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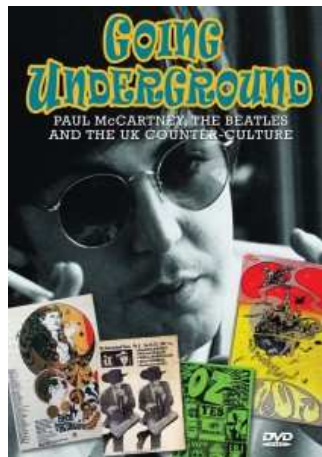
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DVD

GOING UNDERGROUND: PAUL MCCARTNEY, THE BEATLES AND THE UK COUNTER-CULTURE

Published on October 2nd, 2013

Fab social documentary charts how Macca & co. absorbed cutting edge ideas and fed them into the mainstream.



The notion that Paul McCartney was the Beatle most open to the avant garde is nothing new. The central thrust in Barry Miles' official Macca biography *Many Years From Now*, is that it was Paul who was the Fab most interested in experimental theatre, sonic happenings and challenging the cultural status quo. McCartney, through his then girlfriend Jane Asher, met and befriended London's smart young cultural elite while songwriting partner Lennon was stuck out in the stockbroker belt, effectively missing out on the capital's burgeoning cultural scene.

With a cast of characters including John "Hoppy" Hopkins (International Times founder), Joe Boyd (UFO Club and Pink Floyd producer), and John Dunbar (Indica bookshop and gallery), this DVD examines how The Beatles (and McCartney in particular) were able to digest experimental ideas and incorporate them into their own work, bringing pop music up from the level of light entertainment to being the main vehicle for high art. Along the way the work of Stockhausen, Cornelius Cardew, John Cage, Delia Derbyshire and the BBC Radiophonic Workshop, and many others are examined, along with their influence on The Beatles.

The youthful desire to escape the dull monoculture of postwar Britain, the mind-expansion of marijuana and LSD, and the fertile ground of an art school education all fed into this quest for the new. As we're often told by '60s survivors there was "something in the air". This DVD is built around illuminating and entertaining interviews with key '60s underground members such as the above-mentioned Boyd, Miles and Hopkins, along with Soft Machine drummer Robert Wyatt. There's also input from a selection of respected cultural commentators, including the always insightful Mick Farren (RIP), Mojo journalist Mark Paytress, and Beatle expert Jonathan Greene.

The beginnings of the UK counter-culture are traced back to the emergence of the CND movement, where like-minded liberal souls were able to meet and share ideas, almost like the Facebook or Twitter of the day. With their philosophies informed by American jazz and Beat poets, those bright young folk motivated enough manifested their desires for a better society through the formation of the International Times newspaper, the UFO Club, Indica bookshop and gallery and the Notting Hill Free School. McCartney it seems was always aware, supportive and occasionally directly involved.

Musique concrète, cut up, collage, tape manipulation, drug-induced lyrics, along with randomness and chance in music, were all techniques used by The Beatles and brought into suburban living-rooms. In this sense they were more subversive than any punk posers, a fact that even now is often overlooked, mainly due to their tunes being so damn good.

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The DVD concludes by admitting that the counter-culture was effectively killed off by commercialism and a crackdown by the establishment. There were drug busts and the closing down of The International Times, along with the imprisonment of IT founder John Hopkins which led to the famous Times advert supporting the legalisation of marijuana, signed and supported by all four Beatles. In Beatle world the death of Brian Epstein led to McCartney becoming more business and family minded, though there was still the McCartney-led *Magical Mystery Tour* film to come. Essentially an art movie masquerading as family entertainment.

Whether you're a fan of the Beatles' music or not, you have to admit their arc is incredible. Compare a photo of the band from 1962 to one from 1970 and the shift and massive sense of progression is undeniable. It's a shift mirrored in British society. The Beatles were at the forefront of this cultural revolution, and for that we are all indebted to them. This DVD captures all this and more. Even the most jaded Beatlehead will have their appreciation renewed by watching.

Rating 9/10

Going Underground: Paul McCartney, The Beatles And The UK Counter-Culture is released on 1st October by MVD Entertainment Group.

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