

F I L M R E V I E W

By Pete Roche

Wildwood Film's new documentary on the Fab Four may not tell dichards anything they don't already know about the Liverpool lads. But *The Beatles: Their Golden Age* is a concise retrospective that gives casual fans a fairly comprehensive overview of the band's career, not to mention a better understanding of the cultural phenomenon John, Paul, George and Ringo were in the Sixties.

Packed with rare newsreel clips, television interviews, and footage from the group's movies, *Golden Age* is a less an academic study of Beatles music than a video compilation illustrating the profound impact the boys and their tunes had (and still have) upon the world. It's evident no small amount of care went into its creation, which (along with its bargain suggested retail price) will help most get past the fact that despite all the bona fide vintage visuals, the DVD contains no original Beatles music whatsoever.

Narrated by Les Krantz—author and publisher at Facts that Matter, Inc.—the sixty minute revue traces The Beatles' arc from its early incarnation as a skiffle group to its post

Abbey Road disintegration. Krantz surveys the albums and singles, but his focus is on the pandemonium surrounding The Beatles' several world tours. A fair amount of footage is devoted to teenage girls screaming at the band's shows, mobbing the mop-tops at hotels, and camping at airports in hopes of glimpsing their heroes.

While there's little mention of original bassist Stuart Sutcliffe, Krantz identifies Pete Best at The Beatles' original drummer and the seldom heard-of Jimmie Nicol as fill-in for ailing Ringo during summer '64, at the height of "Beatlemania." He follows the group's ascent from its time at the dingy Casbah Club and club dates with Rory Storm and the Hurricanes in Hamburg to its residency at Liverpool's Cavern Club, where they were spotted by future manager Brian Epstein.

Black and white footage of the band chatting with journalists on the Irish countryside suggests they hadn't yet come to terms with the success of its first album or the scope of the impact singles like "She Loves You" had on youngsters everywhere. George is seen puffing determinedly on a cigarette while an astonishingly boyish-looking Paul (think Matthew Broderick in *Ferris Bueller's Day Off*) acts as point man during this interview, expressing disbelief at their reception throughout the U.K.

"We're just normal folk who had a couple hit records," George Harrison is quoted.

But there wasn't anything normal about the size (and volume) of crowds The Beatles drew not only to its shows, but to public appearances everywhere. Clips of John and Paul clowning around backstage or acting nonchalant in front of news cameras are juxtaposed with scenes of the mass hysteria outside concert venues, where devotees (mostly female) sob, swoon, and shout for their attention. At Buckingham Palace, the boys look as if they don't quite know what to do with the Grand Crosses they're awarded as members of the Most Excellent Order of the Royal British Empire, or with the silver trophies they've given at the Variety Club Awards.

"Thanks for the Purple Hearts," jokes Lennon, eliciting laughter from the press.

We're privy to The Beatles' February 1964 arrival at Kennedy Airport, where thousands gathered to greet the band as their Pan-Am jet hits the tarmac. Krantz discusses the group's historic appearance on The Ed

Sullivan Show and tour stops in Miami, Washington, and New York City—where they electrify Carnegie Hall, a venue "typically reserved for Beethoven and Bach." Back in London, the quartet is nearly mobbed by thousands of kids at Heathrow, where several girls faint—or "play possum" so paramedics might lift them over a security gate and bring them nearer to the band. An on-location scientist tells reporters the compounded energy from the screams would power 54,000 transistor radios or launch three Atlas missiles.

"It's as if The Beatles have lifted the lid off hundreds of years of English reserve," surmises another commentator. "They're the kingpins of the teenage set."

"We heard it was a terrible place anyway," deadpans George.

Safely sequestered, Paul discusses the hysteria with journalists while John mischievously tweaks the bassist's ear. Ringo jokingly tells the press corps to not let on about Lennon's marriage. Then the band boards a boat for a "victory lap" on the Thames to celebrate their American conquest.

The painstakingly assembled footage also shows stops in Denmark, Sweden, Hong Kong, and New Zealand—where Paul rubs noses with the locals. Only the Philippines gives The Beatles the cold shoulder after the band is forced to cancel a show.

"We heard it was a terrible place anyway," deadpans George, who turns up later with new bride Patty Boyd.

Krantz gives the inside scoop on Beatles' movies like Richard Lester's campy *A Hard Day's Night*, taking us behind the scenes at Marylebone Station and Scala Opera House. Several girls cry when they're not picked as extras. Others weep with joy when they are chosen to chase John and Paul for the cameras. For the colorized, bigger-budgeted *Help!* the lads indulged in a bit of slapstick and satire, with drummer Ringo's jewelry as the spy spoof's MacGuffin. Krantz also walks us through the makings and releases of the 1967's "surreal, incoherent" *Magical Mystery Tour*, and the entertaining made-for-TV cartoon *Yellow Submarine*.

Golden Age also includes pivotal Beatles moments from between the whirlwind touring, such as John's notorious crack about being more popular than Jesus—and the incipient public outcry (especially in the conservative American South). When taken to

THE BEATLES THEIR GOLDEN AGE



newsmen by saying he'd keep it "a personal thing if you will, too." When questioned about the meanings behind some of The Beatles' more sophisticated new songs like "Day Tripper" and "Norwegian Wood" at a press conference, McCartney jokes he was simply "trying to write songs about prostitutes and lesbians."

Krantz guides viewers through the evolution of Beatles music from the pop songs found on *Please Please Me* to the Bob Dylan influenced folk rock on *Rubber Soul*, the sitar and string-adorned music of *Revolver*, and the psychedelic experimentation of Sgt. Pepper's *Lonely Hearts Club Band*. Regarding the band's decision to stop touring in 1966, McCartney laments that their performances had "gone downhill" because they couldn't hear themselves over the audiences' shrieking. Ringo suggests future shows would be improbable, given the nature of their newer material.

"We'd need to have a whole line of other guys behind us," the drummer posits.

By way of epilogue, Krantz tiptoes through Lennon's relationship with avant-garde artist Yoko Ono and the strains it put on the band (despite John's newfound happiness). Seminal solo albums like Lennon's *Imagine* and Harrison's *All Things Must Pass* are given shout-outs, while McCartney's subsequent work with Wings is briefly considered.

Anyone who's followed The Beatles' commercial output even halfheartedly won't be taken aback by any of *Golden Age's* revelations. But it's terrific having so detailed a history condensed onto a single, hour-long disc.

For the few uninitiated, it truly is golden.

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