

## Video Game Review: Everyone Should Play ‘The Beatles: Rock Band’

Submitted by [BrianTT](#) [1] on September 9, 2009 - 12:03pm

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CHICAGO – “The Beatles: Rock Band” is easily the most fulfilling music gaming experience to date. As someone who has played all of the “Guitar Hero” and “Rock Band” releases so far, I can tell you from experience that most of these titles are easy to pick up and put down without a concrete narrative to drive a player from beginning to end. “The Beatles: Rock Band” has turned the music game sub-genre into something it hasn’t been yet - a complete journey instead of just a collection of songs.



Video Game Rating: **4.5/5.0**

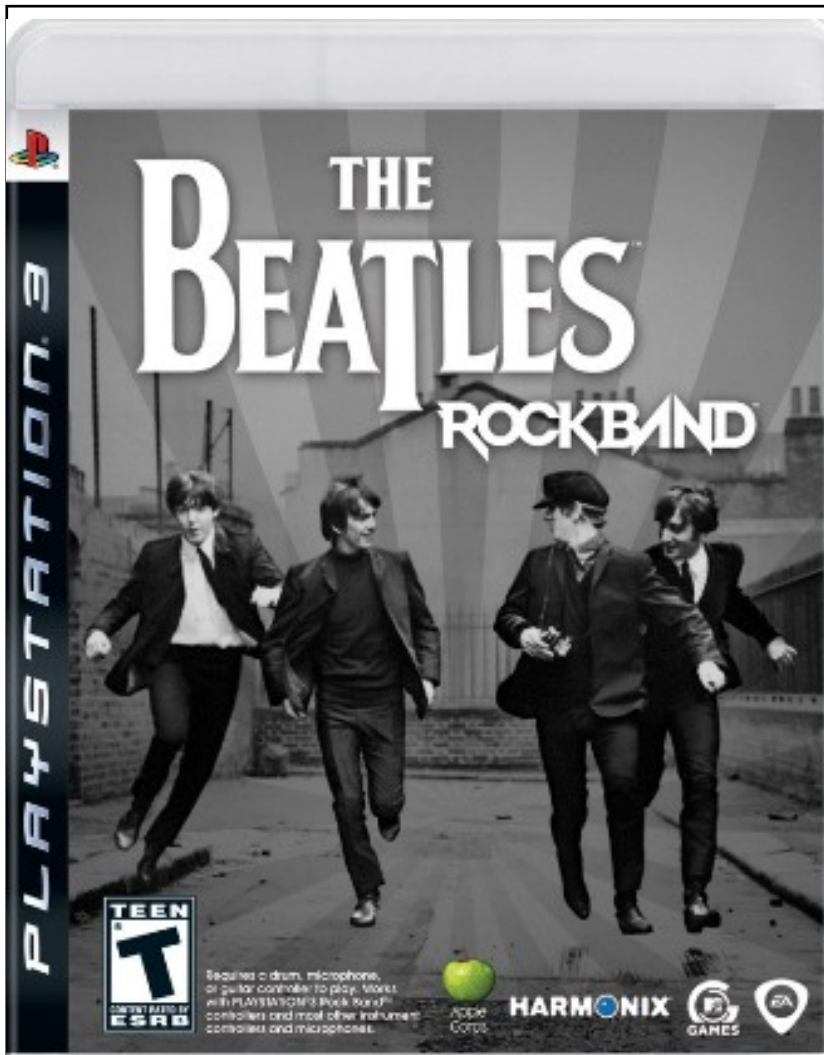
When “The Beatles: Rock Band” came into our office, I was on my way out for a Labor Day weekend, so I handed the title off to a freelance staff writer named Matthew Priest, who also happens to be an enormous Beatles fan and the lead singer of a great Chicago band, [Canasta](#) [17]. Since then, I’ve had time to play through “The Beatles: Rock Band” in its entirety, but I want to include Mr. Priest’s wonderful insights into the game from his viewpoint as a writer and musician himself.



The Beatles: Rock Band

Photo credit: Harmonix/MTV Games

One of the first words that Matthew used to describe the game is “communal,” and that’s a great way to describe the few hours that you and your friends can spend with the legacy of the greatest band in the history of music. As anyone even remotely aware of The Beatles knows, this was a complete band all around, with Paul, John, George, and Ringo all bringing something to the studio and the stage. It’s remarkable how much that sense of teamwork in the creation of the music has been transported to the game that bears their name. In-person or with an online band, “The Beatles: Rock Band” is the one music game that’s most attuned to the word “Band” in its title.



The Beatles: Rock Band

*Photo credit: Harmonix/MTV Games*

Part of the communal feeling created by "The Beatles: Rock Band" stems from the structure of the game, one that takes players through the shockingly brief career of the classic band (look at the catalog of the band and don't forget that they were only together from 1962 to 1969... mind-blowing).

Players start in a small club and progress through major events in the history of the band like their appearances at Shea Stadium and on The Ed Sullivan Show. The live settings are fun, but the later half of the game is truly remarkable as the band goes into the studio and every song is accompanied by ridiculously beautiful visuals like animated music videos to go with tunes like "Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band" and, my personal favorite song to play in the game, "While My Guitar Gently Weeps".

"The Beatles: Rock Band" is inarguably the best looking music video game to date, one that takes the concept of an animated band to a new level. The best compliment I can pay the game is that I was actually distracted enough by the gorgeous backgrounds that they caused me to miss a note every now and then. This title is a leap forward visually, going well above and beyond the typical presentation of musicians in the genre.



The Beatles: Rock Band

*Photo credit: Harmonix/MTV Games*

The sound is similarly perfect. As Matthew says, "When you're playing the raw, stripped down stuff from both their early days and final days, the instruments and voices sound nice and separate, so you can easily pick out the different parts and it gives the impression of four guys playing music together in a space. And then conversely, with the middle period stuff, when they were experimenting more with a bigger, more complex sound, making full use of studio multi-tracking, it sounds as huge and full as ever."

One of the most buzzed advancements in "The Beatles: Rock Band" has been the addition of vocal tracks on top of the lead. As Matthew writes, "The backing vocals! They totally work! And, not unlike backing vocals in reality, a lot of enthusiasm can make up for some sloppiness..."



so they were tons of fun for folks to try, without having to worry that anything less than perfection would derail the song and cause the band to fail.”

So, the video, audio, and narrative experience are all perfectly designed, but what about the set list? There are some wonderful, unusual, surprising choices like “Dig a Pony,” “Boys,” and “I Me Mine” and each chapter in the life of the band feels wonderfully fleshed out.



The Beatles: Rock Band

Photo credit: Harmonix/MTV Games

The one problem with the set list comes down to size. Most Beatles songs are rather short and there are less than 50 in the entire game. It feels like Harmonix is simply waiting to release more songs on DLC when they could have included another chapter or two in the actual title. There are some obvious choices (“Penny Lane,” “Strawberry Fields Forever,” “You Won’t See Me,” “Happiness is a Warm Gun,” “Glass Onion”) that would have worked for an entire band, and their absence feels a bit like double-dipping for future charges in DLC - entire album versions of “Abbey Road” (on October 20th, 2009), “Sgt. Pepper’s Lonely Hearts Club Band” (November), and “Rubber Soul” (December) have already been confirmed.

With multiple track packs on the market, no one can claim that the “Rock Band” franchise doesn’t know how to make consumers keep paying and I worry that our quantity-driven market will cause some fans to look at the nearly-twice-as-many songs in “Guitar Hero 5” and pick that one up instead simply because it’s more tunes for the buck. (Watch for a full review of that title on Friday.)

You can argue about the quantity but never the quality of “The Beatles: Rock Band”. Even for two hardcore Beatles fans like Matthew and myself, the game is nearly an educational experience. Priest puts it best, “I mean, everyone knows that the Beatles had unforgettable melodies, sung by two unmistakable vocalists/lyricists in Paul and John and I’d say that they’re also pretty famous for their guitar riffs. But playing this game brings to light just how inventive Ringo’s drumming was; how badass Paul’s bass fills were; the genius and beauty of the handful of tunes written by George; how seamlessly all of their backing vocals blended into the leads.



The Beatles: Rock Band

Photo credit: Harmonix/MTV Games

As with most musicians, I’ve definitely spent some time paying close attention to that kinda stuff in the past but had never quite realized exactly how impressively aligned the stars must’ve been when each of those songs was written and recorded. Amazing.”

What makes me smile and honestly moves me emotionally about “The Beatles: Rock Band” is that the game is destined to bring my favorite band to an entirely new generation who probably aren’t familiar with the band because they can’t play them on their iPod. I know parents of young children who have told me that their kids play the “GH” and “RB” games and the thought of this title being a learning experience for a whole new generation makes me smile. Beatlemania never dies. It just goes into hibernation every once in awhile. It’s back.

*‘The Beatles: Rock Band’ was released by MTV Games & Electronic Arts and developed by Harmonix. It is rated T (Teen). The version*

*reviewed was for the PS3, but the title is also available for the XBox 360 and Wii. It was released on September 9th, 2009.*



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