



THE  TIMES

The Sessions at Albert Hall, SW7



Some 45 actors and musicians crowded into a full-sized replica of Abbey Road's famed studio two Tom Oldham

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So now we know how many Beatles impersonators it takes to fill the Albert Hall. A total of 45 actors and musicians crowded into a full-sized replica of Abbey Road's famed studio two for this remarkable in-the-round performance. Two John Lennons, two Paul McCartneys, two George Harrisons and three Ringo Starrs were backed by a 20-piece orchestra and an unseen seven-piece live band to recreate 60 Fab Four classics in just under three hours, from *Please Please Me* and *She Loves You* to *Yesterday*, *Eleanor Rigby* and *Blackbird*.

Part concert, part drama and part historical reconstruction, the Sessions is the long-cherished pet project of Stig Edgren, an LA-based producer who has staged large-scale live events for pop superstars, presidents and popes. The show's observational documentary elements are drawn from the memoirs of Geoff Emerick, the studio engineer who assisted George Martin on numerous Beatles' albums. Both men were here played on stage by actors, the latter also serving as narrator. An opening dedication to Martin, who died last month, drew warm cheers.

The world is already saturated with Beatles' jukebox musicals, but *The Sessions* is a cut above, a technically dazzling audio-visual spectacle built around forensically detailed facsimiles of the most beloved back catalogue in pop. Just as impressive as the music was the ingenious stage design by the concert architects Stufish, boxing in the studio space behind huge transparent video walls.

The first act felt a little airless, the music rushed, the dialogue leaden. Thankfully, the second half minimised the dramatic asides and settled into more of a straight rock gig, especially the boisterous, psychedelic *Sgt Pepper* sequence. The harp-driven *She's Leaving Home* was a spine-tingling highlight, while *A Day in the Life* earned loud jubilation with its immortal lyric about the

Albert Hall. A final rousing rendition of *Hey Jude* closed the show on a wave of Last Night of the Proms euphoria. Even for a Beatles agnostic like me, hearing these brilliant, catchy, concise, witty, hope-filled songs played with such power and precision triggered a joyous rush of Proustian sensory nostalgia.

Brighton Centre, Apr 6; then touring from April 30: thesessionslive.com

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