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An ab Fab Four; BATTLE OF THE FANTASY BANDS.

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Friday, BBC1, 8.00pm

KEVIN DAY leads a double life. In his own time he's Kevin, but during working hours he's John Lennon.

No, Kevin is not mad, he's just one of thousands of people the world over who earn their crust by imitating celebrities.

It seems you don't have to have an original idea to be in a band these days. And you needn't feel bad about it - there are more than 2000 tribute bands in the world.

We've all heard of Bjorn Again, the biggest Abba tribute band, and the Bootleg Beatles (no prizes for guessing who they imitate), but they are only the tip of the iceberg.

The BBC delved deeper - and a whole load more came flooding out.

Kevin, 39, from Exeter in Devon, along with three of his friends, make up the Fab Beatles - a copycat band which lives to imitate the original Fab Four - just one of a host of fantasy bands which will fight it out on a BBC special hosted by Ulrika Jonsson and Terry Wogan.

Not bad for a collection of mates who started out with jamming sessions in each other's houses.

"We'd all played in bands and used to have these jamming sessions where we always ended up playing Beatles songs because we were all fans of the band," says Kevin.

"Then we went to jam sessions in pubs and always ended up playing the Beatles. People used to tell us we should do something with it.

"Then we were asked if we would play by the owner of a local club who was having a '60s night, so we decided to do the Beatles thing and it was a success.

"It went on from there, and now we are hoping to take our act on a theatre tour of the UK this year."

The Fab Beatles started out 10 years ago, and for the last two have been professional - and they are never short of work.

"We do corporate events, charity concerts, pubs, clubs, theatres - anywhere really.

"We've done a lot of cruises and played in Denmark, France, Germany and Canada.

"We don't use tapes, and we try to do everything exactly as the Beatles would have done on stage. We do perform shorter sets, but our main one is where we go through all the eras from the early '60s to the Sergeant Pepper period, and we wear all the costumes.

"It's just great fun. People ask me if I ever get fed up, but I don't at all. I can think of worse ways to earn a living."

Kevin gets to dress up as his hero of an evening, but admits he just fell into John Lennon's shoes in his Beatles band.

"We didn't really choose - it was more or less the instrument we played and who sounded most like who.

"John Lennon is definitely my favourite Beatle though, and it's an honour to play him."

For this one-off show, the BBC trawled the internet and the bars of the country looking for talent.

They weren't looking for well established tribute bands like Bjorn Again or the Bootleg Beatles, but they still wanted something which would sound fantastic on a glamorous TV show.

After finding 10 possible Beatles groups, the Fab Beatles were the ones who impressed the most.

"It was a thrill to be on, to be honest," says Kevin. "They found our website and then came to see us at a show.

"There are about 60 Beatles tribute bands in the UK and, although in terms of being the best known the Bootleg Beatles are at the top of the tree, I'd say there are about another five or six, ourselves included, who are just as good.

"We are professional, and we were delighted to be picked.

"It was such a thrill to go to Studio One at the BBC in Wood Lane and meet Ulrika and Terry Wogan.

"It was incredibly nerve-racking - especially when the rest of the band were struck speechless and I had to do all the talking after our spot."

Kevin is hoping that perhaps Paul McCartney, Ringo Starr or George Harrison will be watching BBC1 tonight, and admits an acknowledgement from them would be a thrill.

"They've never seen us," he says. "The closest we've come to the Beatles is a guy called Stanley Parkes who is John Lennon's cousin.

"He was sent some tapes from a lady who runs a Beatles fanzine in the north of England.

"But to actually meet the guys from the Beatles would be great."

In the meantime, Kevin and his band are just content to keep going, and try to make their shows big enough to tour round the whole of the UK.

"That's our main aim for this year," Kevin says. "We want to really get the theatre tour off the ground and to get out there round the country.

"We want it to be as good and accurate as it possibly can be, and play to bigger audiences in Britain.

"We'll do the Beatles week at the end of August in Liverpool again, and our usual gigs, but we are always striving for more.

"We may be a copycat band, but we are just as proud of our sets as any original."

Find out more about the Fab Beatles at www.fabbeatles.com

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