

# Reprise of Sgt. Pepper joyful, even thrilling

## Review

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POP MUSIC CRITIC

Maybe there's some life in the old album yet — even if only as a performance vehicle.

No question, the song has reasserted itself in recent years as popular music's preferred unit of choice.

Legally or otherwise, listeners now pluck individual tunes from the Internet, add them to their own digitized play lists and then walk around with thousands of songs shuffling randomly between their ears. "Gimme Shelter" followed by "Smells Like Teen Spirit" followed by "London Calling" followed by "Hey Ya" and on and on in endless, arbitrary sequence.

Under the circumstances, several hundred people gathering on a Friday night to hear a bunch of capable but unheralded local musicians deliver a track-by-track and largely note-for-note rendition of the 1967 Beatles psychedelic landmark *Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band* —



Album cover of *Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band* is a classic in itself. At right, tribute band journeys through the tracks at The Carlu on Friday.

to jump to the conclusion that this latest monthly instalment in the Classic Albums Live series was yet another manifestation of the Baby Boom generation's endless appetite for nostalgia — except that a couple of months back the disc on offer was Radiohead's *OK Computer*.

Besides, there were plenty of young faces in evidence, both in the house, where many audience members mouthed along to the words, or on stage, where



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and alarm clock. That said, *Sgt. Pepper's* still counts as a significant choice. Along with a handful of other albums from its era, including the preceding Beatles effort, *Revolver*, the Beach Boys' *Pet Sounds*, and somewhat lesser known titles such as Love's *Forever Changes*, *Sgt. Pepper's* defined the album as a conceptual entity.

On the original vinyl, the Beatles bled the tracks together,

start to finish, inaugurating a ritual that eventually spawned the "album rock" radio format of the 1970s. While *Sgt. Pepper's* has its share of songs that are familiar to almost everyone, from the title track to the closer "A Day In The Life," it is littered with idiosyncratic nuggets such as "Fixing A Hole" and "Being For The Benefit Of Mr. Kite," that, even with the bankable Beatles brand behind them, had

what classical ensembles have been doing for centuries: interpreting a piece of music in the spirit of faithfulness, without the false promise of exactitude. Five different orchestras performing Beethoven's *Fifth* will be playing the identical notes but what they produce won't sound exactly the same.

From the outset of Friday's accomplished performance, when trombone rather than French

trombone sounded perfectly fine?

What matters, ultimately, is whether the performers communicate their understanding and love of the music. Which they most certainly did.

The rousing treatment of "Getting Better," the one song on the album that most resembles a conventional, straight-ahead rock tune, was so thrilling that a guy next to me said to his friend,