



“ I love talking to people, taking their stories, and putting the picture together. As I'm writing I love watching my subject emerge on paper. ”

I used to keep a ream of blank paper in my desk drawer. I'd run my thumb along it and think, *One day I'm going to fill up that paper,*” recalls multi-instrumentalist Bob Spitz of the days he spent performing with Bruce Springsteen and managing Elton John. Even during those amazing gigs, he dreamed of writing. Bob felt that his music-business experience would give him an inside advantage as a music journalist. He started writing for *Crawdaddy!* and *Rolling Stone* magazines, then landed a position at New York City's New School, teaching what he knew best: rock 'n' roll. Then he started filling up that ream of paper, first with *Barefoot in Babylon: The Creation of the Woodstock Music Festival, 1969*, then *Dylan: A Biography*, and then two different Beatles biographies—most recently, *Yeah! Yeah! Yeah!: The Beatles, Beatlemania, and the Music that Changed the World*. We chatted with Bob about what makes his Beatles projects stand out from the rest.

Bob Spitz

Beatles Biographer

How do you choose your subjects?

With Woodstock and Bob Dylan, no one had ever written a comprehensive book about them, so it seemed logical to do so. With the Beatles, it was completely different. I interviewed Paul McCartney for *The New York Times Magazine* and he confessed that the 1967 Beatles biography was mostly made up, and because that myth was told so many times he no longer knew what was true and what wasn't. The Beatles were the most important cultural icons of the 20th century, and I felt they deserved a biography that was completely factual for a change.

Why are the Beatles so important?

Their music has survived 40 years and it's just as important now as it was when they first wrote it. Above all that, they gave the world's youth an identity. They gave us a way to look. They were very political and taught kids how to develop their own [perspectives]. That combination made them the most important cultural force that I know of in my generation. Because of that, it was incumbent upon me to write a book that spoke to young adults.

How did you gather info about the Beatles?

I had 80,000 pages of research! I was on the road for over two years, mostly in Europe and the U.S. I talked to hundreds of people—anyone who had interacted with the Beatles

or their families in any way. I spent time with the Beatles themselves—the ones who are still around—and their families, too, simply trying to find out what the real story was.

How did you determine the real story?

When you hear the same story over and over, you get a very good sense of the people you are writing about and can hear their voices in your head telling you if in fact it rings true. I would know within 20 seconds if something wasn't so. As a biographer, you're also an investigator. I had learned that many of the Beatles' telephone interviews in the 60s were actually done by their roadies. So I discounted those and used only interviews where I knew the Beatles were in the room. You have to be sure to cover the story from every angle and leave no stone unturned. It takes a lot of relentless work.

What did you enjoy most about the Beatles' story?

I loved talking to people, taking their stories, and putting the picture together—I love watching my subject emerge on paper. On the day I was ready to write I knew I had the whole story inside of me. I wrote for 5½ years, seven days a week, in a room with just my research and computer. But the story kept me motivated—I felt I was on an adventure with the Beatles. There wasn't one day I couldn't wait to get to the computer to see what happened next. MA!

—VERONICA DOMINGUEZ-GARCIA



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