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'Abbey Road' alternative: 'White Album' in Lexington

By Walter Tunis

Not feeling up to Abbey Road on the River? Then how about getting down with the *White Album* on dry land?

Tonight, as Louisville's huge Beatlefest gets under way, Lexington's Johnson Brothers Band will present its own little Fab Four tribute -- a recreation of the Beatles' self-titled 1968 recording, better known as simply the *White Album*, at Natasha's.

"This is an album unlike *Sgt. Pepper* or *Magical Mystery Tour*," Johnson Brothers guitarist Jim Gleason said, noting the Beatles' atypically sparse production. "It's definitely a band album. Now, it's more like one guy in front with the others backing him up. Nonetheless, it's real ensemble playing. And we like that."

The Johnson Brothers Band has regularly stretched the definition of a "cover" ensemble by adhering to the exact arrangements of the artists whose music it interprets. Tonight, that will mean ultra-faithful versions of Beatles staples, including *Back in the U.S.S.R.* and *While My Guitar Gently Weeps*, along with lesser-known greats including *Glass Onion*, *Dear Prudence* and *Piggies*. But the album's most overtly abstract tune, the sound collage *Revolution 9*, probably will be omitted.

This is hardly the first time the Johnson Brothers Band has taken to performing an entire Beatles album. It played all of the classic *Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band* after hearing a talk by longtime Beatles producer Sir George Martin at the 2004 IdeaFestival.

"About halfway through his address, it occurred to me there were about 800 people there who knew exactly what this album was supposed to sound like. That was the intimidating part, not Sir George."