

"Yesterday" Here to Stay?

Fans can't get enough of the Beatles tribute show at the Trop's Liverpool Club

by [Ray Schreiber](#)

Created in Las Vegas 22 years ago and intended for a three-month stay in Atlantic City during summer 2007, the Beatles tribute band Yesterday was such a hit it was twice granted contract extensions to remain in its tailor-made Tropicana venue, with no termination date in its foreseeable future.

Yes, Yesterday was far away, but now it looks as though it's here to stay.

Founded by John Lennon pretender Don Bellezzo out of college in 1986, Yesterday goes to fanatical lengths to isolate the early era of the Beatles' music in its A.C. act. The Trop show is entitled *The British Are Coming*, and not only recreates the songs and set lists of two of the most poignant facets of the Beatles' first (*The Ed Sullivan Show* in Feb. 1964, and the Hollywood Bowl concert in Aug. '64) and second (the Shea Stadium concert in Aug. '65) United States tours, it mimics their attire, accents, mannerisms and musical equipment to the letter. The Trop's Liverpool Club — the roughly 175-seat nook that once housed the Comedy Store — has been modified to look like the Cavern Club in Liverpool, where the Beatles launched their career and met their famous manager, Brian Epstein.

"We have the exact same instruments the Beatles used — the Rickenbacker and Gretsch guitars, the Hofner violin bass, the Ludwig drums — and we do all of the songs in the original key of the Beatles when they toured," says Bellezzo. "Nothing's been lowered, nothing's been changed. Other bands who've tried to do it have lowered the key they performed in live, because it's too hard to recreate."

Even the amplifiers by Vox, which notoriously boosted the amp power for the Shea Stadium show to make it not just the best attended and highest-grossing rock concert of that era but also the loudest, are

The same on Yesterday's set.

Bellezzo's original band toured various venues before becoming part of the Las Vegas Yesterday Productions, owned by Barbara McKeown. The organization currently consists of two continual shows — the one in A.C. and another in Lake Tahoe, which recreates the Beatles' later "psychedelic" era beginning around 1967's *Sergeant Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band* album — and a third show that has toured on five continents.

"Each show is just so totally detail oriented, and you'll notice that in their mannerisms, their voice and speech, in the details on each song," says McKeown. "I really believe that kind of authenticity is what has the show [in A.C.] well beyond our original contract. And of course, the fact that the Beatles' music is so well it's been written. It changed the face of the music world at that time, and has endured through multiple generations of years."

The three bands that comprise Yesterday Productions have interchangeable musicians who are all put through what Bellezzo calls "Beatle boot camp." They are made to physically resemble the original Fab Four, from the mop-top wigs mimicking their early hairstyles, to the matching black suits they wore on the Sullivan show, to the beige Nehru jackets worn at Shea. They bow after each number, as the Beatles did, and the bass player even plays left handed, as Paul McCartney did.

"The skill level is the same for each show regardless of who's performing," says McKeown. "They're all extremely accomplished musicians who began on their own long before they came to Yesterday."

On a recent Saturday evening show at the Liverpool Club, the band included Doug Cox on drums (as Ringo Starr), Jon Perry on lead guitar (George Harrison), Doug Brown on rhythm guitar (Lennon) and Peter Paul Sacco on bass (McCartney). The show begins with an Ed Sullivan impersonator appearing on two TV screens (probably the only anachronism in the venue's likeness to the old Cavern Club; that and the glow sticks given to the audience before the show) flanking the stage. He introduces the band, they appear in their dark suits, and they later change into the Nehru jackets between two 45-minute sets. The sets include such early hits as "Love Me Do," "She Loves You," "I Want to Hold Your Hand," "All My Loving," "I Saw Her Standing There," "P.S. I Love You," "Ticket to Ride" and of course "Yesterday." Authentic video footage of the Beatles performing is depicted on the TV screens during the show.



"It was a lot of fun, and it really brings you back," said Mark Brown of Harrisburg, Pa., who saw the show with his wife Amanda.

"It was awesome; it made me feel like dancing," said Amanda Brown. "Even my husband, who doesn't dance, was getting into it."

"We loved the Beatles, and these guys do such a great job recreating their music and their image," said Gary Jeannette of Woodbridge, who saw the show with his wife Donna and their friends Vicky and Mark Scarpa of Bergen County.

"We really loved it," added Vicky Scarpa. "I had to do everything in my power to keep [Donna] from throwing her underwear up on stage."