Kolya Vasin

We feel ought to tell you about Kolya Vasin, who made an extraordinary contribution to introducing the Beatles music to the Soviet Union.
So: Nikolai (Kolya) Vasin, a Beatles fan and founder of the The Beatles museum and the Temple of Love, Peace and Music in the name of John Lennon in St. Petersburg (Russia)

Kolya Vasin is one of the best-known collectors of The Beatles recordings in St. Petersburg and Russia, and is the biggest worshipper of the Beatles. He began his renowned collection in the 1960s, when already a very astute young man, not just a “green” fan. And, like many people in those years, he even learnt English to be able to understand what John Lennon was saying to him. Just like everyone else in the mid-‘sixties, he started with cuttings from newspapers and magazines, with the first discs bought on the black market, and with the first groups who played clumsy Soviet rock in imitation of the Beatles. And at the beginning of the 1990s Kolya Vasin moved with his entire collection to Pushkinskaya 10 - home of his official museum.

There are some who describe him as a well-meaning eccentric, hot-tempered but generous. And where’s the evidence of this - he has eulogised rock and roll not for one day, two years, but for forty years on end, without giving a single thought to the potential commercial success of his remarkable idea? Each of the exhibits at his Beatles museum has its own history.
It’s also surprising that Kolya Vasin has not bought a single one of the many and varied records, posters, books, souvenirs and Beatles-related items. As he himself confirms, they were all gifts to him. For example, he considers an autographed disc, sent to him by John and Yoko, to be the most memorable exhibit in his museum. He received it in response to a telegram sent from St. Petersburg to Apple in which he congratulates John on reaching his 30th birthday. The collection also includes books from friends of John, the personal autographs of Paul McCartney, Yoko Ono and Julian Lennon, a gold Beatles disc with a dedicatory inscription on it sent by the company Capitol … And this is just to name but a few of the exhibits … it’s worth having a look yourselves: Come and see: Ul. Pushkinskaya 10, St. Petersburg, Russia.

Better when Kolya Vasin tells about himself.

"It's magical. It's like talking to a God," he said. "The words have something for everybody, but the music is even more important."

He found it hard to live in the regimented lifestyle of Soviet Russia and The Beatles let him escape its confines.

His love of the Fab Four is so great that it has substituted for almost everything in his life, including family, work and even money.

"I have almost never had long-term jobs and I never married because all my time and soul were dedicated to The Beatles," Vasin said, sitting in his richly decorated office at 10 Pushkinskaya Street in the center of St. Petersburg.

The office, which is also Vasin's apartment, is located in a decaying two-story old building. He calls it the office of John Lennon's Temple, which is what Vasin dreams of turning the building into one day.

The walls and ceilings of the tiny room are covered with posters and pictures of the four mop tops both in The Beatles era and afterward.

The shelves sag under the numerous records, tapes, books, and there are full-size cardboard figures of the boys from Liverpool standing on the floor.

Several models of Lennon's temple-to-be, a Lennon T-shirt, handmade ceramic mugs with Beatle symbols, and self-made fan albums filled with newspaper clippings, pictures, comments and lyrics add to the decor.

"Lennon's fan album is the biggest. It weighs 13 kilograms," Vasin says proudly as the sound of The Beatles hit "All My Loving" fills the air.

Vasin says discovering The Beatles was "a revelation."

"I'm sure it was God who sent them to us. They brought His message to the world - the message of peace, love and freedom," he said. "That message was aimed to unite all people on this planet."

In early 1970s, when the Beatlemania was at its peak, Vasin was a legend in Leningrad, as St. Petersburg was then known, because he had every record the Beatles had made.

In those days young people behind the Iron Curtain had to listen to The Beatles secretly.

"Let It Be," "Yesterday," and "Imagine" were branded the demoralizing music of the West, and people listened to them hiding in stranger's apartments and passing records to each other because they couldn't buy them anywhere.

However, in the U.S.S.R., Beatlemania was as strong as anywhere in the world, if not even stronger for being a forbidden fruit.

In 1966, Vasin was one of the first to open his informal The Beatles Club in a communal apartment where he lived with his parents. People came to see the club and him from throughout the Soviet Union.

"I was surprised and happy to have all that unexpected glory," he said.

Vasin said The Beatles changed his character.

"Like many of my compatriots, who lived in the oppressive Soviet atmosphere, I was kind of a scared person with many complexes," he said. "I never had friends.

"The Beatles knocked all that out of me.

"Their music taught me to enjoy life. And they brought many friends into my life."

Vasin said the happiest moment of his life was when he met and hugged his idol Paul McCartney, when the star visited St. Petersburg briefly last year.

"I remember every moment and every word of that meeting, though I couldn't even see him well at that moment. I was so nervous.

"His hug was like the touch of a god." Vasin said every year he and his friends, who are also devoted Beatles fans, celebrate the birthdays of all four Beatles.

"Oct. 9, which is Lennon's birthday, is a holy day for me," he said.

Lennon is his favorite Beatle.

"He is the smartest. He is the most magical one."

Vasin, who is a trained architect, said he has almost never worked at a steady job, but has had a series of casual jobs.

When there was nothing to eat he went to the fields of state farms and harvested cabbages, or friends helped him out financially, he said.

He never gets tired of listening to The Beatles, and today his passion for them is as strong as it was 40 years ago.

Vasin has about 800 songs recorded by The Beatles and the members of the group after it split up. He also has about 100 books on The Beatles.

Once he was about to bury his precious Lennon record in a forest for safekeeping. It was in Soviet times after the police arrested a friend in the band he played in for giving illegal concerts for money.

"I was afraid they'd get me, too, and wanted to hide the record that way. But then I worried it would get spoiled and hid it at a friend's apartment," he said.

In 1991 when hundreds lobbied for Leningrad's name to revert to St. Petersburg, Vasin put on his only suit and went to the city's toponymic commission and asked for a city street to be named after Lennon. But the authorities refused.

Nowadays Vasin's main purpose is to construct a temple named after Lennon and dedicated to all The Beatles.

The temple, which is to honor The Beatles and serve as a stage for other concerts, is to hold up to 3,000 people. Vasin wants it will be made of stone and have two big balls on the roof, which say "Love" and "Peace".

Former St. Petersburg governor Vladimir Yakovlev gave permission for the construction of such a temple in Yuzhno-Primorsky Park, but Vasin does not have money for the construction.

The only dream of Kolia Vasin is to construct a building of the Temple of Love, Peace and Music in the name of John Lennon and The Beatles. There is already a breadboard model of a building, the place where it will be possible to buld the temple. BUT .... There are not enought money ...

Here is the message from Kolya Vasin to all the Beatle-people, to all the people who beleive that music of the Beatles makes the World better:

GENTLEMEN ! BRETHEREN !

YE WHO HAVE EARS SHALL HEAR

WE CALL YOUR ATTENTION

TO THE CAUSE

WHICH IS A CONTRIBUTION TO

THE FREEDOM OF SPIRIT ON EARTH

AND, PARTICULARY, IN RUSSIA.

IT'S THE CONSTRUCTION OF

THE TEMPLE OF LOVE AND PEACE

BLESSED BY THE MUSIC OF

JOHN LENNON AND THE BEATLES

AS A SYMBOL OF OUR FREEDOM

AS A CELEBRATION OF THE

HIGH HOLIDAY OF LIFE

DIG IT !

AND JOIN US!

IT WILL ONLY BE POSSIBLE IF WE WORK

TOGETHER

AND WITH LOVE!

Let us help Russia and Kolya Vasin to build the Temple of Love, Peace and Music in the name of John Lennon and The Beatles.

Please donate. Each dollar received is a new brick in the wall of Temple.