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'The Beatles' in Mono' deluxe boxed set, out Tuesday, presents their 1960s music as they intended people to hear it

By James Grant of The News-Sentinel
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The celebration of the 50th anniversary of The Beatles' arrival in America continues this Tuesday with the worldwide release of "The Beatles in Mono," a deluxe limited edition, 14-LP, 180-gram vinyl boxed set that also contains a 108-page hardbound book.

This lavish set, priced at \$374.98 on Amazon.com, contains all of The Beatles' albums that were originally released in mono in the UK in the 1960s and features the following albums:

"Please Please Me," "With the Beatles," "A Hard Day's Night," "Beatles for Sale," "Help!," "Rubber Soul," "Revolver," "Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band," "Magical Mystery Tour" (a U.S. album that was originally issued in the UK as a two-disc 45 rpm set but is now part of The Beatles' canon), "The Beatles" (a two-LP set more commonly known as "The White Album") and "Mono Masters" (a three-LP set that features singles and stray tracks that were available in mono).

There are no versions of "Yellow Submarine," "Abbey Road" or "Let it Be," as they were not released with true mono mixes in the 1960s, only stereo.

Having just received my set, the first thing that grabbed my attention when I took the albums out to look at them was the amazing recreations of the original album covers.

In the 1960s, British albums were released in what are known as "flip-back" sleeves, a common practice in the UK.

These sleeves had the cardboard edges folded back onto the outside rear of the album cover and then laminated on the front, which created a glossy appearance that was quite different from their American counterparts.

This new set has spared no expense in re-creating those original flip-back sleeves in every detail as best they could, including all of the original packaging elements, such as the pull-outs from the "Sgt. Pepper" LP and the posters that came in "The Beatles (White Album)."

Each sleeve is also carefully stored in resealable plastic bag to keep them looking fresh.

And while the sleeves are amazing, it's the music that counts most in this set.

To say that Beatles collectors and audiophiles around the world have been anticipating the release of this collection would be quite an understatement.

The Beatles mono recordings are held in reverence by most audiophiles and collectors as the way The Beatles intended their music to sound.

Up until 1968, mono was the predominant format for pop music. Stereo versions were created as a niche market for those few who owned stereo players, but most teenagers back then listened to their music in mono.

The Beatles themselves were most involved with the mono mixes. Much more time was spent mixing the mono versions of their albums than their stereo counterparts, which were usually dashed off quickly to meet a deadline for release.

The special thing about this new mono album set is that it's the first time The Beatles albums have been mastered completely from analogue sources since the 1980s.

In 2012, The Beatles' stereo albums were released in a similar deluxe vinyl set, but that was made by taking the original masters and then making a digital master from which the stereo vinyl was created.

There was quite a lot of negative feedback from collectors about this process as The Beatles' stereo albums were also "modernized" with compression and other techniques that made the stereo albums sound more digital and less sparkling and dynamic than some thought they should sound.

This time out, these new mono albums were made in the very same manner in which they were made in the 1960s and sound very close to the original pressings.

From Paul McCartney's opening outburst of "1-2-3-4" from "I Saw Her Standing There" from The Beatles' first album "Please Please Me," to the psychedelic wonder of "Strawberry Fields Forever" and "I Am the Walrus" from "Magical Mystery Tour," to the blistering sounds of "Birthday" from "The Beatles" and "Revolution" from "Mono Masters," The Beatles' music sounds as powerful and gripping as it did when it was originally released.

The power and oomph of these mono mixes just makes the songs come alive, and all the vocals sound very lifelike and natural while the music takes on a breath of life that is



More Information

Learn more

For more information about this set, go to www.thebeatles.com/news/beatles-get-back-mono.

missing on most digital transfers.

Highlights of the set for me were the breathtaking vocals from "Here, There and Everywhere" from "Revolver"; the near 3D sounding laughter at the end of "Within You Without You" and the lifelike sound of the acoustic guitar from "A Day in the Life," both from "Sgt. Pepper"; and the blistering punch of "Paperback Writer" and "Revolution" from the "Mono Masters" album.

The hardbound book that's enclosed in the set is also a thing of beauty. It's an extremely well made coffee table-type book and is filled with wonderful photos, many I've never seen. The photos include those of the master tapes, records and ads from the 1960s.

If you want to hear The Beatles music as closely as you can to the way it was recorded in the 1960s, grab either this limited-edition box set or the individual albums as they are also being released separately from this set.

This is most likely the last time these albums will be made in purely analogue form as there is already damage to the original mono master for the "Please Please Me" album, which necessitated in a copy being made for mastering on this set.

This is truly the best and most exciting way to hear The Beatles' music. Every drum beat, every cymbal crash, every vocal comes at you like The Beatles are standing in the room playing just for you.

So grab these mono albums while you can, and, to quote a line from "Sgt. Pepper," "A splendid time is guaranteed for all."