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FLICKHEAD

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Above: Brigitte Bardot.

WEDNESDAY, JULY 14, 2010

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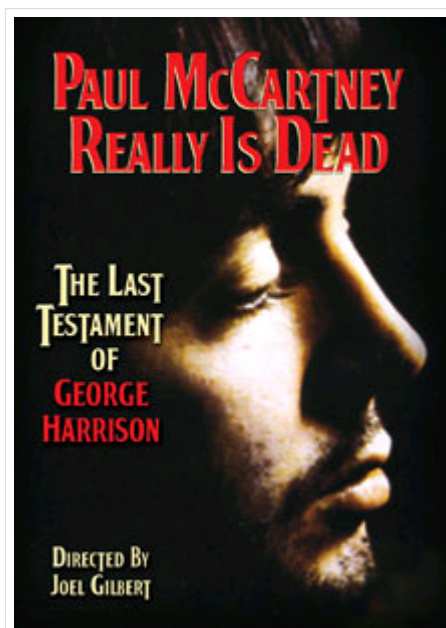
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Paul McCartney Really Is Dead: The Last Testament of George Harrison

Directed by Joel Gilbert. 95 minutes. Released in 2010.

Available on DVD from [See Of Sound](#).

Visit the [Official Website](#).

DVD Review by Nelhydra Paupér

- Simultaneously boring, offensive and pointless — a trifecta seldom achieved by any but the most talentless or delusional — Joel Gilbert's *Paul McCartney Really is Dead: The Last Testament of George Harrison* should have been good for a few laughs and some enjoyable nostalgia for those of us decrepit enough to remember the big “[Paul is Dead](#)” sensation of 1969. Instead, it's a waste of time and, should you be foolish enough to buy it, money. As my 11 year old best friend Jimmy used to say in 1969, it bites the hairy kazoo.

“Paul is Dead” was one of the biggest and fastest spreading [urban legends](#) ever. In a nutshell, in September, 1969 some stoned college students in Iowa came up with a joke piece for their college newspaper claiming Paul McCartney had secretly died and the Beatles were leaving clues in their songs and on their album covers. Someone ran with the joke as if it were true and very quickly — within weeks — it became a worldwide rumor, so wide-spread that Beatles records sales started climbing and news outlets began covering the story. In November, 1969 McCartney turned up in a cover story in *Life* magazine, giving [an interview](#) for the sole purpose of announcing he wasn't even slightly dead. The story was everywhere. I recall watching a nationally syndicated TV show

hosted by attorney F. Lee Bailey that addressed the rumor as if it were a courtroom case. The “Paul is Dead” cottage industry vanished quickly but the event itself has been written about in scholarly publications as a phenomenon approaching mass hysteria and a textbook case of how urban legends spread. (It actually predated the coinage of the term “urban legend” by a decade.)

At the time many young Beatles lovers like myself dismissed the rumor outright yet found the “clues” downright creepy. To this day there are moments in “*Revolution no. 9*” (on the Beatles’ *White Album*) that give me a *frisson* of the willies I felt at the time, harkening back to childhood death fears I first felt during that period. It was a thoroughly strange phenomenon to live through.

A Dutch documentary, *Who Buried Paul McCartney?*, was released in 2005. I’ve not seen it, and there may be others, but the subject certainly is worthy of a proper film examination. This Joel Gilbert thing, however — I call it a thing because it’s unclassifiable; it certainly can’t be called a documentary — looks like nothing more than an effort to make money and get its maker some attention by resurrecting the question of Paul’s supposed death. While the whole project seems at any moment likely to show its tongue is firmly in its cheek, it drones on humorlessly. Likewise, the marketing of the DVD gives no indication of it being a ‘documentary’ and Gilbert has *given interviews* that push the DVD’s stated premise as genuine.

In the film, Gilbert claims that a mysterious package mailed from England arrived at Highway 61 Productions. The one genuinely funny moment of the film is the accompanying shot of a large commercial building with a clearly fake “Highway 61 Productions” sign emblazoned on its facade, as if this fly-by-night company needed more than a post office box to house its requirements. The package allegedly contained two micro cassettes and a micro cassette player. The tapes reveal a voice that claims to be George Harrison lying in a hospital bed after his stabbing by a deranged fan in 1999. “George” speaks with a really bad Liverpudlian accent (“the gooverment”) that bears a striking resemblance to the “accents” used in Al Brodax’s cheesy 1960s Saturday morning Beatles cartoons. He tells the “true” tale of Paul’s death in a car crash, MI5’s intervention to prevent worldwide chaos from blah-blah-blah. *What-ever*. He goes through the “clues,” the fake Paul, follows up with post-Beatles nonsense and brings in John Lennon’s murder and Harrison’s stabbing to buttress the story (talk about bad taste!).

Whether I think Gilbert, best known for a series of innocuous but enjoyable DVDs on Bob Dylan, actually believes what he says cannot

be addressed without proper legal counsel. What I can say is the voice of “George” sounds like a stoner who has been flattered once too often for his Harrison imitation; that the recording sounds nothing like any voice on any live recording of any person speaking into any tape recorder that I’ve ever heard in my life (there’s not a single “er,” “um,” flub, thoughtful pause or self-correction; indeed, the whole thing sounds like it’s being read for *Books for the Blind*); that this voice could not be that of a man who had just been stabbed in the chest and suffered a punctured lung (classy way to make money, Gilbert); and it was most clearly *NOT* recorded on a micro-cassette recorder which, as anyone who has ever used one knows, produces lousy recordings awash in tape hiss, makes words hard to discern, gives every speaker a non-existent lisp and would certainly pick up the room noise in a hospital. On the contrary, this sounds like it was recorded in a soundproof booth on a Shure SM58 microphone with a pop screen, the digital signal bussed through a Joe Meek pre-amp, *yeah-yeah-yeah*.

The film’s imagery is mostly comprised of stock footage, the majority of it the already overused public domain material of the Beatles that has been recycled endlessly on cheapo-cheapo DVDs (the same press conferences, the same crowd shots, the same record burnings, etc.) interspersed with stock shots that match the narration (need surgeons in an operating room? no prob) plus newspaper headlines, photos and album covers, all over-edited in that snazzy-moving Looky-what-I-can-do-on-my-Mac style, using a copy of Final Cut Pro whose provenance may be as questionable as the premise of this DVD .

This endless glop appears to have been inspired by another film about death, cover-ups and conspiracies, Oliver Stone’s *JFK*. That rather dazzling jumble covered all angles — literally — of the Kennedy assassination and the myriad conspiracy theories about it with an undeniable editing mastery. But this isn’t Oliver Stone, this is Ed Wood. Except Gilbert has none of Wood’s naive sincerity. Just the ineptitude. And the stock footage.

So what harm is there if Gilbert made this as a joke and is simply pulling an Andy Kaufman, creating a conceptual art piece that is both a self-parody and an effort to unsettle? What if the DVD and interviews are all a put-on being done for fun? The problem is: it’s not fun. The DVD is lame and its 95 minutes are truly boring. But using the brutal attacks on Lennon and Harrison for funsies would be despicable under any circumstances. (I can’t imagine what Gilbert’s hero, Bob Dylan, would say to someone exploiting his friend Harrison’s agony — but I’d sure love to be there to hear it.)

Top it all off with charging \$14.95 for this load and you've got the definition of a bad practical joke.

But what if, on the other hand, Gilbert actually believes any of this? Well, then he's simply a nut. A perusal of his [Highway 61 Entertainment](#) website shows Gilbert is now also making "serious" documentaries about Islam and the Middle East. I haven't seen them so I won't pass judgment. But if he thinks his *Paul is Really Dead* conspiracy thing is going to help him gain credibility for his Islamic Conspiracy thing: dude, on behalf of the real George Harrison, try chanting a few Hare Krishnas and get a good night's sleep.

POSTED BY FLICKHEAD AT 3:44 PM

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