

The Beatles (the White Album): 50th Anniversary - 7 CD Deluxe Set Apple, 2018 / ASIN: B07HKK3YV5 / (RRP) £120.00



Following on from last year's successful 50th anniversary release of *Sgt Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band*, the 1968 *White Album* also gets a special deluxe release. At the time they recorded this album, The Beatles were going through a turbulent period. John Lennon and Paul McCartney were writing separately, George Harrison was writing more songs but was still not getting enough album space and Ringo Starr was so fed up with the band's bickering that he walked out during the sessions. In spite of that, The Beatles produced one of their best albums as it is recognised today but not when it was originally released. There are some tracks in this set that featured on *Anthology 3* but apart from those recorded during the *Esher Demos* session, very few tracks on CDs 4 to 6 feature on *Anthology 3*.

CDs 1 and 2 feature the original album remixed superbly by Giles Martin, son of George Martin. For those of us who know the album inside out, CDs 3 to 6 are by far the most interesting. CD 3 features the famous 'Esher Demos' which were recorded at George's home in Esher during May 1968, shortly after The Beatles returned from India. These tracks have been available on bootleg for many years and are at last given an official release. The bootleg (*From Kinfauns To Chaos*) is often ranked as the best Beatle bootleg ever and from listening to this official release it's easy to see why. Seven of these tracks did appear on *Anthology 3* but here we have virtually the entire session. The tracks on the CD are put together in the final album track list, not in the order of the session. It also includes 'Sour Milk Sea' which was recorded by Apple artist Jackie Lomax. CDs 4 to 6 contain 50 extra recordings in recording date order made up of many unreleased takes. The fact that they are in recording date order gives us a great insight into the creation of the album. It also includes out-takes of 'Lady Madonna' and the backing track to 'The Inner Light'. An interesting out-take is the song 'Good Night'. This features the vocals over an electric guitar and bears no resemblance to the finished orchestral version. There is apparently a 27-minute version of 'Helter Skelter' in the vaults but this hasn't made the album. We are, however, treated to a 13-minute version of the song. The Who had recorded the track 'A Quick One While He's Away' for their 1966 album 'A Quick One'. At over 9 minutes, it was one of the longest tracks recorded by a rock band at the time. Apparently, Paul was keen to record an even longer track and 'Helter Skelter' fitted the bill. With 'Hey Jude' just making over 7 minutes due to the size of the single vinyl record, which was adjusted to make the grooves as close as possible for this release, The Beatles were looking for a track on the album at a length that would better The Who. The final version of 'Helter Skelter' finished at just under 5 minutes even though longer versions existed. 'Revolution 9' comes close at just over 8 minutes.

There was always a competitive rivalry between the bands in the 60s which inspired great music. *Rubber Soul* inspired The Beach Boys to record *Pet Sounds* which in turn inspired The Beatles to record *Sgt. Pepper*. It was the same with The Who. Disc four starts with Take 13 of 'Revolution 1', the acoustic take without the electric guitars which were later added. The track has a greatly extended finish to that on the final version, some of which ended up on 'Revolution 9'. The rehearsal for 'Everybody's Got Something to Hide Except For Me and My Monkey' is purely the instrumental and bears only a brief similarity to what eventually appeared on the finished album. Take 14 of 'Revolution' is also just the main instruments guitars and drums. It shows what a great rock band The Beatles were despite all the problems they were having at the time. Indeed, I find the instrumental takes the most interesting on the entire set.

The most interesting track on disc five is 'St. Louis Blues' a short studio jam previously unreleased with mainly acoustic guitar and vocals from Paul. Disc five also sees George come into his own. One of the excellent 'Not Guilty' outtakes is featured. How this didn't make the finished album remains a mystery to me. It certainly fits with the other material. Take 27 of 'While My Guitar Gently Weeps' shows how the song had developed from those early acoustic takes. As George said, "I like the way it suddenly changes into a song". 'What's the New Mary Jane' also gets an official release at last. Written by John in India. Mary Jane is a vernacular term for marijuana, which may explain weirdness of the song and maybe explains why it was never released officially at the time. The boys also break into Elvis mode on this disc playing '(You're So Square), Baby I Don't Care'.

Disc six has some studio jams. 'Blue Moon' features Paul on acoustic guitar and vocals and 'Los Paranoias' a reggae type song again featuring Paul on vocals. An early version of 'Step Inside Love' features Paul only. It was later given to Cilla Black who had a massive hit with the song. The very first take of 'Can You Take Me Back' appears here in full. It was later edited and became the link between 'Cry Baby Cry' and 'Revolution 9' on the final album. Take two of 'Birthday' is just the instrumental (minus the bass) and shows the song is almost complete even at this early stage. Disc seven is a Blu-ray disc featuring various album mixes. The set comes complete with the original inserts available with the original 1968 album. The set also comes with a book full of unpublished photographs, copies of handwritten lyrics, recording sheets and details of the sessions that took place. It also features a piece on the 'Mad Day Out' with photographs from that day that I haven't seen before. It closes with one of John's drawings from Nov '68 of the four Beatles seemingly united. The slip case slides across the set to reveal the four Beatles against a white background and the track listing on the back. Apple have done a great job on this release and can hopefully continue with *Abbey Road* one of my all-time favourite Beatle albums as it reaches its 50th anniversary in 2019.

Ernie Sutton