

'LOVE' IS CONSTANT, 'LOVE' IS STUNNING

Cirque's tribute to Beatles paints band's time in a vibrant light

By JOE BROWN, Las Vegas Sun

At last, a Vegas show that restores your virginity.

Even the most rabid Beatlemaniaics might visit "The Beatles: Love" and feel as if they're hearing these most-familiar songs for the first time.

"Love," which opened at the Mirage in 2006, is the fifth of Cirque du Soleil's six resident shows on the Strip, and it became instantly famous for its *soundtrack*, a clarified reimagining of the Beatles canon, and for its unparalleled sound design. I would have been happy to see this show with eyes closed: Cirque has created the ideal circumstance for listening to the Beatles' music. Or any music.

But you'll want to keep your eyes and ears open (and your heart and mind, while you're at it) — "Love" is a constant, kinetic, kaleidoscopic collage of uncorked chaos, an often exhilarating, occasionally disorienting immersion in sound and vision.

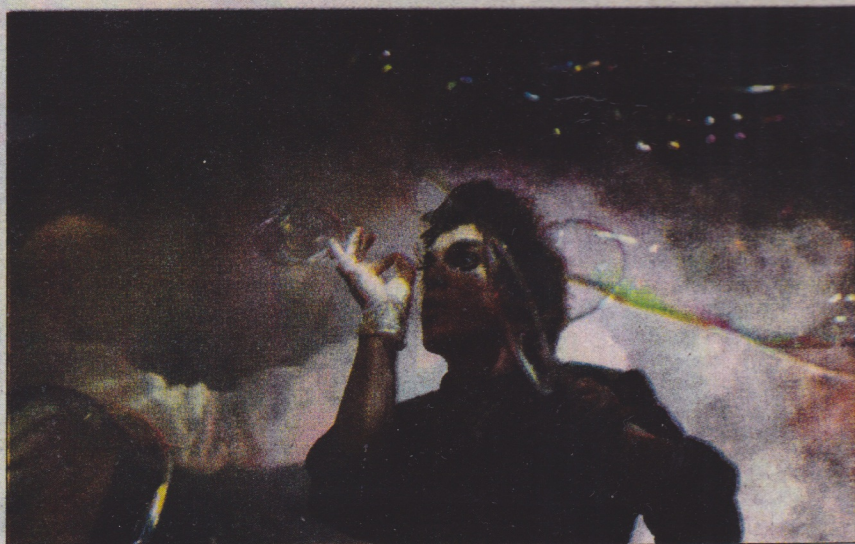
The show begins in the dark, as we eavesdrop on the Beatles joking and tuning up at a recording session.

Then the iconic clangorous opening chord from "A Hard Day's Night" hits like a thunderclap, followed by the galloping drum solo from "Abbey Road," and we're whisked away.

"Love" isn't a modish "jukebox musical," like "Mamma Mia!" or "We Will Rock You," which construct a sort-of story line around the hits of a pop group. It's more like a mix-tape musical, lovingly put together by the genius who was behind the scenes from the beginning. That would be Beatles producer George Martin, who, with his son Giles Martin, remastered, resequenced, and ingeniously recontextualized the original tracks.

Likewise, this "Love" story is not a staid chronology or biographical sketch. It's an explosion of impressions radiating from the Beatles' unprecedented emergence in a repressed, black-and-white, shellshocked postwar England — which sends concussive, concentric ripples of unleashed energy, color, fads and rebellions through the rapidly widening world.

Four impish English boys are at the center of this swirling maelstrom of pop and politics, but "Love" is less about the Beatles themselves than about the whole suddenly self-aware world in the 1960s. It might be compared to "I'm Not There," Todd Haynes' 2007 film, which employed multiple actors to assemble a shattered, refracted, reflective image of Bob Dylan.



Joel Baker is the Nowhere Man in the "Strawberry Fields" scene. Cirque's aerialists, acrobats and dancers appear as many characters in the Beatles' songs.

Characters from the songs make appearances, in the persons of Cirque's acrobats, aerialists and dancers. There's Lucy, in the sky, of course, and Eleanor Rigby, and that guy in the pulpit must be Father McKenzie. Lady Madonna is central to a dance sequence and Sgt. Pepper leads a surrealistic parade. Her Majesty floats in and out, but she doesn't have a lot to say. The Beatles themselves show up several times, in animated silhouette, and their spectral — and still stunningly vital — presence produces shivers.

"Love" teases out a wistful theme that wafts through many Beatles songs, a bitter-sweet yearning, a wish to get back where we came from, to what we imagine to be a simpler time.

IF YOU GO

What: "The Beatles: Love" by Cirque du Soleil

When: 7 and 9:30 p.m. Thursday through Monday (dark Tuesday and Wednesday)

Where: The Beatles: Love Theatre at the Mirage

Admission: \$93.50-\$150; 792-7777, www.mirage.com

Running time: 90 minutes

Online: See a photo gallery with more images from the Beatles "Love" show at www.lasvegassun.com