

Peter Asher: Live at the Iridium, NYC, 12/3/10

The 60's were alive and well again on December 3 when Peter Asher, singer/manager/producer extraordinaire, presented "Peter Asher – Musical Memoir of the 60's and Beyond," at the Iridium in New York City. Asher made a triumphant return to the stage on this first tour since the death of his long-time musical partner, Gordon Waller.

The earlier of two shows began at about 8:30 p.m. with a video of Eric Idle introducing Peter. Of course, Eric Idle had to display his unique style of comedy: "Where's Gordon?" he asked. "He's dead," Peter answered dryly.

Asher and his band launched into "I Go to Pieces," and then Peter spoke about his and Gordon's history in the early 60's. He said two of their main influences were Buddy Holly and the Everly Brothers, and the band then performed the Everlys' "Crying in the Rain." He described how Peter and Gordon got together; originally, they were both great fans of American folk music. Their record company perceived them to be the English versions of the Kingston Trio and Peter, Paul, and Mary, and asked them to record the song "500 Miles," which they did. Accordingly, the band then performed "500 Miles."

Peter went on to describe the duo's successful collaboration with Paul McCartney, as well as Paul McCartney's relationship with Jane Asher, Peter's sister. He showed a clip of Peter and Gordon on the Ed Sullivan Show, and then went into a live version of "I Don't Want to See You Again," followed by "Nobody I Know."

Asher spoke about the "temporary" dissolution of Peter and Gordon in the late 60's, which brought him into a partnership with artist John Dunbar and author Barry Miles. Together, they opened a book store and an art gallery in London, both under the name "Indica." Jane and Paul helped to decorate the bookstore, and many famous writers often stopped by. And early on, the art gallery featured an avant garde artist by the name of Yoko Ono. John Lennon visited her exhibit one day, and the rest as they say, is history. Peter was also very close to the Rolling Stones and singer Marianne Faithfull at this time, and to honor that friendship, the band then performed "As Tears Go By."

One of the great moments of the night arrived when Peter Asher sang "True Love Ways" with a film of Gordon Waller. To look to the screen and see Gordon alone, singing his part, and then look to the stage and see Peter singing with him was a deeply emotional experience.

Peter went on to talk about meeting with Paul to discuss Apple, the Beatles' new record company. They wanted to make Peter the head of A&R (the department that picks new artists for the label), and he accepted. This led to Asher signing artists like James Taylor, Mary Hopkin, Jackie Lomax, and Badfinger. Paul McCartney wrote "Come and Get It" for Badfinger, and they quickly became stars. The band then played "Day After Day." Around that time in Beatle history, John met the infamous Allen Klein, and the Beatles' disagreement over whether to hire Klein as their manager became a major factor in the breakup of the group.

Asher and James Taylor felt a storm brewing, and so they parted company from Apple. They went to America with Peter as James' manager, and Taylor signed with Warner Brothers records. Peter soon became Linda Ronstadt's manager as well. These two associations became the main focus of his life for the next 40 years. Most recently, he produced the Carole King/James Taylor cd, "Live at the Troubador."

In the final segment of the show, Peter Asher said that one of the key moments in his life was an evening when John and Paul went into his mother's music studio, sat side by side on the piano bench, and played "I Want to Hold Your Hand" for him to hear for the first time. They asked him what he thought, and he said "It was very good." He spoke about the song "Woman," which Paul McCartney gave to Peter and Gordon under the name Bernard Webb, to see if a "non-Beatles" song would also be successful. It was. And then on the screen, through the miracle of film, Gordon sang "Woman" once more with our Peter.

For the last song, "A World Without Love," Peter and his band requested audience participation, and flashed the words of the song on the screen. They received a standing ovation, and the band performed "Lady Godiva" as an encore. That produced another standing ovation, encouraged by Eric Idle cheering from the screen.

Peter Asher's "Musical Memoir" was original, nostalgic, poignant, and comical. Wish I could have stayed for the second show!