

Creative Displays With a Musical Note

'Variety is the spice of life,' wrote English poet William Cowper, and James H. Hillestad applies that to enhancing toy figure displays with musicians

Text and Photos: James H. Hillestad

Civilian musical groupings can bring unexpected interest to a collection. They are usually a surprise for anyone viewing the collection -- especially those who think that "toy soldiers" can be military figures only.

Including Luciano Pavarotti, Artie Shaw, Elton John and the Beatles in your toy figure displays is like adding a dash of sherry to split pea soup! It injects added

flavor and interest. And while you're at it, please consider incorporating some related memorabilia or complementary background material to set off your display.

The figures highlighted in this article are from my displays in The Toy Soldier Museum located in Cresco, Pa., USA.

They serve to demonstrate the diversity and imagination of some very talented artists.

ELVIS IN VEGAS

CBG Mignot of France is well-known for its fine range of Napoleonic figures, but it also has received accolades for its civilian offerings. Notables include its colorful rendition of the "Crazy Horse Saloon" and "Lido Girls."

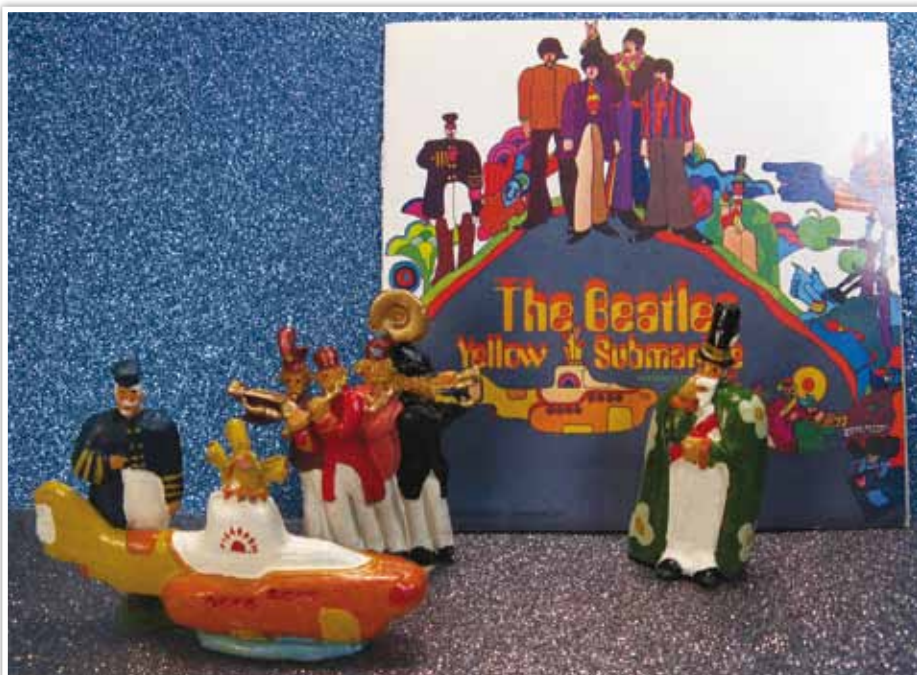
Then there is an eclectic mix by Peter Davis of England, who trades under the name of Little Lead Soldiers. His display

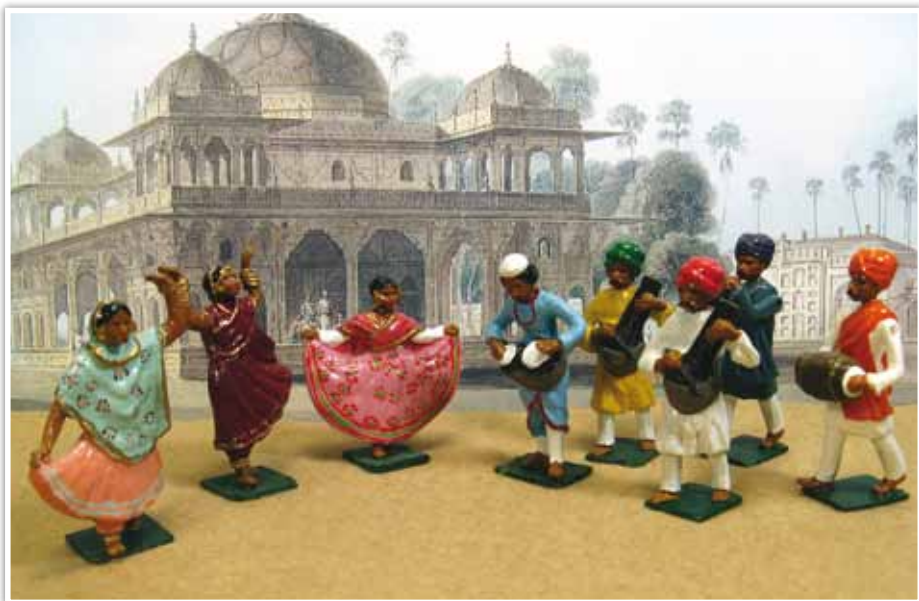
RIGHT: Dixieland band by George Doswell.

BELOW RIGHT: "Yellow Submarine" from the Beatles series by Peter Davis.

BELOW: Elton John performing "Candle in the Wind" by Peter Davis.

BOTTOM: "Keep the Kettle Full" by Trophy.





LEFT: Dancing at the Delhi Durbar by Marlborough.

ABOVE: Band of pigs on wheels by Michael Raymer.

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BELOW LEFT: Operatic Pavarotti performance in miniature by Peter Davis.

BELOW: Vignette of John Lennon playing a grand piano produced by Peter Davis.



BOTTOM LEFT: Jazz band made by Charles Hall.

BOTTOM RIGHT: Jazz performers composed by Charles Hall.





ABOVE: The maker of the canine saxophonist in "Playing Wagtime" is unknown.

ABOVE RIGHT: Musicians from the "Streets of Old Hong Kong" series by King & Country Ltd.

BELOW: Santa Claus quartet by John Eden.

BELOW RIGHT: Georgian era drawing room scene with figures by Phoenix Models.

BOTTOM: Salvation Army band in Britain by Blenheim.



of Luciano Pavarotti at Alice Tully Hall is remarkable. For a change of pace, Peter created an assortment of sets portraying the iconic Beatles and the one and only "Elvis in Vegas."

Someone I think of as a mentor, the late Bill Driscoll from Virginia, created a one-off set of Artie Shaw and his orchestra with vocalist Lena Horne. A friend of Bill's, Walter Dineen of Florida, produced a charming clown band -- check out the "drum horse."

Additionally my good friend and neighbor in Pennsylvania, Martin Ritchie of U.S. Military Miniatures, created a sparkling circus band posed marching.

ROMANS & EGYPTIANS

Stepping back in time, there are British maker John Eden's ancient Romans entertaining in a gladiatorial arena and Egyptian musicians playing for the pharaoh.

Showing the range of his imagination, John has also produced a cheerful Santa Claus quartet, minstrels at an English town fair and a string ensemble of ladies in an Edwardian motif.

From England's Phoenix Models comes a Georgian period trio providing background music in a well-appointed drawing room and a Regency period lady pianist accompanying two male singers. Those figures were painted by the very talented G. Huntley Williams.

Blenheim Military Models of England contributed an eye-catching Salvation Army band. Trophy Miniatures of Wales produced Salvation Army musicians as they would appear at Christmastime.

PIGS ON WHEELS

Introducing a bit of whimsy is Kentucky artist Michael Raymer, with his band of pigs on wheels. Michael's work has been





“Whatever your persuasion, there are musical figures to give new depth to your collection. Rather than have rank after rank of toy soldiers marching in cadence across your display shelves, break it up with unexpected diversions.”

LEFT: William Driscoll's rendition of the circa 1941 Artie Shaw Orchestra gets the crowd dancing.

ABOVE: Regency period parlor musical interlude by Phoenix Models.

BELOW LEFT: Edwardian ladies ensemble by John Eden.

BELOW RIGHT: Band of clowns by Walter Dineen with a “drum horse.”



BOTTOM LEFT: Egyptian musicians performing for a pharaoh produced by John Eden.

BOTTOM RIGHT: Circus band crafted by Martin Ritchie.





ABOVE: "Lonely Hearts Club Band" Beatles set by Peter Davis.

RIGHT: Dancing "Lido Girls" made in France by Mignot.

BELOW: Mignot figures portraying jazz performers in 1920s Paris.



ABOVE: "Bourbon Street Blues" musicians by George Doswell.

BELOW: The Imperial Chinese court by King & Country Ltd.

RIGHT: Minstrels at a town fair by John Eden.



featured in *Antique Toy World* magazine. He is known for his artistry in creating fine brass vehicles, using the lost wax process.

No discussion of the unusual in the toy soldier world would be complete without mentioning the legendary Charles Hall of Edinburgh, Scotland. My collection includes three of his jazz bands. His meticulous attention to dress and realistic animation made him one of the most sought-after modelers in the 1980s.

Following Hall's lead, George Doswell of England created two "foot-stomping" Dixieland band groupings.

EXOTIC & UNUSUAL

Exotic places are represented in this tour of musical toy figure highlights by Andy C. Neilson and company at King & Country Ltd., with two unique musical

displays. One takes place in the Imperial Chinese court. The other group is part of the "Streets of Old Hong Kong" series and features a gala celebration.

England's Marlborough Military Models, inspired by the festivities of the 1903 Delhi Durbar, produced a colorful scene of Indian musicians and native dancers.

Rounding out the unusual is an Old West hoedown at the "Longhorn Saloon" by Sarum Soldiers of England.

So whatever your persuasion, there are musical figures to give new depth to your collection. Rather than have rank after rank of toy soldiers marching in cadence across your display shelves, break it up with unexpected diversions. Your friends and family will be amazed by your eclectic imagination, and your collection will take on another dimension. ■





ABOVE Jazz musicians crafted by Charles Hall.

TOP RIGHT: Beatles figures by Peter Davis portraying the British band's U.S. live TV debut on "The Ed Sullivan Show" Feb. 9, 1964.

BELOW: "Elvis in Vegas" vignette by Peter Davis.



LEFT: The somewhat risqué "Crazy Horse Saloon" by Mignot.

BOTTOM LEFT: Wild West hoedown by Sarum Soldiers.

BELOW: Roman musicians made by John Eden entertain in a gladiatorial arena.



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