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## 'Sgt. Pepper' Celebration Kicks Off in Liverpool, With a Little Help From International Artists

By Christopher D Shea

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A Beatles mural based on the song "Fixing a Hole," designed by the American artist Judy Chicago for the celebration of "Sgt. Pepper" in Liverpool. Credit Oli Scarff/Agence France-Presse — Getty Images

LIVERPOOL, England — Perched on scaffolding several stories above the ground outside the Titanic Hotel here on Thursday — the 50th anniversary of the release of the Beatles' landmark album "Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band" — the painter Gary Jones added the final touches to a giant mural designed by the artist Judy Chicago of the four Beatles engulfed in a circular rainbow.

"He is very, very gifted with a paintbrush," Ms. Chicago said as she sat on the terrace below and described the frequent phone calls she and Mr. Jones have traded as she has watched him execute her mural, first on a live feed from the United States, where she lives, and, over the past week, from a perch in the hotel where she can offer tips to Mr. Jones on his handiwork. (Because of safety regulations, Ms. Chicago, who is 77, is not allowed up the scaffolding, she said.)

The mural had its official unveiling to kick off "Sgt. Pepper at 50," a series of 13 art commissions taking place as the city, where all four Beatles have roots, marks the album's semicentenary.

The anniversary, which began with a prelude event last Thursday — the premiere of "Pepperland," by the choreographer Mark Morris — kicked off in earnest this week with events including the unveiling of Ms. Chicago's mural; the first public performances of "She's Leaving Home," an immersive play

inspired by the song of the same name; and “Suspended Time,” a fireworks display several miles outside the city center that takes its cue from “Lucy in the Sky With Diamonds.”

Other events between now and the festival finale, on June 16, include “Mr. Kite’s MUSICIRCUS!,” a performance of Beatles music by hundreds of local performers based on a model developed by John Cage; and a daylong festival dedicated to the Indian classical music forms that George Harrison injected into the Western imagination via “Within You Without You.”

Liverpool has always been proud of its hometown band, and, according to a recent study, earns about \$100 million each year from tourism related to the group. (The city’s Beatles associations took an unexpectedly sordid turn this week when reports emerged that the bodies of a woman and two children were found in a popular tourist spot, an apartment where John Lennon formerly lived. A man has been arrested in connection with the killings.)

The festival was organized by the city and produced by Sean Doran and Liam Browne, past collaborators on projects including a well-regarded Samuel Beckett festival in Northern Ireland.

In interviews, the artists involved in the projects described their first impressions of the Beatles and the different ways that the band inspired their new work.

Jeremy Deller, a British installation artist, said he clearly remembered first encountering the Beatles when he saw their goofy 1965 movie “Help!” on television, and ran into the kitchen to tell his mother about the full-grown men he saw having childlike adventures on TV.



A billboard featuring the Beatles manager Brian Epstein. The other side of it reads: “Brian Epstein died for you.”CreditJill Lawless/Associated Press

"I was caught at an early age, like a lot of people, by the idea of these four friends who do these amazing things together, kind of a gang, really," Mr. Deller said. But his work at the festival "goes against the psychedelic feel of the album," he explained. The citywide installation, "With a Little Help from My Friends," a response to the song of the same name, revolves around a giant billboard featuring the face of the Beatles manager Brian Epstein, who died the year Sgt. Pepper was released. The flip side of the billboard, which faces a major roadway, reads: "Brian Epstein died for you."

Paul D. Miller, a.k.a. DJ Spooky, collaborated on an audiovisual installation for the festival and is also presenting remixed versions of the works performed by members of a Liverpool orchestra. Mr. Miller, 46, said he first encountered the Beatles as a child, when he heard black artists' remakes of their songs, including the album "Motown Meets the Beatles" and work by Jimi Hendrix.

"The Beatles really helped mainstream certain innovations in editing and engineering and using tape loops and effects," Mr. Miller said in a phone interview before the opening, adding that as someone who was "heavily involved with tech and art," the album was akin to a "cathedral written in sound."

The performer Meow Meow, who is originally from Australia, said she experienced the Beatles as a group that had become "as elemental as the wind" by the time she encountered them.

Meow Meow's project in Liverpool is among the festival's most ambitious. She and several collaborators will present an art installation based on interviews with local traffic wardens; a parade between the city's two cathedrals featuring a 300-member brass band; and an open-air, candlelit vigil. The project is inspired by "Lovely Rita," which Paul McCartney is said to have written after having a run-in with a traffic warden.

Ms. Chicago, meanwhile, took some time to come around to the song that had been assigned to her by festival organizers, "Fixing a Hole."

"I read the lyrics, I'm like, Donald," she said, referring to her husband, "I don't remember this song, do you remember this song?"

Listening to the music again jogged her memory, but it wasn't until she ran across a statement by Mr. McCartney in which he described mending a cultural gap that she felt inspired.

"He talked about fixing a hole in culture, in history, in terms of who had access, who could be part of it, who could participate," Ms. Chicago said. It called to mind her experiences as an outsider in the male-dominated Southern California art scene in the 1960s.

"I wanted to celebrate the unlikely ascent of four working-class boys," she added. "From Liverpool into the stratosphere."