



Saturday, 18 May 1963
The Roy Orbison Tour
Adelphi Cinema
Slough, England

It had begun rather eventfully.

When the dark-haired Texas headliner arrived in Slough – just an hour or so before his tour’s kick-off performance – there were crowds everywhere... unruly girls with jiggling posters and hand-painted banners proclaiming: “We LUV YOU, Beatles!” and “Beatles 4-Ever!”¹¹⁸ Everywhere Roy Orbison turned there were placards and crowds chanting: “Beatles, Beatles, we luv The Beatles!”¹¹⁹

“What’s a Beatle, anyway?”¹²⁰ Orbison paused inside the stage door.

A young man with a bowl haircut tapped him on the shoulder. “I’m one,” he said.¹²¹

“And you’re...?”

“John Lennon. Beatle. Rhythm guitar.”

“Well, girls ‘luv you forever,’ John.” The Holly-Elvisesque Orbison made quotation marks with his fingers and grinned at the almond-eyed boy.

“‘Forever...or until you sing, ‘In Dreams,’” John shot back. “Then, I’m all but history, aren’t I?” Orbison chuckled at the boy’s droll sense of humour.

“Well, nice to meet you while you’re still at the top, then.” Roy chuckled lightly. And the two “luved” stars eyed each other with mutual respect.

There were two shows this evening – one at 6 p.m. and one at 8:30 p.m., and ticket holders were certainly getting their money’s worth. The first act boasted Tony Marsh, the Terry Young Six, Erkey Grant, Ian

Crawford, “film and recording star” Louise Cordet, and hit recorder of “A Very Good Year for Girls,” David MacBeth.¹²² To close the first act, Liverpool’s newest stars, Gerry and the Pacemakers, were slated to roll out their latest chart-topper, “How Do You Do It?”

Act Two would be initiated by the much sought-after Beatles – who prior to the programme were being awarded a Silver Disc for their sales of “From Me to You” – and then, the legendary Roy Orbison himself would grace the stage.¹²³ It was a Danny Betesh production full of big names with big hits.¹²⁴

The Pacemakers had reached Number One with “How Do You Do It” on 3 April¹²⁵ and had hung onto the slot handily for almost a month, until they were edged out by fellow Scousers, The Beatles, with “From Me to You.”¹²⁶ Orbison’s latest hit, “In Dreams,” had peaked at Number Seven on Billboard’s Hot 100 in America back in February, but it was still holding strong.¹²⁷ And besides, Orbison’s past hits had firmly ensconced him as a household name. That gave Betesh three amazing chart toppers on one 18-day package tour – a feat almost unrivaled in the industry.

The competition among the three leader groups – although congenial and silent – was quite keen. “Have those Beatles signs kindly removed from the front entrance,” Orbison had requested earlier that afternoon, when John Lennon had gone his way.¹²⁸ And it had been taken care of immediately. Orbison, after all, was earning two or three times The Beatles’ fee.¹²⁹

But the self-determining crowds refused to play along nicely with the prescribed pecking order. Even though Orbison crooned his biggest hits – “Only the Lonely,” “Dream Baby,” “Running Scared,” and “In Dreams” – girls with genuine tears and gnawed cuticles still wailed for the Liverpool lads.

Without a doubt, the crowds appreciated Orbison; they cheered, applauded, and hung on his every note. But when The Beatles came out of the wings, they went wild.

“And now...” John endeavored to introduce The Beatles’ second song of the evening. “And now...” Roaring screams. “And now for a song...” More screams. “...by that Red-hot Gospel-singin’ Mama, Victor Sylvester!”¹³⁰

Mayhem!

The girls craved The Beatles even more than their drippily-lettered banners could attest. “We luv you to distraction!” they shouted. But these “bairds” were hardly distracted; they absorbed every detail. When Paul winked or waved, when George shared his slant-smile, when Ringo shook his mane, when John offered up his “spastic clap and stomp,” the girls dissolved into delirium. It was overwhelming.

Orbison had a giant, magnificent voice that awed crowds into silence. But even a maestro like Orbison failed to hold the imagination of an audience under the spell of Beatle magic.

Clearly, something would have to be done about the line-up. The Beatles were conjurers.

Monday, 20 May 1963

En Route to Southampton

It seemed like the old Helen Shapiro days. They'd had an early breakfast of eggs and chips,¹³¹ and now the Orbison Tour coach was on the move. Ringo and George were immersed in a sleepy game of cards with Gerry and Freddie Marsden. Paul quietly strummed his early morning guitar, and John buried himself in a pile of newspapers.¹³²

Sipping Earl Grey and reading silently – looking for interesting snippets and inspirations for songs – John jotted ideas on his cigarette packets.¹³³ But he bored easily, and, after a while, he began scribbling a note to Cyn, writing on a napkin, trying not to rip the fragile fabric.

Dear Cyn,

Well, here we are again...a coach and four!

But it's not what you'd expect of a rock'n'roll tour. Our strongest drink's Irish Breakfast Tea, 'n our headliner's a Texas country and western singer with a baby face!!! Yeeeeeha!

But truth is, Orbison's fuggin' great, really...much better than Duane Eddy or The Four Seasons or even Been E. King woulda ben.¹³⁴

I mean, despite the fact that Roy stands (like one o' Lewis's) in the middle of the fuggin' stage and rarely eyes a bat, he's fantastic, y'know. Paul and me started shoutin', "Mankee, go home!" after his fourteenth or fifteenth curtain call last night.¹³⁵

But he only stared at us and hung around anyway. (I'm not even sure he speaks our language - Orbison.)

There is one thing that's rather Eerie Canal about him, though. Seemin'ly, it seems he lost his glasses back at some gig in Alabama, America, and he didn't get replacements before the tour. So, he's donned these dark prescription glasses, and he wears 'em on stage, y'know.¹³⁶ Yeah, great aura 'n all that...

but...

one can't help but remember.

Speakin' of which...Stu'd be madly proud of us, y'know. We got wreck-erd raves from the crowd last night, 'n there's actually talk of us closin' the show from here on out!!!

Of course, that's a birrova wickey sticket, as it were. I mean, "Who'll bell the cat?" Who'll tell ole

boy?

Paul and I've offered to tell him straight out that since he's makin' all the money ("that's what I want!"), we oughta at least to be slated final act.¹³⁷

"Turn about's fair play," and all those other old cabbages, eh? Well, we'll see how it goes, girl...

All right, Powell, kiss Sir Sules for me, pet Tim, and in spite of all the danger, give Mim me love, lov. We'll be home late on the 25th for our show at The Empire, next day.

Until then, beware, more missiles to follow...

Love,

Sohn

Thursday, 23 May 1963
En Route to The Odeon Cinema
Nottingham, England

Growing up in the sheltered Garden District of Dothan, Alabama, Bobby Goldsboro had never anticipated something like this: playing in The Roy Orbison band, touring England, riding on a bench seat next to England's popular Beatles; it was all a bit surreal for a boy from "The Circle City" where The Peanut Festival, an after-school chocolate soda at Nip and Ernie's, and the spring Azalea Trail had been the biggest events of his "growin' up years."¹³⁸

But Goldsboro was talented. So talented that in 1960 – when news

reached the determined Auburn University freshman that Orbison was coming to the area and had dismissed his back-up band for carousing – Goldsboro decided to snag that coveted job for his Dothan combo, The Webs. Calling emergency rehearsals and practicing Orbison tunes over and over, Goldsboro (in four frantic days) readied his band for an audition with Orbison’s manager.

Three years later, here Bobby was, four days into the biggest tour of his life, rubbing elbows with Gerry Marsden, Paul McCartney, John Lennon, Ringo Starr, George Harrison, and of course, Roy as well.

Goldsboro was tempted, at moments, to be a mite star-struck. But stars, he’d discovered, were just regular, Dothan boys with British or Texas accents. They loved to tease or “mickey-take,” as the Liverpoolians put it – or to “pull your leg,” as Goldsboro had always said.

Of course, it’d taken Paul McCartney three whole days to figure out that there weren’t insects on the tour bus after all, and that the authentic croaks and cricket chirps only occurred when Goldsboro was around.¹³⁹ But Macca, as the others called him, had taken it quite well.

“Ah, don’t let it get your goat,” Goldsboro had smiled his charming Southern grin beneath an Elvis pompadour. “It took ole Roy here an entire week to figure it out!” Everyone, including Orbison, chuckled.

But Bobby wasn’t always “ribbin’.” In fact, this morning he wanted to have a heart-to-heart with John Lennon. For the last two days, Goldsboro had been gathering courage to take the bench seat next to the Scouser and to offer a suggestion.

“Hey, John, I’ve been noticin’ ya don’t wear your glasses much...’cept on the bus, that is.” Bobby tried to introduce the topic gently. “But ya seem to need ’em. I mean, I’m pretty sure you’re bat-blind, aren’t ya?”

“Yeah...right.” John was guarded with the newcomer.

“Well, I hope I’m not buttin’ in where I’m not wanted, but...” Bobby waited for permission or rebuff, still as polite as his Southern, Catholic mother had reared him to be.

“Go on,” John was intrigued. He chewed gum and eyed the boy warily.

“Look, help me to understand...aren’t there times up there on that stage when ya need to refer to your play list or to avoid trippin’ over a cord or somethin’ like that?”

“Yeah, right.” John nodded.

“But the truth is, you and me...we can’t see our hands in front of our faces, can we?”

“Nah, not really. It’s fuggin’ inconvenient, bein’ blind.”

“Ya got that right,” Bobby commiserated, shaking his head.

“Not to mention how it feels hearin’ all that noise,” John warmed to the Southern boy’s sincerity, “’n not bein’ able to see a fuggin’ thing, y’know! Terrifyin’ – that.”¹⁴⁰

“Well,” Bobby smiled at Lennon’s honesty, “have ya ever thought about contact lenses?”¹⁴¹ I mean, I wear ’em most of the time. I’ve even got ’em on right now.”

“But y’er eyes aren’t really red.” John leaned up and studied Goldsboro with interest. “And y’ don’t seem tortured. That’s not the way I thought it’d be.”

“Heck no,” Bobby sputtered a laugh, “contacts’re the way to go, man! They’re next to impossible to feel – and they make you see like you got brand, new eyes.”

“Contacts, eh?” John mulled it over. “Wait ’til Cyn hears about this!”

“Uh, sin?” The Alabama boy raised an eyebrow.

“Yeah, Cyn...Cynthia...the gerl back home. The one we never mention ’round here.”

“Your girlfriend?”

“Nah, m’wife...m’wife who’s as blind as I am. But y’didn’t hear about her from me. It’s all taboo, y’know.”

“So, the reporters don’t know...or the fans?”

“Oh, the reporters know,” John explained, “but they’ve been directed to erase it from their memories, as it were. One of ’em just asked if she could mention me wife yet, but when I said, “No,” she nodded and agreed. That’s the way we play it ’round here.”¹⁴²

“And your wife...she doesn’t mind?” Bobby couldn’t imagine a Dothan girl agreeing to such hurtful anonymity.

“Nah, not really,” John paused, thoughtfully. “She wants me t’have...the toppermost of the poppermost, as it were. She doesn’t want to stand in m’way, y’know.”¹⁴³

“Oh, I see.” Bobby put it simply. “She loves you.”

“Yeah,” John said hoarsely. “That.” He edged from the rigid bench seat and reached for the ceiling, working the kinks out of his back. “Ta fer the tip on the eyes, Goldsboro. How about lettin’ me try puttin’ in one of yer contacts, later on...just to see if it’s humanly possible, y’know?”

“I might could,” Bobby nodded, employing a favourite Dothanism which ultimately meant, “No, not hardly!”

“Well, see that y’do, son.” John shot his own colloquial Scouse right back.

Worlds apart, the two guitarists smiled fondly at one another. They had discovered common ground Somehow or another, musicians were

always kindred spirits.

Saturday, 23 May ***En Route to Odeon Cinema, Nottingham***

The Beatles were headliners now. Biggest name on the marquee, closers of every show. They had quickly surpassed their mates, Gerry and the Pacemakers, and had even outshone the renowned Orbison.¹⁴⁴

Almost every review in every town was remarkable. Only one tipped the balance in favor of the melodic American. It read:

"I am sorry to say that Orbison completely overshadowed The Beatles (last night)...he stood in the middle of the stage with his guitar and sang such songs as 'Only the Lonely,' 'Running Scared,' 'Love Hurts,' and 'Crying.' It was magical. The quality of his voice was truly amazing. So was his ability to convey raw emotion...It was like reading a great book. I was taken into a world I knew nothing about."¹⁴⁵

Reading the words, John swallowed hard. His old self-doubt jostled him about.

"See?" it hissed in his ear. "Y'aren't all that y'er cracked up to be, after all. There's the proof, Sonny Jim! Truth, in black 'n white!"

When the voice niggled at him, there was only one cure. John rang Cyn.

Cynthia: Hullo?

John: What's up, Mrs. L?

Cynthia: Only the preparations for my husband's return tonight, that's what. Rumour has it he'll be here for The Empire Show tomorrow evening.

John: Believe half of what you hear, gerl.

Cynthia: Well, I'll just have to wait and see then, won't I? If I wake up and there's a man in my bed...

John: It'd better be me!

Cynthia: What time'll you be in, luv?

John: Late – or very early, dependin' on the way you look at it. But I'll be *in*, nevertheless. (Spoken with innuendo)

Cynthia: (Innuendo ignored) I'll probably be up 'n about anyway, feeding Julian.

John: Well, do it quickly, right? I'm the one in need, y'know.

Cynthia: (flirtatiously) And why is that?

John: Bad review...they said Orbison "completely overshadowed" us last night.

Cynthia: *They?* Or One?

John: One, I suppose.

Cynthia: *One* opinion, John...against the hundreds who're going mad over you, everywhere I turn!

John: Orbison thinks we ought to go to America.

Cynthia: (Her voice fell.) Does he?

John: Yeah, he said, "Dress like you're doing; keep the hair; say you're British, and get on a show like *Ed Sullivan*."¹⁴⁶ That's the ticket to America."

Cynthia: And...what does Brian say?

John: He says we're not ready. He says we've too much goin' on right here to jet off a world away.

Cynthia: (more energetically) I heard something about your getting your own BBC radio show!

John: Right. I thought we'd talked about it...*Pop Go the Beatles* they're callin' it.

Cynthia: What'll it be like? *Thank Your Lucky Stars*, only for radio rather than telly? Or something altogether different? And most important, do I need to worry about a pretty Janice as a host?¹⁴⁷

John: I dunno, yeah, nah, and no.

Cynthia: (smiling) Oh, c'mon, John!

John: Well, I dunno what it's like, now do I, Powell? I mean, we haven't done it yet. And yeah, it's like *Lucky Stars*. It's weekly musical interludes sandwiched in between slices of witty verbal repartee¹⁴⁸ – my bit, of course, the witty – but there's no panel of semi-clever, assorted teens reviewin' records, as far as I know. And no girl host. Instead, we've the ever-charmin' emcee, Pee Liters.

Cynthia: *Pee Litres?!*

John: Y'know, good ole Pee Liters, dryly referred to as Lee Peters, pre-Beatles.¹⁴⁹

Cynthia: I don't believe I've had the dubious pleasure...

John: Well, keep it that way. He's all wet.

Cynthia: *Weekly?* (It finally hit her.) Did you say *weekly programme*, John?

John: Yeah, every Tuesday...at the stroke of 5.¹⁵⁰

Cynthia: If I'd told you eighteen months ago that you'd be getting your own *weekly* BBC radio show, you wouldn't have believed me!

John: Well, as Ringo says, “Ten years from now, we’ll look back on all this ’n...

Cynthia: And?

John: “’N it’ll seem like a long time ago!”

Cynthia: Funny!

John: I thought so.

Cynthia: John, seriously...*The Echo* just last night reported that girls from all over England are making pilgrimages to The Cavern. *Pilgrimages!* Just because of The Beatles! Because of *you!* The reporter said, “The Beatles have turned Liverpool into the ‘Nashville of the North’” or...are you ready for this...“Nashpool,” as it were!¹⁵¹

John: Go on! (John batted his eyelashes, as if Cyn could see him.)

Cynthia: *And* Brian rang up Mim to say that he’s having to divide NEMS into a Northern division run by Freda, and a Southern division in London managed by someone else...um...Bettina Rose, I believe.

John: Right. (John nodded) Freda, so I’ve heard, asked her dear ole Irish father if she could go along to London with the rest of us, but he out ’n out refused...sayin’ no daughter of his would be off to The Smoke unsupervised.¹⁵² Freda, of course, thought she’d have to give NEMS the shove entirely...resign, y’know. She even lined up employment with Joe Flannery, as it were.¹⁵³

Cynthia: That’s awful! You love Freda!

John: Yeah, well, Brian said she was far too valuable to him to let her defect. He said he needed her to keep things goin’ back in...*Nashpool*.

Cynthia: (smiling) So, there’re two divisions of NEMS now...

John: Yeah, and who knows really? We might even have *three* before it’s all over ’n done with, Powell. Four even!

Cynthia: So, in light of all that...that *one* negative concert review is?

John: Shite.

Cynthia: Exactly.

John: Clever gerl.

Cynthia: Clever enough to be married to you, John Lennon.

John: (Dismissing the emotion) ’N how’s the aforesaid Mim thisavvy?

Cynthia: (Curtly) As ever.

John: And young Julian?

Cynthia: I think he smiled at me, John! Not an errant baby smile, mind you...a real one!

John: I’m gonna smile at ya tonight, luv.

Cynthia: Well, wake me if I’m asleep.

John: Y’can count on it.

Cynthia: One, two, three...

John: I’m havin’ an enormous effect on you, aren’t I?

Cynthia: Says you.

John: Tissarraah, Powell.

Cynthia: Tatty-bye, luv.

And the dial tone sounded.

For a moment, John stood, marveling that they'd concluded an entire conversation – husband and wife – without Mim's interfering or Julian's crying, and he was surprised to find himself even more uplifted than he'd imagined he'd be. John wondered why he didn't call his wife more often. He wondered why turning to Cyn was always his last resort.

Goldsboro, he decided, had it right...and about more than just the contact lenses. The fans "luved" him, but Cynthia loved him. John filed the concept away for later and headed back to the waiting coach.

In a half-hour or so, the tour would pull into Nottingham. And he wanted to get with Paul about the new song they'd been working on together. They called it, oddly enough, "She Loves You."¹⁵⁴

Quite unannounced, the city of Nottingham stretched before them, looking nothing like John had imagined it would. There were no forests or outlaws. No enticing Maid Marions. Instead, there was an inn designed after a Swiss Chalet, an immense Romanesque Council House, an old bicycle factory, and an aging, lace-making facility. Pubs, ornate homes, and university buildings gave the sprawling urban city an intimation of old-world charm. Its winding streets twined up and over hills, and the coach gradually wound its way to the Odeon Cinema, their stop for the night.

"All ashore who's goin' ashore!" the coach driver rapped on the bus ceiling and barked over the intercom.

"Well, that's us," Paul closed the composition notebook and tossed it into the scarred, zippered travel bag.

"I still say we should do the Little Richard 'wooo's,'" John insisted.

"Well, right, yeah, we'll keep in the back pocket," Paul nodded, perfunctorily, "though I wonder if Little Richard would agree with that, y'know."

And tossing ideas back and forth, agreeing and disagreeing, the duo patiently waited for their opening to move off the bus and onto the waiting stage.

Notes!

Information about Freda Kelly obtained from her interview and question/answer session at The New Jersey Fest for Beatles Fans, March 2011 and from various personal interviews after that. I was fortunate to meet Freda and visit with her. In July 2013, for example, I conducted an interview with Freda for my radio show, The John Lennon Hour. (You can hear it on iTunes under "Pat Matthews John Lennon Hour #32). Freda Kelly's story is told in the film "Good Ol' Freda," available on DVD. She is even lovelier in person than in legend...what an incredible lady!

As for the information, about Bobby Goldsboro, I lived for 12 years in Dothan, Alabama, where the legend of Bobby Goldsboro and The Webs is still on everyone's lips. During my last five years in Dothan, I was blessed to live five doors down from Bobby's parents, Nell and Charlie Goldsboro and to attend St. Columba Catholic Church with them. We became good friends, and I was able to see Bobby at many local events, where I gleaned the facts for this chapter. No one from Dothan, Alabama ever says Bobby's name without saying "Dothan's own" in front of it. The Goldsboro family is essential to the town's rich musical history and its aura.

One of my dear Dothan friends, Gary Loftin, is closely linked to many of the Alabama musicians who knew and worked with Bobby Goldsboro. One of his friends, Rodney Justo, replaced Bobby on the Orbison Tour when Bobby left the Webs to "go single." Rodney wrote to me in late April 2011 and was kind enough to share his experiences and memories with me. I'm indebted to Gary Loftin who also assisted me in my research. Thanks to Gary and to his lovely wife, Laura!

The Dothan, Alabama band The Webs was formed at Dothan High School in 1959. The original group included John Rainey Adkins (lead guitar), Dave Robinson (drums), Amos Tindell (bass), and vocalist/guitarist, Bobby Goldsboro. Just prior to the Roy Orbison tour, however, Bill Gilmore replaced Amos Tindell on bass. The group was mentored by the amazingly talented song-writing legend, Buddie Buie (who wrote "Traces," "Everyday with You Girl," "Walkin' in Rhythm," and a host of other Top Forty hits.) Some members of The Webs evolved into The Candymen and continued to back Roy Orbison.

Their talented vocalist, Bobby Goldsboro, left the band in 1963 and very successfully went out on his own. Goldsboro had chart-topping hits with "The Funny Little Clown," "Honey," and "Watching Scotty Grow."

For more information on The Webs and The Candymen, see: <http://www.allmusic.com/artist/candymen-mn0000992319>

All vignettes of the Roy Orbison tour in this chapter are all factual and documented. Only the phone conversation with Cynthia is conjecture, though each item mentioned actually occurred, just as stated.

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