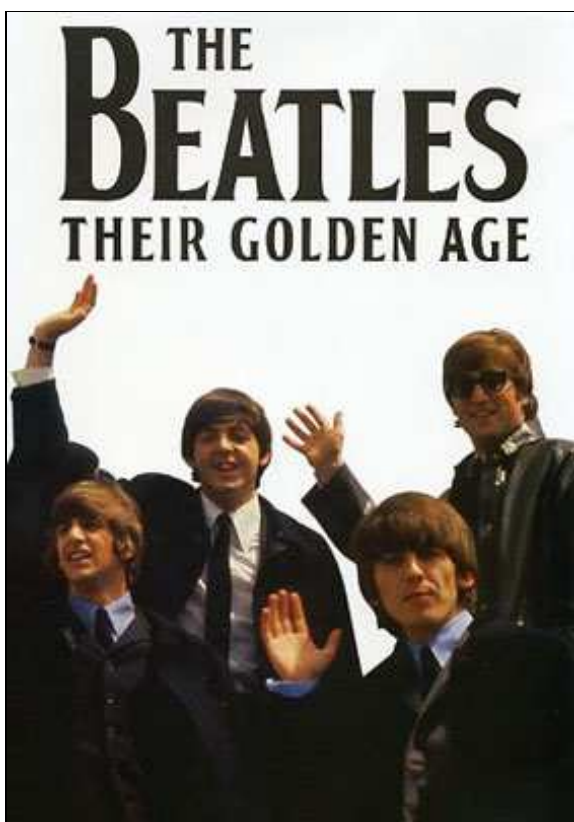


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DVD Review: The Beatles – Their Golden Age



The story of **The Beatles** has been told countless times. So the first question that comes to mind – even before popping the new DVD *The Beatles: Their Golden Age* into the player – is this: does this documentary add anything new to the discussion? Or, if I choose to set the bar a few rungs lower, does it at least present the story in a concise, entertaining manner?

A few moments into the disc I had my answer: no. No on all counts. Now, I try – for the most part – to avoid writing negative reviews. Life's too short, and I know for a fact that there is plenty of worthy material out there deserving of good reviews. But when something by a major artist – or in this case, a very minor artist producing a work about a very major artist – comes along and disappoints, I feel it's my responsibility as a sort of consumer guide to alert my readers.

So I am here to warn you. *The Beatles: Their Golden Age* is amateurish, close to content-free, and ill-informed. I won't bother with a full litany of its near-endless shortcomings; rather I'll highlight a few that will indicate where the disc is coming from.

Right out of the gate, the narrator (and executive producer, as it happens) tells us the story of the group coming

together. He informs us about the Beatles' original *bassist*. Thing is, he pronounces the first four letters of that word like the *fish*, not the four-stringed instrument. What? You're prepared to give him a pass on that one? Okay. But in the very same sentence he tells us the name of this player: Stuart Sidcup. What?! The most casual Beatles fan might not know that **Stuart Sutcliffe** was **John Lennon's** art school friend who joined the band, but there's no excuse for a documentary getting that bit of info wrong.

When the narrator – a **Les Krantz** – gets to the part of the story in which The Beatles get a proper manager, he pronounces the name of that man (**Brian Epstein**) as Ep-*steen* rather than Ep-*stine*. Okay, again you may argue that I'm nit-picking. But what of the narrator's use of the word *maniacal* to describe fans: He pronounces it *may-nee-ACK-uhl*. By that point in the DVD I was starting to get a headache, wincing and wondering what word he'd mangle next.

But even if one chooses to overlook factual errors and dodgy pronunciation, *The Beatles: Their Golden Age* is a notch or two below even qualifying as fluff. All sorts of cognitive-dissonance are elicited when watching and listening to the documentary. The backing music is some reasonably well done ersatz Beatles music (Beatles musical themes rearranged into instrumental songs that *feel* like Beatles songs but aren't, thus avoiding pesky and prohibitively expensive licensing fees). But they're often applied in the wrong places: while onscreen we're seeing newsreels from the 1964 world tour, we're treated to faux rewrites of *Revolver* era music. Um, no.

Much of the visual content in the DVD is recycled material. An old compilation of public domain newsreels called *Fun With the Fab Four* (itself a recycled collection) seems to have been the source for much of *The Beatles: Their Golden Age*. Suffice to say there's no actual Beatles music in the DVD, and precious little footage of the band themselves. And even less of them actually speaking. Worse, a number of the clips – familiar to any Beatles fan who's seen more than two or three documentaries about the group – are used two, sometime three times throughout the DVD.

Many of these old newsreels are silent; I suspect that no more than a few minutes of effort went into the dubbing of some generic crowd noise onto the clips. When a shot of a screaming female fan appears, the dubbed scream comes in a few seconds later. At this point I almost expected (or wanted) the *Mystery Science Theatre 3000* gang to appear at the bottom of the screen. (They did not.)

Krantz's commentary is stiff and often lunkheaded. He often has, well, nothing to say. During the segment covering the film *A Hard Day's Night*, viewers will see onscreen the famous trailer for the film. But since the trailer contains Beatles music, the audio portion has been removed. Instead we get Krantz reading the title cards to us! Thus, a third of the way into *The Beatles: Their Golden Age* we are treated to Krantz telling us – with long pauses in between so as to sync up to the onscreen lettering – that the four members of the band are John, Paul, George and Ringo. No, really.

The narrator's voice is sing-songy and ill-suited to the task of providing voiceovers. The newsreels from the early 60s have that we-really-don't-get-it vibe, and Krantz manages to evoke that same clueless feel as he recites *his* narration. One almost wonders: it couldn't possibly be true, but perhaps he's never actually *heard* any real Beatles music? And the unforced errors continue: when, near the end, mention is made of the Beatles *Love* project, Krantz calls the outfit involved Cirque de Sol.

I did one learn one bit of information from this nearly completely insight-free production: the train scenes from *A Hard Day's Night* were filmed in a van, rocked back and forth to create the feel of a train. Okay, that was kinda interesting. And speaking of the word interesting: using it in a documentary's commentary is useless: it tells the audience exactly nothing about anything. On more than one occasion, Krantz's editorial insight about one thing or another is that it's "interesting." Full stop.

Verdict: I want my hour back. *The Beatles: Their Golden Age* is a sloppy and perfunctory retelling of one of the most important stories in popular music. That story deserves better than this; had the narration transcript been submitted as a freshman college essay, it would have failed to earn a passing grade. The visuals – all taken from

other widely available productions – are overly familiar. The film is so mediocre that I can't even argue that the mistakes distract from an otherwise-good production. Instead they highlight the film's long list of weaknesses.

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[September 14, 2012 at 12:10 pm](#)

Sidcup? Everyone knows the original bass player was Leppo.

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