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The Monkees reunite: Band plays favorites and rarities on 45th-anniversary tour, including three shows in Indiana

By James Grant of The News-Sentinel
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It's been 45 years since a television show about a madcap group of musicians called the Monkees burst onto TV screens around the world. In honor of that milestone, three of the group's original members — Davy Jones, Micky Dolenz and Peter Tork — are reuniting for a 45th-anniversary concert tour.

The Monkees will come to Indiana for three shows: Sunday at Murat Theatre at Old National Centre in Indianapolis, Tuesday at Morris Performing Arts Center in South Bend and June 30 at Star Plaza Theatre in Merrillville.

For those of you who don't remember or weren't even born yet, "The Monkees" was a television show about a struggling rock group that ran on NBC from 1966 to 1968.

While the show was a hit and earned two Emmy Awards, the recordings made by the group were phenomenally successful, almost dwarfing the success of the series.

The band had three No. 1 hits ("Last Train to Clarksville," "I'm a Believer" and "Daydream Believer"), three more top-10 hits ("A Little Bit Me, a Little Bit You," "Pleasant Valley Sunday" and "Valleri") and four No. 1 albums between 1966 and 1968. At the Monkees' peak in 1967, they outsold both the Beatles and the Rolling Stones combined.

One of the more interesting aspects of the Monkees' saga is that, at the height of their fame, the group fought for and won the right to perform the music on their recordings, which had previously been performed by studio musicians. Thus the fictional TV group became a bona fide recording and touring band.

The group broke up in 1970 but reunited for several popular concert tours — most notably their very successful 1986 tour, which got a big boost from MTV running several marathons of their show.

While it's been 10 years since the Monkees last performed together, Peter Tork says this tour has been a happy experience for the group, especially for him.

"It's been going great," Tork said in a telephone interview. "And I do enjoy myself on stage, and the other two are actors, so I can't tell. They're pranksters — they might be pretending to have a great time and really be soured (laughs). No, I'm sure they're having a great time. They're happy and cheerful and well-fed and sassy."

For a group that took so much flak in the '60s for not playing the music on their first records, audiences will be impressed with the wide range of instruments group members now play.

Tork, a trained musician, plays bass, guitar, banjo, keyboards and French horn. Dolenz, who came to the group mainly as an actor, plays drums and guitar. Jones, who also came to the group mainly as an actor, plays guitar, tambourine and maracas.

Mike Nesmith, the fourth original member of the group, isn't participating in this tour. Tork said there are no plans for him to perform at any of the shows, but Tork didn't rule out a one-time appearance by Nesmith sometime before the tour ends.

At the concerts, longtime fans will be thrilled to hear several songs the Monkees have never performed live, including "All of Your Toys," one of the first tunes the band ever recorded as a truly self-contained group.

Other rarities that fans can expect to hear include "I Don't Think You Know Me," "Someday Man," "Saturday's Child" and "Words," as well as all their major hits and songs from their only movie, "Head."

Tork says the nearly 40 songs that fill their two-hour show and the staging, which includes projected video clips from their TV show and movie "Head," are all determined by one person — Jones.

"What Davy says goes in that department," Tork said. "I've always had questions whether we didn't have to stick to absolutely all the tried-and-true songs. But Davy and some of the promoter people also said let's give the die-hard fans what they want — the songs that are a little bit more obscure."



More Information

Hey, hey, they're back

What: The Monkees' 45th-anniversary tour

When and where:

◆7:30 p.m. Sunday at Murat Theatre at Old National Centre, 502 N. New Jersey St., Indianapolis. Call 1-317-231-0000 for more information or go to www.murat.com.

◆7:30 p.m. Tuesday at Morris Performing Arts Center, 211 N. Michigan St., South Bend. Call 1-800-537-6415 for more information or go to www.morriscenter.org.

◆7:30 p.m. June 30 at Star Plaza Theatre, 8001 Delaware Place, I-65 and U.S. 30, Merrillville. Call 1-800-745-3000 for ticket information or go to www.starplazatheatre.com.

Cost: Murat Theatre, \$65-\$102; Morris Performing Arts Center, \$37-\$100; and Star Plaza Theatre, \$47-\$105.

"I enjoy playing music," Tork added. "It's not a question of whether I'm playing some of the best-known songs or some of the least-known songs. I like the music. If it's good music, I like to play it."

Throughout his more than 45-year career, Tork has struggled with personal problems, survived a bout with cancer, seen fame come and go, and maneuvered through the sometimes turbulent relationships with his fellow Monkees. Yet one thing has remained constant — his love of music.

"I love to play in front of people," Tork said. "I love the life on the road, the life of rehearsing and recording and performing. All of those kinds of things are just wonderful.

"If I could do the Monkees four days a week for the rest of my life, I'd be a very happy camper. It's about performing and being an entertainer. That's the lovely part of my life."