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A new documentary traces the ascent of the British rock magazine that chronicled the music and the musicians who defined an era

## Melody Makers

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# the Melody Makers

Filmmaker Leslie Ann Coles discusses her new documentary, *Melody Makers*, which traces the ascent of rock 'n' roll and the British magazine that chronicled the music and musicians that defined an age

**BY HARVEY KUBERNIK**

**A** new music documentary *Melody Makers*, which had its theatrical premiere in December 2019, is now available on DVD via Cleopatra Entertainment.

It chronicles the birth of rock, the ascent of musicians and *Melody Maker* magazine.

Defining musical moments are captured at shutter speed by writer, director and producer, Leslie Ann Coles. It examines the start of music journalism in England during the birth of rock 'n' roll, and the world's oldest and longest standing *Melody Maker*.

*Melody Makers* features the very rare and largely unseen iconic black and white photographic archive by *Melody Maker's* Chief Contributing Photographer Barrie Wentzell (1965-1975) whose images often graced the front cover and forever informed rock photo journalism. *Melody Makers* reveals the cultural significance of the paper when rock was in its infancy and it veered from a jazz musician's trade paper (est.1926) into a bible of rock 'n' roll. In 1975-1980 I wrote a weekly Los Angeles *MM* column.

Barrie Wentzell, deejays, journalists, managers, publicists, and noted musicians Eric Burdon, (The Animals), Ian Anderson, (Jethro Tull), Steve Howe, Chris Squire, Alan White of YES, Dave Cousins (The Strawbs), Judy Dyble (Fairport Convention), Nazareth (Pete Agnew and Dan McCafferty), Sonja Kristina, (Curved Air), Rick Buckler, (The Jam) and Steve Abbott (UK Decay) and other notable pundits along with the original staff of *Melody Maker* magazine provide their recollections.

The British music press and *Melody Maker* in particular are discussed on screen by MM veterans:

Christopher Welch, Chris Charlesworth, Alan Lewis, Allan Jones and archival footage of Richard Williams.

Music, film, art, and photography interviewees are also seen and heard: Chris Tsangarides, Glen Colson, Ian Grant, Jeff Dexter, Jill Furmanovsky, Edie Steiner, Keith Altham, Peter Whitehead, Roger Dean and Peter Blachley.

LESLIE ANN COLE'S CELLULOID OFFERING *MELODY Makers* has garnered a slew of awards, including Winner Best Music Documentary Feature, 18<sup>th</sup> Bare Bones International Film Festival, Lois J. Weber Legacy Award, Bare Bones International Film Festival, Winner Best Documentary, Opening Night Gala, 8<sup>th</sup> Fort Myers Film Festival, Winner Best International Documentary, 16<sup>th</sup> Garden State Film Festival, and Nominated Best Documentary, Women Film Journalists.

*Melody Maker* magazine transitioned from being a weekly jazz musician's trade paper - established in 1926 - into an internationally recognized "must read" for rock 'n' roll fans and musicians alike by the mid 1960's.

"When we entered the music biz at the start of the 60's in the UK we were blessed by the existence of the musical papers as a direct route to the public we were all trying to reach," record producer, author, deejay and university lecturer Andrew Loog Oldham reminisced to me in a 2019 interview.

"The *New Musical Express (NME)* and the *Melody Maker (MM)* were the leaders. *Record Mirror* and *Disc* followed.

"The *Melody Maker* was founded by composer / publisher Lawrence Wright in 1926 to promote live bands. Promoter Maurice Kinn bought the *NME* in 1952 for 1,000 pounds. *Record Mirror* was started by Sir

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Clockwise from top left: Barrie Wentzell's *Melody Maker* photos, Members of YES, Chris Welch, Freddie Mercury, filmmaker Leslie Ann Coles with editor, Chris Charlesworth, *Melody Maker* staff circa 1971