

EARLIEST BEATLES GUITAR TO BE OFFERED AT AUCTION TO BE SOLD IN SOTHEBY'S SALE OF ROCK 'N' ROLL MEMORABILIA AT THE HARD ROCK CAFE

JOHN LENNON'S 1950S ACOUSTIC GUITAR PLAYED THE DAY HE MET PAUL MCCARTNEY

JOHN LENNON'S Gallotone 'Champion' acoustic guitar, the earliest Beatles guitar to be offered at auction, is expected to fetch between £80,000-100,000 in Sotheby's traditional evening sale of Rock 'n' Roll memorabilia at the Hard Rock Cafe, in London on Tuesday, September 14, 1999. The sale starts at 7pm and entrance is strictly by ticket only.

Stephen Maycock, Sotheby's Rock 'n' Roll specialist, said: "This is the most important and significant piece of early Beatles memorabilia to come onto the market. The guitar is the one that John played with his group, the Quarry Men, at the St. Peter's Church fête, Woolton, Merseyside on the 6 July, 1957. It was on that day that Lennon met Paul McCartney for the first time - an event that was to lead to the formation of the greatest rock 'n' roll band ever, The Beatles."

The fête started mid-afternoon in a field behind the church and the Quarry Men performed a series of songs prior to their evening session at the church hall. A black and white photograph of the band taken during the afternoon captures a moment of this historic event which was watched by a crowd of people that included Paul McCartney then aged 15. The photograph shows Lennon standing at the front of the stage playing the Dutch-made acoustic guitar which is now offered in Sotheby's sale.

Later on in the day, while the Quarry Men were setting up for their evening session in the church hall, Lennon and McCartney were introduced and it was not long before McCartney was impressing Lennon with his ability to tune a guitar and remember lyrics from favourite songs such as Eddie Cochran's, 'Twenty Flight Rock' and Gene Vincent's 'Be-Bop-A-Lula'.

A former Quarry Men member recalls that this particular guitar was bought by Lennon, possibly in the May/June of 1957, by mail order from a London company, for about £10 after seeing an advertisement for it in 'Reveille' magazine.

Thirty-two years, later the cherry sunburst-coloured guitar has been restored. The headstock of the guitar bears the 'Champion' logo and a later brass plaque which was probably added to the guitar when Lennon's Aunt Mimi had it restored. The plaque is engraved with the inscription: "Remember you'll never earn your living by it" which refers to a remark that Mimi is said to have made out of exasperation at the amount of hours Lennon spent practising on the guitar rather than studying.

The guitar is to be sold together with a Brexton car trunk case and a 1957 edition of 'Play The Guitar A Self Tutor' published by Mills Music Ltd. A Radio Luxembourg magazine photograph from October 1956 of Lonnie Donegan, one of Lennon's early musical influences, and a series of news clippings about Lennon accompany the guitar, as does a typewritten letter signed by Aunt Mimi regarding the arrangements to donate the trunk and its historic contents to a

Liverpool charity involved in music therapy.

The letter written from Aunt Mimi's address in Poole, Dorset reads: "With regards to the request for items in support of your Liverpool handicapped musicians appeal, most requests I have to refuse, however, in this case I feel able to make an exception....I must admit I didn't know these things still existed until John asked me to sort out his bits and pices from the old days and send them on to N.Y. he must have locked them in the case at Menlove Avenue, being transferred attic to attic when I moved down here. The poor old guitar was in such a state when I found it I had it professionally repaired, it was to have been a big surprise for John, I can't bring myself to even look at it now, its just too painful. I hope that through you John's possessions can bring pleasure..."

Other Lennon items originally kept in the trunk are also included in the sale and immediately follow the sale of the guitar. A portable Imperial typewriter which Aunt Mimi ascertains in her letter: "John used this very typewriter for some of his first attempts at songwriting..." is estimated at £700-1,000, while a group of 12 1950s 78rpm records from John Lennon's collection is estimated at £1,500-2,000.

The records kept in Lennon's brown leather briefcase and comprise six Elvis songs including 'Heartbreak Hotel'/'I Was The One', 'All Shook Up'/'That's When Your Heartaches Begin' and 'Hound Dog'/'Don't Be Cruel'. Other seminal releases represented in the collection range from Buddy Holly's 'Peggy Sue'/'Everyday' and Little Richard's 'Lucille'/'Send Me Some Lovin' to The Goons' 'Ying Tong Song'/'Bloodnok's Rock 'n' Roll Call' and Lonnie Donegan's 'Cumberland Gap'/'Love is Strange'.

A percentage of the proceeds from the sale of all these items will be donated to the Olive Mount Learning Disabilities Directorate, Liverpool.

Note to Editors:

A tape recording of John Lennon singing and playing this acoustic guitar with the Quarry Men at the St Peter's Church fête on 6 July, 1957 was bought by EMI Records at Sotheby's Rock 'n' Roll sale in September 1994 for £78,500.

Transparencies are available on request. Images can also be sent via ISDN or e-mail.

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