

CATCHING UP WITH... BOB HIERONIMUS

# Diving deep into Beatles

Bob Hieronimus knows more about 'Yellow Submarine' than almost anybody, which makes him suddenly in demand.

By CHRIS KALTENBACH: SUN STAFF

**W**hen it comes to yellow submarines, Bob Hieronimus has done just about everything but live in one.

A native Baltimorean whose murals and painted cars made him one of the city's more prominent counterculture figures in the 1960s, Hieronimus has taken on the roles of teacher, founder of a school for the study of metaphysics and mystic arts, and, since 1988, radio-show host (his "21st Century Radio" airs weekdays from 10 p.m. to midnight on WCBM-AM).

But one of the constants over all those years has been a fascination with "Yellow Submarine," a 1968 animated film "starring" the Beatles and their songs (more on that later) that has emerged as one of the era's most enduring pieces of psychedelia.

"Yellow Submarine" is filled with inventiveness and joy. There's Jeremy Hillary Boob, Ph.D., the rotund know-it-all who speaks in verse and has a penchant for well-meaning mischief; there's Young Old Fred, captain of the Yellow Submarine and the last hope for Pepperland; there's the montage of historical figures that accompanies "Eleanor Rigby"; there's the Dreadful Flying Glove and the evil Blu Meanies; and there are enough puns to make even the Marx Brothers envious.

"The first time I saw it, about halfway through, I didn't know what to think," Hieronimus, 58, recalls from his Baltimore County home. "Where in the hell were the Beatles? I didn't realize it was going to be all animation. Finally, I decided I'd pay attention to what was going on and stop worrying about when the Beatles were going to come on ... and I became fascinated."

Fascinated enough to spend almost half his life finding out about the film — making him an authority now much in demand, thanks to MGM's current theatrical and video re-release of the film, complete with enhanced sound, brightened colors and an added sequence to the tune of "Hey Bulldog." Recently, he's been quoted in the *New York Times*, introduced the film at the Senator Theatre and hawked "Yellow Submarine"

merchandise (not his own, but pieces being released in conjunction with the movie) on the Home Shopping Network.

The Beatles' business arm, Apple, had suggested that, if anyone knows about "Yellow Submarine," and especially about the memorabilia, it would be me," says a chuckling Hieronimus. The home shopping stint had him flying into Florida the same day Hurricane Floyd was scheduled to hit the state.

Hieronimus admits the timing of the film could be better, at least as far as he's concerned; his book, "It Was All In the Mind: The Co-Creation of The Beatles' Yellow Submarine," is scheduled to be released early next year.

But that's OK. He loves talking about the film, and he clearly enjoys the spotlight it has shone on him.

He's worked hard to become an expert, spending the better part of a quarter-century gathering pieces of "The Yellow Submarine" story, spending \$3,000 for the film's original script (which, he found, differs dramatically from what ended up on screen) and discovering that the film's creative process left emotional wounds that still have not healed.

One of the first things he discovered is that the success of "Yellow Submarine" really has little to do with the Beatles themselves, except as a source of inspiration.

"It's amazing that this movie ever happened at all, much less that it turned out as well as it did," Hieronimus says. "The Beatles did not want to get involved in this at all, and they had good reason to not want to get involved."

That reason would be a half-hour Saturday-morning kids' cartoon show, called "The Beatles,"



JOHN MAKELY: SUN STAFF

Fond memories: Bob Hieronimus with some "Yellow Submarine" merchandise. He's spent years researching and writing a book about the movie, and it's to be published next year.

that featured bad animation, wasn't very funny and generally ticked the group off. (They fought for years to keep the series off British TV, Hieronimus says.) It was the same people responsible for the series who wanted to feature John, Paul, George and Ringo in a full-length film.

The Beatles "figured that this was going to be nothing more than a 90-minute 'Flintstones' cartoon," Hieronimus says.

But the group was contractually bound to release another movie through United Artists, and at the advice of their manager, Brian Epstein, they grudgingly allowed "Yellow Submarine" to be it. They wouldn't work on the film (other than the songs, their voices were provided by other actors), they provided what they felt were their

worst songs, and they held their collective breaths, fearing the worst.

The film could easily have turned out as bad as they feared. But a group of young, talented and dedicated artists were put to work on the project. "You might call it a happy accident," says Hieronimus, "but I don't believe in those kinds of accidents. I think there's something bigger going on."

Whether by happenstance or divine intervention, the pieces that would soon make up "Yellow Submarine" started falling into place.

Even though "Yellow Submarine" was put together by TVC (for TV Cartoons), the British animation group responsible for the cartoon series, different people were assigned to work on it — most notably German artist Heinz Edelmann, who would be the man most

responsible for the film's look (not Peter Max, who, despite popular belief had little to do with the film). Animators were urged to be creative, to take chances. And the original script, by producer Al Brodax, was thrown out and other writers were brought in.

"The Beatles didn't like Brodax," Hieronimus says. "They thought he was too old. They demanded that they have another writer, so they brought in Lee Minoff, who's now a psychotherapist in New York. His ideas were mostly thrown out the window, but he did suggest some important things, such as the Boob and Old Fred. And he did put a great deal of emphasis on mixing media, which is exactly what the film ended up doing, particularly in the 'Eleanor Rigby' sequence."