

The Beatles' Abbey Road album cover still iconic, 50 years later

By Cillian O'Brian, CTVNews.ca Writer • August 8, 2019

It was 50 years ago today when the biggest band in the world were snapped walking across a zebra crossing on a quiet London street.

The resulting photograph, which was used as the cover image for The Beatles second last album "Abbey Road," has become iconic.

Now thousands of fans visit the leafy north London street every year to walk in the Fab Four's footsteps.

"The trouble is the traffic is rather busier now than in 1969," Beatles expert and Abbey Road guide Richard Porter told CTV News.

"The cover picture took them ten minutes to do."

The album's designer, Apple Corps creative director John Kosh, made the controversial decision not to include the band's name or the album title on the front cover, so why did it become so iconic? Porter has a theory.

"Because it's so everyman, anyone can replicate it. It's just four guys on a road," he said.

"Part of it is the conspiracy theory about Paul McCartney being dead."

A rumour surfaced in the late 1960s that McCartney had been killed in a car crash in 1966.

Conspiracy theorists interpreted the album cover as a funeral procession with John Lennon as the priest in white, Ringo Starr as the mourner in black and George Harrison as the gravedigger in denim.

McCartney's bare feet symbolized his death, the thinking went, because the dead are buried without shoes in some traditions.

The left-handed McCartney is holding a cigarette in his right hand – indicating that he is an impostor – and the number plate on the Volkswagen parked on the street is 28IF, meaning McCartney would have been 28 if he had lived. McCartney was in fact only 27 at the time of the photo and the release of the record.

"It was a hot day. Even now Paul wears sandals," Porter told CTV News.

"He was wearing sandals when he arrived at the session... and he took them off. That was it."

Abbey Road was released in September 1969, followed the next year by Let It Be.

"The original album title was going to be Everest, named after the favourite brand of cigarette smoked by Geoff Emerick, The Beatles recording engineer," Porter said.

"The idea was to go to Mount Everest to shoot the album cover and I won't tell you what they said to that idea. So in the end it was just by default, call it Abbey Road and do it on the crossing just outside the studio."

The photographer who took the famous cover shot was the late Iain Macmillan, according to the BBC.

"They planned it a few days before and there's illustrations that Paul McCartney did showing exactly how he wanted to do it," Porter explained.

"They got a couple of their roadies and a couple of other people to do some rehearsal pictures before The Beatles did it.

"They took six pictures in all, three going one way and three the other. Paul, Ringo and John are wearing suits made by Tommy Nutter from Saville Row. I guess George rebelled wearing the denim."

[Earthcam](#) and Abbey Road Studios provide a live view of the zebra crossing at Abbey Road [here](#).

---- With files from CTV's London bureau chief Paul Workman

