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# 'Strange Fruit: The Beatles' Apple Records' Follows Apple's Decay

By **Jedd Beaudoin** 24 April 2012

It was one of the great failures of rock 'n' roll and arrived just before the dawn of The Beatles' great undoing. The idea was magnificent—to dodge the taxman, the Fab Four would invest money in a business venture that was unprecedented in the music industry: a boutique, a label, an electronics wing, all owned by a rock band. The boutique lasted about as long as a plate of Gran's famous fish and chips; the electronics wing—run by band friend Magic Alex—was doomed in the womb.

But the label thrived, more or less, thanks in part to a major hit from folk singer Mary Hopkin whose material was overseen by none other than Paul McCartney. Other hopes, such as the soulful Jackie Lomax, faded faster than a bootleg Ted Nugent t-shirt. Interestingly, for as much freedom as Apple could have represented it was ultimately subject to all the same constraints as imprints run by The Man. McCartney carefully crafted Hopkin's records to the point that some have argued she was little more than his pop puppet; Lomax's record died a swift death in America, lost in a glut of four Apple singles released on the same day, including one from the lads themselves. They weren't touring and didn't consider that some of their stable might have to. (Manager Brian Epstein died in late 1967, leaving the boys to fend for themselves.)

*Strange Fruit* pays particular attention to the story of Badfinger—birthed from The Iveys, a band that suffered from its share of Beatles comparisons as would its successor—a group that is either derided as derivative or praised for being an early power pop act. (Close your eyes and you might think you're hearing America's Big Star.) The story of Badfinger—long and tragic and marred with suicide and financial difficulties—is, of courses, worthy of its own telling. Of particular interest is the tale of the group's breakthrough "Come and Get It", penned by Macca himself. To hear the telling in this volume, it was a kind of warning/challenge from Sir Paul to the budding pop sensation.

Among the less popular releases were entries from Doris Troy, The Modern Jazz Quartet, and the Black Dyke Mills Band. Billy Preston, who could have had an especially promising career, appears to have stalled somewhat from his time on Apple, while James Taylor, signed and produced by McCartney's almost brother-in-law Peter Asher, went on to greater glory after leaving the imprint behind, albeit with his impressive 1968 debut to the label's credit.

By 1969, as it was increasingly apparent that The Beatles were falling apart, the label began having its own woes; The Beatles became the primary source of output for most of the year while other acts languished in limbo, a trend that would continue for the remainder of the life of the company. It became apparent that one of the guiding policies—a member of the band had to

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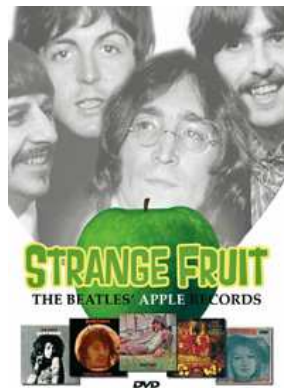
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### Strange Fruit: The Beatles' Apple Records

Cast: Joey Molland, Jackie Lomax, David Peel

(US DVD: 24 Apr 2012)

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personally approve the signing--was a bit of an albatross as Lennon and Starr tended to show little interest in new signings or would keep some--David Bowie, Yes--in a holding pattern until they had no other choice but to move on to greener pastures.

By the time Lennon moved to New York in the early '70s he became increasingly interested in signing acts with his radical outlook, namely David Peel and The Lower East Side as well as Elephant's Memory. The latter, according to band bassist Gary Van Scyoc, was reluctant in this measure, becoming little more than John Lennon's backing band. Eventually Badfinger left for a not-so-sweeter deal with Warner Bros., Yoko Ono released some of the most expensive projects on the label, and Apple became little more than the home of all things from the Fragmented Four.

The documentary doesn't mention the short-lived subsidiary Zapple, more of a paragraph than a chapter in the Apple story, and the albums released on the label by The Beatles are not delved into, making this truly about the other artists surrounding the group. Jackie Lomax, Badfinger's Joey Molland, and Ron Griffiths of The Iveys appear alongside David Peel and Van Scyoc. The usual round of music journalist also pop in, giving their insightful appraisals to the releases and bringing some greater pace to the sometimes-glacial narrative.

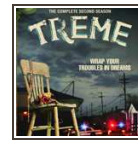
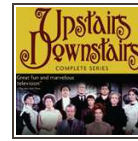
This is the same lot that brought us the appraisal of Frank Zappa's Straight and Bizarre labels and one speculates that others, such as Led Zeppelin's Swan Song, will not be far behind. The release is not sanctioned by The Beatles and a trimming of the 162 minutes which the picture takes to tell the story may have been in order. Then again, for music obsessive, this is almost perfect in scope if a clunky in execution.

The Apple boutique and the electronics wing of the company are merely mentioned, although one can easily learn more about both from others sources. Extras include contributor biographies and a nearly incomprehensible conversation with Brute Force (Stephen Friedland) about the barely issued single "The King of Fuh".

Rating: 

Extras rating: 

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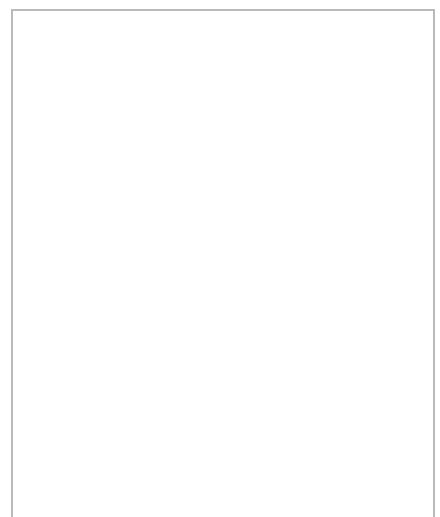
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In 1968, the Iveys (their name a take on the Hollies) were a struggling British band with a lot of promise thanks to the songwriting of members Pete Ham and Tom Evans. After the group signed with Apple Records, the first order of business was a name change. "Bad



"Finger Boogie" had been the working title of the Sgt. Pepper track "With a Little Help from My Friends"; Badfinger would be the new name for a band that looked and sounded uncannily like the Beatles.

Rockaeology at <http://bit.ly/yqFKkj> tells how Paul McCartney gave the group a song he once considered for Abbey Road, then for the sound track of the movie The Magic Christian. Sir Paul recorded a demo of "Come And Get It" in less than an hour, playing all the instruments and double-tracking his vocal. McCartney instructed Badfinger to record the song exactly like the demo because he knew it was a hit.

6 hours ago

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- 9** - Very Nearly Perfect
- 8** - Excellent
- 7** - Damn Good
- 6** - Good
- 5** - Average
- 4** - Unexceptional
- 3** - Weak
- 2** - Seriously Flawed
- 1** - Terrible

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