

Online Monday, May 24, 2004

# The Newport Daily News

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## ARCHIVES

### Love of The Beatles bands them together

By James J. Gillis/Daily News staff



From left, Paul Childs, Paula Forger, Yvonne Childs and Erne Campe, all of Boston, sing along with Abbey Rhode during the band's show last month at Newport Blues Cafe. (David Hansen/Daily News photo)

are older than 50.

So why do they feel re-energized in this new band?

"I've always wanted to play in a band that really showcases The Beatles," Flanders said. "They've had such a huge impact on my life."

And Flanders isn't alone. At Abbey Rhode shows, fans know the tunes, know the words and anticipate the next Beatles gem. But the band goes beyond the hits.

A lot of cover bands might tackle a Lennon-McCartney chestnut like "Get Back," but how many are playing live versions of "Revolution" and "No Reply" or even "This Boy"?

The group debuted in late March at Billy Goode's to a packed house. They formed last fall, but wanted to log a few months of rehearsal time before taking the stage.

"The only way I was going to do this," bassist/singer Davis said, "is to do it the right way. And that means practice and getting it right."

At the Newport Blue Cafe recently, Abbey Rhode drew a nice crowd for a Thursday night. They opened acoustically - Flanders and Sullivan on guitars, Higgins on drums. Sullivan and Davis handle most of the vocals, with Flanders and Higgins taking a lead here and there.

Some in the crowd seemed more intent on finishing dinner, while others sang along to every tune. A few audience members were born well after The Beatles had ceased to exist as a group. But that didn't stop them from getting up and dancing to a song that was a hit before their mothers were born.

"That's the thing with The Beatles," said Higgins, a native of Galway, Ireland. "You can love The Beatles if you're 16 or you're 60."

The guys in Abbey Rhode fell in love with The Beatles as soon as they blasted

Abbey Rhode is not Beatlemania - no collarless white shirts, no shiny Sgt. Pepper suits.

"We're people who happen to love The Beatles and want to play their music as well as we can," said guitarist John Flanders of Portsmouth. "We're not a tribute band."

The four members of Abbey Rhode are Flanders, Kevin Sullivan, Ray Davis and Paddy Higgins. Each has logged decades playing in bands, and all



across the airwaves in 1964. Flanders owns a ton of Beatles memorabilia, including, at last count, 27 neckties.

Davis grew up in Ohio and took up bass guitar because of Paul McCartney.

"I've been playing in bands since I was 16," said Davis, who works as a substance abuse counselor. "And that's all because of The Beatles. They produced music that made people want to make a difference. Music to me is not a hobby. It's never been a hobby. It's something I feel very strongly about."

Sullivan and Flanders, a freelance Web consultant, grew up in Newport and attended the former De La Salle Academy two years apart. But they never met until two summers ago. Sullivan's band, which features Davis on bass and Higgins on drums, played at the Sunset Music Festival on a night featuring a lineup of Rhode Island bands.

Flanders was playing guitar with his old friends, the Cowsills. The men realized their connection went back further than former school ties.

"He noticed that I liked to use old Vox amps, like The Beatles," Flanders said. "We got talking from there about The Beatles."

And then they talked about forming a Beatles-flavored band. Davis and Sullivan already played together. They found Higgins through a posting at the Broadway Blues music shop.

"We found that we all had a lot in common when it came to The Beatles," Flanders said.

Sullivan returned to his hometown in the late 1990s, after living mostly in New York City. Like other kids who grew up in the '60s, he said The Beatles knocked him out. Sullivan also gained a musical education by attending the old Newport folk festivals.

Through a series of circumstances in the 1970s, Sullivan ended up delivering a set of legal papers to former Beatle John Lennon in Florida. It was a brief encounter, but closer than most Beatles fans ever got.

Sullivan said he hardly ever played covers before. Even in other people's bands, he's mostly played originals. "If you're going to play covers, then it might as well be champagne instead of Four Roses or something," he said.

Sullivan said the group spent most of the winter polishing and re-polishing Beatles songs. While they also play other people's songs - shedding the tribute band tag - they have enough material for an all-Beatles night for private parties or the like.

"We had all these great songs to work with," he said. "It was like Pick-Up Sticks, where we could reach into this big grab bag. Then we went to work on really getting to know these songs."

The word on the band, the name of which plays off a famous Beatles album, got out quickly (see [www.abbeyrhode.com](http://www.abbeyrhode.com) for more information), and its members expect a busy summer. "We had 12 bookings before we even played a chord," Sullivan said.

Flanders, who has long run his own band, Fourplay, knows landing gigs can be tough.

"I have to admit that this is the first band I've played in where the club owners are coming to us," Flanders said, laughing. "Sometimes you'd have to go in and get down on your knees."

The group also adds some other tunes, from luminaries such as the Rolling Stones and Neil Young. The band has learned about 45 tunes, about 70 percent of which are Beatles. And a Beatles solo tune isn't out of the question, as they recently tossed in an unexpected "Handle With Care" by George Harrison's Traveling Wilburys.

"I want people to know we're not a tribute band," Davis said. "Man, I hate that stuff. We're guys who love this music and we want to play it well. I'm still amazed by what they did. And having to really sit down and learn these songs, to really listen and pick things out, it gives me even more appreciation ... the melodies, the harmonies. Playing bass and singing these songs at the same time is not that easy."

Davis has played in cover bands and original music groups, and not too long ago was with the now-defunct Blueblood. He no longer dreams that music will make him wealthy - not that he'd mind. But money never was the point in the first place: "My

mother told me I would've made a great lawyer if it hadn't been for those damn Beatles."

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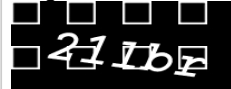
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