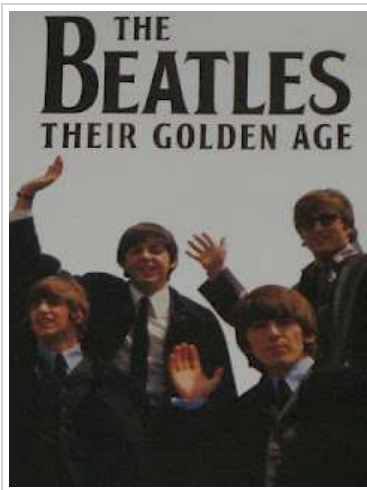


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The Beatles: Their Golden Age (2012) DVD Review

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The Beatles: Their Golden Age is an hour-long documentary on the history of The Beatles. Narrated by Les Krantz, this film focuses much of its attention on the years 1963 and 1964. Obviously an hour is not nearly enough time to provide an in-depth look at this band, and much of this footage has been included in other Beatles documentaries. But there is quite a lot of old newsreel footage, which is always fun to watch, and some of it I hadn't seen before (like the footage of them arriving in Seattle). There is, however, no new information here. The filmmaker conducted no interviews. While knowledgeable fans of the band might be disappointed, casual (or new) Beatles fans will find enough information, which is presented in chronological order so it's easy to follow. Basically the film provides a brief overview of the band's key points.

Its biggest strength is the old newsreel footage, including snippets of interviews with band members. One of the biggest drawbacks of this documentary, however, is its lack of Beatles music. Obviously it's expensive (and probably difficult) to get the rights to their songs. But a documentary about a musical group that is devoid of any of its music can only go so far.

The documentary starts with screaming fans, and in fact includes lots of shots of fans throughout. The narrator acknowledges right at the start that it was a combination of talent and timing that propelled The Beatles into stardom. The documentary spends very little time on the group's beginning. It mentions skiffle and the influence of Elvis Presley, and then quickly gets into the Hamburg scene with drummer Pete Best, and then immediately onto a mention of Brian Epstein. But then suddenly the narrator is talking about "Love Me Do" and "Please Please Me" having already been released, and the media catching on. So suddenly Ringo Starr is there. There is no mention of Pete Best being fired, and also no mention of Stu Sutcliffe.

There is some footage from a short film titled *The Beatles Come To Town*, which is cool. It shows the staff of a venue getting ready for a Beatles concert, and the fans coming in. There is also footage of The Beatles holding up a giant plush panda they received as a gift. The narrator talks about the audience reaction, and says, "It was like *The Beatles* had lifted the lid off hundreds of years of English reserve."

We're treated to footage from their first New York appearance, including shots outside Carnegie Hall where some protesters demonstrated against the band. There are also shots of fans sleeping in Heathrow airport in England, waiting to greet The Beatles on their return home. There is some footage from a press conference at that time too, which is great. I also like that the Variety Club awards newsreel footage is included (where John Lennon says, "Thanks for the purple hearts," eliciting laughter from the crowd).

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In June of 1964, Jimmy Nicol replaced Ringo Starr on a tour when Ringo was sick, and this documentary includes some good footage of him with them. But, again, we don't hear the music. We see concert footage with Jimmy Nicol on drums, but don't hear it. It would be great to hear how much their sound was affected by the presence of a different drummer. I also really wish there was an interview with him, even something from that year.

There is also some nice footage of the production of *A Hard Day's Night* (but I wish there was sound; instead we get the sound of fans screaming along with Beatles-like music). And there is a short segment about *Help!* (it cost three times more than *A Hard Day's Night*), including footage from the trailer.

There is a segment on some of the controversy surrounding the band, including a shot of the butcher cover and bits about the famous Jesus statement. Newsreel footage mentions how the KKK led the Beatle merchandise bonfires. And of course there is that footage of John explaining himself that we've all seen many times. There is also that great "*prostitutes and lesbians*" line from Paul McCartney, and the briefest of moments from a TV interview where Paul talks about LSD. There is also footage of the Beatles arriving at Brian Epstein's memorial (but nothing about how his death affected the band members, particularly John).

There are brief mentions of most of The Beatles albums, including *Rubber Soul* and *Revolver* (one of my personal favorite albums). But there is almost nothing about *Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band*, which is surprising. You'd think some of the film's time would have been dedicated to that album. And to the White Album, particularly the way it was recorded.

There are short bits about their lives outside the band. For example, there is footage of John Lennon talking about his book *In His Own Write* and reading a poem. And there is a snippet of an interview with George Harrison and Pattie Boyd just after they got married (that's the stuff I really like in this film). And we see John and Yoko Ono during their bed-in, and Paul with Linda Eastman (including great footage of Paul teasing his new daughter).

There is a bit about *Let It Be*, but almost nothing about the band's breakup. At the end, there is a short section about the band members post-Beatles.

The DVD has no special features. *The Beatles: Their Golden Age* was released on July 24, 2012.



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