



DUSAN PETRICIC FOR THE TORONTO STAR

# A hard day's delight

Musician is pumped for today's marathon gig: every Fab Four song in order, finds  
**Vit Wagner**

**I**t'll take more than a rebuff from the *Guinness Book of World Records* to dissuade a 20-member ensemble of self-styled "music nerds" from convening at the Phoenix Concert Theatre today to perform every Beatles album back-to-back.

Beginning with 1963's *Please Please Me* and ending with 1970's *Let it Be*, the world's first Beatles Marathon will be a 211-song concert expected to last 12 hours — from noon until midnight. As such, it is the most ambitious undertaking yet by Classic Albums Live, the Toronto-based outfit that has spent the past four years delivering exact recreations of albums by the Beatles, the Rolling Stones, Pink Floyd and even Radiohead.

The Fab Four albums will be played chronologically based on their U.K. release dates, explaining why the program won't end with *Abbey Road*, which was recorded after *Let it Be* but released sooner. It was hoped that the marathon would merit consideration by the folks at Guinness, but the project didn't easily conform to any of the pub-

lication's categories.

"This has never been done before," says Classic Albums Live founder Craig Martin at the band's rehearsal space. "We're doing every album note-for-note, capturing every nuance... it's not about how fast we can do it, so it didn't fit a nice, tight sound bite like, 'Who can throw a cantaloupe the farthest?'"

Classic Albums Live, a franchise that has grown to include regular performances in several U.S. tourist centres, including Orlando and Las Vegas, is not to be confused with Rain, the Beatles' tribute band that returns to the Hummingbird Centre next month, or any of the various impersonators of Pink Floyd and other acts. There are no costumes. No mop-top haircuts. Just music.

"We do not care about the look or anything like that," Martin says. "We treat these albums as if they are sacred. It's a rock 'n' roll recital. We're a cover band as much as the TSO is a cover band."

Martin came up with the idea for Classic Albums Live while singing in another retro-music ensemble — "we were like the bottom rung of the Stones cover bands out there because none of us would dress up or act like that," he recalls. He still takes the mike when a Stones album is on the menu, but will restrict himself to playing the harmonica at today's event.

Instead, he'll rely on an ensemble that includes guitarist and singer Mike Daley, one of four musicians who will be onstage for the entire program.

"For a rock nerd, this is manna from heaven because you get to hang out with other rock nerds and exactly reproduce something," says Daley, 37, a musicologist who recently took time out from the six-week rehearsal schedule to defend his doctoral thesis at York University. "To reproduce this music you really have to get inside it and go beyond your comfort level."

"I've been in bar bands for years. We'd do a cover version of 'I Saw Her Standing There.' We'd sort of get it right. We'd get the chords right and the melody kind of right. But the solo wouldn't be right. And the parts or the back-up vocals wouldn't be exactly right. With this we get to treat it like it's a score."

"If you've grown up with the Beatles the way I have, it's incredibly exciting to hear it come together with all of the bits and everybody doing their part. Some people might say, 'You're not doing your own thing.' But man, it's hard to top this," says Daley, who has helped recreate 25 different albums in concert.

"Seeing how it's done is part of the thrill of live music. To see four people with recorders playing 'Stairway to Heaven' is exciting, compared to somebody playing recorders on a synthesizer. The audience appreciates the difference. They can see we really care and we're going to great trouble to get it right."

*Beatles Marathon runs from noon to midnight at the Phoenix, 410 Sherbourne St. Tickets \$35 at the door.*