

Beatles wannabes are close enough for sold-out Shuler Theater audience

By Tim Keller— For the Comet | Posted: Friday, January 23, 2015 12:00 am

RATON – When Don Bellazzo was in college in Chicago during the 1970s, he did the prevailing singer-songwriter thing, accompanying himself with an acoustic guitar at campus coffeehouses. His covers of songs by The Beatles’ John Lennon always brought his best applause. A smart lad himself, he followed the applause. Thirty-five years later, the only career he’s ever had is as a John Lennon impersonator.

Saturday (Jan. 17) night his band, Yesterday, played to a sold-out Shuler Theater where the audience was nearly the age of the Beatles themselves. A few brought their grandkids, who must have found it a revelation to see grandma scream like that. The band and the fun were infectious enough to produce the most gleeful Shuler concert in a long time.

Fans came from as far as Denver, Pueblo, Amarillo, and Albuquerque. (The band drove in from its home base of Las Vegas, Nevada, via a first tour stop in Artesia in southern NM.) Beatles John Lennon and Paul McCartney wrote, “When I get older losing my hair many years from now, will you still need me when I’m 64? You’ll be older too, and if you say the word, I could stay with you.” Under their Beatles wigs, the band members’ ages reached 64, but they’ve stayed with the Beatles and so has the audience.

Despite the ages, the wigs, and the inconsistent British accents, the band produced a great entertainment and credible renditions of Beatles classics right down to playing them in their original keys. No one’s going to get any closer than this to seeing the Beatles in concert; that was enough to sell out the Shuler, and it didn’t look like anyone regretted the \$20 ticket purchase.

Frankly, to play 28 Beatles songs well enough to please a full house of 450 people, the band members have to be, first and foremost, great musicians. Then, they have to be credible actors, performing in character. Like actors, the four members of Yesterday have studied their Beatles counterparts to the



Yesterday, a Beatles Tribute band, performs at the Shuler Theater

Yesterday, a Beatles tribute band, gave a rousing performance at the Shuler Theater Saturday (Jan. 17) night . After intermission, the musicians returned as Sgt. Pepper’s Lonely Hearts Club Band. Altogether, they played 28 Beatles classics from “I Want to Hold Your Hand” to “Revolution.”

smallest details, duplicating their playing along with their mannerisms, stage banter and personalities, sense of humor, and even the way they hold their instruments.

Bellazzo founded Yesterday in 1981, and he does a good John Lennon, having spent a lifetime perfecting it. None of the foursome can match the Beatles' voices or playing exactly, but they produce a reasonable facsimile.

The rest of the band has been intact for eight years. Drummer Dick Cunico, the group's Ringo Starr, was raised in Colorado Springs according to the band's website, but he has family in Raton. Bassist Rich Fazzi was too heavy and round-faced to pass for Paul McCartney, but he ignored that as he played McCartney's left-handed Hofner violin-shaped bass and his McCartneyisms were often spot on.

Austin native Monte Mann came as close to being George Harrison as anyone could. Quiet and slender, the bashful Beatle stepped forward to add vocals or play exciting electric-guitar solos. Along with Bellazzo's John Lennon, Mann came closest to making this feel like the real deal.

The band performed 28 Beatles classics in two sets that took just over two hours including a 20-minute intermission and a pair of encores. For the few kids in the audience, it was likely the first time they'd seen their grandparents so giddy. It'll teach the kids the meaning of Beatlemania, and help them to recognize all those songs that are still played on the radio in 2015.