

Composing the Beatles Songbook:

Lennon & McCartney 1966-1970

The Beatles

Available from Amazon.com.

A review written for the Folk & Acoustic Music Exchange

by **Mark S. Tucker**

(progdawg@hotmail.com).

This 2-hour DVD is unauthorized, which immediately sets it up as an item of interest. A compendium of critical takes on the evolution of the Lennon / McCartney chartbusting machine, the disc features a number of writers, critics, and friends of the group giving insights not normally aired. The surprising part, then, is how quickly a piss-take begins to develop on Lennon almost out of the starting gate. The sentiment is fairly well founded but certainly a reversal of former days, when John was God and Paul something on the order of the angel Gabriel, respected and luminous in the hierarchy but not top dog. The schism thus presented is strange but highly intriguing, a bit of tasteful pie in the face of the accepted...even if revisionist and not quite fully correct. The emphasis of assertion here is the period from *Sargeant Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band* to *Abbey Road*.

The critics, including the ever-devolving Robert Christgau (thankfully far more absent than present), do their best to maintain a state of superiority on McCartney's behalf—due to the latter's involvement with the avant-garde through Jane Asher (an immersion that seems not to have rubbed off all that much despite several affirmative 'yes' votes among the talking heads)—yet can't help but point out that Lennon had been acid-tripping and turning out material at least the equal of Paul's up to and including *Sgt. Pepper's* and *Magical Mystery Tour*...while also trying to impute that John was peripheral to the LP. Yeah, I know, a little self-defeating, hm? So there's a good deal of head-scratching cognitive dissonance, as might be guessed.

Nonetheless, as of *Sgt. Pepper's*, it's said that Lennon was in artistic retreat as McCartney wafted on the ascendent. Very odd. Increasingly, Lennon is an afterthought as the hand-picked crits opine Paul onto Mount Olympus. George and Ringo barely exist—properly, given the DVD's criteria—but John isn't much more prominent than they. Peter Doggett even calls John lazy and desperate...yow!...but a

funny thing happens: the more the subject is explored, the more the premise becomes tenable.

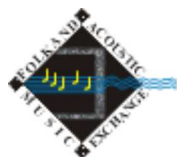
So, is this revisionism? Hard to say unless you're already an authority, privy to the facts, the stories, the innuendo, and everything surrounding the foursome. All the more difficult when Lennon and McCartney's post-Beatles material is considered (which isn't done here): neither emitted stellar work on their own nor was it very reflective of the past ensemble, making interpretation and retrospect even more difficult. Nonetheless, *Composing the Beatles* tends to fly in the face of historical opinionation, and that's its most interesting aspect. We all know the orthodoxy, we also know the world of hype and false history manufacture common to rock and roll colure, we all are more than aware of corporate spin, so where's the truth? Thus, the DVD is deconstructionist, not on a Foucaultian level, thank God, but analysis that bears its points well enough to pose a thoughtful audient to inspect his or her own sense of things against the evidences presented.

In sum, then, this DVD is more a provocation than a remembrance, though it's that also. *Composing* is not at all like the Kraftwerk DVD [reviewed in these e-pages earlier](#), which may well be a landmark in rock journo-criticism, but rather an exposition of, well, a bit of muckraking. Lennon partisans are going to be outraged, McCartneyites will rejoice, and the rest of us will have much to ponder. It has succeeded in forcing me to re-think a few things, and that's the criterion for success in work like this.

Edited by: David N. Pyles
(dnpyles@acousticmusic.com)

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