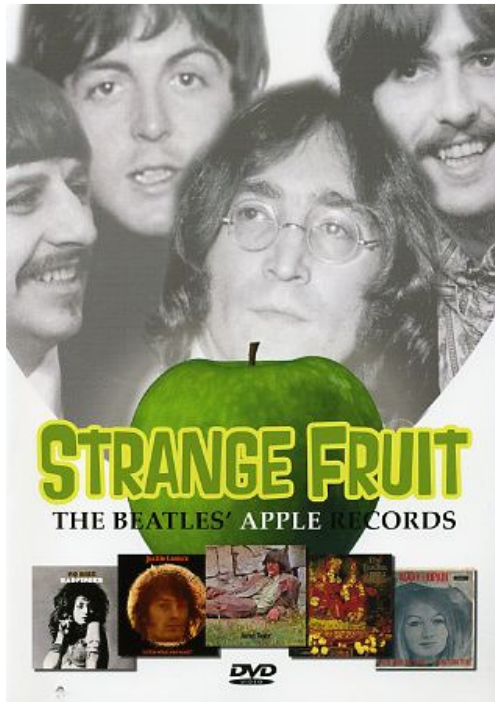


FAME Review: The Beatles & Various Artists - Strange Fruit: The Beatles' Apple Records (DVD)


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Strange Fruit: The Beatles' Apple Records

The Beatles & Various Artists

Sexy Intellectual - SIDVD570

Available from [MVD Entertainment Group](#).

A review written for the Folk & Acoustic Music Exchange
by **Mark S. Tucker**
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Following hard on the heels of their excellent exploration of Frank Zappa's Bizarre and Straight labels ([here](#)), the Sexy Intellectual imprint has issued a long, cool, cloud-entranced but highly realistic look at the strange and rebellious Apple venture launched by the most famous rock and rollers of all time, the Beatles. Watching the video, though, one begins to understand that John, Paul, George, and Ringo had wide ranging musical tastes not unlike those of another quintessential ensemble—the Grateful Dead—and they went out of their way to look into many genres. More to the point, the label and its founding lads intended to change the landscape from businessmen-dominated to artist-friendly, and that indeed worked out...aaaaaaaand didn't.

Perhaps the first portent of times to come arrived in the untimely death of their manager, Brian Epstein, just as everything Apple was kicking up. Then the very first product, the film *Magical Mystery Tour*, got its ass kicked critically and commercially, and the die was cast, but the boys were far from defeated, looking to forge an alternative to their days with EMI and brute capitalism. They wanted to share the wealth and good fortune, founding a small utopia so that artists didn't have to, as Lennon put it, "go on their knees" to The Masters in penthouse suites. They succeeded at that, and no one who was attached to Apple had any complaints whatsoever, working at the best gig they'd ever landed, whether as musician or stenographer. Jackie Lomax was among the first choices signed to the fledgling company, Mary Hopkins and The Iveys following soon after.

The film has its usual complement of critics, experts, and industry figures, along with rockers, and wait 'til you get a load of Lomax now! Rather than the gaunt, angular, hard-scrabble East Ender of yore, you'd swear Wild Bill Hickock was holding forth. With shoulder length hair he never had back in the halcyon Mersey and later days, his spare aspect has leathered into an impressive profile as he recounts the story of Apple alongside crits, writers, residents, and lookers-on. As events proceed, choice rare photos and film clips pepper the narrative, extolling event after event, such as Mary Hopkins' *Those were the Days* knocking her patrons' own *Hey Jude* off the #1 spot on the charts, the single alone eventually selling 8 million copies.

Very quickly, though, things began to fall apart because, well, artists aren't very good business people and even the Beatles themselves grew quickly inattentive to matters, moody, letting groups like Yes, Fleetwood Mac, and Crosby, Stills, Nash, and Young, among others, escape their provenance. This is where the Sexy Intellectual DVDs get very human and extremely interesting, willing to let the whole story out, not just recounting a folk history too often overly sentimental and biased in fan-isms. Writers Chris Ingham and Stefan Granados prove to be excellent guides for that aspect, and as *Strange Fruit* reaches the first hour of its 2-1/2 hour length, as Lennon and compeers start growing apart and spending money like water on personal pursuits rather than on the label, I'm invoking my perennial wond on such matters and am leaving the tantalization there, in a *Perils of Pauline* cliffhanger, the better to seduce the reader into adding this great SI label release of visual journalism to his or her collection. I've hit the first hour in order to whet appetites, the rest is up to you. If you dig the Beatles, always wondered just what the hell happened at Apple, and are a student of rock history and journalism—any or all of those—this is going to deeply satisfy.

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