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## 'Hey hey, it's the Monkees'

### Iconic '60s pop group releases "Good Times!" - its first new album in 20 years.

By James Grant, nsfeatures@news-sentinel.com  
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Here they come, walking down the street, once again.

The Monkees (Micky Dolenz, Mike Nesmith, Peter Tork and the late Davy Jones) have romped across TV screens for more than 50 years this upcoming September and, in celebration, their first new album in over 20 years — called "Good Times!" — will be released Friday on Rhino Records.

For the uninitiated, The Monkees wasn't initially an actual group but the cast of a TV show that also was called "The Monkees," which premiered Sept. 12, 1966, on the NBC television network.

"The Monkees" ran on NBC from 1966-1968 and dealt with the madcap adventures of a struggling rock group that lived in a beach house in California. They emulated The Beatles while trying to pay the rent in their search for fortune and fame.

The Monkees, the group, was born from the demand for music for the television show, which resulted in singles and albums being released that turned out to be enormously successful, eventually dwarfing the success of the Emmy-winning television series.

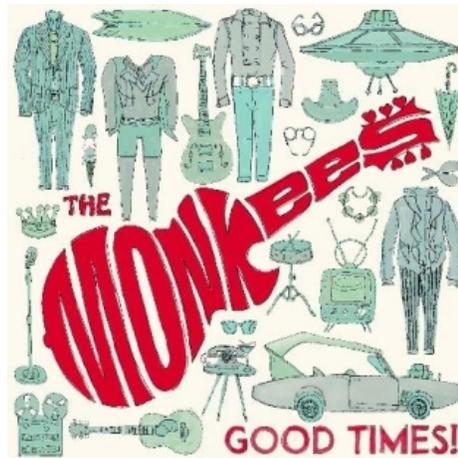
From 1966-68 The Monkees, the musical group, had six Top Ten hit singles, including three No. 1s and four No. 1 albums and at one time in 1967 outsold both The Beatles and The Rolling Stones combined.

The Monkees continued to exist as a musical group well beyond the cancellation of "The Monkees" TV show in 1968 and morphed from the imaginary television group into a genuine musical band that toured, recorded and performed outside the confines of a network television show.

After reuniting as a threesome without Nesmith in 1986 after 16 years apart, The Monkees found renewed fame when MTV rebroadcast their TV show resulting in a massively successful concert tour and new recordings in 1986, 1987 and again in 1996 (this time with Nesmith).

With songs written by the likes of Carole King and Gerry Goffin, Neil Diamond, Boyce and Hart, not to mention group member Nesmith, The Monkees continue to generate a lot of interest and have multiple generations of fans who are continually discovering the group through reruns of their television show.

So here we are in 2016, 50 years after the television show premiered, once again hopping on the last train to Clarksville via a new batch of recordings aimed at



The Monkees are releasing their first new album in 20 years, "Good Times!" (Courtesy photo)



The Monkees have released "Good Times!," their first new album in 20 years. Shown here, along with the new album cover, are action figures of The Monkees released for their 50th anniversary along with the "Classic Album Collection" 10 CD box set released for the 50th anniversary. The Monkees TV show debuted 50 years ago. (By Jim Grant for The News-Sentinel)

### More Information

To hear samples from The Monkees' "Good Times!," check out some of the official links from The Monkees YouTube page:

"She Makes Me Laugh": <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kpp-Ry2ZNhY>

"Me & Magdalena": <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7JzXSTs2a10>

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celebrating the spirit of fun and adventure generated by the TV show "The Monkees" as well as Top Forty radio circa 1966/1967.

**In concert**

The Monkees will be here for a concert at 7:30 p.m. June 7 at Foellinger Theatre.

Because of The Monkees' 1980s rebirth in popularity, a lot of current indie rock groups and performers grew up as fans of The Monkees music and have been inspired to use that mid-1960s pop sound of Monkees recordings in their own work.

Current musical indie artists such as Adam Schlesinger from Fountains of Wayne, who produced "Good Times!," as well as Andy Partridge (XTC), Ben Gibbard (Death Cab for Cutie), Rivers Cuomo (Weezer) and renowned Britpop composers Noel Gallagher (Oasis) and Paul Weller (The Jam) contributed songs to the new album along with songs written by Dolenz, Nesmith and Tork, resulting in a joyous celebration of the sound of The Monkees and simultaneously the mid-1960s.

Take a blender and puree The Monkees, The Beatles, and Brian Wilson, add a dash of Americana and a pinch of Paul Revere and the Raiders and you have what amounts to the sound of "Good Times!"

From the first few bars of "She Makes Me Laugh" (written by Rivers Cuomo), which features a searing vocal performance from Dolenz that sounds as if it could have come off any of the group's first two albums, it's apparent that The Monkees and producer Adam Schlesinger have crafted an album that at once emulates and updates the sound of 1966-1968 era Monkees.

Jangling guitars, soaring choruses and impassioned vocals abound in this album, which really does celebrate the carefree feeling generated by Monkees hits such as "Last Train to Clarksville," "I'm a Believer" and "Daydream Believer."

Unlike the two previous Monkees reunion albums, 1987s "Pool It!" and 1996s "Justus," this album doesn't try to update The Monkees' sound to fit any current fashion. It purposefully steers itself toward the 1960s, and for any fans of pop/rock from that era, of which there are many, this album is a joyous return to hook-filled radio-friendly classic pop music.

Four songs on the album were actually backing tracks recorded in the 1960s but never completed until now.

"Good Times," the title track written by Harry Nilsson and featuring his co-lead vocal, "Gotta Give it Time" (written by "I'm a Believer" producer Jeff Barry), "Wasn't Born to Follow" (written by Carole King and Gerry Goffin) and "Love to Love" (written by Neil Diamond) were all recorded in the 1960s but never fully completed, most lacking vocals.

In the case of "Love to Love," featuring vocals recorded by Jones in the 1960s, this song was nearly completed but left unreleased until the 1980s and 1990s when it appeared on various compilations of Monkees music.

The version on this new album features a single-tracked lead vocal from Jones that sounds different from previous versions and is accompanied by lovely new backing vocals from Tork and Dolenz.

Another song, "Whatever's Right" written by Boyce and Hart, actually was recorded at the sessions for The Monkees' first album in 1966 but never completed.

The song finally makes its debut here in a newly recorded version featuring all three surviving Monkees: Dolenz on lead vocals with Nesmith (and songwriter Bobby Hart) doing background vocals and Tork playing keyboards.

The album comes across as more of a group effort than any Monkees album since 1968 and seems to veer from innocence to experience in the feel of the songs.

The first half of the album evokes more of the early Monkees' upbeat, poppy sound and then takes a turn toward the more adult and introspective with the Americana-tinged ballad "Me & Magdalena" (written by Ben Gibbard) co-sung beautifully by Nesmith and Dolenz.

From the joyous jangly pop of "You Bring the Summer" (written by Andy Partridge), "Our Own World" (written by Adam Schlesinger) to the more soulful pop of "Gotta Give it Time" and "Good Times" to the wistful introspection of "Wasn't Born to Follow" (one of Tork's finest Monkees vocal performances) and Nesmith's tender ballad "I Know What I Know," the album neatly encompasses the Monkees sound from 1966-68.

The highlight of the album for me, and I'm guessing what will be for many listeners, is the song written by Noel Gallagher and Paul Weller called "Birth of an Accidental Hipster."

This psychedelia-tingled rocker features alternating vocals from Nesmith and Dolenz and really seems, to me, to exist in its own time and space. Veering from The Beatles and Brian Wilson back to 1968-era Monkees, this song not only evokes and emulates The Beatles' "Sgt. Pepper" era but at the same time feels fresh and modern and is a most welcome surprise, something I never thought I would hear on a new Monkees album.

The album also ends on a decidedly Beatles-inspired note with the Dolenz co-written song "I Was There (And I'm Told I Had a Good Time)," which comes from a phrase he often says on stage while talking about the 1960s.

The song sounds as if it jumped right off The Beatles' "White Album" — think "Why Don't We Do it in the Road," but less goofy and more of a song — with a touch of the backing vocals from The Beatles' song "Girl" from "Rubber Soul" thrown in for good measure.

With this album, The Monkees have managed to do what few rock acts have ever done — create a late-career album that not only stands up to their beloved catalog, but in some cases surpasses it.

For fans of 1960s pop/rock or any causal fan of The Monkees music, "Good Times!" will certainly entertain and delight and is the perfect way to celebrate the madcap foursome that emerged 50 years ago on televisions across America.

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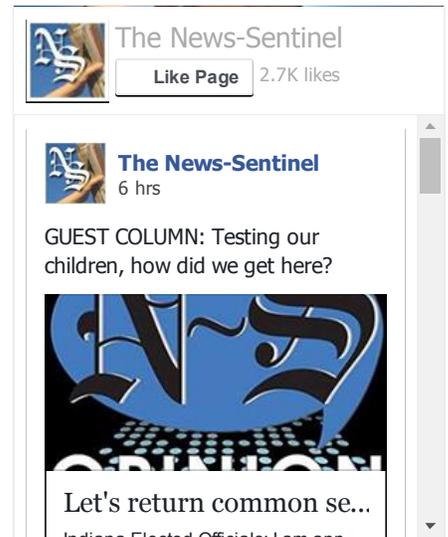
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