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DVD Review: *Strange Fruit: The Beatles' Apple Records*

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Author: Wesley Britton — Published: Mar 29, 2012 at 10:27 am

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In Chrome Dreams' previous documentary on a specialty record company, *From Straight to Bizarre*, the filmmakers had several advantages. First, the story of [Frank Zappa](#) and Herb Cohen's eccentric labels is known mainly among cult circles. Much of the music discussed is extremely rare, so most viewers would find this film an eye-opening history lesson in a rather obscure chapter of rock. Second, while there was useful commentary from music historians, the heart of the film were the interviews with many of the actual participants including members of the GTOs, Alice Cooper, and Captain Beefheart's Magic Band.

However, the story for *Strange Fruit: The Beatles' Apple Records* is rather different and much more complex. After all, Apple had four head chefs named John, Paul, George, and Ringo with other key players like Beatle compatriots Peter Asher, Mal Evans, and Neil Aspinall. While the Zappa and Beatles projects were almost exactly concurrent (essentially from 1968 to the mid-70s), Apple Records had a very high profile indeed. From the much publicized 1967 announcement the group was seeking new talent, the post-Epstein rudderless period, the Allen Klein takeover, and finally the ultimate break-up of the Beatles, the story of Apple Corp Ltd. topped the headlines. Along the way, the group had popular releases from the Fabs themselves as well as a handful of their discoveries, notably [James Taylor](#), Badfinger, and [Mary Hopkin](#). Of course, this is only part of the story.

Strange Fruit attempts to analyze and explore some of the lesser-known aspects of Apple Records, and the resulting lengthy (162 minutes) film is a mixed bag, much like its subject. It's at its best when musicians like Jackie Lomax, David Peel, members of Badfinger and Elephant's Memory, as well as

label M.D. Tony Bramwell, reminisce about their involvement with Apple. They were there. However, Beatle “experts” Chris Ingham and Mark Payt get much of the screen time, and their perspectives are often intriguing and just as often quite debatable. In particular, the choices of what releases get in-depth coverage and which do not should raise some eyebrows. Even more questionable are some of the conclusions the experts make.

To be fair, the multi-faceted stories of Apple Records productions are skillfully woven together. Following a chronological flow, it’s clear 1968 was a time of utopian and energetic goodwill in Apple offices. It’s evident the Beatles who invested the most energy in the early days were McCartney and Harrison. That is, when they were inclined to produce or support the acts they had signed. Since every release and signing had to have the approval of a Beatle, if the group was busy with its own affairs or on vacation, much productivity was lost.

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Dr. Wesley Britton is the author of four books on espionage on TV, Films, and in literature. He’s co-host of online radio’s “Dave White Presents” where he interviews musicians, authors, actors, and entertainment insiders. ...

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1 - [The Madhatter](#)

Mar 29, 2012 at 7:35 pm

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As for this review’s last paragraph asking why Neil Aspinall was not involved... Well, he passed away!

2 - Paul

Mar 30, 2012 at 7:11 am

This documentary has over 50 copyright issues starting with the cover showing the apple copyrighted covers and actually having Beatles music in it (Penny Lane & Hey Jude)....Amazon has pulled it sale, luckily I do have one and think it is quite insightful.

3 - BeatlesandBeyond

Mar 31, 2012 at 2:08 am

A fair - if sometimes inaccurate - review. Apple 1 was in fact 'The Lady is a Champ' which is not difficult to research. Molland was not on 'Maybe Tomorrow' by The Iveys. I look forward to part 2 of the Apple Records Story....

4 - Wesley Britton

Mar 31, 2012 at 7:59 am

Perhaps my sentence on the Iveys and [Badfinger](#) wasn't clear--I thought I at least implied "successor" would suggest a second guitarist wasn't on the early releases. Didn't I say "Lady is a Champ"? Yes, easy to research--but not mentioned in the film. Of course, I couldn't mention everything either such as Harrison's "Apple Scruffs," a tribute to the girls who hung around the offices. Due to copyright issues, I'd say get it while you can--

5 - BeatleTom

Apr 01, 2012 at 11:27 am

Apple 1 was indeed assigned to the Sinatra acetate, but it was not a "release" as noted in the review. IT was a private pressing made to give Ringo's wife as a one-off gift. As for no mention of "Brute Force", there's actually a lengthy interview with him included as "bonus" material

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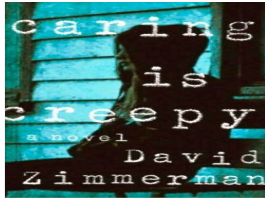
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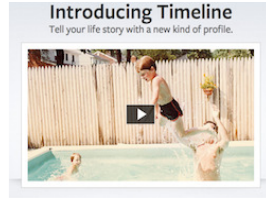
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