

DOUBLE-LIVE DECADE!

Back in the 1970s the double-live album was hailed as the absolute pinnacle of the hard rock artform. Derek Oliver investigates why this was the case, and selects his 10 greatest double-live releases of an amazingly creative decade...

FOR THOSE OF US who first discovered, then fell in love with hard rock in the '70s, the double-live album holds powerful mystic qualities. A band's studio releases were the meat and potatoes of the genre, the regular helpings of goodness that kept us musically nourished. But the double-live album was indisputably the gourmet meal, the *crème de la crème* of our audio diet.

What was so special about those four sides of vinyl? Well, at a time when all music – studio and live – wasn't freely available across streaming platforms and YouTube, the primary way to get an injection of the visceral thrill of rock music was in the live arena. Anyone who'd experienced a great rock band performing live immediately recognised that there was something awe-inspiring and otherworldly about it. The shared experience of enjoying music, loud and vibrant, with like-minded souls was genuinely profound. And once you'd been a part of that holy communion you found yourself wanting it more and more. You wanted to bottle that feeling, store it, and return to it again and again, needing to get another hit of the good stuff. You couldn't be at a live show every day, of course. But you could listen to live albums all the time.

WHEN ROCK was in its infancy in the '60s, the live experience was a hit-and-miss affair. Bands and concert promoters were only just beginning to grapple with the process of diffusing loud sounds into cavernous spaces as rock became a much-in-demand consumer product. Super-basic technology, together with human inexperience and sometimes ineptitude, meant that live shows could often be a sonic disappointment. But as the '60s faded and the '70s dawned, the live industry was learning its lessons – and learning them fast. Better and bigger PAs and more experienced crews made live shows less of a lottery and more of a sure thing. Bands and record companies started to realise that with trucks specifically designed for 'away from the studio' recording and specialist engineers operating them, the chances of bottling that live electricity were much, much greater.

Labels were also aware that the live musical experience was becoming a huge commercial proposition. They knew that great bands sold studio albums to fans via the

strength of live performances. But what if the label could muscle in on the live experience in a more direct manner? Initially conceived as a stop-gap to satisfy demand between a band's studio recordings, record companies soon saw that live recordings cost a fraction of studio albums that often took months of work in residential settings to complete. Fans loved live releases from the get-go too, and so the idea of commercial live recordings quickly took flight.

For their part, the bands knew that live performance brought something special out of them, something more freewheeling and rawer than even the best of their studio recordings. When they heard live tapes they immediately recognised an uptick in the energy levels. And with some judicious work from skilled producers, these recordings came closest to the sounds band members heard in their heads. Live albums were a win-win and everybody – from musos to industry execs to fans – was happy.

LOOKING AT this list of recordings I've chosen as the finest representation of the '70s double-live album phenomenon, what really strikes me is just what an incredibly fertile period it was. Think about the double lives that *didn't* make this list. Scorpions' 'Tokyo Tapes', Aerosmith's 'Live! Bootleg', Peter Frampton's 'Frampton Comes Alive!', Queen's 'Live Killers', Rush's 'All The World's A Stage'... The list goes on. All of these albums captured a moment in time, with rock bands performing at the very top of their game supported by crowds that were enthralled and excited by what they were not only seeing, but *participating* in. The combination made for a heady brew, and the visceral thrill of these albums is something that in some cases has now endured for more than half a decade.

These recordings are important time capsules, seizing a major moment in musical time and bottling it forever. And whenever the needle touches the vinyl of these masters, we're immediately transported back to a time and a place that will forever be a pivotal moment in music. These 10 live albums offer the very best experience of the joy and power of '70s rock at its finest. And once you've read all about them, all you then need to do is go listen, and experience their eternal mystic power for yourself...

Photo: Getty Images/Ron Pownall

