

Guitar virtuoso, Berklee Professor, Beatle George - Meet Lauren Passarelli [Log In](#)

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While My Guitar Gently Weeps - Lauren with "All Together Now"

You Tube, Lauren Passarelli

A rare and fortunate few in this world know from an early age exactly what they want to do in life. It's rarer still when that person continues to follow their unique dream without ever letting vagaries and the pernicious influences of the world interfere.

Meet Lauren Passarelli, guitar teacher/mentor, [Professor/Guitar at Berklee College of Music](#), recording artist for [Feather Records](#), songwriter, singer, multi-instrumentalist, musical groundbreaker as a female guitarist, and, oh yeah, yeah yeah... Beatle George.

A seasoned, lifelong guitarist, Lauren's view of her talent is one of selflessness and sharing of her experience, rather than the oft-seen musicians' need for ego and attention. Of her work at Berklee, she says, "Teaching at Berklee is... my first love. It is easy to share the things that I love about [music](#) and guitar all day. I've found that I



Lauren Passarelli

have been able to be a mentor to my students. I don't really feel like I am imparting knowledge: I feel more like an artist in residence coaching people on how to keep their art alive. Society can be hard on artists. It's important to learn how to fit in and stay happy."

And then there's her love of the Beatles. At four years old, Lauren saw the Fab Four's American debut on the Ed Sullivan Show, like most of America, but unlike most American girls, Lauren didn't want to scream at them from the audience, she wanted to be onstage, be one of them.

That dream has been, in a way, realized and played out over the years in two Beatle Tribute bands - twelve years in All Together Now, and currently in [AfterFab](#), a unique tribute band which plays the individual Beatles' music from after the Beatles' breakup. In both bands she has played the George Harrison part, both singing and playing impeccable recreations of his guitar work.

I conducted the following interview with Lauren. Her responses portray the single-minded, clear-focused, fascinating journey of one woman to realize her original dreams.

When did you first pick up a guitar?

My Mom gave me a plastic guitar at two years old. I played it constantly and got a better plastic guitar every Christmas! I was begging for guitar lessons at seven years old. The first teacher she called said I was too young and too small. Two years later she found Lou Sabini in the Paramus Town News, in New Jersey, and I started lessons at nine years old. Lou got me started with Alfred's and Melbay guitar books. Then I progressed to Berklee College of Music guitar books: Bill Leavitt's, A Modern Method, For Guitar series... I was amazed there was a college you could go to for guitar. I can still feel the moment in my lesson deciding, "I'm going to Berklee!" I was eleven yrs old, and I could hardly wait.

What was the first music you learned to play?

Simple chord solos of standards that Lou would notate for me from memory, strumming pop songs that I was singing- Beatles, Stevie Wonder, Chicago. I began writing songs at ten years old. I was taught the instrument: learning how to read, harmony, theory, chord formulas, technique. Lou lent me guitar virtuoso albums by Tal Farlow, Johnny Smith, Buddy Fite & Howard Roberts. I was fascinated with melodic, articulate guitar playing. And George Harrison was one of the most precise, clean players out there in rock & roll. His playing has so much soul, subtlety and deep emotion. I love his playing. I got deeply into everything music, recording, microphones, songwriting, performing. While loving The Beatles, the solo Beatles, James Taylor, Carly Simon, Fleetwood Mac, Stevie Wonder, I also listened to and played George Benson, Pat Metheny and Jeff Beck, Yes, Doobie Brothers, Allman Brothers and many others. I grew up in the seventies when there wasn't very good sheet music, we all did everything by ear. No tab. I had two books of James Taylor's music, though, that were excellent. They really showed his voicings and a few picking patterns. So I was thrilled to take parts off records, transcribing guitar parts by ear. When they sounded like the record with the right articulation, phrasing and emotion that was on the records, I knew I had learned it well.

When did you first discover the Beatles?

I had uncles who were playing *Please, Please Me*, and the V-Jay, "Introducing the Beatles" LP in 1963 when I was three yrs old. Then I saw The Beatles on The Ed Sullivan Show in 1964 . I knew I wanted to be a Beatle. Which then became, "I want to be a musician." The world was a new place after hearing The Beatles. I didn't have words for it at the time, but I was thrilled there was an alternative to what looked like a black and white,

crew cut, run of the mill existence in the early sixties. The Beatles represented, energy, humor, possibilities, cool, youth, joy, innovation, they were everything to me, they taught me how to think, react, write songs, be optimistic, enjoy, and use your power for the good, how to play, sing, record, arrange, produce. They did it all, and I wanted to, too.

What were your first bands like?

I was in bands with school pals in grammar school. When were around twelve yrs old we started gigging private parties and town events at restaurants. Some of the songs were *Time is Tight*, by Booker T and The MGs, *It Don't Come Easy* by Ringo Starr, *Bangla Desh* by George Harrison, *Brown Sugar*, The Rolling Stones. There's pix of us on my Facebook page. We were six little kids and we made \$30 for the whole group the day of those pix, our first paying gig! We were called Strawberry Bricks. We figured if it was good enough for Yes before they became Yes, it was good enough for us.

Then I had a band in HS. I was still underage to play clubs so we played special function gigs for birthdays and anniversaries, graduations, parties for different age groups and we played all kinds of songs, by Bread, Van Morrison, The Four Seasons, we'd specifically learn requests for the event spanning many genres, plus what was popular on the radio at the time. We were called If.

I was playing a lot of solo shows by the time I could drive, playing fifty percent popular songs, and fifty percent originals. I did that for decades 'round New England after college as well. I was playing hotel lounges, and restaurants, and clubs, bars and weddings. There was always a juke box in the venue, so I'd go meet the owner and explain how it would be more interesting to their customers to have a live music. I played the 99 restaurant circuit, and Ground Round's as well!

Did you meet any resistance early on from boys, for being a female guitar player?

Never. I'd bring my guitar to High School to play in between classes and end up with a crowd of kids around me and many of them wanting guitar lessons. Most of them were boys. It did defy gravity that a girl could be so good, it still does, because it's not expected, but woman, girls, can do anything. They always have. They just didn't always get mentioned in the history books.

As far as your guitar mentors, who were the ones who were influences and who did you personally study with?

I would have loved to study with George Harrison & James Taylor. The way I adored and absorbed their playing has certainly been personally transformative for me. Huge influences. Lou Sabini got me on a great path so early. And what I always loved about him was he encouraged me to explore and write and listen and play anything I wanted to. He taught me how to hear and learn how to play by ear from records and there was no stopping me. He was amazed when I came in with note perfect *Mood For A Day*, by Steve Howe at fourteen yrs old, all by ear.

Music is vast and it takes time to sort through and figure out what you will do with all this stuff. Everybody has the same notes and chords and things to play with. But what we all choose to do with it is so interesting. I fell in love with microphones and tape recorders very young. The tools of being a performing and recording artist are equally fun and thrilling for me.

What led to you getting the first female guitar professorship at Berklee?

Just being there as a student in 1978 and finishing the performance program first, in 1982, joining the faculty in 1984 led me there. It's a blast teaching at Berklee. I'm the Beatles' Guitar Professor, an Artist in residence, my job is to keep growing as a musician and share what I love. My students enjoy studying Songwriting, the Creative Process, Artist Survival Skills, the Music of The Beatles, Home Recording, Reading, and all levels of guitar proficiency taught at Berklee, with me. I started the Beatles guitar class and Beatles Ensemble, which is a full band. I teach private lessons at Berklee and via Skype to students all over the world. It's wonderful how technology has made connecting with each other and anything we're passionate about, accessible. Even the evolution of equipment to record has gotten so advanced since I began recording, that the results and the tools we all have now just on laptops alone are better than top notch studios in the past. I love it all.

Did you run in to any resistance from the male teachers?

There was a mixture. Mostly, it felt odd being the only woman teacher in the guitar department for many years. And yet it was totally normal too. There were always more men than woman with musician friends, colleagues and students. There was actually more resistance and judgment about musical styles and artists and who you liked then, and I was teased for playing a Fender Stratocaster. Some would say, "Where's your jazz guitar?" But that's the really amazing twist about being so in love with something like The Beatles your whole life. Whatever pleases you and invites you to become a better you gets you to go deep into what you love, and people think you're silly or geeky about it, then the subject becomes one of your specialties, your expertise in life. I am the Beatles Professor in the guitar department at the greatest music college on the planet. It's quite a giggle when you think about how it started. But for me it was pure fascination and love for The Beatles. I love how their musicianship and sensibilities have shaped me.

How'd you decide to become George Harrison in Beatles tribute bands?

An ad in the paper. The band Get Back (we later changed our name to All Together Now) were looking for a lead guitarist. The ad said something like, "Established Beatles tribute band seeks lead guitarist, vocals a must, George Harrison where are you?" And I got all verclept and called leaving my best Beatles accent asking to meet them. I was on with on thirteen tours with them over twelve years throughout New England, from 1995-2007. I have a lot of hand held videos of us playing good performances are on my YouTube channel.

As far as you know, are there other female musicians playing in Beatles tribute bands?

Oh sure. I've met a few over the years. And there's always more. There are hundreds of thousands of Beatle bands round the globe and many with more woman than we know.

After-Fab is your most recent band. How'd that happen?

Well, this is brand new for me as of October, 2014. AfterFab heard me on YouTube and invited me via email to hear them in Cambridge. They casually mentioned they were looking for a slide player who could sing. I had been eager to be in a band again and was marveling at what a great idea AfterFab was, playing the solo years of George, John, Paul & Ringo. I never heard of any band doing that repertoire note for note as a tribute band. What a cool idea. I was intrigued and wrote back, "I play slide and sing." I attended the show – I loved what I heard, and was invited to the rehearsals and began learning the songs. Music has this wonderful way of bringing magic to the whole body. We've all been listening to these songs since they came out. So we're talking about music from 1970 to the present day, because Paul and Ringo are still releasing new music. These songs mean so much to us because it was the way the Beatles continued to create, grow and

develop as artists. Learning these parts can be so emotional for me. They make me so happy. They're so much fun to play and to program the right sounds for the live shows. And most of these songs I never played in such detail before, and didn't perform them for live audiences before this. So it's a whole new world, a perfect next band for me. What a cool surprise. I love these guys in AfterFab and I'm excited for all the cool shows we have coming up.

Do you see this role of George playing in a tribute band as continuing, or do you see an end to it at some point to concentrate more on your own music?

I've been a performing songwriter and releasing my original music into the world since 1989. I never stopped or let anything interfere. I love writing songs, arranging, playing lots of instruments, doing the overdubs, producing, engineering and mixing my music. [My CDs](#), "Tender Ramble," "Playing with the Pieces," "Blast of Love," "Honeywine," "Back to the Bone," (original guitar instrumentals) "Shadow Language & Among The Ruins" with my band: Two Tru, are available on my website laurenpassarelli.com, [iTunes](#) and [CD baby](#). I have hundreds of unreleased songs and I'm working on a guitar & vocal CD, and a new band CD with a batch of friends guesting with me. I could hear my music in films like Garden State, Crazy, Stupid Love or Eat Pray Love. The indie songwriter, catchy, life affirming music that some folks enjoy.

Top four favorite Beatle songs - either within the Beatles or after the Beatles...

Way too many to mention for many reasons. I love the sound of the recordings, how the song makes me feel, or a special lyric, the vocal performance, lead guitar, bass line, drum sound, or the song itself. So many are tied for first place. Hundreds. Not enough space to list them all here. The thing about The Beatles were they never claimed to be anything special, they were just a good little band that enjoyed rockin' and rollin'. They said, "If we can do it anybody can do it." And it's true. I hope everyone gives themselves permission to enjoy learning anything they want, especially an instrument and making a good noise, as Tom Petty would say.



Lauren Through the Years

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