



## Strange Fruit: The Beatles' Apple Records (2012)

**Featuring:** The Beatles, Billy Preston, Mary Hopkin, Badfinger, Jackie Lomax, Elephant's Memory

**Studio:** Sexy Intellectual SIDVD570

**Video:** 4:3 color

**Audio:** English PCM Stereo

**Extras:** The Fuh King Speaks: A conversation with Brute Force, Contributor biographies, Beyond DVD

**Length:** 162 minutes

**Rating:** \*\*\*\*

Despite being marketed to Beatles' fans, *Strange Fruit: The Beatles' Apple Records* documentary is basically an almost three hour argument for why the Beatles had no real business running a record label. Despite the good intentions of Paul, John, George, and Ringo, Apple Records was mostly a failure as a record label, lacking the money, the know-how, and the vision to truly be the artist's utopia it was initially promoted as.

In its original incarnation, Apple was supposed to be a multi-faceted entertainment company, releasing not only music but movies and clothes and electronics as well. According to many of the artists and Apple records staff interviewed, the company's first year of operation, 1968, was full of creativity and possibility. Jackie Lomax, a Liverpool musician who fronted the band the Undertakers, and who was one of Apple's first signings, recalls working out songs in the attic of the Baker Street building that was the company's first home. From the beginning, Paul McCartney and George Harrison had the most involvement with the label's artists, with McCartney producing folk singer Mary Hopkin's first single "Those Were the Days" and her album *Postcard*, and Harrison producing Lomax's first solo album, *Is This What You Want?*

Despite scoring a hit with *Those Were the Days*, Apple struggled to be profitable, ill-equipped to market and nurture artists that weren't the Beatles. Because the Fab Four didn't need to tour, it was assumed that Apple's artists didn't need to either, despite the fact that this is how new artists traditionally gain their audience, especially in America. Much time and money was spent trying to create hit singles, with McCartney creating hits for Hopkin and The Iveys, a Swansea band that changed its name to Badfinger before recording McCartney's song "Come and Get It"; Harrison enlisted many A-list friends like Eric Clapton, to help create magic for Lomax, and later Billy Preston and soul singer Doris Troy, but never succeeded in reaching anywhere near the top of the charts. Perhaps most unfortunate, the label's rule that every artist had to be approved by the Beatles caused them to pass on such artists as Yes, and Crosby, Stills, Nash, and Young because the four couldn't find time between vacations and other commitments to sit down and agree on the signing.

Though by no means definitive (without interviews with Beatles' manager and Apple chairman Allen Klein or any of the surviving Beatles, how could it be?), *Strange Fruit* does an admirable job exploring all the ways in which Apple struggled, while also highlighting some of its strengths, such as its willingness to release more fringe records, like the Radha Krishna Temple albums and classical composer John Tavener's many religious-themed works. Interviews with Lomax, Badfinger's Joey Molland, and Gary Van Scyoc from John Lennon's 1970's backing band Elephant's Memory highlight the way artists were sold on Apple's idealistic visions of full creative control and yet were basically musical playthings of the Beatles, jettisoned when they were no longer novel or profitable.

—Daniel Krow