

## [More Best Of's Mean More Money For Labels](#)

I generally refuse to buy music from supermarkets. Not because I like paying the extra fiver in HMV or my nearest retailer, but because of the detrimental effect supermarket CD shopping has on the industry and record shops - especially the independents who simply can't afford to price albums under ten of your English pounds. That, however, is another article entirely. There's also the fact that I'm a little... let's be diplomatic and say picky... in my music taste and the chart albums churned out in supermarkets don't generally make it onto my i-pod.

This week though I was killing time in a supermarket - I won't name it - waiting on a prescription to be filled and strolled over to the music section. I made my way past the eco-packed CDs available for under a fiver that fall apart and get damaged too easily and took a look at the chart selection. Not a lot caught my interest but what I did see was a new Tom Petty and the Heartbreakers "Greatest Hits" and had to ask myself why. It has exactly the same tracklisting as the first 'Best Of' compilation that was released back in 1993, since when there was a far better and comprehensive two disc anthology - "Thru The Years" - released - which I bought and served as my starting point into exploring more of their music. It doesn't even contain material from the 4 studio albums released between times.

Why do labels insist on merely re-branding existing packages? It's like the whole Led Zeppelin "Mothership" album debacle - it has to be the third maybe fourth version of the same collection of songs. I bought the Led Zeppelin "Remasters" album when it was the only Led Zep collection available and got so excited by what I heard I since, bit by bit, collected almost the whole discography.

Then, in 1999 and 2000 they decided to split it into two discs - "Early Days" and "Later Days" with only a slight difference in track listing between the compilations and the two discs on remasters, just in case somebody only wanted to listen to songs from the first or last 5 years of the band's recorded career.

As if that wasn't enough they (they being the band and label) decided to re-release "Early Days" and "Latter Days" in a combined collection.... an ever so subtle reworking of "Remasters." Then, to throw salt in the wound, with a reunion concert on the horizon the greed got a little higher once again and they released the same songs but decided to use a different packaging image with "Mothership," which was almost exactly the same compilation as Remasters - please, compare the track listing for yourself if you don't believe me - but with a couple of tracks LESS!!!

I know that there was a 17 year gap between the release of "Remasters" and "Mothership" but it is not like there was any new material made between then. I'd understand it if that were the case, or if they decided to put a couple of tracks from the Page and Plant album "Walking Into Clarksdale" on there, but NO!!! THE SAME MATERIAL just... different artwork?! How lazy?! How.. redundant?!? Then there's the Deluxe and Collectors editions.... in case you had more money with which to buy the same thing only boxed differently.

It actually made me lose respect for the band. Considering how much I love their music and how astounding they are as musicians, that's pretty hard to do.

The problem with Best Of's etc is that they are subjective. On what basis is something considered the Best Of an artist? Led Zeppelin never released a single in the U.K so it can't be done on hit factor. Plus, with so many bands, the hits are so rarely the genuine best of that band or artist. The same could be said of The Beatles. There's a lot of compilations for the Fab Four available out there, including the mega-selling "1s" but is Love Me Do truly their best work? You have to scour their collected works to get such an insight or purchase one of the 6 other - double disc - collections to do so.

As has been pointed out in so many linear notes (Cameron Crowe in the Tom Petty "Anthology") and, research reveals, by Bruce Springsteen in discussing his own choosing of tracks for "The Essential Bruce Springsteen;" "one man's coffee is one man's tea is another man's whiskey." And, yes, "The Essential" is the second Bruce Springsteen collection but the difference being that between the release of the two there were three more albums released and an extra disc added to span his 30 year career. It would be hard to cull 4 decade's worth output onto one disc.

How many bands out there release a 'Best Of' only two albums after the last one? Every time another a supposedly retired artist mounts the comeback or reunion wagon the record label heads must rub their hands together and envision big cash bags marching toward them as they blow the dust off the very same Best Of released at the time of the artist's retirement, call the design department for a new image and throw it back out on the shelves as a 'new' release. Oh, and don't forget the big sticker pronouncing it as 'a new collection featuring...' that is ridiculously hard to get off the case.

I'm not sure if I'm being too cynical here or if record companies are being too greedy. Yes compilations do make a great introduction but it won't be long before artists have more compilations than actual releases. Sounds a bit silly, doesn't it? Well it has happened. How many times have you seen an advert for a Madness collection? Plenty, I'm sure I know I've seen more than enough. Well that's because there's 8 Madness compilations, yet only 9 Madness studio albums. Perhaps that's an unfair example as they are still, annoyingly, a working band and recording maybe one album between

each compilation.

Let's look at another example. The King himself - Elvis. During his lifetime Elvis Presley releases 41 studio recordings, sounds a lot but I checked, and 17 compilation albums. Since he slipped this mortal coil there have been 29 compilations (bringing the total up to 46) and at least a dozen box sets released. It's well known that the King has been "taking care of business" since he died - frequently topping lists of posthumous earners - but does the world need 46 Elvis compilations or do certain 'interested parties' need new office furniture at the the label headquarters?

As a side note I personally think I have the greatest Beatles compilation album because I made it myself. Perhaps I should package it up and sell it before, in 3 years time deciding that While My Guitar Gently Weeps doesn't represent their best as much as She Loves You and re-package it for another quick buck.

### About the Author

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