

Wings - Wings Over America (1976)

Written by bluesever

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Side One 01 - *Venus And Mars / Rock Show*. 02 - *Jet*. 03 - *Let Me Roll It*. 04 - *Spirits Of Ancient Egypt*. 05 - *Medicine Jar*. Side Two 01 - *Maybe I'm Amazed*. 02 - *Call Me Back Again*. 03 - *Lady Madonna*. 04 - *The Long And Winding Road*. 05 - *Live And Let Die*.

Side Three

01 - *Picassos' Last Words*. 02 - *Richard Cory*. 03 - *Bluebird*. 04 - *I've Just Seen A Face*. 05 - *Blackbird*. 06 - *Yesterday*.

Side Four

01 - *You Gave Me The Answer*. 02 - *Magneto And Titanium Man*. 03 - *Go Now*. 04 - *My Love*. 05 - *Listen To What The Man Said*.

Side Five

01 - *Let 'Em In*. 02 - *Time To Hide*. 03 - *Silly Love Songs*. 04 - *Beware My Love*.

Side Six

01 - *Letting Go*. 02 - *Band On The Run*. 03 - *Hi Hi Hi*. 04 - *Soily*.

Musicians: Paul McCartney – lead and backing vocals, acoustic and bass guitars, piano, keyboards Linda McCartney – backing vocals, piano, keyboards, percussion Denny Laine – vocals, acoustic, guitars, piano, keyboards, percussion, harmonica Jimmy McCulloch – lead vocals, acoustic, electric and bass guitars Joe English – backing vocals, drums, percussion Tony Dorsey – trombone, percussion Howie Casey – saxophone, percussion Steve Howard – trumpet, flugelhorn, percussion Thaddeus Richard – saxophone, clarinet, Western concert flute, percussion

Basically, there are two things that rock bands do: they make an album and they go on tour. Since Paul McCartney fervently wanted to believe Wings was a real rock band, he had the group record an album or two and then took them on the road. In March of 1976 he released *Wings at the Speed of Sound* and launched a tour of America, following which he released *Wings Over America*, a triple-album set that re-created an entire concert from various venues. It was a massive set list, running over two hours and featuring 30 songs, and it was well received at the time, partially because he revived some Beatles tunes, partially because it wasn't the disaster some naysayers expected, and mostly because -- like the tour itself -- it was the first chance that millions of Beatles fans had to hear McCartney in concert properly (the Beatles had

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toured, to be sure, and had played before millions of people between 1963 and 1966, but as a result of the relatively primitive equipment they used and the frenzied, omnipresent screaming of the mid-'60s teen audiences at their shows, few of those present had actually "heard" the group). Wings were never a particularly gifted band, and nowhere is that more evident than on Wings Over America. Matters aren't really helped by the fact that the large set list gives McCartney full opportunity to show off his vast array of affected voices, from crooner to rocker to bluesman. Also, the repertory, in retrospect, is weighted too heavily toward the recent Wings albums Wings at the Speed of Sound and Band on the Run, which weren't really loaded with great tunes. (It's also hard to believe that there were two Denny Laine vocals so early in the program, or that the concert ended with the plodding rocker "Soily," which was never released on any other McCartney album.) In its defense, the album offers bracing renditions of "Maybe I'm Amazed" -- arguably the best of McCartney's post-Beatles songs and possibly his single greatest composition -- and "Band on the Run," as well as nicely distilling the harder side of his repertory, with a few breaks for softer songs such as "My Love" and "Silly Love Songs"; another highlight is the rippling bass sound, showing off that instrument in a manner closer in spirit to, say, a John Entwistle solo LP than to McCartney's more pop-focused studio work. The triple LP, issued two weeks before Christmas of 1976, was priced so low that it was offered by most stores as a "loss leader" to pull customers in; what's more, the Beatles mystique was still very much attached to record and artist alike -- at the time, John Lennon had seemingly burnt out a major chunk of his talent, George Harrison was losing his popular edge and had done a disastrous 1974 American tour, and no one was expecting great things from Ringo Starr -- and it seemed like McCartney represented the part of the group's legacy that came closest to living up to fans' expectations. Thus the album ended up selling in numbers, rivaling the likes of Frampton Comes Alive and other mega-hits of the period, and rode the charts for months. The double-CD reissue offers considerably improved sound, though the combination of workmanlike performances and relatively pedestrian songs diminishes the appeal of such small pleasures as the acoustic Beatles set or the storming "Hi Hi Hi." Wings Over America is most valuable as a souvenir for hardcore fans and also as a reminder of the excitement -- beyond the actual merits of the group's work -- that attended McCartney and Wings' work in the lingering afterglow of the Beatles. --- Stephen Thomas Erlewine, Rovi

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