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The Beatles - The Beatles Magical Mystery Tour Memories

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Sunday, January 04, 2009

The cover of *The Beatles Magical Mystery Tour Memories* reminds one of the Magical Mystery Tour (MMT) itself, with psychedelic colors and bubble letters. The first thing that stands out, though in tiny print on the back cover, is that none of the songs on the DVD are performed by The Beatles. That's disappointing.

To begin, a cheerful voice speaks of the 60s as images from the time it appears on the screen. That voice is Victor Spinetti, the babbling army sergeant in MMT, who also played important roles in the two Beatles movies. He describes the documentary as "very special and enduring personal memories and encounters with The Beatles on their Magical Mystery Tour."

The documentary's 'feel' does live up to the description. It is very intimate, and you could almost be sitting with people you've known for a while, talking of their experiences. Overall though, the DVD seems slightly disjointed. Topics flip flop, from encounters with The Beatles, to MMT history, to 8mm raw footage of the band - which is certainly interesting and welcomed.

We get a little history of the MMT (Paul McCartney's "baby") from Spinetti and Miranda Ward, a journalist who describes how everyone got together and set out on the bus. We hear personal accounts from many of those involved, including Paul McCartney's brother, Michael, the "Eggman," road manager Tony Bramwell, and two boys who got up close and personal to their idols in the Atlantis Hotel.

Located in the seaside town of Newquay, the Atlantis is the setting for a large portion of the documentary. The Beatles didn't have reservations, so they ended up staying in the annex of the hotel, revealing a more humble side to the most popular band in the world.

Extracts of Ward interviewing George Harrison and Ringo Starr are included, while rare pictures of them are shown.

Another memorable instance that proves The Beatles to be normal, everyday guys is when Paul and Ringo go to The Tywarnhayle Inn during some time off from filming, take over the piano, and start playing requests from bar guests. They then, according to the storyteller, "proceed to get sloshed."

Unfortunately, some stories are so trivial and unimpressive they take away from the better ones. A woman speaks at length how her dad's hat was used in a scene in the movie, and about her auctions of Beatles memorabilia. Her "claim to fame," according to Spinetti. The story doesn't particularly add anything of value to the video.

The Bonzo Dog Doo Dah Band was in a segment of MMT, so speaking with band member Neil Innes seemed like the natural thing to do. But after a few minutes, Innes just talks about his own band, and the topic strays from what everyone watching wants to hear about, The Beatles.

The end of the film shows footage of The Beatles' ballroom scene at the end of MMT. Their choreographer's voice tells the audience that The Beatles treated it as a game, and there was "laughter all the way." The documentary closes with McCartney saying, "It's a mystery to me."

When it comes to the bonus features, don't expect them to be unique. They are just a continuation of the film - 10 more run-ins with The Beatles, just more neatly organized into short segments under headings.

While the documentary has some strong points, it still seems as though it should be a made for TV special rather than on DVD. Positives include real footage of The Beatles, enthusiasm of the guest speakers, and stories that reveal things about The Beatles you wouldn't learn by watching another history of the band. But some of the stories are so mundane, and the long string of people talking can get tiresome. Another con is the music, strangely enough. The Beatles' music is the fans' main interest, not the guys' personal lives. There are a couple of songs sung by a faux Beatles band, but all-in-all, the lack of true Beatles musical accompaniment leaves something to be desired in more than one sense.

Magical Mystery Tour Memories isn't an earth-shattering documentary that will change your life or drastically change how you see The Fab Four. But if you're a hard-core Beatles fan and have

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