

Beautiful day, beautiful night

West Broadway. 1:30 PM. Photo: JH.

Thursday, June 7, 2012. Beautiful day, beautiful night. Sunny and maybe 70 with wide moments of bright Sun. Then the billowing grey and purple storm clouds rolled in en masse and threatened the day. Soon thereafter they rolled out again, and the Sun returned.

The plan for the night was first to a booksigning at Archivia, and then the Central Park Conservancy's "Taste of Summer" at the Bethesda Fountain off East 72nd Street. There was also another book-related party (I've been telling you, books and booksignings are often the new hot parties in town). I had tentative plans to attend this one: Taschen Publishers' reception for **Harry Benson** to celebrate his new limited edition book.

For those who are unfamiliar, Taschen is the *crème de la crème* of art photobooks, right up there with yesterday's aforementioned Steidl. These books are Art Collectibles to many, and they are exquisitely published, providing a special feeling about the subject, the photography and the page.

Harry Benson is one of the most prolific contemporary photographers of the last half century. His work is not paparazzi but often has that quality. That's because the eye of the man is *always* working. That, I believe, is the secret. Harry's pictures engage your interest even when posed.

The assignment with the Beatles when they first came to America in the early 1960s was what launched this long career. I remember that visit quite clearly. It was big big news across the nation, to give you an idea of how innocent the world seemed. The Beatles and James Bond; total intellectual, cultural entertainment. The haircut, so revolutionary, even controversial, the irreverence with a smile; all charm. In their hotel Harry got a shot of them jumping up and down on the bed. America was captured beyond description. People said the Beatles changed the world; that's what it felt like.

This new book is of his two years on the road with the mop-tops. In one of their first interviews, a reporter asked



Ringo what he "called" their (then far-out) haircuts.

Ringo replied "I call it Arthur."

The whole world thought this was priceless. Hahahaha. Soon everyone across the world was mop-top. That turned out to be just the beginning for all of us, as well as for the photography of Harry Benson. He was also there with **Muhammad Ali** training for his world championship. He was in the kitchen on the spot in the Los Angeles Ambassador Hotel in 1968 when **Robert Kennedy** was shot.



Harry Benson's first shot of the Beatles disembarking from the BOAC's airliner at Idlewild airport (now JFK) in 1964. This was the first time the Beatles came to America and it was mainstream headlines.

Meanwhile, the memory of **Ringo, Paul, John and George** and their appearance on the *Ed Sullivan Show* on that first trip to America remains a lovely memory for those us who were coming of age.



Cassius Clay holding Ringo Starr in Miami, 1964. Photograph: Harry Benson.

Last night's party was the spectacular version of a New York booksigning. Held at 107 Greene Street downtown, it featured an exhibition and sale of both famous and never-before-seen photographic Harry Benson prints; an interview with Harry by **Reuel Golden**, the Taschen author and editor, and Harry signing this special edition – "personalize copies of this historic book" is how the invitation read. All this while The Tribute String Quartet performed their *Beatles Tribute*.

Harry has published several important photobooks as collectors of his work know. This one, however, is even a cut above. The publishers are sending Harry and his wife **Gigi** on a world tour to publicize it. The airfare alone (for two, no less) tells you everything about this book. Sensational. *The Beatles; On the Road 1964-1966*. Harry Benson, Taschen.