

May Kang writes:

What struck me first and foremost about last Friday's ONES performance in Brantford is that there was no feeling of compromise in this production. No feeling that something had been swept under the musical or the creative rug, it felt as though every nuance on and off stage had that special attention to quality that you see in only the best shows.

Secondly I was struck both by the amazingly accurate performance of the Beatles catalogue and the spellbinding stories in the narration. This was the one-two punch I wasn't expecting. Before I knew it, the first act was over and I was hungry for more.

And third, I could not get over the audience reaction to this show. It seemed the entire audience (a full house is the trend for this show) were singing along (in a good way) to every song, they knew every word, every ooooh, every yeah. They were dancing in their chairs and in the aisles, and that included the theatre staff who were thoroughly enjoying their jobs, eyes glued to the stage through both acts.

The energy was undeniable.

Mae Kang, freelance music writer interview, October 21, 2019

Q & A

MK: So tell us about the name ONES. Where did that come from, what does it mean?

FZ: Well, the theme of the show is the number one hits of the Beatles, which might have easily been the title for the show, but it takes up a lot of marquee space. (laugh) I wanted something short and direct to describe the show. I think it crossed my mind during a walk on a beach at one of my winter getaways. I went with that name because ONES is easy to remember, it's short and unusual.

MK: So why the number one hits of the Beatles? What inspired you to write ONES?

FZ: I wanted to produce a Beatles show that hadn't been done before, something that might bring the 'wonder' and 'phenomena' of the Beatles back to life the way I experienced back in the 60's. There's plenty of shows out there that reproduce an entire album, or a look, and that's great cause it involves quite a bit of talent, research, and hard work, but it's not nostalgia or thought provoking enough for me. What I found particularly attractive about the number one hits as a presentation, is that there is a chronology involved that's very close to my own heart.

MK: I noticed that the versions of the songs you play, for instance Hey Jude, sound different from the way we heard it on the LP. Why is that?

FZ: I wanted to use the "singles" version of each song. That's the way those songs affected us most. If you were there, then you will have a personal story for each and every number one song. I mean, if you lived those 7 years in the 60's, every Beatles number one song will relate back to your own personal great experiences, moments, and adventures in those years. Those singles versions of the Beatles songs literally filled the radio airwaves and radio was the 'portable' media for music for all of

us back then. Radio was everywhere and it literally played the soundtrack to our lives. Albums are great, but they are a very different experience from radio.

MK: But didn't you base your show on the album 1?

FZ: There's an album called 1, which is a compilation of the number one hits of the Beatles in the UK and the USA. It was the first Album I studied while creating my show. But I didn't base this show on that album. As I said, I wanted to reveal my experience of the Beatles and the 60's, and I couldn't parallel all the songs on that album when I discovered that certain songs that I remember as being number one, weren't there. I wanted people in Canada to experience the hit songs that we heard on the radio... I mean "From Me to You" was a number one in the UK but not here, and "All My Loving" went to number one here but never even charted in the US or the UK.

And conversely, the US version of the ONES show has a few different songs in it, and a few different narrations for the stories behind those songs based on the US experience, and if we ever make it over to the UK... (aside) which would be on my bucket list... the show will be tailored to their experience.

MK: You also perform in the show. Such a huge undertaking, how do you manage?

FZ: Well first I have some seriously talented people working with me both on and off stage.

The performers in the ONES show are world class. It's uncanny how much their performances actually sound like Beatles records. Seriously, some of the busiest and most sought after players in Canada. I could recite the long laundry list... but let me give you the short version... the band is comprised of band leaders, imagine five lead vocalists to handle every possible vocal layer of the original Beatles recordings... each of them has their own successful band and each have performed with very successful Canadian artists like Burton Cummings, Randy Bachman, Kim Mitchell, Rik Emmet, Bruce Cockburn, and Goddo, the orchestras for Canadian Opera and Canadian Ballet, and have been nominated for JUNO awards... and they are all huge Beatles fans, even the performers in the show that weren't born All years after the Beatles broke up! (laughs) Our performers have also worked with the likes of Roger Whittaker, Chrissie Hynde, Bob Hope, Andy Kim and Alex Lifeson, and one of our current performers is the new bass player for Styx.

MK: What do you hope will happen with this show? What is your wish?

FZ: Well, I would love to take this show round the world. I'm working on it... and for me, if I could get to meet Paul and Ringo, that would make me very happy... and I feel like a kid saying it... if I could get to 'perform' with Paul or Ringo, then my life would be complete! But on a less grand but no less important scale, it makes me very happy to see the faces, and meet people after the show who have been transported. I will hope that we can keep ONES playing for those people that love the Beatles.

MK: Well I wasn't born yet, but I love the stories in the narration. And the people I spoke with all said it was like living those fab times all over again.

FZ: Thank you. Mission accomplished.