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Re-mixed Beatles "Hollywood Bowl" CD worth the wait



The Beatles' "Live at the Hollywood Bowl," originally released in 1977 on vinyl, has been re-mixed and re-released on CD and digital download. (By Jim Grant for The News-Sentinel)

The release ties in with new documentary film 'Eight Days a Week'

By James Grant, nsfeatures@news-sentinel.com
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Good things come to those who wait, or so the saying goes, and that's certainly the case for Beatles fans with the release of "Live at the Hollywood Bowl" last Friday on CD and digital download.

This new live CD is a tie-in release for the Ron Howard-directed documentary "Eight Days a Week – The Touring Years," which will be shown one time here at 7 p.m. tonight at the Cinema Center. The film chronicles The Beatles' early career, focusing on the mania and madness that enveloped their lives when they were an active touring group from 1962-1966.

The original release of this material, called "The Beatles at the Hollywood Bowl," has been unavailable for decades since its release in 1977 on vinyl and has been on the CD and digital want-list for Beatles and music fans since the Beatles' albums were first issued on CD in 1987.

"The Beatles at the Hollywood Bowl" LP was compiled by the Beatles longtime record producer George Martin. He assembled the best moments from three concerts the Beatles gave at the Hollywood Bowl; one concert from Aug. 23, 1964, and two concerts (Aug. 29 and 30) from 1965.

The Hollywood Bowl shows are the only professionally recorded Beatles concerts recorded specifically for record release and are the best sounding Beatles shows committed to tape.

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Martin chose 13 songs from the three concerts to create what he viewed as the best performances from those shows to make a solid live album that showed just how exciting and energetic the Beatles and their audiences were during the peak of their touring years and the height of Beatlemania.

This new live CD has been carefully remixed by Giles Martin, George Martin's son, who has helmed several recent archival releases of Beatles music including the soundtrack to the LOVE show in Las Vegas and last year's well-received "Beatles 1+" DVD and CD releases.

Martin has cleaned up the sound of these recordings by using the original three-track masters that were recently unearthed in the Capitol Records archive. He used new technology to give better separation to the instruments the Beatles were playing, as well as somewhat lowering the frantic screaming from the over 17,000 people who attended each performance.

The new "Live at the Hollywood Bowl" CD features the same 13 songs and performances that George Martin chose in 1977, but as an added bonus four songs have been included that weren't available previously — "You Can't Do That" and "I Want to Hold Your Hand," both from 1964, and "Everybody's Trying to Be My Baby" and "Baby's in Black," both from 1965.

Finally being able to listen to these recordings on a newly remixed CD is a thrill.

The 1977 live album came out when I was 11 years old and was one of the first Beatles records I bought, as I was just getting into the Beatles music around that time.

I vividly remember being amazed at the raw energy of the crowd as walls of screams erupted throughout the Beatles equally powerful performance, and it was that energy and drive that got me interested in listening to other Beatles recordings, which led to a life-long love affair with the Fab Four.

Listening to the new CD I'm impressed by how much better Ringo's drums and Paul's bass playing come across in these recordings.

There's a punch and clarity that stands out, especially on songs like "Dizzy Miss Lizzy" and "Boys," which both are blistering performances well worth discovering if you've never heard the Beatles live.

I was worried this new CD would sound shrill and loud, but I'm happy to report that Giles Martin did a great job, as this CD sounds terrific.

Martin did indeed cut down some of the screaming to highlight more of the Beatles' performance without stripping the energy from the recordings.

The Beatles voices also stand out more and underline how remarkably good they sounded, as in those days there were no on-stage monitors to allow the Beatles to hear themselves sing over the constant din of screaming from thousands of hysterical teenagers.

While die-hard fans have bemoaned that there are still some performances from those 1964 and 1965 concerts that are unreleased — and truth be told I, too, would love to have the full shows — this new CD is certainly very enjoyable and is the best recorded document of what the Beatles sounded like in concert.

This new collection is certainly aimed at more than just Beatles die-hards, and as an historical document it succeeds in capturing a moment in time that still seems to reverberate with sparkling energy over 50 years later.

The "Live at the Hollywood Bowl" CD is the best I've heard this material sound, and the crackle of energy and excitement generated by the Beatles onstage at the height of their fame is well worth seeking out.

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