



“EIGHT DAYS A WEEK”: Impressions of Ron Howard’s Beatles Film

By Alan Chrisman

I just saw the new Beatles film, “Eight Days a Week” and these are some of my impressions. I didn’t think I would actually like it that much. The Beatlemania years, frankly, don’t interest me as much as their more interesting Liverpool and Hamburg beginnings or their more creative period in the studio. The usual story is that, most of the time, they were just going through the motions, unable to hear themselves play, with all the screaming fans’ madness (especially near the end of their “Touring Years”, as the movie’s subtitle is called).

I thought director Ron ("Happy Days") Howard might only cover the nice parts of Beatlemania. He does in the first half of the film and captures the pure energy of their early performances. He has assembled some not usually-seen footage and photos of their early concerts and appearances in Liverpool and Europe. These sometimes black and white images give it an almost old newsreel and historical feel. The film does seem primarily aimed at the North American market though. There were only a couple Liverpool interviewees included in the theatre version, except for some trusted Beatles-insiders like roadie and later Apple director, Neil Aspinall (although I understand the later-to-be-released Deluxe 2 DVD version will include more of these and lots more).

Howard also puts the Beatles Invasion into context with the tumultuous events the U.S.A. was going through in the mid-60's with the Vietnam War, Civil Rights demonstrations, and the assassination of JFK, which had only happened a few months before. The American people, especially its teenagers, were certainly ready for something to lift them out of their depression. Along come these 4 English lads with the funny Liverpool accents and humor and it's just the right medicine. The Fab Four did so with its own version of the, ironically, America's export, rock and roll, and the simple but catchy words and rhythms of their early original songs. But what struck me again, upon seeing the film, is just how young and mainly female so many of their fans were. For by this time, The Beatles themselves were already grown men in their early 20's, playing to some only half their age. Some of the most interesting and humorous moments for the movie audience, I was with anyway, was seeing again the complete hysteria they created in their fans (remember, early attendees of their performances in the Cavern and Hamburg, evidently, didn't originally scream).

But by '66 and for most of the rest of the film, the whole atmosphere begins to change around The Beatles and they themselves could do little to contain it. Of course, there was the infamous "we're more popular than Jesus" Lennon remark and the reaction it caused. But it wasn't only in America that they began to feel a backlash; there were death threats in Japan and, in the Philippines, they barely escaped when its First Lady Imelda Marcos felt snubbed. Howard has said in interviews promoting the film, that he didn't want to go into dark corners. But I

have to give him credit for also not shying away from this part of their story too. For it seemed the once innocent teen hysteria had indeed turned into a far more dangerous form of madness. Howard includes excerpts from John and George's recorded comments and also present day interviews with Paul and Ringo on both, the good and bad, aspects of this period.

The pall of these later more disturbing times toward the end of their touring years, which somewhat descends on the last half of the movie, is fortunately broken by his choice to also include their famous last public appearance on their Apple company's rooftop in 1969. What this reveals once again, is that even to the end (which they would also demonstrate on their last recorded album, Abbey Road) these were first and foremost musicians and original songwriters. Once they decided to finally get off the road because of the mounting pressures they were feeling, it would also allow them more time to spend in the studio and become more and more creative artists and not just entertainers.

Also shown in the movie theatre after, was a half-hour film of their '65 Shea Stadium concert. With improved color footage and remixed sound for this project by George Martin's son, Giles (although some in the particular theatre I was in, said the sound wasn't that good-but it may be fine in the movie and DVD itself), it shows just how good of performers they could be, even in often chaotic conditions. Ringo says that they really did try to always give their best-all four of them. You can tell by their on-stage jokes that they are still having fun-most of the time. In the Shea Stadium show, Paul does one of his best, but perhaps underrated rockers, "I'm Down", with which they often ended their concerts, but for some reason was never released on a regular Beatles album(it was the B-side of the "Help" single). John seems to be his old self, mugging and delivering gobbledigook asides and Paul is always the consummate showman. George is the musician, making sure he doesn't miss a single guitar note and Ringo is driving the beat and shaking his hair. They alone were in the eye of the hurricane, but the film does seem to capture what it must have been like. Howard's title for his film is appropriate, for it really was "Eight Days a Week." As I said, the DVD will be released later this fall with some interesting extras. But I would recommend, if

you can, going to see this film still in the movie theatre, and getting that feeling of enjoying it with other fans, which is what the best of Beatlemania was all about.

“Eight Days a Week” movie trailer <https://youtu.be/OfFyZzqPDws>