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NO DEPRESSION

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Two Major Releases Mark the 50th Anniversary of Days of Future Passed

The Moody Blues - [Days of Future Passed \(50th Anniversary Deluxe Edition\)](#) and [Days of Future Passed Live](#)



When the Moody Blues entered a Decca recording studio in October 1967, they were a modestly successful British Invasion act with one likable Merseybeat hit single to their credit, 1965's "Go Now." Their contract with the label was about to expire and they owed several thousand pounds to Decca. In exchange for having

the debt canceled, they agreed to make a rock version of Dvorak's *New World Symphony* that the label wanted to use to showcase a new stereo audio format.

But the weeklong Decca session didn't work out as planned. Instead of a Dvorak recording, it produced *Days of Future Passed*, an album that successfully fuses rock and classical in a performance that profits substantially from the contributions of composer/conductor Peter Knight and his London Festival Orchestra (a nonentity that was named for the occasion). The album, now regarded as an early linchpin of progressive rock, was the precursor to such efforts as Emerson, Lake & Palmer's take on Mussorgsky's *Pictures at an Exhibition*, Procol Harum's album with the Edmonton Symphony Orchestra, and pretty much the entire Electric Light Orchestra catalog. A song cycle about a day—sort of like the Beatles' "A Day in the Life," which came out months earlier, but much longer and musically quite different—it was also among the earliest concept albums.

Fans took a little while to discover the record, which appeared in November 1967, but they eventually did: "Tuesday Afternoon" was a minor U.S. hit about nine months after *Days of Future Passed* appeared; "Nights in White Satin," meanwhile, scored quickly in the U.K. but didn't become a hit in the U.S. until the LP had been out for five years (at which point it made it all the way to No. 2). The album itself took six months to reach *Billboard's* Top 200, but then spent two years on the charts and ultimately reached No. 3.

If record buyers were a bit slow to catch on, critics were even slower. Journalists regularly derided *Days of Future Passed*, and the other Moody Blues efforts that followed, as pretentious and lightweight with *Rolling Stone*, for example, savaging the group as "truly crass" purveyors of "easy-listening psychedelia" whose "self-importance" was "offensive." OK, so they were not the Grateful Dead and their poetry—especially the spoken bits on *Days of Future Passed* and on later songs like "Balance" (from *A Question of Balance*)—could seem both trite and grandiose.

But you don't have to listen more than once to the Moody Blues' early albums to understand why they've sold many millions of records—and why some critics have softened to the point where the group are now finally about to be admitted into the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame. Even *Rolling Stone* has reassessed, listing *Days of Future Passed* in 2007 as one of 1967's essential albums.

That it is, thanks to indelible melodies, inventive arrangements, the winning classical/rock blend, and frequently gorgeous vocals, especially by the group's Justin Hayward on standouts like "Nights in White Satin" and "Forever Afternoon (Tuesday?)." So I'm glad that the group have marked the 50th anniversary of the album's release with two new collections. *Days of Future Passed (50th Anniversary Edition)* embraces two mixes of the 1967 album, numerous bonus tracks, and a DVD with audio and video content. *Days of Future Passed Live*—which is available on Blu-ray, DVD, and CD—preserves, for the

first time, a live performance of all of the album's music (and more) with a full orchestra.

Let's start with the three-disc 50th anniversary edition of *Days of Future Passed*, which begins with the LP's original 1967 stereo mix. This is what you've heard only if you have the album's initial vinyl release. Because the master tapes for that record deteriorated, a 1972 remix—also featured in this package—was used for reissues between 1978 and 2017, including all CDs. The original mix was recently recovered and transferred digitally for this collection.

I haven't made a careful side-by-side comparison, but the mixes don't sound the same to me, and the album's Wikipedia entry details a rather long list of notable differences. On the 1972 version, for example, "Dawn Is a Feeling" begins more abruptly; "The Sun Set" is missing some piano and percussion parts, and some of the strings near the end of "Nights in White Satin" are out of sync with the song's main body. If you've been listening for years to the later mix, you'll find it interesting to hear the earlier one.

There's a lot more on this collection's two CDs, including alternate mixes of "Forever Afternoon (Tuesday?)," "Dawn Is a Feeling," and "Twilight Time"; a version of "The Sun Set" without the orchestra; and A and B sides of three period singles, among them the hit version of "Nights in White Satin" that employs Mike Pinder's Mellotron rather than the orchestra; and "Love and Beauty," the first Moodies recording to feature his Mellotron. Also here are nine BBC radio performances, including three *Days of Future Passed* selections and a flute-spiced cover of the Animals' "Don't Let Me Be Misunderstood" that hints at the Moody Blues's R&B roots while also suggesting where they were headed.

Finally, we have the set's DVD, which showcases performances of "Peak Hour," "Forever Afternoon (Tuesday?)," and "Nights in White Satin," all from a 1968 French television program. Neither the black-and-white picture nor the sound are up to today's standards, but the musicianship is excellent and it's a kick to see the young group in their mod attire and period haircuts. It's also particularly interesting to hear this version of "Peak Hour," which shows the band mining territory that really isn't all that far from what contemporaries like the Who, the Small Faces, and the Move were exploring.

The highlight of the DVD, though, is its 5.1 mix of *Days of Future Passed*, which was crafted from Tony Clarke's 1972 quadrophonic master. Played on a good surround system, it will deliver the best-sounding version of the original album you've ever heard.

Speaking of fantastic audio quality, that's one of many pleasures afforded by *Days of Future Passed Live*, which on Blu-ray features DTS-HD Master surround sound and was filmed last year at the Sony Centre for the Performing Arts in Toronto. At the helm for this concert are the group's three remaining original members, guitarists Justin Hayward and John Lodge and percussionist

Graeme Edge. (The two other musicians who played major roles in the band's early years are keyboardist Mike Pinder, who left in 1978, and multi-instrumentalist Ray Thomas, who retired around 2002, after 38 years with the Moodies, and died in January of this year. They are remembered via photos that appear on a screen behind the stage during the Toronto performance.)

Filling out the band for the new live recording are four other musicians who help to recreate the classic Moodies sound. Among them are multi-instrumentalists/vocalists Norda Mullen, who has toured with the group since Thomas retired, and Julie Ragins, who has played with them since 2006; and keyboardist Alan Hewitt and percussionist Billy Ashbaugh, who have worked with the Moodies since 2010 and 2016, respectively. In place of Peter Knight (who died in 1985) and his ad hoc London Festival Orchestra, the concert features conductor and musical director Elliot Davis and his orchestra, who do a magnificent job. (Knight's original arrangements were not kept, incidentally, so Davis and co-arranger Pete Long had to recreate them.) Actor Jeremy Irons appears on the screen behind the performers, reciting the spoken parts.

A motley assortment of songs from throughout the Moody Blues's career bookend the *Days of Future Passed* performance: the group deliver nine songs from other albums before the orchestra comes onstage; another two, with the orchestra, serve as encores. All are well performed, and some of these numbers—including "Your Wildest Dreams," "I Know You're Out There Somewhere," "The Story in Your Eyes," and "Question"—rank with the group's best work. But there are several questionable choices here, such as "Steppin' in a Slide Zone," "Say It with Love," and "I'm Just a Singer (In a Rock and Roll Band)"—all weak tracks from relatively weak albums. A bonus feature, *Remembering Days of Future Passed*, offers consistently interesting, newly filmed reminiscences by Hayward, Lodge, and Edge.

But the main event on *Days of Future Passed Live* is the concert recreation of the entire 1967 album, and it's terrific. Hayward, Lodge, Edge, and their new bandmates do justice to the excellent material, and Peter Knight's orchestral compositions shine in this performance, thanks to Davis and his ensemble. An amateurish light show—images projected on a screen behind the stage—is about the only thing about this performance that didn't impress me. For anyone who loved *Days of Future Passed* in 1967, this new concert recording will bring back memories while demonstrating how well the music holds up a half century later.

Days Of Future Passed Live (Extended Trailer)



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