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 was as a producer with his 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, Voormann created the album sleeve and booklet artwork for Ringo Starr's album I'm the Greatest, 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, Voormann started work as a commercial artist graphic designer and illustrator, spending eight months in Düsseldorf working for magazines.

It was in Hamburg that Voormann first met Astrid Kirchherr. After an argument with her and Jürgen Vollmer one day, Voormann 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. Voormann 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. Voormann invited Kirchherr and Vollmer to watch the performances the next day. After joining Voormann 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 illicit behaviour commonplace. It was an area where prostitutes were to be found, and anyone hanging about who looked different from the usual clientele took a risk. As a trio, Voormann, Kirchherr and Vollmer stood out in the Kaiserkeller, dressed in suede coats, wool sweaters, jeans and round-toed shoes, while most of the customers had greased-back Teddy boy hairstyles and wore black leather jackets and pointed boots. During a break, Voormann tried to talk (in faltering English) to Lennon, and pressed the crumpled note he had designed into Lennon's hands. Lennon took little interest, and brushed Voormann off, suggesting that he talk to Stuart Sutcliffe, who, Lennon said, "is the artist 'round here".

Sutcliffe did not share Lennon's attitude, and was fascinated by the trio, who he thought looked like 'real bohemians'. He later wrote that he could hardly take his eyes off them, and had tried to talk to them during the next break, but they had already left the club. Sutcliffe managed to meet them eventually, and learned that all three had attended the Meisterschule für Mode, which was the Hamburg equivalent of the Liverpool art college that both Sutcliffe and Lennon had attended. Lennon dubbed the trio the Exies, as a joke about their affection for existentialism.

Voormann 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 in black, including the walls and furniture, was decorated especially for Voormann. 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 Voormann.

Move to London and affiliation with the Beatles

In the early 1960s, Voormann 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. Voormann 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), Voormann (bass/vocals) and Gibson Kemp (drums) called Paddy, Klaus & Gibson.

In 1966, Voormann returned to London to design the sleeve for the album Revolver. Voormann had a style of "scrapbook collage" art mind. When showing his efforts to the band and their manager, Brian Epstein, the band loved it, although Voormann's payment for the album cover was £40 (equivalent to £700 in 2019). For this work, Voormann won the Grammy Award for Best Album Cover, Graphic Arts. Voormann 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 Voormann 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 Voormann. The following year, artwork by Voormann graced the front cover of the American edition of the Bee Gees' album Idea. In 1973, Voormann 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, Voormann became a member of the 1960s band Manfred Mann, having turned down offers by The Hollies and The Moody Blues. Voormann 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 nicht auf dem weißen Klavier, John? ("Why Don't You Play 'Imagine' On The White Piano, John?"). Voormann played bass and flute for Manfred Mann from 1966 to 1969, appearing on all their UK hits from "Just Like a Woman" (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. Voormann was a member of Yoko Ono and Plastic Ono Band, with Ono, Alan White (future Yes drummer) and Eric Clapton, who 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 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 EM in 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 Popeye. He produced three studio albums and a live album by the German band Trio. He also produced their worldwide hit "Da Da Da". After Trio broke up in 1986, he produced the first solo album by their singer Stephan Remmler and played bass on some songs of the album. The following year he produced a single by former Trio drummer Peter Behrens.

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 Rio 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 2003 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 Stories" 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 Buskohl.

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 Glay'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
Other artists:

- Jackie Lomax, *Is This What You Want?* [1969]
- 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, *"Oo 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* [1972]
- Lon & Derek Van Eaton, *Brother* [1972]
- Carly Simon, *No Secrets* [1972]
- Lou Reed, *Transformer* [1972]
- Maria Muldaur, *Maria Muldaur* [1973]
- Cheech & Chong, *Los Cochinos* [1973]
- Ricky 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]
- Chi Coltrane, *Let It Ride* [1974]
- Martha Reeves, *Martha Reeves* [1974]
- Harry Nilsson, *Pussy Cate* [1974]
- Bert Jansch, *L.A. Turning* [1974]
- Splinter, *The Place I Love* [1974]
- Jerry Lee Lewis, *The Session* [1974]
- London Wainwright III, *Unrequited* [1975]
- Van Dyke Parks, *Cleg of the Yankee Reaper* [1975]
- Keith Moon, *Two Sides of the Moon* [1975]
- Harry Nilsson, *Duit on Mon Dei* [1975]
- Carly Simon, *Playing Possum* [1975]
- Lon & Derek Van Eaton, *Who Do You Out Do* [1975]
- Dion, *Born To Be With You* [1975]
- The Cate Brothers, *Cate Bros.* [1975]
- Patti Dahleström, *Your Place or Mine* [1975]
- Eric Mercury, *Eric Mercury* [1975]
- Art Garfunkel, *Breakaway* [1975]
- Geoff Muldaur, *Motion* [1976]
- Vaddy, *Vaddy 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 Casablanc* [1976]
- Jackie Lomax, *Did You Ever Have That Feeling?* [1977]
- Harry Nilsson, *Knisel* [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]
- 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]

Notes:


References:


External links:

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