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Because There Are Enough Stooges In Hollywood



Beatles completists should be thrilled with the arrival of “**Strange Fruit: The Beatles’ Apple Records,**” which documents the Fab Four’s failed attempt to reshape the music-publishing business by nurturing new talent, recording their material and sending it out with the Apple imprimatur. It was a great idea and completely in step with the mood of the revolutionary times. In 1968, the major labels had yet to figure out how to exploit the emergence of album-oriented rock ’n’ roll and bands that didn’t rely on songwriters with offices in the Brill Building and Tin Pan Alley, as was the common in the early days of rock and R&B. Unfortunately for everyone involved, the success of Apple wasn’t the Beatles’ top priority. They had recently stopped touring and were going through the changes that ultimately would lead to their breakup and pursuit of such pastimes as Transcendental Meditation, radical politics and trading in old wives for new ones. This would have been OK if the persons left minding the store back home in London could make decisions without the OK of one Beatle, at least, and the artists were given the attention they deserved. Paul tended to mold the artists he recruited in his own image, while John obsessed over Yoko’s career and his collaboration with Elephant’s Memory. George dropped everything he was working on to focus on the Concert for Bangladesh and Ringo had other things on his mind. Even the artists who scored early hits – Mary Hopkin, Badfinger, Billy Preston, James Taylor – eventually came to think of themselves as afterthoughts. The ones whose work suffered from being overshadowed by the release of the Beatles last album – deejays could only squeeze one or two Apple products into rotation, and the company was releasing as many as four new singles simultaneously – missed the train to success entirely. Some soon-to-be huge bands voiced a desire to be added to the label, but couldn’t find a receptive ear to listen to their songs. While fascinating, the Apple story isn’t terribly relevant in the era of Internet publishing and declining record sales. If anything, the exhaustively researched “Strange Fruit” best serves as a cautionary tale for artists aspiring to control their music and swim with the sharks of the industry. Fans, though, tend to eat up anything new about the Beatles.

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