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Reissued editions of the Beatles '1' offer a mix of audio and video options

The audio and audio-video sets are just in time for holiday gift giving.

By James Grant, nsfeatures@news-sentinel.com
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This holiday season, Universal Music Enterprises and the Beatles' Apple Corps. are taking a sad song and making it, if not better, at least a little different.

On Nov. 6, Universal reissued the Beatles' enormously popular "1" CD compilation, which was originally issued in 2000 and has gone on to sell over 30 million copies worldwide. It features their 27 No. 1 United Kingdom and U.S. hits.

The new version of "1" is available in several different configurations designed for every budget (all prices from Amazon.com): CD (music only, \$15.88), CD and DVD set (\$24.99), CD and Blu-ray disc set (\$31.99), DVD (videos only, \$14.99), Blu-ray (videos only, \$19.88) and as "1+" in two DVD and CD set (\$40.99) or two Blu-ray and CD set (\$50.98). The latter two sets both contain a 124-page hardcover book.

On Dec. 4, "1" will also be made available on vinyl with the new stereo remixes and deluxe packaging (\$38.98).

A "1+" limited-edition two DVD or two Blu-ray disc set also features a bonus disc containing an additional 23 rare videos, as well as the new "1" audio disc.

The main draw for fans is the DVDs (or Blu-rays) featuring the promotional videos and television appearances the Beatles made as a group between 1962 and 1970, along with newly remixed sound.

Longtime fans may be familiar with the videos and performances in this new collection, but they have never seen them in such striking quality.

The videos featured in these sets — none of which have ever been previously released in full-length, uncut form — have been cleaned up extensively and restored frame by frame. They also have been color corrected, digitally enhanced and edited by a team of 18 film and video technicians under the supervision of Apple Corps.

All of the videos look far superior to what is available either officially or unofficially, whether it's on YouTube or as a part of the Beatles' own "Anthology" series, which was released in the late 1990s on TV and later on VHS and DVD.

THE SOUND

Although remastered once for CD before in 2011, what makes this new version of the Beatles' "1" CD so special is that the songs have been remixed into brand-new stereo mixes (and in new stereo 5.1 Dolby Digital and DTS-HD surround audio mixes for the DVD and Blu-ray discs).

Giles Martin, son of original Beatles producer George Martin, and Sam Okell produced the sound mixes on this new collection at the famed Abbey Road Studios in England where the Beatles recorded most of their albums. Martin tried to make the new mixes in the collection sound as close to the feel of the original mono hit single mixes, but in stereo and 5.1 surround sound.



Fans of the Beatles have lots of options this holiday season for picking up the remixed version of the group's "1" album, ranging from the audio CD, bottom, which has just the music, to various "1+" sets, such as a two-disc Blu-ray set, top, that has video footage, a booklet and an audio CD. (By James Grant for The News-Sentinel)

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Some of the original stereo mixes have extreme separation with vocals on one side and music on the other and lack the punch of the original mono mixes that were played on the radio when these songs were hits. The Beatles themselves focused more of their attention on the mono mixes, leaving the stereo mixes as an afterthought — especially in their early pre-1967 career.

Giles Martin wanted to improve the sound of these songs without trying to change them drastically from what the Beatles originally created.

While there has been a lot of pro and con reaction from fans online to the new version of “1,” even the two surviving Beatles, Paul McCartney and Ringo Starr, aren’t afraid to see their music’s sound updated.

Martin told Reagan Gavin Rasquinha of The Times of India earlier this month, “If you ask Paul McCartney whether it’s sacred or not, he’ll say that he wouldn’t want their work to be ‘covered in dust’. If there are ways to improve things technically, we should do it. And I think with these new mixes on ‘1,’ they just sound more powerful because they are a throwback to the mono mixes. And, obviously, we have surround sound as well.”

ORIGINAL VS. REMIX

Though I really enjoy the new mixes Martin has created, first and foremost I’m a fan of the original mixes, both stereo and mono. I think there’s a magic in those mixes that can never be replicated, and, up until the last few years, I was not a major fan of remixes.

I must say, though, that while not all of the new stereo mixes on the new version of “1” are successful, on a majority of them Martin has met his goal and brought some of the mono punch to these new stereo versions.

I’m particularly fond of “Paperback Writer,” “Penny Lane” (I love how the bass just dances in this mix and, to me, still evokes the same 1967 sound this song has always evoked), “All You Need is Love,” “Let it Be” and “The Long and Winding Road” (which to me is the best-sounding strings version, as it has a presence that the original mix is lacking).

The 5.1 mixes are fun, too, though I’m not a huge 5.1 listener. But it’s a new listening experience for these songs, which is nice.

The crisp, clean look of the videos in the “1+” set matched with the new audio remixes look and sound great. I do, however, think the Blu-ray is a tad bit too loud, and I really wish “Free as a Bird” wasn’t letterboxed to death. But, minor quibbles aside, this set is fantastic.

FAVORITES

I particularly enjoy the new mixes of “Free as a Bird” and “Real Love” on the bonus disc in the “1+” set. There are new alternate vocals and guitar solos throughout both songs, and Jeff Lynne, who produced these tracks and remixed them for the new set, has toned down the ELO sound of the original mixes, making them sound even more like vintage Beatles recordings.

Like me, most Beatles enthusiasts will probably purchase the “1+” set, as some of the best video material is on the bonus disc in that set. The bonus videos for “Strawberry Fields Forever” and “Hey Bulldog” (one of the only videos to show the Beatles at work inside the recording studio) are highlights of the entire set for me and aren’t to be missed.

As for these new mixes replacing the original mixes, I vote no. I hope that never happens, and I think it won’t, but I do see what Apple Corps. is trying to do. And if McCartney and Starr aren’t worried about the Beatles’ music being seen as sacred, I can live with these sparkling new additions to the Beatles’ catalog.

I love having new little bits and pieces to discover in songs I’ve played a million times, and listening to the new CD makes these songs sound fresh again, which is a good thing. I’m glad to have both.

James Grant works for the Allen County Public Library, is a former librarian for The News-Sentinel and occasionally covers music for The News-Sentinel. This column is the personal opinion of the writer and does not necessarily reflect the views or opinion of The News-Sentinel.

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