

HOME VIDEO REVIEWS *Mark Voger*

Idle, left, and fellow Rutles

The Rutles: Anthology
\$24.95 (Blu-ray/DVD), VSC

It would have seemed petty for John Lennon, Paul McCartney, George Harrison and Ringo Starr to sue the Rutles.

But they had grounds.

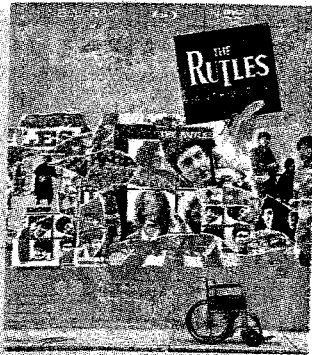
"The Rutles: Anthology" raises the question: Where is the fine line between spoof and ripoff?

How, and why, did Monty Pythonite Eric Idle's one-joke skit — the (fake) Rutles are exactly like the (real) Beatles, but with jokes and less talent — get upsized into a 73-minute mockumentary?

In audio commentary, Idle explains: Collaborator Neil Innes (who plays a Rutle) wrote songs for Idle's '70s BBC series; Idle deemed one of the songs Beatle-esque, and married it with a "Hard Day's Night" parody; when Idle hosted "Saturday Night Live" in 1976, Lorne Michaels played the clip; Americans went wild for the Rutles; Michaels, flush with NBC money, produced the mockumentary.

But like many of Michaels' movie adaptations of "SNL" skits ("MacGruber" and "It's Pat: The Movie" come to mind), "Can't Buy Me Lunch" amounts to one thin gag ridden into the ground.

That said, it's a marvel how Idle and company faithfully re-create each (familiar) touchstone of the Beatles' odyssey: Hamburg, the Cavern Club, the landing at JFK; "The Ed Sullivan Show"; the movies;



the psychedelic lunacy of "I Am the Walrus"; the "Let It Be" rooftop set. Iconic photos of the Beatles are re-staged with care. (Then again, they cheat by pasting the Rutles onto actual, recognizable Beatles album covers.)

So, Beatles fans must see the Rutles films at least once.

Thanks to Michaels' participation, there are cameos by "SNL" stars John Belushi, Dan Aykroyd, Gilda Radner and Bill Murray. (Only Belushi scores legitimate laughs as an Allen Klein-like character.) Mick Jagger and Paul Simon came as themselves.

An extra is "All You Need Is Cash," a 2002 followup with Idle recreating his TV journalist from the original, but no new footage of the Rutles save for the odd outtake. Playing themselves are David Bowie, Bonnie Raitt, Jewel, Conan O'Brien, James Taylor, Salman Rushdie, Gary Shandling, Carrie Fisher, Steve Martin, Tom Hanks and Graham Nash, each talking about the Rutles as if they're (yawn) the Beatles.