

REJECTED BY THE BEATLES

The story of Dave Humphries' adventures on Savile Row

Like many other artists out there, singer-songwriter Dave Humphries has sent out armloads of promo packages to prospective labels and management companies, **XXXX** Mendoza writes. But it's a pretty safe bet that Humphries is the only one who was turned down by The Beatles, not once, not twice, but four times. And he got it in writing.

Sitting in a Mission Hills, CA, condo with Dave Humphries is an experience not unlike being dropped in the middle of a PBS Britcom. Humphries was born and raised in Durham England, falling in love with a San Diegan and moving here in 1995. He possesses a distinctly dry wit, each comment tagged with a droll punchline, his sense of humor underlining everything. As a performer, he's been hitting the stage since the mid-'60s, and he has just released his sophomore album, "Years Away From Yesterday".

In 1968 however, Humphries was 16 years old and his band, the Idea, had just taped a few songs -- a very big deal at the time. "We'd done some stuff with an old reel to reel, and we just used a church hall where we used to rehearse for the recording," he remembers. "When Apple [Records] first came on the scene there was a newspaper advertisement looking for new talent. It was a newspaper advertisement of a guy, like a one man band. That was [Beatles aide] Alistair Taylor. He had all his gear and it had a spiel along the bottom, use your neatest handwriting, blah blah blah, this man now owns a Bentley. So we thought we would go down [there] with this recording. It was 1968, so they were working on the White Album at the time. We didn't have a lot of money then, because we were just kids, so we got the overnight bus."

In those days, travel was a more difficult proposition. "Of course that's millions of miles from Durham to London, at least in those days, when the motor ways weren't there yet. Anyway, we got into Victoria [Station] and we decided we would walk to wherever Apple was. We didn't have a clue. So we went in this, that and the other direction, and you know when someone gives you directions you only listen to the first two, whenever anybody tells you which way to go, so we go left and then right and have to ask somebody else," Humphries says. "Eventually we ended up in Baker Street, where the [Apple boutique] shop was, we thought. And there was still the white-washed windows that Paul had put up for 'Revolution' and 'Hey Jude' [after the boutique was closed down]; he was using the Apple boutique as a promotional thing for that record.

"We realized Apple isn't there anymore. But I had read in a magazine that Paul lived in St. John's Wood and could sit in his top story bedroom and watch cricket. So we went to St. John's Wood and asked people where the Cricket grounds were. Didn't want to look too obvious. Eventually there was a guy cutting his hedge and we asked 'could you tell us where it is?' He told us, but then he said, "But if you want to go past Paul McCartney's house . . . "

"So we went. And we waited. After a while this lady came walking down the street and started asking us questions. Turns out it was Rose, Paul's housekeeper. We said 'we've got this tape' and she told us, write your names, I'll take it in for Paul, he's busy, they're recording. She said come back tomorrow at 10. So the next morning we rang the bell. We had one of the guys down across the street jump up and down so Rose would know it was us. Anyway she came down to the gate and said that Paul hadn't had time to listen to it yet, so come back at 2 o'clock. We did the same thing, even jumping up and down. This time she said 'he still hasn't heard it but he says will you take it round to Apple in Saville Row.'"

Though today every little thing about The Beatles seems to be known by everyone, at the time few knew the band's inner workings. "Of course all this time we didn't know that he [Paul] was just around the corner. Remember Abbey Road wasn't like it is now where everybody knows where it's at because of the album title, which was still some time away. We just thought somewhere in London. We could have gone around there, but we didn't know."

Humphries mentions that there were other fans around McCartney's house "There were some girls hanging around outside as well and you could feel the knives going in your back. Because there'd been a message sent from "him" in there, to us lot."

"Anyway, we were three scruffy lads and we went looking for Saville Row," he continues. "We eventually found it. We went up the stairs, we went knocking on the door but there was no answer, and we thought this is crazy -- he sent us away." The now dejected trio headed back down the steps, but another group of fans approached. "These other fans came up and they were from Birmingham or something. We said "how do you get in there?" he says referring to Apple. "So we exchanged the information. They told us how to get in and we told them how to find Paul's house."

The band thought they were to meet some label people, but instead found an office still under construction. Inadvertently the trio were amongst the first to ever see the inside of Apple. "We got in through the ground floor basement, which eventually became the Apple Studio. There was nothing there, just this green carpet, white walls and then this set of steps. As you got up to the first floor the reception area where the main door is with all this sea gray furniture and a couple of pictures on the wall and then we explored each floor, looking in each of the offices." While Apple was still to be formally occupied, one room caught his eye. "In one of them there were big pictures of all the Apple artists at that time, so there was a big big picture of Jackie Lomax and Mary Hopkin and of course The Beatles as well."

Continuing their exploring, the group approached the last floor. "As we got to the top floor we could hear these voices, and we thought, who might that be?" Preparing themselves for a possible Fab Four encounter, "We timidly knocked and the door opened . . . And there were all these workmen sitting having a cup of tea." He can't help laughing at the memory. "The first one yelled at us 'What the bloody hell are you buggers doing here!' After explaining their mission, the band left.

"There was an ash tray at the reception desk, so I put the tape under it with a note saying, 'Paul asked us to bring this around.' We just left it there."

On Sept 25, 1968, the band got their first rejection letter from Peter Asher, former member of Peter & Gordon, future producer of James Taylor and Linda Rondstadt, and at that moment head of Apple A&R.

Not giving up, Humphries and crew decided to try a new tactic. "We wrote some new songs and sent them to the publishing arm of Apple." This time their rejection would be swifter, earning them a letter from head of Apple Publishing, Dee Meehan, wife of Shadows drummer Tony Meehan. Of course, the band still had a never-say-die attitude "We were so delighted with what we thought that we had done we sent it also to George Martin. Of course, he just passed it on to some one else." That someone else was Chris Thomas, who would go on to produce the Sex Pistols, Pretenders and many more. It still resulted in the band's third Beatles-related rejection in a year.

But they weren't through yet. "So then we thought, we need some gear, good quality gear. So somebody came up with the bright idea of writing to Ringo, because we thought he was probably the kindest, with less projects going on," he says, laughing. "So we wrote to Ringo and asked him if he would buy us some amplification. And that's the letter we got [back] from [Apple exec] Peter Brown, who was immortalized in the 'Ballad Of John and Yoko'."

Despite the rejections, Humphries knew his band's attempts to sign with Apple, though unsuccessful, would be a lifelong conversation piece. "Oh yes, I suppose so. Even then we saw it as an adventure."

In a small way, all those long ago efforts were vindicated when Humphries recently collaborated on a new song, "38 Days", with early Beatles Hamburg compatriot Tony Sheridan. "It was tremendous just to be sitting next to him, both of us playing guitar on tunes that I had written," he remarks. "I was sitting there when he was putting a guitar part on a song. And [all of a sudden] I went back to somewhere like '66 when I was in a bedroom in the northeast of England listening to my first copy of Tony Sheridan with the Beatles."

Currently, Humphries fluctuates between solo acoustic shows and occasional gigs with a small combo dubbed the Shooting the Breeze Band. He's also working towards releasing a third album incorporating those Sheridan collaborations and newer material. While he's hoping to shop this to a few indie labels, he's a realist about his chances at a deal. Luckily, his experiences in 1968 have insulated him from a negative response. "If I get rejected for anything now," he says good naturedly, "I can always say I've been turned down by bigger people than you."

For the latest on Humphries, check www.davehumphriesmusic.com