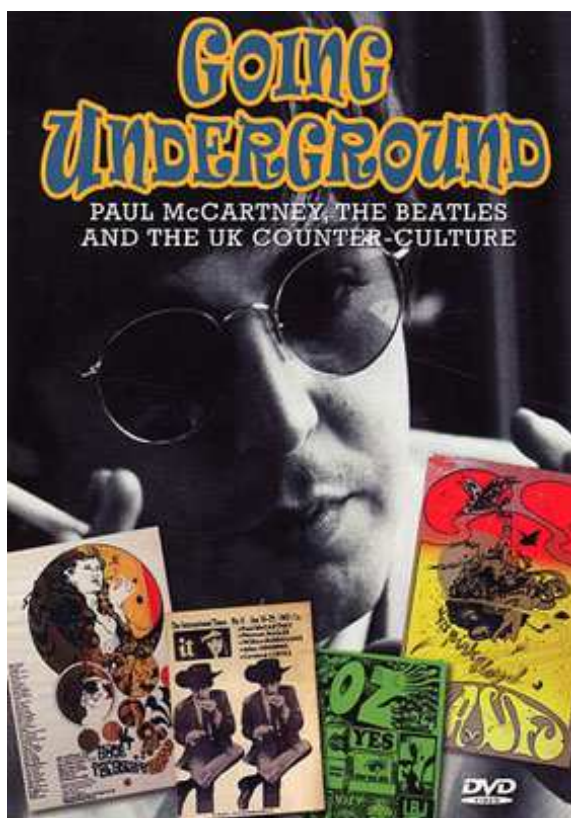


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DVD Review: Going Underground



Sir **Paul McCartney** had no role in the making of *Going Underground: Paul McCartney, the Beatles and the UK Counter Culture*. But to the extent he even knows about it, he must surely approve. As he might say, he's probably "well chuffed" about it. Extending to feature film length the argument that official Macca biographer **Barry Miles** (that's just plain Miles to you and me) made in his 1997 tome *Many Years From Now*, in the mid 1960s, McCartney – not **John Lennon** – was the avant-garde Beatle.

The team of docu-filmmakers that brought us [Strange Fruit](#) and a host of other thoughtful and well-made music documentaries has been at this game for several years, and they get measurably better at it each time. *Going Underground* may be the best yet, and none of their previous offerings is bad. In *Going Underground*, the filmmakers employ their standard procedure: talking-head clips of relevant personnel discussing the subject, good BBC-English style narration that avoids hyperbole, and as many audio clips as can be reasonably used.

The talking heads on this one are of special interest, chiefly because (a) several of them were actual participants in the London underground scene in the 1960s and (b) some of them have passed away since they did their interviews for this project, making *Going Underground* their final public comment on the subject.

Miles was proprietor of Better Books, co-founder of the Indica Gallery, and editor of *International Times* (for legal reasons referred to as *IT*). As such he was a linchpin of the underground scene, and – key to this film’s point of view – McCartney’s access point to that scene. So his contribution is crucial to an understanding of the art/poetry/music scene that thrived in mid 1960s London. But **John Hopkins** (aka “Hoppy”) and producer **Joe Boyd** were as important. And they’re here, too, weighing in at illuminating length about the scene.

Also on hand are **Robert Wyatt** and (now-deceased) **Mick Farren**, both of whom lend weight and humor to the discussion. Lesser-known but nearly as important figures of the underground scene are represented, as well: **AMM**, a musical collective who are often mentioned when the subject comes up, are nonetheless rarely explored in any detail. But in *Going Underground*, the avant-garde’s group’s music is excerpted, and drummer **Eddie Prevost** offers his recollections. For that alone, the film is worthwhile viewing. The knowledgeable contributions of music journalist **Chris Ingham** (who also composed and played the DVD’s backing score) and underground chronicler **Jonathon Greene** also add greatly to the discussion.

But there’s much more. Portraying McCartney not as some dilettante observer, but instead as a keen participant, *Going Underground* uses the Beatles bassist as a vehicle to chart the scene’s rise and fall. Key events are chronicled: the IT bust, the opening of UFO (pronounced in the British idiomatic way: “you-foe”) and the legendary 14 Hour Technicolor Dream. Events that led to the scene’s explosion are examined as well, in particular a poetry reading at Royal Albert Hall (featuring **Lawrence Ferlinghetti**, **Gregory Corso** and **Allen Ginsberg**) that woke the sleeping giant that was the London artsy subculture.

At two hours and change, *Going Underground* has the space to delve into the episodes and trends that were the hallmarks of the London-based movement. By focusing on musical acts such as AMM, **Pink Floyd** and **The Soft Machine**, but not ignoring the non-musical side of things, the film presents a fascinating portrait of this influential time-and-place. Highly recommended.

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