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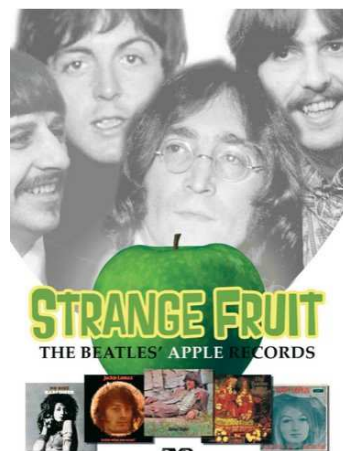
Strange Fruit: The Beatles' Apple Records

starring The Beatles, The Iveys, Badfinger, Mary Hopkins, James Taylor

Sexy Intellectual

If you suddenly find yourself with more money than you know what to do with, you're not likely to do anything terribly brilliant, and The Beatles proved that by founding Apple Records. Apple began with a thunderous barrage of smoke and fury but ultimately faded away as an embarrassing monument to what happens in a cutthroat business when no one is in charge and no one cares. By 1967 The Beatles had done most of their best work as a group, finished touring, and the money was rolling in so fast Inland Revenue couldn't haul it all away. Apple was founded for tax reasons as much as artistic ones — a corporation could deduct lots of ordinary expenses that a private citizen could not. There were laudable intentions as well; Apple was to be an "artist's label" free of meddling for guys in ill-fitting suits and with uncool tastes.

Too bad those suits were what made hits and made money and most of Apple's non-Beatles releases were flops. When a promising band was signed, it rarely got the support and guidance it needed for success, and talent was selected at the whim of individual Beatles when they weren't on holiday or

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working their own projects. James Taylor released one album on Apple and was then foolishly released to Warner. The Iveys felt like a retread of the early Beatles and languished until they became Badfinger and recorded some of McCartney's material. Mary Hopkins had a few minor hits and faded away, and those successes were the recordings McCartney touched. Beyond that, the batting average is low. Acts like Elephant's Memory, Jackie Lomax, Brute Force, Hot Chocolate Band, and Lon & Derrek Van Eaton are largely forgotten outside of the vinyl collecting universe, while stars like David Bowie and Crosby, Stills, Nash, and Young slipped by. Only Yoko Ono went on to renown, and not because she sold records or drew either popular or critical praise, but rather her look and promotion by John Lennon made her the Warhol-ish star she was. Eventually the label ran out of cash.

This is NOT an authorized documentary, and it dishes the dirt pretty well. A collection of Beatles experts, former label mates, and rock journalists provide commentary between archival footage, and early promotional films and still photos with annoying "Fakey Old Film Scratch Effects" tell the story. It's well-written and researched, and at 160 minutes run time, it will keep you engaged for an entire evening. You don't see much of The Beatles themselves; the focus is on The Iveys / Badfinger, Jackie Lomax, and Elephant's Memory. A special feature interviews Brute Force, who recorded "The King of Fuh" which wasn't released until the digital age. I'm not sure why...

While the Fab Four have little to say, you get a good look at what they focused on post breakup. McCartney comes across as the best writer and promoter; he gives a few brilliant songs to label artists which are the ones you might have actually heard. Badfinger's "Come and Get It" was an uncredited McCartney number that themed the Peter Sellers / Ringo Star hit film *Magic Christian*. George Harrison generally looks stoned, and he walked away from Apple first. John Lennon moved to New York, took up with the radicals in Greenwich Village, and made politics instead of hits, losing even more money. Ringo seems lost in all this, and fades away after a few movies, under promoted, under financed and the lost boy of the band. The entire documentary is a metaphor for the transition from '60s idealism to '70s commercialism, and while the '70s bands were more about the almighty pound sterling, they still made music that moved people. Idealism is fun while it lasts, but nowadays no one is talking to their old friends, and that's kind of sad.

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