

A Klein collection of rock . . . stars

By Greg Kowalski
staff writer

George Harrison has a fairly neat script. Ringo Starr's is flashy. Yoko Ono's is illegible.

Arnold Klein does not as a rule collect autographs of The Beatles or near-Beatles. But he does have some of their signatures. And a lot more.

Klein, owner of Arnold KLEIN gallery in Royal Oak, has a penchant for a young person's hobby. He's a collector, so much so that he has perhaps the largest collection of books on The Beatles in the country. And he probably has the largest collection of Beatles newspaper and magazine clippings in the universe.

Klein is a bit of a contradiction. At the age of 60, with a background in classical art, the impression he gives is of someone more attuned to Beethoven than The Beatles.

"But," he said, "I was instantly attracted to them," when they came out in the early 1960s. Prior to that he had little exposure to rock'n'roll, having studied and toured extensively in Europe. About as far as he got into American pop music was Bobby Darin ("Splash, Splash," "Mack the Knife").

In 1962, The Beatles ushered in a new era of music in England and carried that over to the United States in 1964. By the time The Beatles reached the States in 1964, Klein had already begun his collection of Beatles clippings.

"But wait," he said by way of introduction before opening his huge collection. "I am a collector."

ANOTHER COLLECTOR would immediately relate to what he means. True collectors of anything border on, and often cross, the line of fanaticism in securing their treasures.

Klein hunts for several collections. Along with The Beatles, he has a passionate interest in books and articles on The Rolling Stones, The Doors and the Talking Heads.

His in-depth files also cover Bob Dylan, David Bowie, Bruce Springsteen and Lou Reed, and extend to other arts, such as classical pianists, violinists and conductors, dancers as well as a select group of artists, poets, architects and sculptors.

Klein also has a special fondness for artist James McNeil Whistler (and his mother) and has a collection of books on Whistler so impressive that it is used for reference by art museums.

But, at least in the volume of material, even Whistler can't compare with his Beatles collection.

Klein has more than 200 books, such as "All Together Now," "Who Killed John Lennon?" "Tell Me Why" and "Dakota Days." Some are common. Others are rare, such as Brian Epstein's 1964 volume, "A Cellar Full of Noise."

MOST KLEIN found while prowling through old book stores. Others are instant collectibles, such as Derek Taylor's "Fifty Years After," a limited-edition volume put out by Genesis Press, a London-based specialty publishing house that issues elaborately boxed books autographed by various Beatles and related artists, such as Eric Clapton.

"These sell for several hundred dollars," Klein said.

Although this ticket to ride down memory lane costs more than a few pennies, value is relative, Klein said. It's nice to have valuable autographs, but the real story of The Beatles is in their "cheap" clippings that have been printed over the years.

And there they are, fitted neatly in plastic holders in several scrapbook-style volumes. The basement of Klein's Pleasant

Ridge home is littered — literally — with hundreds of magazines and clippings ranging from serious treatises on The Beatles' lives and works to '60s fanzines, such as "Teen Screen." You can almost hear the adolescent girls screaming.

Why Klein's interest in a group that broke up 20 years ago?

"Something is in their music," he said. "When I first heard it, something happened to me — and apparently millions of other people. Their music can be liberating. People could be swept up into a cultural revolution."

"WHEN THE Beatles came along, you could immediately tell it was not Tin Pan Alley music," Klein said. "Here was a group writing and performing its own stage songs. It was something fresh and new."

The freshness persists. Even today, it's not unusual to switch on the radio and tune in a Beatles' song within a few minutes.

"That's because the interest in The Beatles is still there," Klein said. "It persists because of its quality."

Klein's fascination with The Beatles is reflected in his collection of clips. From obscure music notes from the 1960s to the major coverage of Lennon's murder in 1980, The Beatles have had a command of the world press unknown to any other artist.

Klein's scores of clips include publications from around the country. He has or has had subscriptions to *Life*, *Look*, *Time*, *Newsweek* and a host of other publications long since vanished.

They offer a unique commentary on the music scene from the '60s to the present. The books are just as interesting. Take the British book series, "Great Lives," which features Shakespeare, Louis Braille (inventor of writing for the blind), Queen Elizabeth II and John Lennon. Talk about a



Arnold Klein shows off some of the more than 200 books, such as "All Together Now," "Who Killed John Lennon?" "Tell Me Why" and "Dakota Days," that fill his collection.

working class hero being lionized by a paperback writer.

THEN THERE'S The Beatles pop-up book that features 3-D cutouts of the Fab Four on each page and ends up with a tiny micro-circuit generated rendition of "Hey Jude" when you flip open that last page.

The '60s teen magazines offer a nostalgic bonus in features on now-forgotten teeny bopper idols and equally forgettable fashions.

Klein limits his Beatles interest mainly to books and clippings. He avoids other memorabilia.

"There's just too much of it," he said.

A few exceptions: Several years ago artist Richard Bernstein created a silk screen poster, entitled "Nude Beatles."

"I saw it once in New York but never saw it listed in any catalog, and I got many through the gallery," Klein said. He finally saw a print for sale in a Cleveland, Ohio, gallery and bought it. Although by no means pornographic, it definitely is a non-typical Beatles collectible.

Another favorite is an autograph by Yoko Ono, whom Klein met during a visit here in 1968.

SURPRISINGLY, considering he owns a gallery, Klein said he has no interest in Lennon's drawings.

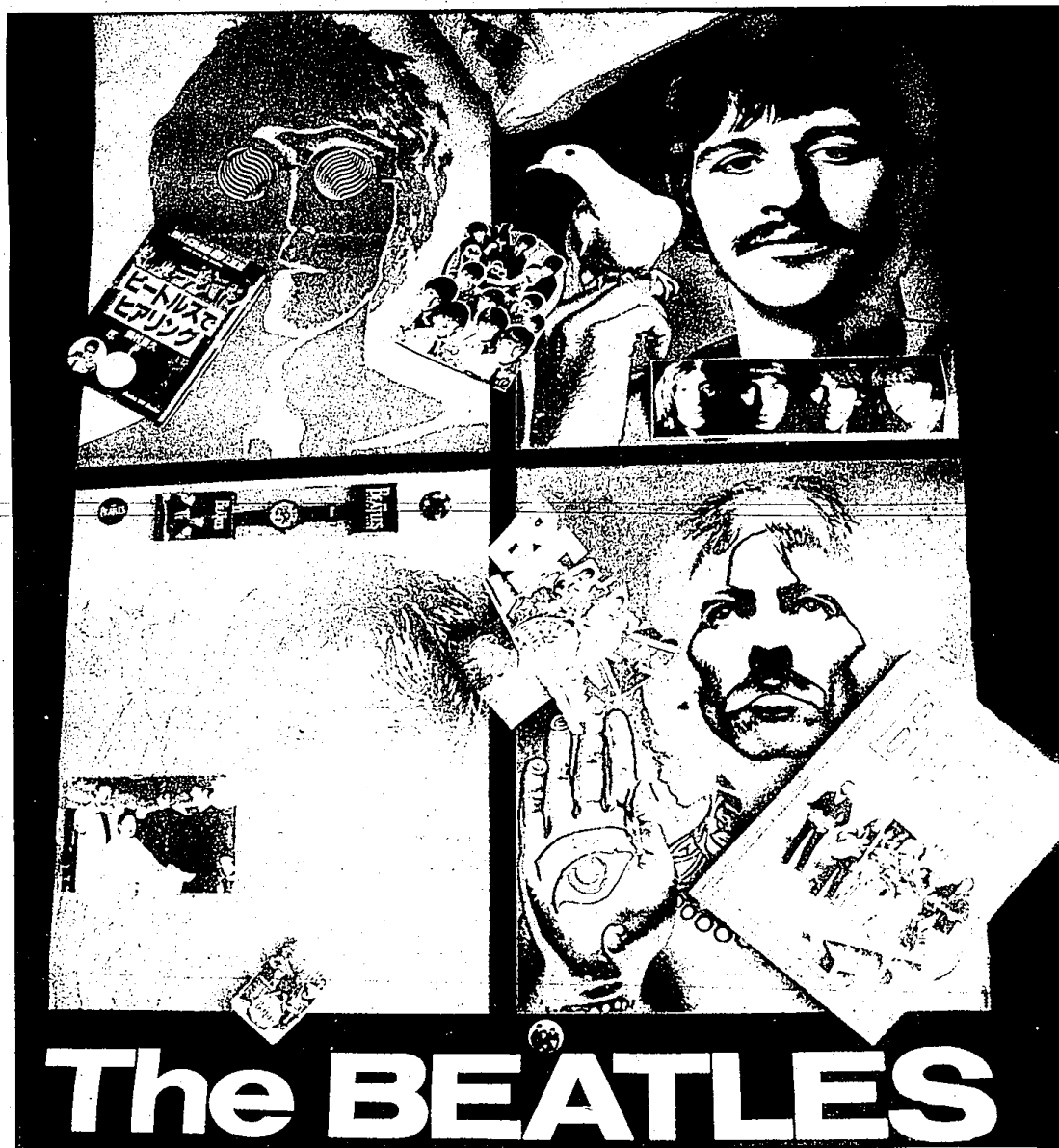
"They're very poor," he said. "I don't like his art." But Klein does admit he'd like to have a Lennon lithograph, only a signed one.

What eventually will happen to this perhaps unequalled treasure of Beatlemabilia?

Well, it would be an invaluable resource to anyone writing about The Beatles. And assuredly, it will keep on growing, provided Klein's wife Karen continues to tolerate the mounds of clippings scattered about waiting to be filed.

Klein has even mused what it would be like to be in the business of marketing Beatles items. He attends the periodic Beatles conventions held locally.

"I picture myself in my old age, renting a booth . . ." he said with a smile, leaving one to wonder.



Books, tapes, photographs, a watch, pillow, even a psychedelic poster are among The Beatles memorabilia that Arnold Klein has collected over several decades.

The BEATLES

PHOTOS BY STEVE GANTRELL/AMR