

Facebook had not been created when I wrote this story.

By February, 2010 there were 439 members in the "Beatle Bob, Sit Down!" group "for everyone who has ever witnessed the crazy sensation that is Beatle Bob blocking your view at a show because he needs to play the air typewriter."

July 18, 1997---

It was a hard day's night for Beatle Bob.

The St. Louis-based music fanatic had put in a full evening at FitzGerald's American Music Festival over the Fourth of July weekend in Berwyn. The apex of Beatle Bob's visit came when the Skeletons invited him onstage to join guest vocalist Syd Straw for a dreamy version of the Ramones' "I Wanna Be Your Boyfriend." The Sonny and Cher image of Beatle Bob shaking a tambourine while gazing into Straw's eyes was memorable.

Beatle Bob is a familiar figure to club- and concertgoers across America. Known only as Beatle Bob, he dances in the front rows of shows at the New Orleans Jazz & Heritage Festival, the City Stages festival in Birmingham, Ala., and the South by Southwest Music and Media Conference in Austin, Texas, where I imagine that someday they'll have a Beatle Bob panel. FitzGerald's festival is now part of Beatle Bob's annual itinerary.

Beatle Bob saw 487 concerts in 1996.

"I keep a diary of every show I see," Beatle Bob said from his home in St. Louis, where he has 25,000 45s and 13,000 vinyl albums in his basement. "Last year was my all-time record. I know there aren't that many days in a year. Most of the shows were in St. Louis, where they have happy-hour performances. Then, later at night, I'll go to a club show."

Beatle Bob is 44. Amazingly, he doesn't own a car. He borrowed a vintage blue '57 Chevy to come to Berwyn. He flies to most of his out-of-town shows. Beatle Bob's never been married. He doesn't sleep a lot. When he returned my first phone call, the time on the answering machine was 5:55 a.m.

"I need only three or four hours of sleep a day," Beatle Bob said. "And this may seem anti-rock 'n' roll lifestyle, but I don't drink. I never liked the taste of alcohol. If you stay out late and don't drink, it makes it easier to get up in the morning."

Beatle Bob has no visible means of the sort that can support the endless pursuit of rock 'n' roll. A couple of the Skeletons said he was a social worker once. He hosts

several music specials on public radio KDHX-FM (88.1) in St. Louis. "And I write free lance for several magazines," Beatle Bob said. At least he doesn't need many haircuts. He has the same thick black bangs popularized by Sid Caesar's old sidekick, Imogene Coca.

He has been Beatle Bob since he was Pubescent Bob.

"I was in sixth grade at Mount Providence grade school in St. Louis," he recalled. "It was a Catholic all-boys school. We were supposed to be reading our geography book, but behind my book I had a 16 Magazine all-Beatles issue. Sister Celeste flew down the aisle and said, 'That will be enough of that, Beatle Bob!' The name stuck." By the way, John is his favorite Beatle.

Beatle Bob began dancing alone in the front row of concerts during the 1980s new wave era. He began buying loads of mod and sharkskin jackets. He'll even wear paisley thrift-store jackets in the heat of the New Orleans Jazz & Heritage Festival.

"Unlike a lot of other music critics, I consider myself a fan first," he said. "Why should I sit down and take notes when so much good music is going on?" I asked Beatle Bob to rate the best and worst of the 487 shows he saw last year. This list includes his out-of-town festival trips:

"The top one was (singer-songwriter) Tom Russell at Off Broadway in St. Louis," he said. "He did a live album there and he had a band. Dave Alvin was in the band and so were Katy Moffatt and Steve Young. Wilson Pickett played the St. Louis Blues Festival and he was really good." Beatle Bummers included the BoDeans and Prince.

"Years ago the BoDeans were one of my favorite bands," he said. "They've gotten worse and too bombastic. And Prince was one of my favorite artists in the '80s. I wouldn't call his show a flop, but it was a letdown. It was the first time he played St. Louis in 13 years. I'd seen him twice, and the band didn't perform to standards of his previous bands. George Clinton and P-Funk jams can go endlessly, but they're continually uplifting, where Prince's jams were more measured."

Rockers who spend any time on the road know Beatle Bob. Matthew Sweet asked him to come onstage at City Stages. The musicians appreciate his positive energy. "Sometimes I may be weary when I get to a show," Beatle Bob said. "But once I plug into the music, it's like a Frankenstein monster. It's infectious. I come alive."