Klaus Voormann

Klaus Voormann (born 29 April 1938) is a German artist, musician, and record producer. He designed artwork for many bands including the Beatles, Harry Nilsson, the Bee Gees, Wet Wet Wet, and Turbonegro. Voormann's most notable work as a producer was his work with the band Trio, including their worldwide hit "Da Da Da". As a musician, Voormann is best known for being the bassist for Manfred Mann from 1966 to 1969, and for performing as a session musician on a host of recordings, including "You're So Vain" by Carly Simon and on many recordings of the former members of the Beatles.

His association with the Beatles dated back to their time in Hamburg in the early 1960s. He lived in the band's London flat with George Harrison and Ringo Starr after John Lennon and Paul McCartney moved out to live with their respective partners, and designed the cover of their album Revolver for which he won a Grammy. Following the band's split, rumours circulated of the formation of a group named the Ladders, consisting of Lennon, Harrison, Starr, and Voormann. This failed to materialise; however, all four would-be Ladders (plus Billy Preston) performed on the Ringo Starr track 'Tim the Great', and Voormann did play on albums by Lennon, Harrison, and Starr, and was for a time a member of the Plastic Ono Band. In the 1990s, he designed the artwork for the Beatles Anthology albums.

In 2009, Voormann released his debut solo album A Silencer's Journey, which featured many notable musicians, including the two surviving members of the Beatles, performing as "Voormann and Friends".

Early years

Klaus Voormann was born in Berlin, Germany, and raised in the suburbs of north Berlin. His father was a physician and Klaus was one of six brothers. In his July 2010 interview on "Talking Germany”, Voormann discussed his dyslexia.

The Voormann family were interested in art, classical music and books, with a feeling for history and tradition. His parents decided that instead of studying music, it would be best for Klaus to study commercial art in Berlin at the Meisterschule für Grafik und Buchgewerbe. He later moved to Hamburg to study at the Meisterschule für Gestaltung. However, before finishing his education in the graphic arts, Voornmann started work as a commercial artist graphic designer and illustrator, spending eight months in Dusseldorf working for magazines.

It was in Hamburg that Voormann first met Astrid Kirchherr. After an argument with her and Jürgen Vollmer one day, Voornmann wandered down the Reeperbahn, in the St. Pauli district of Hamburg, and heard music coming from the Kaiserkeller club. He walked in on a performance by Rory Storm and the Hurricanes. The next group to play was the Beatles. Voornmann was left "speechless" by the performances. He had never heard rock 'n' roll before, having previously only listened to traditional jazz, with some Nat King Cole and Platters mixed in. Voornmann invited Kirchherr and Vollmer to watch the performances the next day. After joining Voornmann at a performance, the trio decided upon spending as much time as possible close to the group and immersing themselves in the music.

The St. Pauli district was a dangerous section of town, with illegitimate behaviour commonplace. It was an area where prostitutes were to be found, much time as possible close to the group and immersing themselves in the music. The Voormann family were interested in art, classical music and books, with a feeling for history and tradition. His parents decided that instead of studying music, it would be best for Klaus to study commercial art in Berlin at the Meisterschule für Grafik und Buchgewerbe. He later moved to Hamburg to study at the Meisterschule für Gestaltung. However, before finishing his education in the graphic arts, Voornmann started work as a commercial artist graphic designer and illustrator, spending eight months in Dusseldorf working for magazines.

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Voornmann was in a relationship with Kirchherr at the time, and lived just around the corner from her parents' upper-class home in the Altona district of Hamburg. Kirchherr's bedroom, which was all black in including, their walls and furniture, was decorated especially for Voornmann. After the visits to the Kaiserkeller, their relationship became purely platonic as Astrid started dating Sutcliffe, who was fascinated by her. Nevertheless, she always remained a close friend of Voornmann.

Move to London and affiliation with the Beatles

In the early 1960s, Voornmann decided to leave Germany and move to London. George Harrison invited him to live in the Green Street flat in London's Mayfair, formerly shared by all four members of the Beatles, Lennon and McCartney having moved out. Lennon to live with his wife Cynthia Lennon, and McCartney to live in the attic of the home of Jane Asher's parents. Voornmann lived with Harrison and Ringo Starr for a time before finding work as a commercial artist and renting an apartment of his own. He returned to Hamburg in 1963, where he founded a band with Paddy Chambers (guitar/vocals), Voornmann (bass/vocals) and Gibson Kemp (drums) called Paddy, Klaus & Gibson.

In 1966, Voornmann returned to London to design the sleeve for the album Revolver. Voornmann had a style of "scrapbook collage" art in mind. When showing his efforts to the band and their manager, Brian Epstein, the band loved it, although Voornmann's payment for the album cover was £40 (equivalent to £700 in 2019). For this work, Voornmann won the Grammy Award for Best Album Cover, Graphic Arts. Voornmann later designed the cover art for Harrison's 1988 single "When We Was Fab", which included the image of Harrison from the cover of Revolver along with an updated drawing in the same style.

Around the same time, another group was about to release their international debut album. The Bee Gees had recorded their first album, Bee Gees 1st and Voornmann was hired to design the cover for that album. The album cover featured all five group members standing above a colourful, psychedelic collage painted by Voornmann. The following year, artwork by Voornmann graced the front cover of the American edition of the Bee Gees' album Idea. In 1973, Voornmann created the album sleeve and booklet artwork for Ringo Starr's album Ringo on which he also played bass.

In 1966, at the same time that he was designing the cover of Revolver, Voornmann became a member of the 1960s band Manfred Mann, having turned down offers by The Hollies and The Moody Blues. Voornmann did substitute for Eric Haydock on a couple of TV shows (see List of The Hollies band members). He mentions his negotiations with the group in his biography, Warum spielst Du Imagine nicht auf dem weißen Klavier, John? ("Why Don't You Play 'Imagine' On The White Piano, John?"). Voornmann played bass and flute for Manfred Mann from 1966 to 1969, appearing on all their UK hits from "Just Like a Woman" (July 1966) to their final single "Ragamuffin Man" (April 1969) and including the 1968 international hit "The Mighty Quinn".

After that, he became a session musician, playing on solo projects by Lou Reed, Carly Simon, James Taylor and Harry Nilsson, among others. Voornmann was a member of Yoko Ono and Plastic Ono Band, with Ono, Alan White (future Yes drummer) and Eric Clapton, which played on the Live Peace in Toronto album, recorded in Toronto on 13 September 1969.
After the Beatles disbanded, there were rumours of them reforming as the Ladders, with Voormann on bass as a replacement for Paul McCartney. An announcement to this effect filtered out of the Apple offices in 1971, but it was ultimately withdrawn before it got very far. This line-up (Voormann, Lennon, Harrison and Starr) did perform on Ringo Starr's 1973 song "I'm the Greatest". Voormann served as the three former Beatles' bassist of choice through to the mid 1970s. Among his contributions to their solo work during that time, he played on Lennon's albums John Lennon/Plastic Ono Band (1970) and Imagine (1971), Harrison's All Things Must Pass (1970) and Living in the Material World (1973), and Starr's Ringo (1973) and Goodnight Vienna (1974).

**Studio work in Los Angeles**

In 1971 he moved to Los Angeles. In an interview with EMI about his 1974 album Walls and Bridges, Lennon was asked who was playing bass on the album. Lennon answered with a hard German accent: “Klaus Voormann. We all know Klaus, ja.” He also played in Harrison's band at The Concert for Bangladesh, held at New York's Madison Square Garden in August 1971. Harrison fittingly introduced him to the audience by saying, "There's somebody on bass who many people have heard about, but they've never actually seen him - Klaus Voormann.”

**Return to Germany**

In 1979 Voormann moved back to Germany. He had a cameo as Von Schnitzel the Conductor in the 1980 film adaptation of You're Sixteen, and a bonus DVD of Timeless by Wet Wet Wet. In 2008 he recorded the song "For What It's Worth" with Carl Carlton (German Musician) & The Songdogs feat. Eric Burdon and Max Buskoh!

**Retirement**

Voormann retired from the music business in 1989, spending time with his family. He lives at Lake Starnberg, near Munich with his second wife Christine and their two children, born in 1989 and 1991. From time to time he appears on TV shows, mainly when the shows are about the 1960s in general or the Beatles in particular, or when he is asked to talk about his famous album sleeve for Revolver. In 1995 Voormann was asked by Apple Records to design the covers for the Beatles Anthology albums. He painted the covers along with his friend, fellow artist Alfons Kiefer. In the 1994 movie Backbeat about the Hamburg days of the Beatles, Voormann was portrayed by the German actor Kai Wiesinger. In 2000 Voormann also designed the cover for Enja Records recording artist Azhar Kamal’s debut Me Río which was influenced by his acclaimed design of The Beatles’ Revolver cover.

On 29 November 2002, a year after George Harrison's death, Voormann played bass on the song "All Things Must Pass" at the Concert for George, held at London's Royal Albert Hall. In an interview with author Simon Leng, he described Harrison as a "really great guitarist" and "the best friend I ever had".

In April 2003, Voormann designed the cover of Scandinavian Leather for the Norwegian band Turbonegro. In October 2003, Voormann published his autobiography, Warum spielt du Imagine nicht auf dem weißen Klavier, John? Erinnerungen an die Beatles und viele andere Freunde (Why Don't You Play "Imagine" on the White Piano, John?: Memories of the Beatles and Many Other Friends). The book gives special focus to the 1960s and 1970s, and covers Voormann's close friendship with the Beatles and other musicians and artists, as well as his private life. A 2005 BBC documentary, Stuart Sutcliffe: The Lost Beatle features interviews with Voormann and shows drawings he made of the Beatles in Hamburg. Also that year his book "For Track Storied" which contains his experiences with The Beatles during the Hamburg days, and stories narrated both in English and German, and pictures made by him. In 2007, Voormann designed the sleeve for the album Timeless by Wet Wet Wet. In 2008 he recorded the song "For What It's Worth" with Carl Carlton (German Musician) & The Songdogs feat. Eric Burdon and Max Buskoh!

**Comeback**

On 7 July 2009 Voormann released his first solo album, A Sideman’s Journey. It was credited to "Voormann & Friends" and featured Paul McCartney, Ringo Starr, Yusuf Islam (formerly known as Cat Stevens), Don Preston, Dr. John, The Manfreds, Jim Keltner, Van Dyke Parks, Joe Walsh and many others. The album has been available in a limited number of audio CDs, vinyl LPs, and deluxe box sets with original (and signed) graphics by Voormann. It included new versions of old songs such as "My Sweet Lord", "All Things Must Pass", "Blue Suede Shoes", "You're Sixteen" and Bob Dylan's "Quinn the Eskimo (The Mighty Quinn)". A bonus DVD of Making of a Sideman's Journey was released with the album.

On 30 June 2010 Franco-German TV network ARTE released a 90-minute documentary called All You Need is Klaus which features footage from the "Voormann & Friends" sessions as well as interview footage with Voormann and some of the artists he had collaborated with in his storied career.

In 2014, Voormann designed the cover to Japanese rock band Gorillaz's album Music Life. The image depicting the face of each member of the band is strongly reminiscent of the cover to The Beatles' Revolver.

In 2016 he created a graphic novel based on his experiences recording Revolver named Revolver 50. Birth of an Icon.

In 2017, Voormann designed the artwork featured in the deluxe box set edition of Liam Gallagher's debut solo album, As You Were.

Voormann made a surreal pencil drawing of Mad magazine mascot Alfred E. Neuman for the publication's December 2017 issue.

**Discography**

Voormann designed the covers for the album LPs known as Timeless by Wet Wet Wet, and deluxe box sets with original (and signed) graphics by Voormann. It included new versions of old songs such as "My Sweet Lord", "All Things Must Pass", "Blue Suede Shoes", "You're Sixteen" and Bob Dylan's "Quinn the Eskimo (The Mighty Quinn)". A bonus DVD of Making of a Sideman's Journey was released with the album.
Notes:

1. [2003, p. 202]
2. [2005, p. 222]
3. [2005, p. 222]
4. [2005, p. 222]
5. [2005, p. 222]
6. [2005, p. 222]
7. [2005, p. 222]
8. [2005, p. 222]

References:

As Voormann & Friends:
- A Soldier's Journey
- With Manfred Mann:
  - UK Albums:
    - As Is
    - Up the Junction (Original Soundtrack Recording)
    - What a Mann
    - Mighty Garvey!
  - US Albums:
    - Up the Junction (Original Soundtrack Recording)
    - Mighty Garvey!
- With The Plastic Ono Band:
  - "Cold Turkey" [1969 non-album single]
  - "Instant Karma [We All Shine On]" [1970 non-album single]
  - John Lennon/Plastic Ono Band
- With John Lennon:
  - "Power to the People" [1971 non-album single]
  - Imagine [1971]
  - "Happy Xmas (War Is Over)" [1971 non-album single]
  - Some Time in New York City [1972]
  - Walls and Bridges [1974]
  - Rock 'n' Roll [1975]
- With George Harrison:
  - All Things Must Pass [1970]
  - "Bangla Desh" [1971 non-album single]
  - The Concert for Bangla Desh [1971]
  - Living in the Material World [1973]
  - Dark Horse [1974]
  - Extra Texture (Read All About It) [1975]
- With Ringo Starr:
  - Sentimental Journey [1970; arrangement on "I'm a Fool to Care"]
  - "It Don't Come Easy" [1971 non-album single]
  - "Back Off Boogaloo" [1972 non-album single]
  - Ringo [1973]
  - Goodnight Vienna [1974]
  - Ringo's Rotogravure [1976]
- Other artists:
  - Jackie Lomax, Is This What You Want? [1969]
  - Leon Russell, Leon Russell [1970]
  - Billy Preston, Encouraging Words [1970]
  - Doris Troy, Doris Troy [1970]
  - Gary Wright, Extraction [1970]
  - Ronnie Spector, "Try Some, Buy Some" [1971 non-album single]
  - The Elastic Oz Band, "God Save Us" [1971 non-album single]
  - Howlin' Wolf, The London Howlin' Wolf Sessions [1971]
  - Yoko Ono, Fly [1971]
  - B.B. King, B.B. King in London [1971]
  - Jim Price, Kids Nowadays Ain't Got No Shame [1971]
  - Gary Wright, Footprint [1971]
  - Harry Nilsson, Son of Schmilsson [1971]
  - John Baldry, Everything Stops for Tea [1972]
  - Bobby Whitlock, Bobby Whitlock [1972]
  - Bobby Hatfield, "Go Wee Baby, I Love You" [1972 non-album single]
  - Peter Frampton, Wind of Change [1972]
  - Bobby Keys, Bobby Keys [1972]
  - Harry Nilsson, Son of Schmilsson [1971]
  - Lon & Derek Van Eaton, Brother [1972]
  - Carl Simon, No Secrets [1972]
  - Lou Reed, Transformer [1972]
  - Maria Muldaur, Maria Muldaur [1973]
  - Cheech & Chong, Los Cochinos [1973]
  - Nicky Hopkins, The Tin Man Was a Dreamer [1973]
  - Jerry Lee Lewis, Sometimes a Memory Ain't Enough [1973]
  - Don Nix, Hobos, Heroes and Street Corner Clowns [1973]
  - Carl Simon, Hotcakes [1974]
  - Harry Nilsson, Son of Dracula soundtrack [1974]
  - Chi Coltrane, Let It Ride [1974]
  - Martha Reeves, Martha Reeves [1974]
  - Harry Nilsson, Pussy Cat [1974]
  - Bert Jansch, L.A. Turnaround [1974]
  - Splinter, The Place I Love [1974]
  - Jerry Lee Lewis, The Session [1974]
- Other artists (cont'd):
  - London Wainwright III, Unrequited [1975]
  - Van Dyke Parks, Clang of the Yankee Reaper [1975]
  - Keith Moon, Two Sides of the Moon [1975]
  - Harry Nilsson, Duit on Mon Day [1975]
  - Carly Simon, Possum [1975]
  - Lon & Derek Van Eaton, Who Do You Out Do [1975]
  - Dion, Born to Be With You [1975]
  - The Cat Brothers, Cat Bros. [1975]
  - Patti Dahlstrom, Your Place or Mine [1975]
  - Eric Mercury, Eric Mercury [1975]
  - Art Garfunkel, Breakaway [1975]
  - Harry Nilsson, Sandman [1976]
  - Geoff Muldaur, Motion [1976]
  - Veldy, Veldy and the Hometown Band [1976]
  - Donovan, Slow Down World [1976]
  - Carly Simon, Another Passenger [1976]
  - Harry Nilsson, ...That's the Way It Is [1976]
  - Hoyt Axton, Fearless [1976]
  - Long John Baldry, Welcome to the Club Casablanca [1976]
  - Jackie Lomax, Did You Ever Have that Feeling? [1977]
  - Harry Nilsson, Knucleus [1977]
  - Susan Cowsill, "I Think of You" and "Mohammed's Radio" [1977]
  - Randy Newman, Little Criminals [1977]
  - Lonnie Donegan, Puttin' on the Style [1978]
  - Lorna Wright, Circle of Love [1978]
  - Nicolette Larson, Nicolette [1978]
  - Lee Clayton, Naked Child [1979]
  - Screamin' Lord Sutch, Alive & Well [1980]
  - Harry Nilsson, Flash Harry [1980]
  - Nicolette Larson, Radioland [1981]
  - Various Artists, Every Man Has a Woman [1984]
  - Various Artists, For Our Children Too! [1996]
  - Lon & Derek Van Eaton, Black & White [1998]
  - Various Artists, Concert for George [2003]
  - Carl Carlton & The Songdogs, "Songs For The Lost And Brave" [2009]
  - GLAY, Music Life [2014]

External links:

- Official website
- Klaus Voormann Interview
- Hamburg Press book with unseen imagery by Astrid Kirchherr & Klaus Voormann & Foreword by George Harrison
- Klaus Voormann discography at Discogs

References:

Amplifiers
Acoustic Guitars
Bass Guitars
Computers
Cymbals
Drums
Electric Guitars
Electronic Drums
Microphones
MIDI Controllers
Music Theory Books

Music Scenes
Anaheim, California
Albuquerque, New Mexico
Anchorage, Alaska
Atlanta, Georgia
Arlington, Texas
Aurora, Colorado
Austin, Texas
Bakersfield, California
Baltimore, Maryland
Baton Rouge, Louisiana
Billings, Montana
Boise, Idaho
Boston, Massachusetts
Charlotte, North Carolina
Chicago, Illinois
Cincinnati, Ohio
Cleveland, Ohio
Columbia, South Carolina
Corpus Christi, Texas
Colorado Springs, Colorado
Columbus, Ohio
Dallas, Texas
Des Moines, Iowa
Denver, Colorado
Detroit, Michigan
Durham, North Carolina
El Paso, Texas
Fort Wayne, Indiana
Fort Worth, Texas
Fresno, California
Honolulu, Hawaii
Indianapolis, Indiana
Irvine, California
Jacksonville, Florida
Jersey City, New Jersey
Kansas City, Missouri
Lansing, Michigan
Las Vegas, Nevada
Lexington, Kentucky
Los Angeles, California
Lincoln, Nebraska

Popular Artists
Adele
Alicia Keys
Ariana Grande
Beyonce
Bruno Mars
Chris Brown
Coldplay
Drake
Ed Sheeran
Gorillaz
Jay-Z
Justin Bieber
Klaus Voormann was born in Germany on 29 April 1938. He was an artist, musician and record producer, who knew The Beatles in Hamburg and later designed the front cover of Revolver. One of those days we were doing our stuff and some slightly strange-looking people arrived who didn't look like anyone else. Immediately we felt, 'Wey-hey kindred spirits something's going on here.' They came in and sat down and they were Astrid, Jürgen and Klaus. Paul McCartney Anthology.