

= At Folsom Prison =

At Folsom Prison is a live album and 27th overall album by Johnny Cash , released on Columbia Records in May 1968 . After his 1955 song " Folsom Prison Blues " , Cash had been interested in recording a performance at a prison . His idea was put on hold until 1967 , when personnel changes at Columbia Records put Bob Johnston in charge of producing Cash 's material . Cash had recently controlled his drug abuse problems , and was looking to turn his career around after several years of limited commercial success . Backed with June Carter , Carl Perkins and the Tennessee Three , Cash performed two shows at Folsom State Prison in California on January 13 , 1968 . The resulting album consisted of fifteen tracks from the first show and two tracks from the second .

Despite little initial investment by Columbia , the album was a hit in the United States , reaching number one on the country charts and the top 15 of the national album chart . The lead single from the album , a live version of " Folsom Prison Blues " , was a top 40 hit , Cash 's first since 1964 's " Understand Your Man " . At Folsom Prison received good reviews upon its release and the ensuing popularity revitalized Cash 's career , leading to the release of a second prison album , At San Quentin . The album was re @-@ released with additional tracks in 1999 and as a three @-@ disc set in 2008 . It was certified three times Platinum on March 27 , 2003 by the Recording Industry Association of America for US sales exceeding three million .

= = Background = =

Johnny Cash first took interest in Folsom State Prison while serving in the United States Air Force Security Service . In 1953 , his unit watched Crane Wilbur 's film Inside the Walls of Folsom Prison . The film inspired Cash to write a song that reflected his perception of prison life . The result was " Folsom Prison Blues " , Cash 's second single on Sun Records . After its release , the song became popular among inmates , who would sometimes write to Cash , requesting him to perform at their prisons . Cash 's first prison performance was at Huntsville State Prison in 1957 . Satisfied by the favorable reception of the concert , he performed at several other prisons in the years leading up to the Folsom performance in 1968 .

A few years after attaining commercial success from songs such as " I Walk the Line " , " Understand Your Man " , and " Ring of Fire " , Cash 's popularity waned . This was due in no small part to his increasing dependence on drugs . In 1967 , Cash sought help for his escalating drug problems ; by the end of the year , his drug use decreased and he sought to turn his career around . Concurrently , the country portion of Columbia Records underwent major personnel changes . Frank Jones and Don Law , who had produced several of Cash 's albums , were ousted in favor of Bob Johnston , who was known for his erratic behavior and willingness to disagree with studio executives . Cash saw this as an opportunity to pitch his idea of recording a live album at a prison ; Johnston enthusiastically supported the concept . Johnston called San Quentin State Prison and Folsom , with the latter being the first to respond .

= = Recording = =

On January 10 , 1968 , Cash and June Carter checked into the El Rancho Motel in Sacramento , California . They were later accompanied by the Tennessee Three , Carl Perkins , The Statler Brothers , Johnny 's father Ray Cash , Reverend Floyd Gressett , pastor of Avenue Community Church in Ventura , California (where Cash often attended services) , who regularly counseled inmates at Folsom and helped facilitate the concert , and producer Johnston . The performers rehearsed for two days , an uncommon occurrence for them , sometimes with two or more songs being rehearsed concurrently by various combinations of the musicians . A fashion show taking place in an adjacent ballroom provided an unneeded distraction , and during the rehearsal sessions on January 12 , California governor Ronald Reagan , who was at the hotel for an after @-@ dinner speech , visited the band and offered his encouragement . One focus of the sessions was to learn " Greystone Chapel " , a song written by inmate Glen Sherley . Sherley recorded a version of the

song , which he passed on to Rev. Gressett via the prison 's recreation director . On January 13 , the group traveled to Folsom , meeting up with Los Angeles Times writer Robert Hilburn and Columbia photographer Jim Marshall , who were paid to document the album for the liner notes .

Cash decided to hold two performances on January 13 , one at 9 : 40 AM and one at 12 : 40 PM , in case the first performance was unsatisfactory . After an introduction by MC Hugh Cherry , who encouraged the prisoners to " respond " to Cash 's performance , Carl Perkins took the stage . Perkins performed his hit song " Blue Suede Shoes " . Following this song , The Statler Brothers sang their hit " Flowers on the Wall " and the country standard " This Old House " . Cherry again took the stage and instructed the inmates not to cheer for Cash until he introduced himself ; they obliged . Cash opened both shows with a rendition of " Folsom Prison Blues " and the concerts contained many songs about prison , including " The Wall " , " Green , Green Grass of Home " , and the gallows humor tune " 25 Minutes to Go " . The singer also included other songs of despair , such as the Merle Travis song " Dark as a Dungeon " . Following " Orange Blossom Special " , Cash included a few " slow , ballad @-@ type songs " , including " Send a Picture of Mother " and " The Long Black Veil " , and then followed with three novelty songs from his album Everybody Loves A Nut , " Dirty Old Egg @-@ Sucking Dog " , " Flushed from the Bathroom of Your Heart " , and " Joe Bean " . June Carter joined Cash on stage to perform a pair of duets . After a seven @-@ minute version of a song from his " Blood , Sweat and Tears " album , " The Legend of John Henry 's Hammer " , Cash took a break and Carter recited a poem . Cash ended both concerts with Sherley 's " Greystone Chapel " . The second concert was not as fruitful as the first ; the musicians were fatigued from the earlier show . Only two songs from the second concert , " Give My Love to Rose " and " I Got Stripes , " made it onto the LP release .

= = Reception and impact = =

The album release of At Folsom Prison was prepared in four months . Despite the recent success of " Rosanna 's Going Wild " , a Cash single released just before the Folsom concerts that reached number two on the country charts , Columbia initially invested little in the album or its single " Folsom Prison Blues " . This was due partially to Columbia 's efforts to promote pop stars instead of country artists . Nevertheless , the single charted on the Billboard Hot 100 on May 25 , 1968 ; it also hit the country charts a week later . The single suffered a setback , however , when Sirhan Sirhan assassinated Senator Robert F. Kennedy on June 5 , 1968 . Radio stations ceased playing the single due to the macabre line : " I shot a man in Reno / Just to watch him die " . Reeling in the success prior to the assassination , Columbia demanded that Johnston remix the single with the line removed . Despite protests from Cash , the single was edited and re @-@ released . The new version became a success , hitting number one on the country charts and the top forty on the national charts . The successful single prompted the album to climb the album charts , eventually reaching number one on the Top Country Albums chart and number thirteen on the Pop Albums chart ? the forerunner to the Billboard 200 . By August 1968 , Folsom had shipped over 300 @,@ 000 copies ; two months later it was certified gold by the Recording Industry Association of America (RIAA) for shipping over 500 @,@ 000 .

At Folsom Prison received rave reviews upon its release . Al Aronowitz of Life stated that Cash sang the songs like " someone who has grown up believing he is one of the people that these songs are about . " For The Village Voice , Ann Fisher wrote that " every cut is special in its own way " and Richard Goldstein noted that the album was " filled with the kind of emotionalism you seldom find in rock . " Fredrick E. Danker of Sing Out ! praised At Folsom Prison as " an album structured an aural experience for us . "

The success of At Folsom Prison revitalized Cash 's career ; according to Cash , " that 's where things really got started for me again " . Sun Records re @-@ dubbed Cash 's previous B @-@ side " Get Rhythm " with applause similar to Folsom 's , and it became successful enough to enter the Hot 100 . Cash returned to the prison scene in 1969 when he recorded At San Quentin at San Quentin State Prison . At San Quentin became Cash 's first album to hit number one on the Pop chart and produced the number two hit " A Boy Named Sue " . The ensuing popularity from the

Folsom concert also prompted ABC to give Cash his own television show .

The album was re @-@ released on October 19 , 1999 with three extra tracks excluded from the original LP : " Busted " , " Joe Bean " , and " The Legend of John Henry 's Hammer " . Stephen Thomas Erlewine of Allmusic praised the new version , calling it " the ideal blend of mythmaking and gritty reality . " On May 27 , 2003 , At Folsom Prison was certified triple platinum by the RIAA for shipping over three million units . Since its release , it has been acknowledged as one of the greatest albums of all time by several sources . In 2003 , the album was ranked number 88 on Rolling Stone 's list of the 500 greatest albums of all time . Also that year , it was one of 50 recordings chosen by the Library of Congress to be added to the National Recording Registry . Country Music Television named it the third greatest album in country music in 2006 . Blender listed the album as the 63rd greatest American album of all time and as one of the " 500 CDs You Must Own " . In 2006 , Time listed it among the 100 greatest albums of all time .

In 2008 , Columbia and Legacy Records re @-@ issued At Folsom Prison as a two CD , one DVD set . This so @-@ called " Legacy Edition " contained both concerts uncut and remastered . The included DVD , produced by Bestor Cram and Michael Streissguth of Northern Light Productions , featured pictures and interviews relevant to the concert . Pitchfork Media lauded the collection , claiming that it had " the force of empathic endeavors , as if he were doing penance for his notorious bad habits . " Christian Hoard wrote for Rolling Stone that the Legacy edition " makes for an excellent historical document , highlighting Cash 's rapport with prison folk . "

= = Track listing = =

= = = Re @-@ release (1999) = = =

= = = Legacy Edition (2008) = = =

= = Personnel = =

Johnny Cash ? vocal , guitar , harmonica

June Carter ? vocal

Marshall Grant ? bass guitar

W.S. Holland ? drums

Carl Perkins ? electric guitar

Luther Perkins ? electric guitar

The Statler Brothers (Lew DeWitt , Don Reid , Harold Reid , Phil Balsley) ? vocals

Bob Johnston ? producer

Bob Breault , Bill Britain ? engineers

Jim Marshall ? photography

Credited on 1999 re @-@ issue

Bob Irwin ? producer

Steven Berkowitz ? producer , A & R

Vic Aneseni ? mixing

Howard Fritzon ? art direction

Darcy Proper ? mastering

John Henry Jackson ? product manager

Randall Martin ? packaging manager

Darren Salmieri , Tim Smith ? A & R

Nick Shaffran ? consultant

= = Charts = =

