

The Saga of Seven Skins

The history of

THE BEATLES DROP-T-LOGO

*and
The Seven Most Famous Drumheads in History*

by Russ Lease

To the casual Beatle fan,

the 60's mental image of the Beatles playing live includes Ringo Starr sitting behind his oyster black pearl drums with the famous 'drop-T' Beatle logo blazoned across the bass drumhead. In most people's minds, the drum set that appears in this image doesn't change from photo-to-photo or year-to-year, only Ringo's clothing or length of hair seem to. But to us drum hardware/artifact junkies, the changes are obviously much more substantial.

Ringo owned four different oyster black pearl Ludwig drum kits during his Beatle days. Photographic evidence strongly suggests that Ringo used only four specific drum sets from May 12, 1963, through to mid-1968. How can you tell? The swirl design of the oyster black pearl creates an abstract, non-repeating pattern around the wooden shell of the drums. This unique pattern, in relation to the hardware mounted on the drums, makes each manufactured drum completely identifiable to the exclusion of all others. This obviously does not apply to Ringo's peripheral hardware – cymbals, drum and hi-hat stands, etc. It is known that from time-to-time, Starr interchanged this hardware from his inventory. The purpose of this article, though, is not to delve into the hardware changes and histories of these four sets. That would be a separate story unto itself for another time. Rather, I'll explore the 'drop-T' logo drum heads themselves, as it is a topic that has rarely, if ever, been written about.

I have been a collector of Beatles auction artifacts for well over twenty years. My obsession with the Beatles' logo drum heads started back in September of 1994 when I made a pivotal life decision to invest in a piece of memorabilia that would do severe damage to my lifesavings at the time. I got

involved in the bidding at a Sotheby's auction for what was being described as 'possibly' the logo drum head used by the Beatles for their first Ed Sullivan broadcast in February, 1964. My pre-auction research seemed to indicate that five or six different logo skins had been used over the years and, indeed, preliminary measurements of numerous Sullivan photos looked to me like what I thought could be an exact match with the head about to be sold. After 'maxing out' on what financially would have to be my last bid, I held my breath. What seemed like an eternity passed without anyone upping the ante. Finally, the wonderful sound of the hammer confirmed my new acquisition. 'Oh my God, is it really mine?' For many hours later it seemed hard to believe. It still does.

Upon taking physical possession of the piece, my mind was set on two things. Number one, proving to myself that the drum skin really was what it appeared to be and number two, proving to the collecting world in general that this was, in fact, the Sullivan Show logo drum head. This started an eight-year obsession concerning not only my new acquisition, but also how many other logo drum heads did Ringo use? Why were they changed and what were the histories of each?

A few months after the skin was in my hands, my apprehension turned to jubilation when I came across a Washington Coliseum concert photo that was the tightest and sharpest photo of the head I had seen up to that point. Sure enough, every tiny scrape, scratch in the lettering, and brushstroke was clearly evident in the picture, as well as what I was holding in my hands. In addition, Sotheby's top specialist, Stephen Maycock, assured me that the chain of possession was impeccable because the skin had been sold

by them initially ten years prior, in 1984, and it was now in the possession of just its third owner.

There are people who feel that historical artifacts of this stature should not be in the hands of a private individual, but rather, in a museum or the archives of a prestigious institution. This is not a thought that I find completely disagreeable. In a perfect world, I'd love to see all the icons of my generation safely guarded or otherwise under special care. Of course, the world doesn't always work that way. If

not me, it would simply be someone else. My personal desire then would be that they would take the responsibility for the safety, protection, and preservation of this artifact as seriously as I do.

Armed primarily with reference books, photos, a telephone, and numerous industry contacts, I began an eight-year trek to document each of the drum heads, time of use, and current whereabouts. The balance of this article documents what has been uncovered so far.

The Origin of the 'Drop-T' Logo and Drumhead No. 1

The origin of the Beatles' logo itself is held within the history of this, the first logo drum head. In April 1963, Ringo Starr, along with Brian Epstein, visited Drum City in London. Drum City was London's largest drum dealer at the time and it was here that Ringo purchased his first Ludwig kit. It was a small 20" set in oyster black pearl. The deal for the new drum set was basically promotional in that Drum City was making little or no money on the transaction and trade in - Ringo's old Premier kit. In exchange, Ivor Arbiter, Drum City's owner, wanted the Ludwig name on the front drum skin since he had recently started distributing the brand. This was long before drum companies routinely splashed their name across the front like they do today. In response, Epstein wanted the band's name on the front, as well. Obviously, the Beatles' name would have to be larger than the Ludwig sticker that Ivor wanted to use. Arbiter claims that, on the spot, with his only instruction from Epstein being to emphasize the word 'beat', he pulled out a piece of paper from his desk and designed a couple of crude Beatle logos. On one of them, Arbiter isolated 'beat' by elongating the "B" and lowering the tail of the "T", leaving the rest of the letters symmetrically the same height. The soon-to-be world famous 'drop-T' design was chosen and approved by both Epstein and Starr.

This is where a gentleman named



Eddie Stokes comes into the picture. Stokes was a London sign painter who worked around the corner from Drum City. On his lunch hour and in his spare time, Stokes was employed by Arbiter to paint band names on bass drum fronts. Stokes, using Arbiter's scratched out design, hand-painted the new Beatle logo on the 20" Ludwig Weather Master drum head below the Ludwig sticker. Credit for the official 'drop-T' logo goes to both Ivor Arbiter and Eddie Stokes. Ringo took possession of his new Ludwig drum kit and logo on May 12, 1963, for the taping of Thank Your Lucky Stars, a U.K. TV. talent show.

By November of that year, the Ludwig sticker started flaking and chipping away from all the pounding and transporting of the drum. So much so that by the time The Beatles finished

their autumn tour on December 13th, only the letters 'Lu' were left. By this time John Lennon had taken to making 'loo' (English slang for toilet) jokes on stage whenever he introduced Ringo. This was obviously not good for Arbiter's Ludwig promotion idea. The drum head was brought back in to Drum City to have the remaining part of the sticker chipped off and Stokes was asked to permanently hand paint the Ludwig logo back on, only this time larger.

The last time we see this logo drum head is for the Olympia Theater shows in Paris ending on February 4, 1964. This drum skin has never shown up for public auction at any of the major auction houses.

'Drop-T' Drum Head No. 2 The Sullivan Head

In January 1964, preparations were being made for the Beatles first American visit. Ivor Arbiter was contacted and asked to prepare a second logo drumhead for the all-important trip. Eddie Stokes was again brought in to work his skills. This time Stokes used a 20" Remo Weather King drum skin. The Remo heads are identified by the small crown logo located at the very top of the head near the rim. Drum City was also an authorized Remo dealer and Arbiter thought he could kill two birds with one stone by promoting both Ludwig and Remo on the same drum head. "At the time, the Beatles were huge in England and I was counting on fairly wide exposure,"

says Arbiter. This time Stokes painted the Beatle logo much larger, stretching completely from edge to edge. He also used a much fatter typeface than on the previous drum head. His faint pencil guide marks can still be seen on the front of the drum head today.

It was decided that the Beatles would travel to America as light as possible. The decision was made that Ringo would travel without his drum kit. Only his snare drum and cymbals would make the trip along with the new front drum skin. A new set of drums would be purchased when they arrived in the States. The reason for this was that a second kit was going to be needed in any case. Once the Beatles returned from America, filming was going to com-

set in America, rather than carry the old one over.

Manny's Music Store in Manhattan, delivered the new Ludwig set to the Ed Sullivan studio in time for the 1:30pm Saturday, February 8th rehearsals. One problem - Manny's mistakenly sent over a white pearl kit instead of Ringo's familiar oyster black. By the Sunday morning dress rehearsal, Manny's had switched for the correct color kit. Just before that afternoon's taping of what would become the Beatles "third" Sullivan Show appearance, the new logo drum head was fitted on the front of the bass drum. This logo drum skin was used for the duration of the Beatles first American visit that included three Sullivan Show appearances, two Carnegie Hall concerts, and their American debut concert at the Washington Coliseum.

As evidenced from photos, the Sullivan logo drum head endured a few scuffs and scratches during its travels up and down America's east coast. Most notably is a half moon scrape running across the "B-E" and into the "A" in Beatles. This was probably caused by laying or packing the 14" hi-hat cymbal on top of the flat lying head. The curve matches perfectly.

This logo drum head, with the entire new set of drums, went back to London's Abbey Road Studios when the band left America and the skin was not publicly seen again until being auctioned by Sotheby's London in 1984. It is considered to be the most famous of the seven Beatle drum heads and is the only one to ever appear on a Beatles Album cover - it appears on four.

This drumhead originally left the Beatles' inner circle in 1984 when Sotheby's sold it to an Australian

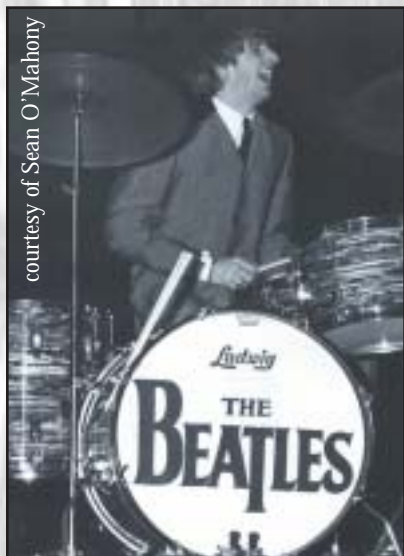
restaurateur named George Wilkins. Wilkins owned it for ten years and then consigned the head back to Sotheby's in 1994 where it was purchased by 'yours truly'.

'Drop-T' Drum Head No. 3 The "Hard Days Night" Head

After returning from America, the Beatles immediately began recording the soundtrack for A Hard Days Night. Filming for the movie would start a week and a half after returning home. The decision was then made that a brand new pristine logo drum skin would be needed for their film debut. The drum head chosen this time would be a Ludwig Weather Master and again, the drum brand logo was hand painted. One of Stokes' identifying characteristics for this skin is the elongated tail on the "L" in Ludwig. This time it extends well below the "d" and the 'drop-T' design is also much narrower and a little smaller than the Sullivan head. The 20" disc was mounted on Ringo's new Sullivan drum set and head No. 2 was discarded. The kit remained in this configuration throughout the filming of the movie, the NME Poll Winners concert at Wembley, and the TV special Around the Beatles on April 28, 1964. This drum head was then only publicly seen one more time and that was almost a full year later. It shows up in



photo by Miki Slingsby



courtesy of Sean O'Mahony

mence on their film, A Hard Days Night. One drum kit would be needed on the film set and, since the soundtrack was going to be recorded at the same time during breaks in the schedule, a second kit would be needed at Abbey Road. The powers that be concluded it was easier to pick up the new



the Help movie scene where the Beatles are in the mock recording studio miming to You're Going To Lose That Girl. This drumhead has never been offered up for auction by any of the major auction houses.

'Drop-T' Drum Head No. 4 First American Tour Head



The Beatles took a well-deserved holiday break in May 1964 and reconvened on May 31st for a show in London at the Prince of Wales Theater. This show marked a significant change in Ringo's on-stage appearance. That same day he took delivery of his first 22" Ludwig OBP set and, obviously, the requirement of yet another new front drum head. Stokes went back to using a Remo Weather King head for the new larger kit. For this skin, Stokes' font was a little more closely related to drum head No. 1 and again the Ludwig logo was hand painted on.

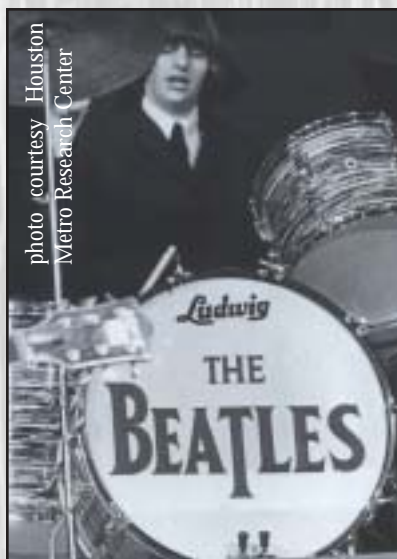
This setup was used exclusively for all appearances from May 31, 1964, straight through to August 1, 1965, for their Blackpool Night Out U.K. TV broadcast. Actually, from this May 31st date forward, Ringo never went back to playing his two 20" drum kits - whether publicly for concert/film appearances or as far as we can determine, for recording purposes - the one exception being that previously men-

tioned scene from Help. The use of this new 22" set included the Netherlands and Australian tours with Jimmy Nichol sitting in for Ringo and the Beatles first full-fledged American tour. This configuration is also seen in all Help scenes (with the exception of the one mentioned) and, in addition, their European tour of June/July 1965.

This drum head has never been publicly auctioned through any of the major auction houses.

'Drop-T' Drum Head No. 5 The '65 American Tour Head

The Beatles returned to New York in August, 1965, to start their summer American tour. For this occasion, Ringo would debut his fourth and last oyster black pearl Ludwig drum set. For this new head, No. 5, they went back to a



22" Ludwig Weather Master. For the first time since logo head No. 1, a sticker was used for the Ludwig logo. The sticker was larger and thicker than the previous logos and the application was somewhat haphazard as it was put on crooked, running slightly uphill from left to right. The lettering in Beatles was not very pleasing on this one, differing from what had traditionally become the accepted logo. The lettering was fatter and much less italicized. This head/kit setup made its debut on the Ed Sullivan Show, taped

on August 14, 1965, the day before their triumphant Shea Stadium show. The Sullivan show was broadcast four weeks later, the first show of the new TV season, on September 12th. The drum kit, in this form, was used throughout the 1965 American tour and into the fall, including the famous Shindig taping on October 3rd. The original 'drop-T' No. 5 is currently known to be in the collection of a well-known celebrity drummer who wishes to remain anonymous.

A consignment resembling this drum head has twice been entered into sales at major auction houses, most recently in Bonham's Tokyo sale in March, 1997. This skin, however, had a silvery sheen to the head surface and it was not a Ludwig Weather Master. After consultations, the head was withdrawn prior to the auction.

'Drop-T' Drum Head No. 6 The '66 American Tour Head

On November 1st and 2nd, 1965, the Beatles went before the cameras again for another TV special. This one centered around their songwriting and was entitled The Music of Lennon & McCartney. On this night Ringo reverted back to his first 22" kit and another new logo head was broken in. Logo drum head No. 6 was again a

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Ludwig Weather Master and this one was a little less opaque than its predecessors. Ringo appears to have used this drum set and logo head from this point exclusively through to Magical Mystery Tour. That is, every live and film appearance in 1966 was done with this set/head configuration. It's also this setup that is evidenced in numerous studio photographs during the recording sessions for Sgt. Pepper throughout the first half of 1967.



The skin was temporarily removed from the bass drum for the Our World live world broadcast on June 25, 1967. It should be noted that this logo head was still in use for the Our World rehearsals, but was switched just prior to broadcast. In its place for the transmission was the orange/red 'Love' head that you also see in the Magical Mystery Tour film, which began shooting on September 11th. By November of that year, drumhead No. 6 was back on the drum kit and ready for the Hello Goodbye promo film shot at the Saville Theater. 'Drop-T' No. 6 turned out to be the longest used of the seven logo skins.

Andy Babiuk, while working on his book Beatles Gear, uncovered an interesting story with regard to the disappearance of No.6. He was interviewing Brian Gibson, an engineer at

Abbey Road in the '60s, who recalled that there was a storeroom next to studio 3 where instruments were sometimes kept.

Gibson recollected, "Ringo's drum with The Beatles skin on it was left in there, and I remember thinking how attractive to a collector that particular item would be. Strangely enough - and I plead not guilty to this - we came in one day and someone had neatly trimmed the skin out of the drum frame. So someone somewhere has got the original Beatles skin that came out of Starr's drum kit. After that they used the red-painted skin with 'Love' in yellow, rather than bother to get another Beatles skin because they obviously weren't going to perform on stage anymore."

This skin is probably still in the possession of whoever stole it in 1967. I imagine fencing a drum head in this condition would prove rather difficult.

**'Drop-T' Drum Head No. 7
The "Let It Be" Head**

And finally we have the last of the 'drop-T' heads. Logo drum head No. 7's lifespan consisted of about ten seconds of celluloid at the very start of the Let It Be film. The 22" Ludwig Weather Master - with Ludwig logo sticker - was originally intended



courtesy of Sotheby's

for Ringo's maple-finish Hollywood kit seen throughout the film. Due to the group's recently adopted practice of not using a front bass drum cover during recording, the head was never mounted for the film or seen again during their career. Thus, head No. 7 was never really part of the drum kit at

all.

This drum head was originally put up for auction through Sotheby's London in September, 1988. It was consigned by George Peckham, who was one of the original Fourmost, and worked for the Apple recording studio in 1969. His claim is that the drum skin was given to him by John Lennon. Sotheby's estimated its value at around \$50,000, but the bidding topped out below the reserve price and it didn't sell. Sotheby's again had the head on the block in August, 1992. This time it sold to an anonymous bidder who is presumed to still be in the possession of it.

Retouched Photos and the Sash

One footnote to this history is that there were two retouched photograph versions of the logo heads that have appeared in publishing and advertising. In 1963, the Ludwig Drum Company, to capitalize on the Beatles growing popularity, used a photo of Ringo for promotional purposes. He was sitting at his first Ludwig set displaying drum head No. 1 on the front. Ludwig had their logo sticker air-brushed out of the photo and replaced with a much larger Ludwig logo that they thought was more commercially pleasing. This photo was used for advertising the brand name.

Also, early on someone doctored one of the photos from the Beatles Albert Marrion photo sessions with Pete Best taken in December, 1961. The

photo shows Best sitting behind his marine pearl Premier drums with the other three Beatles. The pristinely blank white bass drum head was airbrushed with a



photo shows Best sitting behind his marine pearl Premier drums with the other three Beatles. The pristinely blank white bass drum head was airbrushed with a

completely fictitious Beatle logo. This bogus photo actually made it into a few books. Pete Best does admit to at one time having a Beatle logo on the front of his kit but it was very short lived and apparently never photographed.

In reality, Ringo's very first Beatle drum logo was not a 'drop-T'. It was a white linen sash that was stretched across the front of Ringo's brown Premier drum kit during the first three or four months of 1963. The sash logo was sketched out by a Liverpool gentleman named Tex O'Hara based on some of McCartney's doodles. The logo included bug antennae protruding out of the top of the "B". When O'Hara was asked to do the graphics, he wasn't sure if the band would want it done



photo by Tex O'Hara

in the traditional black or if they would want it done in a dark brown to match Ringo's drums at the time. O'Hara made both and the Beatles chose the black one to adorn the front of the drums. Gerry Evans picks up the story here. Evans, at the time the manager of



photo by Hulton Getty

Arbiter's Drum City, remembers the end of the sash from Andy Babuik's Beatles Gear interview.

"I took his old Premier drum kit from him and brought it back to the store. We renovated it in our workshop, and then sold it. I ripped off the bit of material from the bass drum head where he'd handwritten the Beatles name and threw it away." O'Hara hung on to the brown copy as the Beatles fame rose and finally sold it at auction some thirty years later along with his preliminary sketches.

The Folks At Ludwig

There is another aspect to this story that came to light a number of years ago, while researching what became this article, that deserves to be addressed. There's an old 'war' story that has made the rounds over the years with regard to Ringo and his touring drums. It seems to have originated with

two former executives of the Ludwig Drum Company that have told the story that Ludwig was responsible for providing Ringo with a new set of drums in each city the Beatles would visit during their American tours. This was supposedly done through the local authorized Ludwig dealer in each town. On the face of it, this would seem a very feasible and economical way for the Beatles to tour the country without having to carry the

drums around with them. The problem with this scenario is that it doesn't appear to have happened this way. Photographic evidence proves conclusively that Ringo played the same set of drums at each and every venue with respect to each individual American tour. Not only did he play the same kit

for the duration of the tour, but also it was *always* one of his own four OBP drum kits. If Ludwig did provide new drums for each tour date, then it is apparent their drums never made it on stage and were strictly used as back-ups. In fact, this scenario even seems to be likely given a couple of other incidents that have taken place in the last number of years.

A few years back it was brought to my attention through a magazine article that a museum in Huntsville, Alabama, had recently opened a 60's exhibit. Included in this exhibit was what was being described as "Ringo Starr's drum set from his last Beatle concert at Candlestick Park, San Francisco." Intrigued, I called the museum and spoke at length with its curator, James Hagler. Mr Hagler was nice enough to tell me all he knew about the drums. I was intrigued because the photos in the article showed that these drums were obviously *not* the drum kit that appears in Jim Marshal's excellent photos of the Beatles final show that August night in 1966. Not only were they definitely not the drums, but the front *Beatles* drum head was too italicized to be even close to any of the known seven,



photo by Ken Williams

much less head No. 6 that was used that night. Mr. Hagler went on to tell me that the prized drums were owned and lent to the

museum by one of the former Ludwig executives.

About a year later, I got a phone call from a gentleman named Ken Williams. Mr. Williams had recently retired by closing up his San Francisco drum store called (ironically, and no

relation to Arbiter's) Drum City. Drum City in the 60's was San Francisco's largest authorized Ludwig dealer. Mr. Williams introduced himself and went on to tell me that he owned the logo drum head used by Ringo for the Beatles 1964 Cow Palace show in the city. He said that he picked the drums up from the venue after the show, and before forwarding them back to Ludwig (because the tour was over), he removed and kept the front logo drum head which he proudly hung on the wall of his drum shop for the next 30 years. He wanted to know if I was interested in purchasing the drum head from him. I told him I was interested and asked him to forward some Polaroids of the head to me and I would get back to him. Upon receiving the pictures, I was dismayed to discover that again the font was painted very differently than the one that appears in the photos taken of the Beatles on stage that night. However, it did seem to match the logo drum head on the set at the Huntsville museum that I described earlier.

Last year I was sent some photographs during a consultation that I was doing for one of the major auction houses. The pictures were of a Beatles logo drum head for potential consignment for an upcoming auction. The head in question was instantly distinguishable from any of the original seven skins, but...it did seem vaguely familiar. Yes, you guessed it, it was a very close match to both the Huntsville museum drumhead and the Ken Williams drum head. I was later told that this skin could be traced back to Ludwig in Chicago.

All three logo drum heads used the identical Ludwig logo sticker and all three were of the same slightly over italicized font. It is absurd to me that the people claiming their drum heads to be "Beatle-used" never even bothered to consult a photograph of the

particular show in which their claim is based. Photographic evidence proves, beyond a shadow of a doubt, that things did not happen the way they thought they did. Who knows how many other 'Beatle-used' drum heads are out there. All that can be said for sure is that none of them were ever owned or played by Ringo in the context of a Beatles concert and therefore are not 'Beatle logo drum heads.'

ADDENDUM

These seven 'drop-T' Beatle logo drum heads are the only drum heads that have ever been identified as having been used by Ringo. No more, no less. Each head is hand-painted and none was of the traditional calfskin variety. Each is mylar, which was fairly new to the industry in the late 50's and early 60's. No stencils were used. Original photographs exist which

6 to 8) of Beatle heads for use as display or for promotional purposes. Some were used in the Sound City or Drum City stores (both owned by Arbiter). Some were used for cinema promotion and at least one was done for Madame Tussaud's in London. In virtually every case though, some extra promotional graphic was also painted on the head in addition to the Beatle logo.

Over the years many fake drum skins have been submitted to the major auction houses as being actual Beatle used logo heads. I'm happy to say that most were turned away for what they were. A few though, especially prior to the last six or seven years, did manage to actually make it to the auction block and were sold. This was due, I think, to an understandable lack of time and resources on behalf of the

auction houses. At that point, to my knowledge, this kind of research had not been published. We can be fairly confident that this would not happen today. A fake Beatle drum head submission to a major auction house would have to get past a few people much more educated on the subject than in years past and that's quite unlikely.



show spotlights hitting the heads at just the right angles to reveal a reflection of each of the individual brushstrokes. This creates, in effect, an identifying 'fingerprint' that allows you to differentiate these seven skins to the exclusion of all others. The whereabouts of most, but not all, of the original seven drum heads is known. It has also recently been verified, personally through Ringo, that he does not possess any of the original seven Beatle drum heads himself.

During the 60's, Eddie Stokes was asked to paint a handful (estimated at

My thanks to both Andy Babiuk and Terry Butz, some of whose research and documentation, in addition to my own, formulated the basis for the facts in this article.

Mini Bio – Russ Lease, of Columbia, Md., has been collecting one-of-a-kind Beatle memorabilia for well over twenty years and has built an extensive collection. Russ also does consulting work for some of the major auction houses. Russ can be contacted by email at russlease@comcast.net or via his website at www.beatlesuits.com