

Photographer Ethan Russell Shares His Life With the Stars

He will relive his time with the Beatles and the Rolling Stones during a show June 3 at The Sharon in The Villages.

By MICHAEL FORTUNA
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THE VILLAGES

The last thing Ethan Russell wanted to be was a photographer.

Yet he found himself in London in 1968, asking to take pictures for an interview.

The subject? Mick Jagger of the Rolling Stones.

His next assignment? John Lennon of the Beatles.

Russell wants to take the audience back to that time through his show, "The Best Seat in the House," which will take place at 7 p.m. June 3 at the Sharon L. Morse Performing Arts Center.

Instead of 70 pictures at an art exhibition, Russell uses more than 300 pictures for his presentation, where he tells the stories of what he and his Nikon film cameras experienced during a span of some 20 years.

He snapped pictures of such performers as Chuck Berry, Linda Ronstadt, Jerry Lee Lewis, Jim Morrison, and the Eagles.

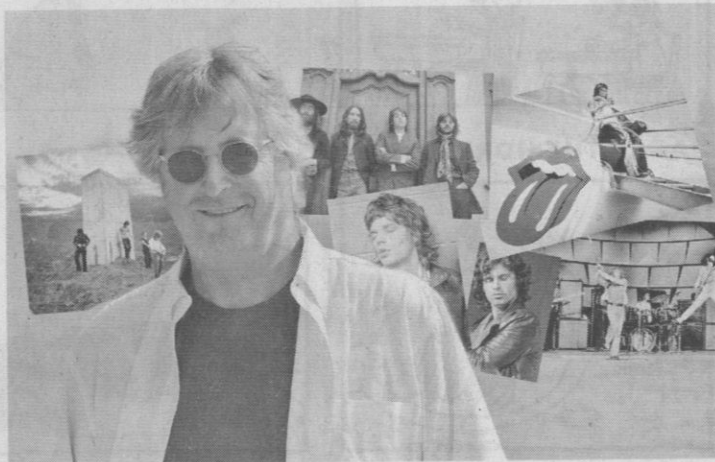
"(The audiences) get to be there at the places I got to be, which were incredible," Russell said. "They get to be on the roof with the Beatles, on tour with the Rolling Stones, on tour with the Who. That's why it's called 'The Best Seat in the House.'"

"(I hope they walk away with) that they got to be there, that they heard the truth," he said. "They'll get to experience being in these places. It's worth the price of admission."

Prior to this, Russell didn't have any background in photography.

"This whole thing doesn't make any sense," Russell said, laughing. "I wanted to be a writer. Little did I know..."

Russell had seen the movie "Blow-Up," which tells the tale of a photographer living in London. That helped spark the idea of heading to England. He bought a camera and roamed around Golden Gate Park in 1967.



Submitted photo

Photographer Ethan Russell, who helped create album covers for the Beatles, the Rolling Stones and The Who, will present "The Best Seat in the House" on June 3 at the Sharon L. Morse Performing Arts Center.

Russell wanted to take pictures that were more in-the-moment as opposed to being staged.

"The last thing I wanted to do was have people notice me," he said. "When you look at the pictures, you don't see them looking at the camera."

He considers a staged photo shoot to be "one of the worst human experiences you can have. You're not doing anything. You're not engaged with your life."

"Most of my work is being

there. If I happen to be at an incredible event and capture it (on film), that's more valuable."

He was one of 16 people who followed the Rolling Stones around during their 1969 American tour. He took the photos for what would be used for the Stones' "Rock and Roll Circus." That led to the Beatles bringing Russell in to take photos while the band recorded "Let It Be" in front of a camera crew.

"They were always on," Russell

"THE BEST SEAT IN THE HOUSE"

Ethan Russell will present "The Best Seat in the House" at 7 p.m. June 3 at the Sharon L. Morse Performing Arts Center, 1051 Main St. Tickets are \$20 to \$40 and are available at any Villages Box Office location or online at thesharon.com.

said. "It's a very abstract thing when you think about it."

His photos ended up on the cover and gatefold of "Let It Be." Russell also photographed the Beatles playing their final concert on the roof of Apple Records.

His photo of the Who graced the front cover of their album, "Who's Next."

Russell backed away from taking pictures some 30 years ago, shifting his focus to filmmaking and writing.

"Somebody getting the pictures I got doesn't happen anymore," Russell said. "Since the early '80s, it became about packaging. They actively prevent seeing people for who they really are. It's manufacturing to get people to buy (things)."