



PHOTO: ANTHONY SCARLATI

# Richard Courtney

Author, Realtor, Beatles Fan

**M**y favorite painting is a photograph. It is an image created by German photographer Astrid Kirchherr taken in Hamburg, Germany, in the art studio of her fiancé Stuart Sutcliffe.

The subjects of the photograph are members of Stuart's rock and roll band that had come to Hamburg two years prior, in 1960, having been unable to find work in Liverpool, England. This band called themselves the Beatles and were a rough, unpolished, crude lot upon their arrival. The group consisted of Stuart Sutcliffe, Pete Best, John Lennon, Paul McCartney, and a 17-year-old George Harrison.

In Hamburg, they were hired to perform under the worst of conditions, playing before drunken sailors, prostitutes, and drug dealers in the German town still rife with animosity and anger over World War II. Stuart was the best friend of John, the leader of this band, who had met Stuart when both attended the Liverpool College of Art.

It was in Hamburg that the band tightened and evolved into the act that would take the world by storm. But Stuart chose to leave the Beatles in order to dedicate his life to his art. He enrolled in the Hamburg College of Art where he studied under the renowned pop artist Eduardo Paolozzi, who had marveled at the talent of the 21-year-old artist.

On the day of this photograph, the Beatles returned to Hamburg victorious, having scored a recording contract and their first hit song, "Love Me Do," and were eager to reunite with their dear friend and former band member. Although they had not seen each other for several months, John and Stuart communicated with lengthy missives during that period.

Astrid met them at the airport and informed them that Stuart had died from an aneurysm the previous day. John demanded to be taken to Stuart's art studio that was located in the attic of Astrid's home. George went along, and this photograph was taken at that time.



George Harrison and John Lennon

This photograph is my favorite as it captures the confidence of John Lennon as he prepared to embark upon his conquest of the world, the pain he was experiencing at the loss of his closest friend who himself was making a name for himself in the world of art, and the disappointment that they would not be able to share their future. ✓

## ARTIST BIO

Astrid Kirchherr thought that she wanted to be a fashion designer when she began her studies at Hamburg's Meisterschule für Mode, Textil, Grafik und Werbung in the late 1950s. She began her career in black-and-white photography when her tutor, Reinhard Wolf, encouraged her to pursue her talent and offered her a job after graduation. While in art school, Kirchherr befriended Klaus Voormann and Jürgen Vollmer, and together they explored the highly stylized sub-culture of the European existentialist movement or "exies." The exies were known to glorify Sartre, wear all black, and move about with a moody attitude, all of which inspired Kirchherr's approach to photography.

Kirchherr is known for her photographs of the Beatles, including the series of the young band in Hamburg and behind the scenes of "A Hard Day's Night." She is also credited with giving the band their iconic mop-top haircuts of the early 1960s. Although she no longer works as a professional photographer, her early works continue to be exhibited in galleries and museums across the world.