



The big question
MARK MCGANN

Mark McGann has been playing the role of John Lennon, on and off, for over 30 years. He steps into John's shoes again for *In My Life* at the Royal Court Theatre, Liverpool, on August 24, a show which features Beatles tribute band Pepperland, from Sweden.

Q. What can people expect of In My Life?

A. They can expect an unforgettable live concert and theatrical experience that will at different times, be an extremely accurate representation of the man's past life and music that they will find incredibly moving, celebratory and exciting. The marriage of the brilliant narrative by Bob Eaton with John's autobiographical songs all performed in chronological order by the extraordinary Pepperland, arguably paints the most complete picture of his life on stage to date, all presented by myself as John as he may have been now had he lived.

Q. Playing John Lennon as often as you have on stage and film, you must have thought about what made him tick. What do you make of the man?

A. A flawed genius. A man who, through the trauma of his formative years when first experiencing the absolute rejection of abandonment by his father and the giving up for adoption to his aunt by his mother, and then experiencing the death of his mother as a teenager, had struggled to find the peace of mind and self-acceptance that would finally arrest a deep sense of unworthiness and restlessness. Luckily for us, he possessed immense courage and desire to survive his isolation and self-loathing, and this helped produce some of the most beautifully honest, acerbic, human and elevated pop songs ever written. His pain was our gain.

Q. Your first portrayal of John was in Lennon at the Everyman Theatre, Liverpool, in 1981, just months after he was assassinated. What are your memories of that time?

A. Much of it a blur as you might imagine! I do though remember the incredible euphoric release at the end of the press night. The thought of it still makes the hairs stand up on the back of my neck. It was like a mass outpouring of grief, gratitude and a sense that something extraordinary had just taken place.

Q. How have those close to John responded to your representation of him?

A. With great kindness and gratitude



Above: Mark portrays John Lennon in the 1985 movie John and Yoko A Love Story, with Kim Miyori as Yoko.

fortunately. Yoko cast me as John in the film for NBC (John & Yoko) which she was involved in as a producer in 1985; Sean was very warm and kind after the initial shock of hearing and seeing someone look and speak like his father when I met him during filming outside the Dakota in New York. Julian wrote a beautiful quote in support of the show and I know how much he appreciates the portrayal, which means everything to me.

Q. You've grown older playing him. Do you wonder what John himself may have done, given a longer life?

A. Often. Though I am also of the persuasion that we are all destined to live life at different rates, lengths and cycles. I think John had a full life by anyone's standards!

Q. You and brothers Joe, Paul and Stephen followed the same path in life. How do four brothers all end up as actors?

A. If I had a pound for every time this question was asked...I wish there was a simple answer. Safety in numbers? Seriously, it has to do with lots of factors like, place of birth, Irish-Catholic community/families, the Labour experiment of the '60s and '70s, huge amount of luck, determination, enjoyment of each other, respect and maybe a little talent.

Q. Does it bring you closer together...or make you more competitive?

A. Both.

Q. Can you tell us a little about your life now in Somerset ?

A. I live in Frome with my wife Caroline, daughter Lee-Sian and granddaughter Lylah. We love this place. It's an artist colony that reminds me of the arty vibe in Liverpool around Hope St/Lark Lane circa 1977, but surrounded by beautiful countryside in the form of the Longleat Estate.

Q. When you think of your years in Liverpool, are they warm thoughts?

A. Extremely, though I doubt one can live anywhere without experiencing some adversity. I love Liverpool deeply. I am proud to hail from there and the city is part of me always. I think Liverpoolians are unique. There is definitely something of the clannishness, searching and restlessness of the Irish in them which makes them fiercely loyal and supportive of their own.

Q. Do you see much of your home city these days, and if so what do you make of it?

A. I think it's looking fantastic, certainly since the Capital of Culture injection of finance in 2008. It is still easy to get a less than kind impression when driving through certain boarded-up areas en route to the city centre, I suppose, but even these are nothing in comparison to former times, and it is most definitely on the up, which is terrific. It feels like a truly international city once more.