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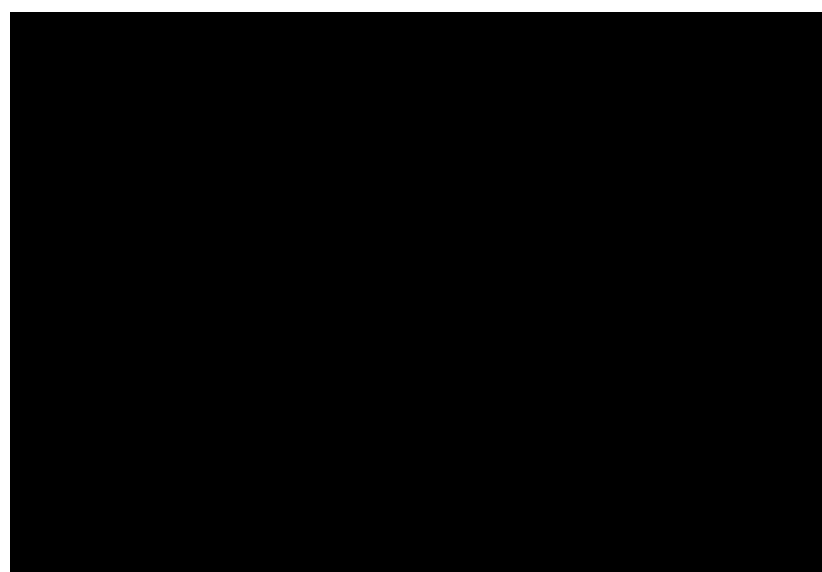
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ROXBURY, WEST ROXBURY

## Bus named for Beatles' John Lennon rolls full studio to Boston schools

Posted by Matt Rocheleau October 7, 2011 11:00 AM

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(John Lennon Educational Tour Bus; Avid; & Higginson/Lewis K-8 school)

A group of students from the Higginson/Lewis K-8 school in Roxbury recorded this song and music video from scratch using equipment from the John Lennon Educational Tour Bus, which is visiting Boston this week.

By Matt Rocheleau, Town Correspondent

Dreamer John Lennon could have only imagined the capabilities of this state-of-the-art rocking and, literally, rolling music and video production studio named in memory of the English rock legend and founding Beatles member.

Parked outside the West Roxbury Educational Complex Wednesday, the 51,000-pound, blue-painted [John Lennon Educational Tour Bus](#) has all of the tools a musician would need to create a song and music video from scratch.



PHOTOS

[John Lennon Educational Tour Bus visits](#)

Just ask a group of youngsters from the Higginson/Lewis K-8 School in Roxbury who, over the course of eight hours aboard the bus, wrote, recorded and edited the original song and music video embedded at the top of this page.

Professional musicians, including the Black Eyed Peas, have used the bus to develop and produce their art. Most of the songs featured on the acclaimed hip-hop group's sixth and most-recent album, "The Beginning," were written

when the band spent about three months aboard the bus, according to crew member Ryan L'Esperance.

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(To see more photos from the bus' visit to Boston schools, [click here](#).)

The 25-year-old L'Esperance is one of four – three crew members and a driver – who spend 10 months out of the year traveling to cities across the U.S. and Canada making stops, including at schools and various headlining tours and music festivals like the Vans Warped Tour, to give youth a chance to explore the bus, participate in workshops and learn more about music.

Since the bus began touring the country 14 years ago, it has offered children and teens, including plenty who have little to no music background before climbing inside, a chance to record a song and music video during an eight-hour session guided by bus staff.

“We want to provide an opportunity for kids to have this once in a lifetime music experience,” said L'Esperance, adding that when he and his crewmates work with youth to create their own song and video, “It’s all them. We don’t say anything. We take their ideas and make them work.”

The team also educates its younger visitors about the guy whose quirky self-portrait sketch and name are splashed on the outside.

“We want to make that a part of it, but we don’t beat them over the head with it either,” L'Esperance said. “A lot of times kids have no idea who [Lennon] was, unless they’ve played [the video game] Beatles Rock Band or something.”

Instead of using the bus to teach history lessons about the late performer and peace activist, the mobile facility serves as a space for today’s youth to discover their own artistic talents.

“This is precisely the kind of project that John would have loved,” Yoko Ono Lennon has said, according to the bus’ website. She agreed to allow her late husband’s name and image to be used to help promote the bus.

“It’s dope. It’s awesome. It’s fun. It’s crazy, different, exciting, unusual,” said L'Esperance, who hails from a small beach town in California and now sleeps in a cramped bunk bed near the back of the bus in a space that also serves as a studio. “Before I had this job, I’d never been east of New Mexico.”

After two-and-a-half years on the job, he says he’s now visited all but three of the country’s states.

“It’s amazing,” added a fellow crew member, 23-year-old Kyle Baudour, a San Diego native. “You do something outside yourself and get to produce music and work with kids everyday ... There’s no distinction between fun and work. I wouldn’t imagine doing anything else.”

The 45-foot-long bus features three rooms – an audio and video production suite in the front of the bus, a recording and mixing suite in the middle and an isolation booth for acoustic recording in the back – which can be used simultaneously, each room divided with glass, sound-proof doors for a separate purpose, or opened to be one large space.

The bus also tows a 22.5-foot long trailer, and a stage can be setup outside the bus, which is equipped with exterior speakers, transforming the vehicle into a live performance venue.

As L'Esperance put it, there’s “everything you could want to record a song and video.”

The nearly \$5-million worth of donated equipment, gadgets and technology used in modern music making are also all customized and secured to handle the stresses that come with traveling to the tune of some 65,000 miles of roadway and letting between 200,000 and 300,000 people – or around half a million curious hands – on board each year, said Lee Whitmore. He is director of education solutions at Burlington-based digital audio and video technology

company Avid, a primary sponsor of the nonprofit bus that costs around \$2 million to operate each year.

There are drums, guitars, keyboards, laptops, photography equipment, the latest in digital music production software and technology, a green screen, remote-controlled video cameras to shoot video inside the bus and portable equipment to shoot anywhere off the bus, all done in high definition. The final works can be played back on high-quality monitors with sound blasting through powerful speakers and subwoofers.

“It was really cool,” said West Roxbury Academy senior Yaritza Pemadiaz. “I didn’t really expect this.”

Standing beside her, classmate Daje Bowle added, “We didn’t know all the buttons, but it was creative and interesting.”

The two 17-year-olds, who said they each used to play instruments when they were younger and may consider studying music more in the future, are part of a growing number of students who have signed up for a music class introduced to the school this fall.

Keith Papa teaches the class and has dedicated some lessons over the past two weeks to teaching his students about Lennon and the Beatles, including playing some of the music that dominated airwaves in the 1960s and remains among the most commercially successful the world has ever seen.

“I made sure they got a good listening,” said Papa, a lifelong musician who performs in his own band, “Dadios.” “In the second grade, I stayed up to watch the ‘Ed Sullivan Show,’” where the Beatles gave their first live television performance in 1964 and later aired promotional music video-esque clips on the weekly CBS program.

Michael Ortiz, a 17-year-old senior and student in Papa’s music class remembered some select facts about the “Fab Four.”

“People still listen to them,” he said. “They did a lot of drugs.”

Eighteen-year-old Misha Brun said she had a chance to play the drums when she toured the bus Wednesday afternoon and, after hearing the melody during a recent music class, she’s now a fan of “Michelle,” a song the Beatles released in 1965 and featured on the band’s “Rubber Soul” album.

Partnerships between bus sponsors and the city’s public school system began forming over the summer, said Cleopatra Knight-Wilkins, senior program director for arts at Boston Public Schools.

Two district schools – the Higginson/Lewis school and West Roxbury Academy – were selected based on their commitment to the arts as well as their location, she said. Some students from the Urban Science Academy also had a chance to tour the bus, which made a few other stops around Boston this week.

“We’ve been committed to the arts for a while,” said West Roxbury Academy principal Rudolph Weekes, but said that while the school has been known for its visual and graphic arts courses, there were no music offerings until this year when the school brought on its first music teacher, Mr. Papa.

Since the school year began, “We went from five kids to 35,” signed up for the elective music course, the principal said.

Having the bus visit West Roxbury Academy students was a harmonious fit for the school’s budding music program.

Weekes said he joined a group of students during the first tour of the bus Wednesday morning. They watched a music video created by a group of students from a school in Alabama whose song offered a hopeful message in the wake of tornado devastation there this past spring.

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“The arts can heal. That was inspirations to a lot of students,” said the principal, adding later that, “Many of them didn’t know what to expect. They thought they were just going to learn about the Beatles. But when the kids came off the bus, they were all so excited.”

The city school system’s executive director of arts, Myran Parker-Brass said the district, which two years ago announced an [arts expansion initiative](#), plans to use the partnerships formed through this past week’s bus visit as an educational tool to further expand the city schools’ growing arts programming, resources and partnerships.

“This is not just a one-time thing for us,” she said.

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