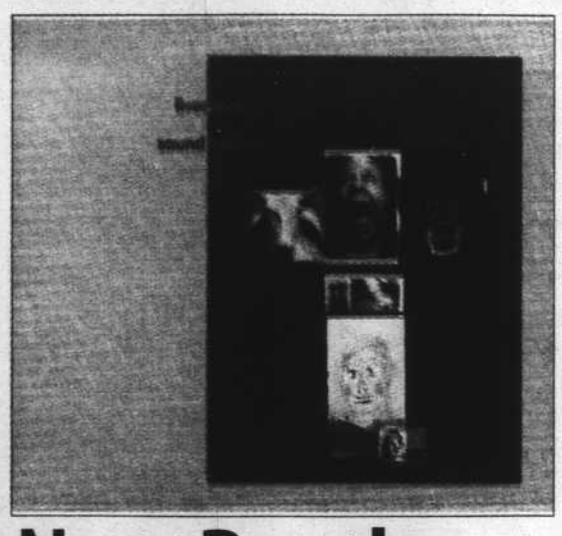

New Beatles album fills sonic void left after the White Album

■ 'Liverpool Sound Collage' is reminiscent of the '60s, but fresh sounds and techniques bring it to life.

BY NEAL OBERMEYER

There are basically two types of Beatles fans.

To put it simply, there are those who think that "Let it Be" and "Abbey Road" were a fine end to a brilliant career.

Then there are the rest who are still waiting – who think that, blasphemy aside, those last two were a bit boring.

The "Liverpool Sound Collage" will only accent that dividing line. Some will hear an unfathomable heresy. The others, however, will hear one of the most sonically exciting albums of the year.

The story: Peter Blake makes collages, including the cover to the Beatles' "Sergeant Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band." He put on a collage show in Liverpool, including his own works, as well as a rare work of John Lennon, amongst others.

Blake wanted music to accompany his show, so he called on Paul McCartney, who then enlisted the aid of the Super Furry Animals and ex-Killing Joke bassist Youth.

The premise: to complement the visual collage exhibit with a collaborative sound collage built from Paul's secret stash of Beatles tapes from the late 60s, full of previously unreleased material. The resulting music was such a hit at the exhibit that Paul decided to release it as an album.

MUSIC REVIEW

Various Artists

Title: "Liverpool Sound Collage"

Label: Capitol Records

★★★★ of 4 stars

The test: Do you have "Revolver"? What do you think of "Tomorrow Never Knows"?

Loops, sampling – that was some foreign whacked-out stuff in 1966, man. Not a lot of people got it. A lot of people still don't.

The Super Furry Animals do, though. It can't be expressed any simpler. The rest of the songs on this album could be vomitous, and this would still be a 73-star album (They'd only let me give it four.) on the strength of this one song and what it represents.

For a few years now, the Super Furry Animals has carried on the original mission of sonic experimentation within the vehicle of fine pop-rock songs.

They understand samples in the same way that the Bomb Squad and Terminator X did. There is rhythm in speech, and there is music in nature.

The first six minutes of "Peter Blake 2000" are nothing more than quickly cycled speech loops. Beautiful nuisance. Cue Paul:

"The bit that John finally got … do what you wanna do …"

And then "do what you wanna do" loops for two minutes, slurring and distorting until you get this chill when you realize that the entire song is going to build on the rhythm provided by this one adorably deteriorated Paul McCartney quote.

At eight minutes, the drums finally enter – so artificial in their sampled and rearranged nature, yet still so very Ringo. Cue the eerie little boys' choir, some sampled ringing guitar and then somewhere around 10 minutes into the song comes the vocal hook: "Free now … gotta be free now …"

It's the same old hippie fluff we're used to hearing, but basically what we've got here is a 16-minute long *new Beatles song* that lives up to the sonic expectations that were never fulfilled after the white album.

Paul's two contributions, "Plastic Beetle" and "Made Up," are near the same league. Snippets of Beatles dialogue jump in and out with a steadily sampled Ringo underneath.

They seem a bit loose and unfinished, but unlike Paul's solo career of the past 30 years, they are charming reminders of the fact that he was once one of the most creative and imaginative men on earth.

The album's weak spot is Youth's contribution. A collage in the weakest sense, this song is like calling a bulletin board a collage. He loosely throws together the required Beatles samples with a bunch of whoop-whirly space noises. Samples are thrown together with a somewhat haphazard Aphex Twin sense of (absent?) rhythm. But to call it the album's weak spot is to judge it relative to the other contributions, which puts it more in perspective.

"Rare, unreleased material" never sounded so fresh and challenging. This is no "Free As a Bird" bunk. This is the spirit that made the Beatles great, channeled through some old rockers and a pack of hairy Welsh guys.

Treat this less like *Anthology 4* and more like a brand new Beatles album.

Spreading her wings

Heather Gleobski/DN

Acting didn't always come so easy for senior theater major Katie Byrd. Byrd said her shyness used to hold her back, but now she uses it to her advantage. She is appearing in Shakespeare's "All's Well that Ends Well" this fall on Howell Stage.

An Artistic FORTE

Editor's Note: In this weekly series, we examine the exceptional work and accomplishments of individual students in art, dance, music, acting and design.

Theater student Katie Byrd refuses to let shyness get in the way of reaching new heights in acting

BY MELANIE MENSCH

Playing a role on stage is easy for Katie Byrd.

Being herself is not.

"The hardest part of an audition is introducing myself," said the senior University of Nebraska-Lincoln theater major. "My first three years of college, I left auditions crying because it just terrified me. If I'm told what to say in the lines … I could talk for hours."

This fall on Howell Stage, Byrd is quite convincing as the gentlewoman Helena in Shakespeare's "All's Well That Ends Well." But Byrd said her confidence as an actor doesn't always show.

"The first time I saw Katie act…I remember thinking 'God, she's really good.' "

Stephanie Dodd
junior theater major

"My shyness has gotten in the way so many times," she said. "My mom wouldn't let me act when I was little because she thought I was too shy to do it. I could never order at restaurants. I was so shy."

While watching her older sister Colene audition for plays, Byrd said, she caught the acting bug, and even her shyness didn't stop her from pursuing the spotlight.

"I knew I could do it, so I made the choice in high school," she said. "It made sense."

Beginning her acting debut at Mercy High School, the Omaha native later performed with the Omaha Community Playhouse, Nebraska Repertory Theatre and did public television announcements.

Even after winning an award for best undergraduate actress from the Nebraska Masquers, a UNL student theater group, Byrd still lacked confidence until last February, when she attended the regional American College Theatre Festival in Sioux City, S.D.

"I am still shy in everyday situations, but now I use it and focus it into my work."

Katie Byrd
senior theater major

The American College Theatre Festival is a national organization that annually selects and recognizes college theater communities through awards and scholarships in playwriting, acting, criticism, directing and design.

Last February, the group asked UNL students to perform their adaptation of the Russian play "Three Sisters" by Anton Chekhov. Byrd, who was a part of the play, was the only undergraduate member to perform at the festival and was in contention for scholarships.

Although she didn't win the $1,000 Irene Ryan Acting Scholarship, Byrd, one of 287 actors who applied for the scholarship, was as one of 15 finalists.

"It was a life-changing experience," she said. "My acting changed. It was magical. I wasn't counting on external forces to bless me and make me a good actor anymore. The confidence – it just clicked."

Although Byrd said her shyness is still present, it no longer acts as an obstacle in her acting.

"I am still shy in everyday situations, but now I use it and focus it into my work," she said.

That newfound confidence shines through, and Byrd isn't the only one who noticed.

Although previously given only roles as weak or abused women, Byrd said, she has recently been offered stronger, more complex roles. Her parts as Rosalind in Shakespeare's "As You Like It" and Helena in "All's Well That Ends Well" are evidence of the change.

Although gaining confidence was an important step toward stronger roles, becoming comfortable with herself was another.

"I've learned to live in my body," the lanky, 5-foot 9-inch actress said. "I used to feel so tall and all elbows and knees. Now I use my body as a tool – not an obstacle. I know now that I *can* have grace."

Her acting colleagues say Byrd possesses more than just grace and talent

John Wachter, a junior theater major, portrays Betram, Helena's love interest in "All's Well That Ends Well"

"Katie makes me feel like I should work harder because she works hard," he said. "She genuinely cares about doing her craft well."

Stephanie Dodd, another junior theater major, is also working with Byrd this semester as Diana in the fall UNL production.

"The first time I saw Katie act was with the Omaha Community Playhouse, and I remember thinking 'God, she's really good,' " Dodd said. "It's scary to act with her because she's so natural. You can't be fake. You can't just say your lines. On stage, Katie makes you laugh; she makes you cry. She makes you feel honest emotions."

Depending on her character, Byrd takes audiences through a gamut of emotional reactions, including side-splitting laughter, on-the-edge-of-your-seat suspense and whimsical sighs of romantic bliss, Dodd said.

Last summer, Jeff Elwell, theatre arts and dance department chairman, cast Byrd in "Picnic," by William Inge. Elwell said Byrd's character flexibility reminded him of Meryl Streep.

"Every role you see her, she's different, not just a different version of Katie Byrd," Elwell said. "What makes Katie a wonderful actress is the variety of roles she can play."

Byrd said although acting was called a "selfish profession," she hoped to one day affect audiences with diverse, edgy roles in modern plays for 20-something audiences.

Byrd said she'd like to start a company of inspired, young actors like the Chicago-based Steppenwolf Theatre Company, from which famed actors such as Gary Sinise, Laurie Metcalf and John Malkovich hail.

"They were just a bunch of kids who started out in a church basement," Byrd said. "I want to do that with new, high-quality writing, where we direct each other in plays, where we create plays."

"What makes Katie a wonderful actress is the variety of roles she can play in."

Jeff Elwell
UNL department chairman of theatre arts and dance

Byrd also discovered she's more than just an actor – she's a good director, too. So good that she's submitting a videotape to the American College Theatre Festival this year of the one-act play "Sex and Metaphors," which Byrd directed last semester with UNL students Jill Dickey and Tim Hammer.

"We're re-staging it in November, and it's being held for (the festival). Then they can take it or not," she said.

Byrd plans on stepping closer to her dream of directing, playwriting and acting this summer by moving to Chicago in August with the person who first inspired her: her sister Colene.

"I wouldn't say she gives me any pointers, but we do talk about theater," Byrd said. "We give a lot of support and criticism, too."

Byrd said film acting may offer greater exposure and fame, but performing in a theater personally reaches the audience.

"Film bugs me because there is always a star. The focus is all on one person," she said. "In ensemble acting, you all have to trust each other. I want to move people in the audience, so I make more sacrifices to become better for the role."