

## Destination Hamburg: The Beat

(2007) Rated: Unrated

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by **Jessica Suarez**

There is a disclaimer at the beginning of *Beatles: Destination Hamburg*, a documentary about the early days of the Beatles, that states much of the footage is archival, and while all attempts have been made for high quality, it should still be noted that only the introduction that serves more as a warning than anything else.

Unfortunately, much of the footage is of poor quality and many of the photographs grainy, lending the production a low-budget, unauthorized feel. The focus of the documentary is the origins of the band and the ways in which their time in Hamburg helped to shape their musical education. After a quick overview of the skiffle movement in Liverpool and the formation of John Lennon's The Quarrymen, the documentary then shifts to Hamburg.

This portion of the story, interestingly enough, does not get as much coverage as one would expect. For a documentary whose running time is just under 45-minutes, it seems like Hamburg would be much more of the focus (as the title suggests), but instead it comes across rather spare and with little insight imparted. Nor is the film helped by the narrator, Jon Cardwell, rushing through the script and further distracting from the subject matter.

Most of the archival footage focuses on shots of Hamburg and teenagers in both Germany and the United States. Some of this is the typical shrieking fans footage that has come to be standard fare in most Beatles-related television programming and DVD releases. However, there are also clips of interviews with fans and of The Beatles speaking to the media that provide some context, as well as serve to entertain.

The only interviews in the documentary are with Hamburg Beatles "collaborators" Tony Sheridan, Roy Young, and Howie Casey, the latter of which is only an audio snippet. While they appear to be filmed with a home camcorder with sound problems (further emphasizing the low-budget production), there are some nice first-hand experiences shared that do offer some insight into Hamburg's music scene in the early '60s. Young is particularly engaging as he tells the story of being offered the job of Beatles drummer before Ringo Starr. However, the bulk of the interviews provide less than illuminating information.

Despite many of the production quality problems and the largely superficial treatment of the beginnings of arguably the most important modern musical group of the rock 'n' roll era, the documentary's biggest misstep is the exclusion of original Beatles music. The closest we get to this is in the form of Tony Sheridan and The Beat Brothers, essentially The Beatles serving as Sheridan's backing group on a number of standard early rock 'n' roll numbers. While it can only be assumed that copyright restrictions kept Beatles music out of this Beatles documentary, its absence is especially glaring and serves to emphasize all of the other problems in this production.

While the concept of *The Beatles: Destination Hamburg* may have been "conceived in Liverpool, born in Hamburg", as is stated by the narrator, only a cursory attempt is made to offer a complete picture of the group. This leads to a glossing over of the rest of their career that would have been better served to not be mentioned at all, particularly as the documentary is so short. Perhaps there was a limit to which footage could be used, much like there were clearly restrictions on the music, and there was only enough footage to sustain a limited history.

It's difficult to imagine who this DVD is geared toward. It is possible that serious Beatles fans and collectors may be interested in some of the archival footage, although I can guess the reaction to such an abbreviated "history" would be less than favorable. As for a casual fan, the focus on such a specific time in the story of The Beatles would discourage most from this documentary.

Bonus features include audio recordings of an interview of John Lennon and Ringo Starr by Kenny Everett on June 6, 1968; as well as Tony Sheridan and The Beat Brothers performing "Johnny B. Goode", "Money", "My Bonnie", "Skinny Minnie", and "Mess Around". The interview consists mainly of Lennon and Starr joking around and making up silly songs. It's

fun to listen to, but definitely not essential and probably not great for repeated listens. The songs are fine, but again, fans of The Beatles will be missing their originals even more after these clips. It should also be noted that snippets of these songs are the only music used in the documentary.

RATING:  3  
EXTRAS:  2

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