

‘A Life With The Beatles’



I came away from A Life With The Beatles feeling a bittersweet nostalgia for an era that occurred over three decades before my existence, and also having actually written down the words ‘OMG how good were the Beatles’ in my notebook about halfway through the play – two occurrences that are testament to the skill and energy of the production’s star Ian Sexon, as much as of the foursome themselves.

Told from the point of view of the Beatles’ ultimate fly on the wall, roadie Neil Aspinall, A Life With the Beatles is a one-man show that remains captivating throughout, expertly manipulated by the versatile, lively Sexon. His performance is complete, with an impressive range of accents that are at once convincing and tongue-in-cheek; his impersonations are perfectly pitched, straying neither into the realm of caricature nor of hackneyed homage.

Especially enjoyable are Sexon’s impressions of band members deep in the throes of hazy hallucinogenic-addled inspiration – he incorporates a respectful intimacy into the humour that gives the audience a sense of being privy to genius at work. Sexon’s rapid transitions between characters make for exhilarating watching – his slick ability to manoeuvre between accents and personas is breathless, but never strained.

While the piece is set out chronologically, there isn’t an overall feeling of a logical or linear progression. Certain important parts are skimmed over – whole years, especially the latter ones, remain untouched – while some events are given a focus

that might be construed as disproportionate, most notably the construction of the Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band album, which constitutes a significant stretch of the play.

But this erratic form seems suitable for a piece that illustrates the frenzied highs and lows that the band carried in their wake. The complete power of Beatlemania is particularly thrown into relief at the reading of manager Brian Epstein's suicide note – "This is all too much and I can't take it any more" – a poignant moment of stillness against the frenetic energy of the rest of the play.

The piece's weakness lies in its rather amateurish set design. An interesting analysis of the album cover design of 'With The Beatles' loses some of its gravitas when it is illustrated by a budget photocopy of the image, poorly endowed with pixels and pasted onto a mediocre black and white collage of Beatles memorabilia. However, these visual quirks aren't prominent enough to detract from a lively performance interspersed with tantalising song extracts and the occasional ecstatic burst of audience singalong – a perfectly immersive encapsulation of the hysteria of Beatlemania.

Josie Finlay, "EdFringe Review" 23rd August 2015