

Lavish photo book brings back memories of The Beatles

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Taschen launches a limited edition photo book on The Beatles that features iconic pictures by Harry Benson.



Photographer Harry Benson traveled with The Beatles in 1964-1966.

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IF YOU GO

What: Launch and exhibition for "The Beatles On the Road 1964-1966"

When: 6 p.m. Wednesday for signing with photographer Harry Benson; exhibit will be up for a week.

Where: Taschen, 1111 Lincoln Rd., Miami Beach

RSVP for launch a must: 305-538-6185 or store-miami@taschen.com

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If every photographer is forever linked to one picture, Harry Benson — who has photographed presidents, movie stars and Robert Kennedy's assassination, among other things — knows precisely what will define him.

"The pillow fight," he says, giving the nod to his black-and-white shot of four very young, very playful Beatles goofing around in a Paris hotel room in 1964. "It's my favorite. Every photographer comes down to one picture he took in his life. I don't mind this being the one for me."

The photograph — a funny, indelible image of the most famous musical performers in history acting like a bunch of giddy kids — is one of hundreds in the hefty, staggeringly gorgeous new limited edition of *The Beatles On the Road 1964-1966*, which publisher Taschen will launch Wednesday at its Miami Beach store with an exhibition and signing by Benson. The book, expertly designed by art director Josh Baker, chronicles the whirlwind of life on tour: live appearances, rabid crowds climbing on limos, the set of *A Hard Day's Night*, even a few elegant portraits of rare quiet moments amid the hysteria. The price is steep (\$700), but 200 lavish art editions, which came with a silver gelatin print signed by Benson, sold out quickly; serious fans of

photography could not wait to get their hands on the book.

"It's probably the most complete document of that period in their career; it's very comprehensive and intimate as well," says Taschen editor Reuel Golden. "Harry had unparalleled access to the band that you'd be unlikely to get these days. ... The photograph taken of the pillow fight, these days it would be a photo op; there'd be 15 photographers or videographers there, and it'd be streaming live as it happened on YouTube. It's a totally different era."

Launching the book in Miami Beach is appropriate, somehow: Some of the photographs were taken there during the Fab Four's visit in February 1964 (their second appearance on *The Ed Sullivan Show* was broadcast from the Deauville Hotel).

"Miami was very important," says the Glasgow-born Benson, who originally tried to turn down the assignment to cover the band because he thought of himself as a news photographer (for London's *The Daily Express*). "Another *Ed Sullivan Show* solidified them. But we did come out of London in January and February, and it was bleak. Even New York was bleak. And then we came into the sunshine, and it was wonderful."

In the photographs, the band frolics in the surf in what can only be described as hilarious gym shorts, chats up fans on the sand and meets with another brash rising star who happened to be on the Beach at that time: Cassius Clay, in town training at the 5th Street Gym for his upcoming fight with Sonny Liston.

The Beatles, Benson says, wanted to meet with Liston, but the heavyweight champ said he "didn't want to meet those bums." So instead Benson dragged them over to the gym to clown around with the upstart who would become Muhammed Ali. As one might imagine, the camera that so loved Paul and John and George and Ringo virtually ignored the carefully coiffed boys from Liverpool in the glow of the 22-year-old Clay's magnetism.

"He didn't upstage them; he dwarfed them," Benson remembers. "He controlled them. He kept them waiting for at least 15 minutes. They were just hanging around the gym. ... This had never happened before, someone getting the better of them. He said, 'I'm much more beautiful than you!' They were bewildered." John Lennon, who had grumbled early on that Clay was a "big mouth," was particularly incensed afterward, thinking boxing's soon-to-be legend had made them look foolish. He blamed Benson, who says he shrugged off the accusation at the time.