

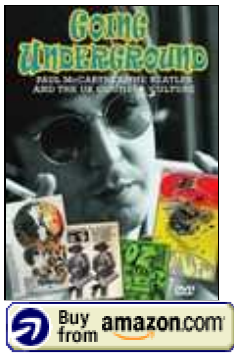
DVD & Blu-ray Reviews

Going Underground (2013)

Fascinating documentary on McCartney, the Beatles and the U.K. counter-culture.



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Going Underground (2013)

Paul McCartney, The Beatles, Barry Miles, John Dunbar, John "Hoppy" Hopkins

Studio: PRIDE PGDVD161 [10/1/13] [Distr. by MVD]

Video: 4:3 color & b&w

Audio: English

All regions

Extras: "U.S. vs. U.K. Psychedelia" featurette, Detailed contributor bios (text)

Length: 153 minutes

Rating: *****

In the middle of the '60s the colorless and confined British lifestyle was transformed by a loose collective of young radicals who brought in new social, musical, sexual and aesthetic perspectives. They had their own bi-weekly journal, *The International Times*, and a wild psychedelic nightclub called the UFO.

This film traces the history of the underground movement and its effect on the Beatles, as well as other music groups of time such as Pink Floyd, AMM and Soft Machine. Paul McCartney was the first to be connected with several key people in the underground movement, and brought some of their ideas into the mainstream. McCartney was considered the high priest of the counter-culture. McCartney was the first Beatle to admit in an interview that he had taken LSD, which upset the other three Beatles. But after the death of the Beatles' manager Brian Epstein, McCartney became straighter and more concentrated on the operation of the Beatles' company, Apple Records. While John Lennon, through his relationship with Yoko Ono, became the most active creative person who got involved in all sorts of avant things. This caused a schism between McCartney and Lennon which eventually led to the breaking up of The Beatles.

I didn't know about the strong connection between the British counter-culture and that of the Beat poets in San Francisco, which is covered in the film. Then there is a short talking heads featurette in the extras on the differences between the music scene at the time in the London and that in San Francisco. Certain tunes and albums in the development of The Beatles are analyzed and discussed by the various talking heads. "Strawberry Fields Forever" is

regarded as the first truly psychedelic tune, and “Revolution No. 9” as the epitome of the experimental avant-garde efforts of Lennon and Ono. Many of the key players of the time are among the new interviews in the documentary. John “Hoppy” Hopkins, who was incarcerated for some years as a result of his involvement, doesn’t look too good now, but the others look fine and add interesting recollections on the underground movement. Barry Miles founded IT and organized the UFO Club, and he says The Beatles “were probably the most avant-garde group in Britain, but also the most commercial.” Joe Boyd was Soft Machine’s drummer, and Eddie Prevoost owned Indica, the art gallery/book store of the counter-culture.

The documentary is long but full of fascinating information about the period and the people. It also uses news footage and TV clips of the period showing reactions to drug use, the civil rights fight, and the Vietnam War. No director as such is listed for the film, only a notice on the jacket that “This project is an independent review requiring independent editorial control.”

—John Sunier



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