode. And Eric is on record as saying that the Bonzos taught them anarchy!"

"Did you know that in Japan there's a magazine called Strange Days? All it's about is The Beatles, The Bonzos, Python and The Rutles. God knows what they find to write about, but they've found a connection there, and there *is* a connection. George [Harrison] is on record as saying that what should have happened is that The Beatles should have got together with The Bonzos and the Pythons and The Rutles and had a good time."

**The sense of humour and the anarchy in the way that you approached your creativity is certainly the link there. As you moved forward and worked with Python, especially with your songwriting, how did you retain that sense of freedom?**

"When they were thinking about making a record, I was first choice because we knew each other well. I hadn't met John [Cleese], so I met John and Graham [Chapman] after one of their shows. We went for a meal, and they said they were making a record and would I help them out with the music? I said 'what sort of songs have you written?' and Eric said 'well, Michael's written a thing about agrarian reform in the middle ages.' Oh, alright, ok! Get in there before Motown!"

"And John Cleese, who wants to know what's what, said 'what sort of music for that then, Neil?' I said I don't know, what about reggae"? It was exactly like going into the Bonzos again. It was lucky. You can't plan these things. The Bonzos had wonderful chemistry, Python had wonderful chemistry. It was irresistible. We did records, then we did tours, and it was such great fun."

**Some of your stuff with Python is just great – the Hollywood Bowl for example. What are your memories of performing there?**

"I have wonderful memories of it. The first thing was that I didn't have my duck for my head for How Sweet To Be An Idiot. Air Canada lost it. You can't write this stuff! I bought it in Woolworths, and we were on the phone to the head of Woolworths in New York to find this duck. They were called Quacksies, and when you took the wheels off they made a hat. It was just ridiculous. Somebody got to hear about this, and there was a cartoonist from Pittsburgh called Wayne Olaf, I'll never forget. He'd got one, he'd made his own, and he sent me his. I've still got it. So Hollywood Bowl, didn't have my duck.

"But what was the naughty thing, I did the Protest Song, which you never saw. Every night in the stadium the whole audience was lit up as I was doing it. All four nights, the bastards were using my song to do cutaways of the audience laughing! That was the sort of stuff that went on."

**You also appeared in Monty Python And The Holy Grail, what was it like to shoot that?**

"It's a wonderful film. A lot of the songs of mine are still in there, the little medieval things. Terry Gilliam and I used to share dressing rooms, because we were from the art world as opposed to the word world.

Cleese used to say Terry was subhuman because he was American and couldn't talk properly. 'What do you mean, a whole bunch of water?'

"I felt that the basic insecurity of these literary people meant that every time anything heavy was lobbed out of a castle, it landed on me. The cow, the wooden rabbit. When I was up on the battlements and keys turns round to tell me to get the cow, he says to me 'fetchez la vache.' I was just supposed to get up and go, so I said 'Quoi?' So I built the part! And all the better for it – 'fetchez'? Ha! It was a blast.

"The tragic thing was I wrote really good tunes for King Arthur, for two french horns and about eight violins, because that's all we could afford. The budget was £3000 for the music for the movie. It was heroic, but it sounded really weedy on such a small line up. In the end Terry rang me up and said that with the coconuts and everything else, they couldn't have weedy music.

"They tried this library music with 140 people banging and scraping any old thing, and it really works because it's a big noise. It's a counterpoint to people with coconuts. And he was absolutely right. I didn't mind, but I was a little bit sad my tunes didn't make it because of money."

### **But you're all over the film anyway.**

"Terry Gilliam is such a great film maker. Filth, smoke, everything. When Michael had his 60th birthday, Terry Jones said this wonderful thing. He said 'he's such a nice chap, but he has lost his temper on two occasions. One was in Paris when we were promoting the Holy Grail. We were walking round and Terry kept saying that there might be a better restaurant elsewhere, and after two hours Michael said 'for God's sake this is Paris, they're all good!' And the other time was in Holy Grail.

"They all mucked in and did every job, and Michael was playing a peasant with a basket on his bottom. He was going around eating mud, and they'd put all this chocolate down for him. They kept doing it again and again, and there was all this smoke, and finally the dirt got mixed with the chocolate. There's a lovely photograph of him somewhere with his face covered in chocolate. He was there at the rushes, and they showed him the shot, and you couldn't see his face or him eating the chocolate, and he lost it. Understandably!"

## **The Rutles**

### **Let's turn to The Rutles now. It was a sketch initially on Rutland Weekend Television, wasn't it?**

"The way it worked was that Eric wrote stuff, and then I was covering the music bases and coming up with musical ideas. It was supposed to be a television station, so it wouldn't just be talking, you'd have to break it up. So it was my job to think up cheap musical ideas and song ideas. One of them was to do a spoof of Hard Day's Night, because it was black and white, speeded up, four guys, four wigs, tight trousers, pointy shoes, running around a field. It's got to be cheap! It was a cheap joke!

"Eric had this idea for a documentary maker who was so dull the camera ran away from him. And so it started off as a scene with someone suffering from love in the hospital, as if it was a disease. Then it turned into the spoof, and then it turned into talking about the Rutles. We then coined the word 'Rutle', which I didn't like at the time. I wish we called it The Bootles or something. Bootle was a part of Liverpool, and it's very close to Bootleg. Anyway, that's how The Rutles started, and then of course it was shown on Saturday Night Live.

"Sid Bernstein was trying to get The Beatles together again, and offering them millions of dollars each. It was getting silly, and something sillier had to be done. So we showed it on Saturday Night Live – they'd got Eric to do the hosting because he said he could get The Beatles back together for \$300. They set it

up, and when Eric took over the hosting, they said 'sorry, he hasn't got The Beatles back together, it was a bad phone line. He's got The Rutles!'

"They showed the clip, and that's when the audience all kicked in and started saying 'We want The Rutles!' So we did the whole story, went and got the money and made the now famous mockumentary All You Need Is Cash. Everybody knew somehow that The Beatles were never going to get back together again, and the real story, Brian Epstein dying and everything, it was too sad. Something sillier and funnier needed to be done, and that's when George thought 'I want to see this'.

"That's when he got really involved. He got footage from Neil Aspinall that turned into Anthology, and we actually used bits of teenagers and audiences from there so that we could shape it and tell the story in a new way. George of all of them, probably, wanted to put the suits in the cupboard and move on. John really loved it too. Ringo might have thought some of the drumming jokes were a bit out there. Paul was fine about the music, I've talked to him about it since, but I think he took exception to the way Eric played 'him' as it were."

**All You Need Is Cash features songwriting that's so sharp, and the sound is so good and so close to those Beatles records. Did the songwriting come easily? How did you approach it?**

"I knew if I had to write all these songs that were going to be credible as Beatles songs, I would be sunk if I listened to a lot of Beatles songs! I didn't do which lots of people think I did, which is take a little bit of this and a little bit of that. I decided not to listen to any Beatles songs at all, and instead tried to remember where I was when certain Beatles songs came out. I used my life and my memory to think about teenage love and things like that – Hold My Hand, you know.

"The psychedelic ones are fun to write. I had to be more disciplined then, because not any old thing will do. It's not just putting a pickled onion on a hairbrush. It's not surrealism, you have to have a bit more to it than that. I didn't want to trivialise Beatles songs, so I tried to make the songs about things. Even Cheese And Onions, which is about 'man and machine, keep yourself clean, or be a has-been like the dinosaurs.' It is only pop. You can only do so much!"

"The sound was definitely down to Steve James, the engineer – Sid James' son. He wanted to take no chances. We recorded it at 30 inches per second on 2 inch tape. We got it to where it was all sounding fantastic, but it still wasn't right. It suddenly dawned on us: it sounded too good! So we took the mix and compressed it, took a bit off the top and a bit off the bottom, that was more like it. We did the same thing again, and it started to sound like it had been made on four tracks. The first album was like that, the second album we made it a bit more hi-fi. Archaeology, that was such a joy to make. I think it's the better album if you look at the music and the songs.

"No, I didn't want to do anything to diminish their songwriting. But mostly The Rutles is production sounds, and speaking Rutlese every now and then!"

**You managed to achieve certain sounds and styles that many bands have tried to do in a very serious way since. Your creativity seems to be based in play, but the end result is always better for it.**

"You can't force that. Analysing something kills the spark. It's more to do with, let's play Batman and Robin now. You get happiness coming into it. Even though it is a miserable world, you can't shirk it but you can have it in there. It's not dominating anything. I've written other songs, but the songs in Archaeology were more or less my songs. They weren't written to be any particular Beatles songs. When



I went to see George to play him some of them, he was sitting there with a smile on his face waiting to hear which song was which, and then he suddenly realised: 'these are your songs! Don't be shy.'

"You can take the song Joe Public and do it a hundred ways. We decided to do it like an indian sitar thing, but the song is still the song. Somebody said to me the thing about Bach is that you can play it on school recorders and it will still sound good. But you can't do that with Tchaikovsky, because it's all in the arrangements.

"The other thing I didn't mention was that when I'd written the Rutles songs for the first album, the rule was if I could play it just on the guitar or on the piano to somebody else, and it works as a song, then I know it's alright. Not hiding behind harmonies or dressing, it's a basic song.

"It's funny, the only down thing about The Rutles is that it branded me as a parodist. But I'm not! Not really, I write songs. Some of them are silly, but some of them are not, some of them you can think about. But that puts people out of their comfort zone in the music business. They like you to be one thing or the other. And I refuse to be like that, because I'm a Bonzo!"

**You never seem to have gone after fame or anything like that.**

"No. You have to work to be famous, or want it. And I've never wanted it, and I'm a complete stranger to work! I love all the toys and being able to play with great musicians, and being able to make enough of a living to be able to do that. I'm happy with that.

"I have to quote Seneca now – some of the best ideas in the world are a thousand years old, but Seneca said it most succinctly. 'We should measure wealth not by how much we have, but how little we need.' And that's my philosophy."

**It's a good one...**

"It's not bad!"

**Rutling again, Monty Python reunion and Raggy Dolls**

**Obviously you're back on the road with The Rutles now.**

I thought it was all finished, I thought it was finished when we did Glastonbury. But something else came up and we did some more. We love it. There's the five of use. Mickey Simmons on keyboard, Mark Griffiths on bass – he's played with The Shadows, but he's a really good jazz guitarists – and there's Ken Thornton on lead guitar. He's the guest if you like. And there's John Halsey on the drums.

"We did eight gigs last August, and it was such a blast we thought we'd do some more while it's up and running and in our heads. So we're doing more this spring, and we're going to Tokyo immediately afterwards. So you never know, there might be more! But I don't look too far ahead. This might be it. We're not trying to do the film. Eric isn't there, he wasn't involved in the music side of things. Ricky [Fataar, original guitarist] has just come off the road – 22 months on the road with Bonnie Raitt – and all he wanted to do was sit on a beach!

"So it's only me and John from the original line up. That was the film. You can always watch the film. You can't always listen to the songs live and join in. And John Halsey is one of the only drummers alive who can make you laugh with a drum solo.

"It's more like a mixture of Bonzos and Rutles than Rutles. It's nothing to do with The Beatles anymore! We got a great live album out of last year as well, recorded into two tracks. There's no mixing, it's how it came. There's 14 really great tracks. The more I've listened to it now it's been mastered, what luck! It's like a photo album of the last tour. It's on sale on tour, and it'll go into shops after that."

**Obviously there's a Monty Python reunion coming up. Are you involved in that at all?**

"I can't see myself doing it. I think some of the others would like me doing it. But Eric Idle is in charge. And he's got Arlene Phillips, and boy and girl dancers, and a band. You don't really need an idiot with a duck on his head and a piano! Now Eric's gone all show business, he sees it as he sees it. It fills me with horror to be honest. I remember the closing ceremony of the Olympic games, and I hope it's not going to be like that."

**There's one other thing to ask you about on top of everything else: you wrote one of the best kid's TV theme tunes ever, which was Raggy Dolls [1980s British children's cartoon].**

"I didn't just write the theme tune, I wrote the shows and did all the voices! That's me! I was asked to do the voices, and I agreed to do because I liked the idea. It's a great thing to teach kids. Nobody's perfect, and if you muck along together you can solve things. It turned out that the guy who had the idea had written one, and I was supposed to be script editor and do the voices."

"They asked me to write it in the end, and we did over a hundred. And I thoroughly enjoyed it. There was a lovely thing that happened right at the end. A mother wrote about her daughter who had started watching it. Her daughter was autistic, and sometimes it can happen that they get fixed on something. She got fixed on the Raggy Dolls, and they could use it to turn her around and make her a little bit more so social. I thought that for that one girl alone, it was all very, very worth it."

"It's nice to do things that feel right. I've been lucky enough to have the opportunity to do it. I'm very pleased about that."

## Interview: Rutlemania – Douglas T Stewart talks to Neil Innes

Posted on April 30, 2014 by [Douglas T. Stewart](#)

**With a UK tour with the legendary The Rutles about to get underway we sent BMX Bandit Douglas T Stewart to have a chat with Neil Innes.**

Neil Innes is one of my favourite songwriters. He started off his adventures in music with The Bonzo Dog Doo-Dah Band. They made splendidly surreal and melodious records and made a memorable guest appearance in The Beatles' Magical Mystery Tour.

After John Cleese left Monty Python Innes stepped in for the fourth series writing songs, contributing to sketches and performing. He also featured in Python movies and sang songs at the Pythons' now legendary concert at The Hollywood Bowl, including How Sweet To Be an Idiot (a tune that Noel Gallagher borrowed for 'Whatever').

After the Python team stopped making TV shows Neil joined Eric Idle to make Rutland Weekend Television for BBC2. One sketch in 1975 featured a mini documentary parodying The Beatles. The group created for that sketch was The Rutles. Then after appearances on Saturday Night Live in America there was a Rutles made for TV film 'All You Need is Cash' featuring cameos from S.N.L. regulars including Gilda Radner, John Belushi, Dan Ackroyd and Bill Murray plus George Harrison, Paul Simon and Mick Jagger. Rutles songs have been covered by acts including Teenage Fanclub, Shonen Knife, Galaxie 500 and my own group BMX Bandits.

Now almost 40 years after their inception The Rutles are about to embark on a major tour and have a new live album coming out. I had a chat with Neil Innes about The Rutles and more.

**Douglas: My introduction to The Rutles was seeing the original sketch on Rutland Weekend Television and buying the Rutland Weekend Television album in 1975. So how did the idea for that sketch come about?**

Neil: Well Eric (Idle) asked me to do the television series with him and in agreeing to that he said I could tell the camera where to point and he wanted me to come up with musical interludes that we could televise as part of the idea of Rutland Weekend Television being the smallest television station. The ideas had to be cheap as it was BBC2 and one of the ideas I had was to do a parody of Hard Days Night because it was in black and white, had speeded up bits like Benny Hill and directed by Dick Lester who did The Running, Jumping and Standing Still Film with Peter Sellers and Spike Milligan.

A Hard Days Night had a comedy feel to it anyway and everybody knew it so you only had to put four guys in wigs, tight trousers and pointy shoes and then run around a field. So it was my idea to do the spoof of The Beatles and Eric came up with the idea of calling them The Rutles and the idea of the documentary who was so boring that the camera ran away from him. So it was both of us throwing things in the pot really.

**Douglas: And did you think that was going to be it? Just like all the other musical interludes it was going to be a one off?**

Yes but then real life can be as silly as anything you could make up and offers you opportunities you would never expect. Sid Bernstein, the promoter, was trying to get The Beatles back together to play in America and was offering them crazy money, something like twenty million dollars each.

**So he couldn't get them, so he got you?**

Well that was exactly the joke that Saturday Night Live were running with, how could they get The Beatles cheaper. They had George Harrison on and the producer Lorne Michaels had three thousand dollars which was the American musicians union rate for four musicians appearing live on the show. So he waved it under George's nose and said this could be all yours if you just get the guys back together and get them on the show. So George says "Wow all of that for me" and Lorne says "No, you'll have to share it with the other guys but maybe you don't need to tell Ringo".

Then Eric was hosting the show under the pretext that he could get The Beatles to perform for three hundred dollars but then the gag was that it's been a bad phone line and there's been a mix-up. He hasn't got The Beatles, he's got The Rutles instead. So they showed our Rutles clip. Then the Saturday Night Live mail bag went crazy. People started sending in pictures of Beatles albums with The Beatles lettering cut out and The Rutles put in instead. So the public decided they wanted more Rutles.

**Then you had the job of having to create a whole bunch of other material.**

I could see it coming. I was sitting to one side in the NBC offices in the Rockefeller Centre at a meeting and everyone was getting very excited about the public response. I was just waiting for it to occur to them they needed more songs and then they said can you write us another 20 Rutles songs and I said I'd try. I was sitting on the plane going back home and I decided I couldn't listen to any Beatles songs or I'd be sunk, I wouldn't be able to come up with any original ideas of my own.

So then I decided to think where was I when I first heard milestone Beatles tracks. I found myself remembering being at art school dances and having a snog and other circumstances that helped me remember how they had made me feel. It was a very useful exercise for conjuring up ideas and Eric was a great help. He suggested the title 'Ouch' which was perfect. It appealed to the part of me that likes cryptic crosswords because it was really like puzzle solving, finding the songs and in crafting these songs I knew you couldn't have any flab on them. They would need to grab people's interest in just a few seconds.

So once I had songs that I could sing to someone with just a guitar or a piano and they worked, we could add copycat production styles to make them sound like they fitted into the times and sing them in Liverpool accents and then they would start to sound like Rutles songs.

**I think a lot of people think of you as someone who just writes comic songs but although some of them are funny there's a lot of the songs that appeared in The Innes Book of Records and were written for The Rutles that aren't comic songs at all, they are just good songs and that's maybe one of the reasons they have a life beyond their original context.**

Well, people like to give you a label and then they can stop thinking. From the beginning I didn't want to trivialise what The Beatles had done. I thought they dealt with big issues in a way that was very accessible and I'd tried to that in the Bonzos too. It wasn't all just silly songs in the Bonzos. A song like Equestrian Statue for instance had a thoughtful side to it. There are big issues out there and although there aren't always easy answers the more we are made aware of them then perhaps we'll be less inclined to crap up the planet all the time. If we all die out and the bacteria take over are they going to be impressed by what wonderful shiny golf shoes and other junk we could make.

### **At what point did The Rutles go from being a fictional band to being a real band?**

I think it must have been in 1994, about the time when The Beatles Anthology was being prepared for release I was invited to go to three Beatles-fest events in America in New York, Chicago and Los Angeles. I had no idea that all these Beatles fans were also Rutles fans. I was spending literally hours on end signing all these Rutles albums and people kept asking me are the Beatles going to do an anthology album. People seemed to genuinely want it and so I went down to see George and I said to him what do you think about the idea of more Rutles and he's got this wicked sense of humour and says "Oh yeah, which one of you is going to get shot?" But he said it was all part of the soup and if The Beatles had their Anthology coming out why shouldn't The Rutles have something too.

Doing The Rutles again was never really a career move. I thought it could be more a homage to the greatest pop stars ever and writers of their generation. We invited Eric to take part but he declined in fact he tried to stop the album coming out.

### **It seems kind of ironic and a bit sad that you had the blessing of the surviving Beatles but not the blessing of Eric Idle.**

Yes, well doing the album made me realise that a lot of pop music is copycat. Like when The Beatles came out and were successful any band that had a Liverpool accent was signed up. Rutle should be a verb, to rutle, to copy or emulate someone you admire, brackets especially in the music business. That's what pop music does, it rutles each other.

### **And I guess The Beatles rutled quite a few different people too like Arthur Alexander and The Isley Brothers and Goffin and King.**

Yes, one of the tremendous things about The Beatles is they took the best from everything and never did the same thing twice. They were screamed off the stage and forced into the recording studio and they revolutionised the recording industry.

**I remember speaking to a friend in a band about being influenced by The Beatles and he said "Oh I love The Beatles but I'm probably more influenced by The Rutles". Were you surprised when groups started to quote The Rutles as an influence and recorded versions of Rutles songs or played them live? In Japan there's a Rutles tribute group The Mountbattens (named after The Rutles fictional manager Leggy Mountbatten).**

I think it's fabulous because they really like the songs and I've never been someone very interested in playing the fame game. I think it's tedious. George and I saw eye to eye on that. He'd say it's all very well wanting to become rich and famous but if you are lucky enough to get wealth and fame you've still got to work out who you are.

That's why I don't like this celebrity culture and money culture that is so prevalent today. We're all in the same boat and it should be more about trying to make things better for everyone rather than trying to elevate yourself out of the reach of others around you. I'm firmly a Woody Guthrie guy and not Simon Cowell.

**After you finished with The Rutles, first time round, you started working quite a lot in children's television. How did that come about?**

Like a lot of things I'm not totally sure, it wasn't really a plan. I find myself in life leaning against doors, then some of them fly open and I find myself falling into whatever is inside. After The Rutles film things got a bit bloody and ugly with publishers threatening to sue and I just thought "sod it". So I wanted to get away from all that.

Then a girl I was at art school with ended up being a producer at Yorkshire television and she called me up and said would you fancy doing this reading scheme programme called Puddle Lane? And I said I think I would, I'm fed up with the music business they can't take a joke and so I did Puddle Lane. While I was doing that someone said have a look at this idea and it was Raggy Dolls and I thought it was a wonderful idea. It was about reject dolls cooperating with each other. It gave out the idea that nobody's perfect and we need to help each other out and what better than sending out this message to pre-school age children. So I wrote about a hundred of those and got to do all the voices. I was happy as Larry. I couldn't understand why people were desperate to get out of children's TV and go to grown up television.

**Going back to your earlier musical adventures, you really started off more as an art project than a pop group?**

Going to art school and learning to draw made you look at things objectively but also got your subjective juices flowing and art is more than just drawing or painting. So you can apply these things to making music. I've always thought of myself as more of an artist than a pop musician.

**So were you surprised when the Bonzos ended up having a hit single?**

Well we'd never thought about doing a single and we were surprised when our record company said we had to do one. We had a producer who said we'd have to do it all in just three hours and we didn't want to do that because we knew The Beatles spent much longer doing stuff and it allowed them to be more creative. Then Viv (Vivian Stanshall) bumped into Paul McCartney and he said he would come and produce it for us and he did a cracking job. Then we outraged the record company by saying we didn't want to put his name on the record. He was credited as Apollo C. Vermouth. They couldn't believe we didn't want to use his name to help sell the record but we insisted and out it came and got to number 5 all on its own.

**I guess Paul would have understood what you were thinking.**

Neil: He totally got it. He was really cool. He was an arty guy. He was into Bunuel and all the art films. He and The Beatles had an understanding of artistic ideas that allowed them to create the epoch where popular songs could have more to them than just the moon in June.

I saw The Rutles in Edinburgh last year and I am delighted that I'll be getting the chance to see them again this year in Glasgow. It's a evening full of fab songs that will have you smiling inside and out. One particular highlight of the Edinburgh show was a tender tribute to Neil's late friend George Harrison. I won't spoil it by revealing the exact nature of the tribute.

There are also some very funny moments, like original Rutles drummer Barry Wom (John Halsey)'s totally awesome drum solo. The Rutles live show is a rare and precious thing in its warmth, humour and in the connection Neil and co. make with the audience. As Neil says "You may not be able to change the world but you can keep parts of it nice", I very much approve of that sentiment