Cultural Daily

Independent Voices, New Perspectives

Misfit to Misfit Vivek Tiwary Gives Brian Epstein His Long-Deserved Due

Tod Hardin · Wednesday, February 26th, 2014

"If anybody was the fifth Beatle, it was Brian."

– Sir Paul McCartney

Sometimes the most unlikely of things just have a way of happening.

Take, for example, the US men's hockey team beating the Soviets in the 1980 Winter Olympics. The Detroit Lions going 0 – 16 in 2008. Anybody thinking that Woody Allen isn't a bit creepy. Or the fact that the world continues to ignore the ongoing atrocities of the Syrian government.

Add to that list the unlikely fact that a particular story has gone untold for over 50 years – at least in any meaningful way. It's a story of a man that believed in a vision when nobody else did. It's the story of a man that wouldn't give up on his vision, despite numerous rejections and an onslaught of personal demons. And finally, it's the story of a man that did, in fact, fulfill that vision and in doing so literally changed the world forever. But it's also a sad story on par with any of the classic Greek or Shakespearian tragedies.

It's the story of Brian Epstein – the man responsible for discovering and cultivating the Beatles. He saw in John, Paul, George and Ringo what nobody else did and orchestrated nearly every facet of their rise to iconic super stardom. He was also Jewish in a society full of anti-Semitism, homosexual in an age when it was illegal to be so, manically depressed, suicidal, and he drank, gambled and consumed drugs to excess – just to name a few of his personal demons.

Sadly, his life would end far too early in 1967, at just the age of 32, and since then he has become somewhat of a forgotten man. No films, no significant books, no TV mini-series, no induction into the Rock & Roll Hall of Fame (WTF?!?). A Nowhere Man, if you will.

That is until now.

Vivek Tiwary. Photo: Jarett Bellucci

Enter, stage right, Vivek Tiwary – a man with a vision of his own. (Be sure to catch our interview with Vivek on Cultural Weekly Radio)

Over the past decade, Tiwary has established himself as a major player on Broadway, despite not

quite fitting the role. Through his company, Tiwary Entertainment Group, he's produced such critical and box office hits as Green Day's *American Idiot, A Raisin in the Sun,* Mel Brooks' *The Producers,* and *The Addams Family* – not to mention that he is currently developing a Broadway adaptation of Alanis Morissette's *Jagged Little Pill.* In total, his productions have taken home 25 Tony Awards via 44 total nominations. If that wasn't enough, he also has his hand in various film, television and comic book projects.

Not bad for an Indian-American guy with an affinity for punk rock, whose parents arrived in the US by way of Guyana, South America. That alone sets him apart from 99.9% of Broadway's elite.

"Indians are a rare breed on Broadway, so I was the outsider when I started," said Tiwary, from his offices in New York City. "But I'm not a traditional member of the Broadway community anyway. I don't do lunch at the Angus McIndoe and I don't go to Café Un Deux Trois for drinks … two of the typical industry hangouts. I'm still a little bit of a different kettle of fish … and I love that about myself, as I find that it gives me the ability to naturally push boundaries."

And pushing boundaries he is, with his desire to tell the story of Brian Epstein – something he refers to as his life's work.

It all started over 20 years ago while Tiwary was a student at the Wharton School of the University of Pennsylvania. While studying both English and business, he complemented his strong interest in the music industry by going to work for Sony Music Distribution in Philadelphia. He would eventually become intrigued with Brian Epstein and all that he accomplished, and thus began a quest to learn from one of the masters. However, he quickly found that very little research material on Epstein was available:

"Twenty-one years ago there was no Wikipedia. There was no Google. I was dumbfounded by how little info there was on the guy that discovered and managed the Beatles. I mean how was that even possible? You could find a book about John Lennon's astrologist, but you couldn't find a book about the guy that discovered the band? It was just crazy to me."

Cover of *The Fifth Beatle: The Brian Epstein Story*

Since then, Tiwary has continued his ongoing research into Epstein's life, resulting in the critically acclaimed New York Times bestselling graphic novel, ***The Fifth Beatle: The Brian Epstein Story***, which was released by Dark Horse Comics in November of last year. With limited resources available, he relied heavily on interviews with people that actually knew Brian well – family, friends, and those who did business with him.

CW PICK OF THE WEEK – *THE FIFTH BEATLE* – BUY NOW

The result is a beautiful and graceful telling of Epstein's life that concentrates on his time with the Beatles, from 1961 until his untimely death in 1967 of a sleeping pill overdose. The story is concise, the artwork stunning, and the attention to accurate details of that era are astounding.

Andrew C. Robinson provided most of the artwork for the graphic novel and he certainly had his work cut out for him in trying to capture an accurate likeness of the Beatles and Epstein. He says this about the experience:

“Creating art depicting real people is a lot more difficult. More research and a lot more drawing is needed, especially when trying to hit their likenesses and their personalities within the range of your own style of drawing. It was quite a heavy load on my shoulders. These are heroes of mine and pop icons from my earliest memories. I’m definitely a fan. So I made it my mission to give every character a lot of love and attention in getting their likeness not necessarily perfect, but to get it right. The story has a lot of love, passion and caring and I hope that every reader knows how much I cared about Brian and the Beatles within the context of the artwork.”


Andrew C. Robinson at work on *The Fifth Beatle*

Robinson was given a great deal of freedom to visually tell the best story he could and to be the artist he needed and wanted to be.

“For me the story was all there in the dialogue and descriptions of places and times. It was a long and winding road but we knew we were making something special.”

Tiwary comes from a multi-disciplinary background, but one steeped heavily in the theatre, so the collaboration process with Robinson was a bit different than the team environment found on a typical Broadway production.

“With a graphic novel it’s the writer and the artist,” said Tiwary. “It’s just the two of us. We’re the cinematographers picking the camera angles. We’re in charge of wardrobe design. We’re set designers, location scouts. It’s all up to us and that’s also what’s wonderful about it.”

He adds that work on a graphic novel is much lonelier than what he is accustomed to in theatre or television, which was especially the case for Robinson.

“Everything was given to Andrew and then he was off on his own. I’d check in with him and ask is there anything I can do to help and he’d just say no and tell me that he just needs to keep going. That painting process is meticulous and takes a lot of time.”


Beautiful words and images from *The Fifth Beatle*

While it was a collaborative effort, there is no question that this was and is Tiwary’s baby.

“Vivek was involved, page by page, panel by panel, in every stage of the book’s production process,” says Philip Simon, Dark Horse’s editor on The Fifth Beatle. “He reviewed and approved every page of artwork, and every lettered page, for both our print and digital editions.”

Simon continues by saying that Dark Horse Comics publisher, Mike Richardson, was attracted to the story because he was a huge Beatles fan and because Tiwary’s script focuses on an aspect of the Beatles story that hasn’t been told.

Tiwary did take some creative license in that story, but Beatles and Epstein fans shouldn’t mind. He says his goal was not to give a litany of facts, but to offer a true sense of what the essence of Epstein’s story was. He adds this:

“When you learn that Johnny Cash didn’t really propose to June onstage in the middle of a performance, so beautifully and dramatically as he did in that scene from Walk the Line, nobody’s

really upset about that. With a film you're OK with it. And I think this graphic biography that I've written sort of fits into that as well. People get the medium of the graphic novel and the comparison to film is a good one."

The comparison to cinema is indeed a good one, as validated by the fact that a feature film version of *The Fifth Beatle* is in the works and on target for a 2015 release date. Certainly not surprising, given the ever-common practice of adapting graphic novels to the big screen, but there is something quite surprising about the effort.

More stunning artwork and prose from *The Fifth Beatle*

Tiwary has done what no other producer has ever managed to do. He has secured full rights to the entire Beatles catalog of music for use in the film. Without question, this is a major coup and something that will make the film even that much more attractive to Beatles fans, financiers and distributors – thus improving the odds that production plans will stay on schedule. It's an effort that took a lot of work and required a great deal of patience over a three-year period.

"I just wouldn't take no for answer," said Tiwary. "My persistence and passion spoke well for me. I think the main reason they granted permission is because it's the Brian Epstein story and they are really fond of Brian. They realize that he has not gotten his due and I think they believe I got the story right."

Further evidence that he got the story right can be had by the fact that Sir Paul McCartney himself has given his stamp of approval to the graphic novel, and that the film has already attracted two top-notch creators in producer Bruce Cohen (*American Beauty, Silver Linings Playbook, Milk*) and director Peyton Reed (*Yes Man, Bring It On*).

"From the moment I read Vivek's graphic novel, I knew I wanted to be the person to bring Brian's story to the big screen," said Reed in a recent press release about the film. "I'm a lifelong Beatles fan, obviously, but it's Brian's fascinating life that really blew me away and drew me to this project. He's the ultimate outsider who, against all odds, became the ultimate insider."

The respect for Epstein's accomplishments is universal among all the creators involved, which is easily understood given the nature of it. It's so compelling that it's easy to believe that it's ficticious itself and even harder to believe that nobody has attempted to capture in any significant way until now.

"Finding and telling Brian's story has been incredibly organic and that's part of the reason the graphic novel has been so successful," said Tiwary. "It comes from a place of the heart. It's a great Beatles story, so it has a certain commercial value, but that's not where anybody involved in the project is coming from. The story has taught me that the most impossible dreams are the best ones to chase."

They are indeed, and we couldn't be more happy to have Vivek Tiwary chasing his.

PLEASE ENJOY THE OFFICIAL TRAILER FOR *THE FIFTH BEATLE* GRAPHIC NOVEL:

[embedvideo id="70196926? website="vimeo"]

This entry was posted on Wednesday, February 26th, 2014 at 4:51 pm and is filed under Theatre, Film, Music, Lifestyle, Visual Art
You can follow any responses to this entry through the Comments (RSS) feed. You can leave a response, or trackback from your own site.