

# DVD REVIEWS

## THE BEATLES: Help! (Capitol)

The colorful adventures of the Beatles really are more colorful than ever, as their 1965 classic, their second movie, has been gloriously restored with rich, gorgeous hues, as well as a crisp stereo soundtrack (including score and sound effects.) And while the film itself doesn't surpass *A Hard Day's Night* in quality, the story of Ringo and his coveted sacred ring is still packed with hilarious Beatle wit and ingenious visual gags. Oh yes, and great songs too, including "You've Got to Hide Your Love Away," "Ticket to Ride" and the title song.

But you know that. You've already seen *Help!*, so onto the DVD's bonus features. We get the 1965 trailers for both America and Spain, an advert for a special theater pass, several American radio spots and lots of recent interviews with cast and crew, including director Dick Lester, actress Eleanor Bron, recently departed Beatles aide Neil Aspinall (hats off to Neil for...taking his hat off) and costume designers, hair stylists and stunt doubles.

Their recollections provide amusing anecdotes, like Lester "admitting" that there was much pot-smoking on the set by the Fabs (Bron recalls John offering her a joint, which the naive actress refused, unable to accept something so "expensive") or his ordering the Beatles not to attempt learning to ski until the cameras were rolling, to ensure capturing their foibles on film.

Most interesting is an account of a "secret" Beatles gig in Austria, where the Mops took the stage at their resort's pub for a night of rock'n'roll standards, with Paul on drums, John and George taking turns on guitar, and Lester on piano. Behind the scenes news and home movie footage adorn the recollections (none of the gig, unfortunately).

One fiendish thingy: The Special Features selection entitled "A Missing Scene - Featuring Wendy Richard" is not the excised scene with the future Miss Brahms of *Are You Being Served*, but merely recollections and production photos of the scene, which Lester sensed during shooting just wasn't gelling. Richard's first hint her scene had been cut was when she didn't receive an invite to the premiere.

So will this DVD satisfy Beatles fans? STOP WORRYING! (Michael Lynch)

## THE BEATLES - John, Paul, Tom & Ringo: The Tomorrow Show with Tom Snyder (Shout! Factory)

For a man who served as a TV news anchor in such major outlets as Philadelphia, New York and Los Angeles, the late Tom Snyder is pretty much remembered as the butt of jokes. Dave Thomas on *SCTV* and Dan Aykroyd on *SNL* ripped him with merciless caricatures, Thomas portraying him as a reporter/doctor who talks his patients to death and Aykroyd riffing on Snyder's guffawing pomposity.

Even *Playboy* belittled him in a series of cartoons.

Whether the barbs sliced his thick skin isn't recorded, but Snyder never tried to change his on-camera persona. Cigarette in hand, back when smoking on TV was allowed, he kept asking weird questions and ignoring confused answers. His *Tomorrow Show* bookers figured out that the more offbeat the guests they scheduled the more surreal the show—a wondrous thing in a 1 a.m. time slot. Wendy O & the Plasmatics sledgehammered a TV monitor and blew up a car; Kiss squabbled on camera like petulant little girls; Johnny Rotten seemed about to hawk a loogie at Tom's nose; and, best of all, three Beatles showed up separately to gab, as preserved on *John, Paul, Tom & Ringo* from Shout! Factory.

The John Lennon appearance dates from April 25, 1975, when he was still taking government heat for his alleged connections with subversives out to destroy these United States. The threat of deportation had lessened when Nixon decamped from the White House, but Lennon still brings his immigration lawyer to the studio. He also talks about his days in the Beatles and his post-band life in NYC. It was to be John's last televised interview, and a relaxed one at that, before Mark David Chapman caught up with him outside the Dakota in 1980. Snyder re-aired the interview in tribute the night after the murder.

The Paul McCartney show dates from the year before Lennon's death. Macca was out touting his *Back to the Egg* disc with Wings and has on camera with him wife Linda and bandmates Denny Laine and Laurence Juber. Besides showing the "Spin It On" video, Paul offers up some dubious rock & roll damage control, the consequence of 11 fans having been trampled to death the night before at a Who concert in Cincinnati. Opening more doors would help, he says with a suitable face on.

Ringo also has wares to promote and a new wife, *Caveman* co-star Barbara Bach, along on his November 25, 1981, appearance. *Stop and Smell the Roses* was fresh to record store bins and featured contributions from McCartney and George Harrison, with the latter's "Wrack My Brain" the video Snyder aired that night. A nervous Ringo manages to keep things relatively on keel despite Lennon's then-recent death and Snyder's muddled attempts to draw him out.

*The Tomorrow Show* got the ax the year after Ringo's appearance, not long after Snyder found himself trying to interview a sometimes-raving Charles Manson in prison. That experience, plus having Rona Barrett foisted on him as a co-host before the cancellation, had to be rock-bottom low points in his career. But interviewing three Beatles, even if not together, must have been highs in his televised life. (Bill Wasserzieher)

## CACTUS - Live (MVD)

No one who ventured into the BB King Blues Club & Grill in New York City on June 3, 2006, to see the reunited Cactus will soon forget the experience. A line stretched down an entire city block on 42nd Street in Times Square in anticipation of the sold-out show, which was but a prelude to the electricity inside. From the time a spotlighted, black-clad Jim McCarty kicked things off with the opening feedback squalls on "Long Tall Sally" from his majestic shiny black Gibson Les Paul, the crowd was the sixth member of the band—with a megawatt jolt of energy that the reinvigorated Cactus seemed to feed off of as their set grew more intense.

No DVD or live album could possibly duplicate



that atmosphere, but this one provides the foundation on which it was built—the music itself. Cactus delivered a bluesy, metallic hedonism built for speed, not for comfort. They were reckless drivers fleeing the cops in an early '70s car chase movie, playing blues as bastardized rock'n'roll. Critics, at least the pretentious kind who were always going on about getting "back to the roots," hated the band.

Awakened after a 34-year hiatus, Cactus—minus deceased vocalist Rusty Day—is no longer the speeding Dodge Charger, but rather a precision Ferrari driven by seasoned racers still capable of incredible velocity. McCarty's experimentalism and spontaneity is still there, but his playing is noticeably more fluid and even more powerful when he revisits the solos on songs such as "One Way...or Another" and "Evil." The latter is also a highlight of the famed Tim Bogert-Carmine Appice rhythm section, whose fireworks and drive on "Parchman Farm," "Let Me Swim" and a new tune called "Muscle and Soul" are awe-inspiring. New vocalist Jimmy Kunes has the perfect shout-tone for the Cactus sound, and Randy Pratt—the man as responsible as any for this amazing reunion—checks in with periodic harmonica solos in the spots where Day used to shine. In short, a triumphant return.

Having attended the show myself, I can say that this pro-shot gig with optimal sound captures the music portion well. Ditto on some bonus footage from an October 27, 2006, gig at Jaxx in Springfield, VA—which I coincidentally also attended—featuring one of the night's finest moments: McCarty's improvised solo after "Evil." And for some taste of the atmosphere, the extras offer glimpses of rehearsals and backstage footage that—while not as cool as actually being backstage after the New York show (thank you, Eli Brown)—again give a good idea of the experience of seeing the resurrected Cactus, a band whose few reunion shows have been something to cherish. (Doug Sheppard)

## JOHNNY CASH: The Best of the Johnny Cash TV Show (Sony/Legacy)

For those who bother to put an ear to it, contemporary "mainstream country" sounds more like more pop trash than southern comfort. Today's country music has just as much rap, metal and R&B as it does twang, moving a gazillion units across broad demographics. In many ways though, Johnny Cash's television show helped create this widespread acceptance of country music across America and validated the practice of cross-genre collaborations.

Though it aired for only three years from 1969-71, *The Johnny Cash Show* was a vanguard program. On ABC primetime, Cash himself performed every show but was equally giving to his favorite stars. A compilation of 66 of the best performances, *The Best of the Johnny Cash TV Show*, doesn't run chronologically. But the first guest track does with Bob Dylan, the initial guest from the premier episode, performing "I Threw It All Away," backed by the crack session band from his just-released *Nashville Skyline*. The Man-in-Black, for his own turns, often performed solo acoustic, and often not in black at all but in brilliant and embarrassing shades of blue, mauve,

