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

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By Christian Lipski



I took a class on Ancient Roman history once, and slogged my way through the textbook and its dry recounting of the emperors' lives. Later I discovered Robert Graves' historical fiction *I, Claudius* and suddenly the facts came to life. The personalization of the information made it more real to me, and I actually learned more through that book than my class. Presentation can mean a lot, even when the material is lifeless. This is what director Joel Gilbert puts into effect with his film *Paul McCartney Really Is Dead: The Last Testament of George Harrison*, which gives a living voice to the "Paul is dead" phenomenon.

At first I was unsure about the aim of *Paul McCartney Really Is Dead*. The back-story is that a mysterious package arrived at the offices of Highway 61 Entertainment, containing cassettes of George Harrison recounting the truth behind McCartney's fatal 1966 car crash and subsequent replacement with a look-alike. It could have been a low-budget conspiracy theorist's attempt at blowing the lid off of a big secret, or the ramblings of a crazed Sterno bum.

The title itself is just over-the-top enough to indicate that the DVD's not meant to be taken seriously. If that doesn't convince the viewer, then the exterior shot of the Highway 61 Entertainment building with its obviously Photoshopped logo should do the trick. And if that doesn't do it, then the voice from the tape itself is a dead giveaway; the late Bea Arthur sounds more like George Harrison. It's really a poor imitation of a Liverpool accent, or even a British accent.

That said, though, the DVD is a delightful recounting of all the clues people have discovered since Detroit DJ Russ Gibb first popularized the legend in late 1969.

Strung together in a decades-long tale of government-enforced deceit, the voice of "Harrison" describes the fateful night when Paul left Abbey Road Studios after a fight with John only to crash his Aston-Martin not far away. The rest of the band were informed by a mysterious official known only as "Maxwell" (oddly, "Maxwell's Silver Hammer" is not mentioned in the film) and then taken to the scene where a lone witness named Rita sat sobbing.

Her Majesty's government decided that the effect of McCartney's death on the female population would be too great, and ordered a double to be located through a Paul look-alike contest. This look-alike, William Campbell, underwent plastic surgery to perfect his likeness and took up the bass. Though right-handed, he was spared public exposure thanks to the band's decision to stop touring at that time.

The narrative continues through the history of the band, with the surviving members placing clues to the actual events in their album covers and lyrics. If the truth ever came out, they could defend their part in the cover-up by claiming that they had been trying to drop hints all along. This seeming disclosure was always the hitch, in my view: if they were the ones who perpetrated the scam, why would they deliberately provide hints? Making it involuntary thus provides the necessary counter-effort that Lennon and the others were pushing against. It also provides a chilling interpretation of the death of Lennon in 1980 and the allegedly fake McCartney's rather unaffected reaction to it at the time.

Though the film is in no way endorsed by anyone mentioned in it, director Gilbert is still able to use album art, filmed interviews, and include snippets of songs to illustrate clues. There are reenactments of events from time to time, but in general the visuals are still photos. Apart from the audio clips used as clues, there is no Beatle music on the DVD, but composer Wayne Peet provides a soundtrack filled with Beatle-pastiche, which is also included in an MP3 folder on the disc.

Although the narrating voice doesn't really encourage suspension of disbelief, preventing the viewer from really immersing him or herself in the "what if" world being presented, the story that has been constructed is entertaining enough to keep interest piqued. Some of the clues are pretty far-fetched, but others are a little too accurate to prevent a chill up the spine, which is worth the cost of admission.

Paul McCartney Really Is Dead: The Last Testament of George Harrison is recommended for Beatles fans, especially those who enjoy the "Paul is dead" urban legend, as this film is a catch-all for the old rumors and then some. It doesn't really portray McCartney (or his double) in a very good light, but then again I suppose the movie came to bury Paul, not to praise him.

Paul McCartney Really Is Dead: The Last Testament of George Harrison was released by Highway 61 Entertainment on September 1 in North America and is available to order on [See of Sound](#). [Wienerworld](#) will release the DVD in Great Britain and Europe with subtitles in Spanish, French, and German on October 4. Find out more on the movie at the Paul Really Is Dead [website](#).



One Response to “Paul McCartney Really Is Dead: The Last Testament of George Harrison”

1. *Danny R. Phillips* Says:
[September 1st, 2010 at 3:07 pm](#)

Christian-

As a Beatles fan and a sucker for conspiracy theories, both real and imagined, I have to watch this.... thanks for reviewing it so I would know it was out there.

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