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Across the desk: the Beatle mini-review page

Introduction: On this page, we will occasionally offer short reviews and commentaries of (mostly) Beatle items out in the universe. Some will be new products, others will just be, if you get the meaning. There won't be a timetable for reviews, just when the fancy strikes us.



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- Update (12/8/08) **"The Who At Kilburn: 1977" (Region 1 DVD) (Image)** and **"The Who At Kilburn: 1977 [Blu-ray]" (Region 1 DVD)** (Also available from Amazon.co.uk [in Region 1 only \(no Region 2 available\)](#) and [Region 1 Blu-ray](#) . Archival releases by the Who always have a certain excitement, for us, anyway. We saw the Who in concert on several occasions, mostly notably the night in 1974 when Keith Moon collapsed and had to be replaced by an audience member. (No, it wasn't us on the drums.) The Who have released several archival DVDs over the years, but the best ones are the unadulterated concerts like this two-disc set. The first disc contains the Who's 1977 appearance at the Gauman State Theatre in Kilburn, North London. What's notable about this is it's one of Keith Moon's final appearances with the band. Though the usual manic quality of Moon seems to be a little less evident than other shows, this is still a great show and the Who sound tremendous, even given the fact they hadn't played on stage for a year, a fact Roger Daltrey tells the audience as the show opens. Townshend's guitar packs a sledge hammer wallop, Daltrey's vocals are top notch. and Entwistle's bass is rocking steady, as it ways did. The setlist is pretty standard Who, which means it was pretty much above everyone's else at the time.

The real treasure of this set, though, is the second disc, a 1969 show at the National Opera House in London. It includes an early live performance of the rock opera by the Who and the first time it was ever filmed. The quality of this footage is grainy, the sound is thin and not even all the show is included because of filming limitations. Still, "Tommy" always had a wonderful extra bit of power when done live, and this performance, even early on, is no exception. And watching Moon's manic movements here is a real joy. This DVD is a great little Christmas present from the Who to its fans and well worth every penny.

- Update (11/12/08) **"The Beach Boys and the Satan" (Region 1 DVD)**. Also available [through Amazon.co.uk, but only in Region 1 format](#): This oddball German documentary is a bit of a mess. The first 45 minutes is a fairly straight Beach Boys story from the German clips, some rare, some coming from "Wasn't Made For These Times" docu from "American Band" (the party scene "Rubber Soul" influenced "Pet Sound Kim Fowley, Greg Shaw (of the great documentary starts discussing Charle almost entirely. Adding to the strangeness is the use all the way through of German subtitles you can't turn off. The disc also has no scene breaks or extra features. Given the fact, though, that most of the Beach Boys documentaries were done by the band themselves with their spin, it's nice to see the band get a fresh look. And the disc includes enough vintage Beach Boys clips to please any fan. Still, though, this is one strange trip.

- Long John Baldry -- "It Ain't Easy: Live at Iowa State University" (Region 1 DVD)**. Also available in [Region 2 DVD from Amazon.co.uk](#): Long John Baldry's name may not click right away with Beatles fans. However, he does have a connection: He was one of the performers on the Fabs' "Around the Beatles" TV special (remember "Got My Mojo Working?") and in an interview on this DVD, he says he observed the Beatles perform at the Cavern on several occasions. But Baldry is more well known as the guy in whose bands Rod Stewart and Elton John got their starts. This 1984 show, originally made for German TV, has been out for years in the UK, but was finally released in the U.S. in September. Baldry was a rock 'n' roll character and it shows. His signature song was the raucous "Don't Try to Lay No Boogie Woogie on the King of Rock 'n' Roll," which he sings here, along with "It Ain't Easy" and "Iko Iko" from his two Warner Bros. albums. Accompanying him is Kathi McDonald, who took over the vocal duties for Big Brother and the Holding Company after Janis Joplin's departure and had a long-running alliance with Baldry that resulted in a No. 2 hit in Australia in 1980 with a cover of "You've Lost That Lovin' Feeling." Younger audiences also knew Baldry as the voice of Dr. Robotnik in the animated "Adventures of Sonic the Hedgehog." Baldry passed away in 2005 and over the course of his career did everything from easy listening to blues, but this disc is a nice testament to the rock'n/blues music he did best.



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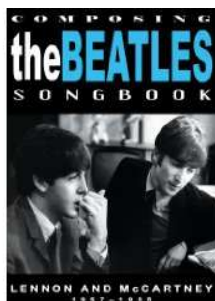


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- Update (9/8/08) **The About "Iter Itininis"** -- A mock Beatle tribute with some religious overtones that tries to be a "new" Beatles album (with a decidedly Lennon/Badfinger influence), but doesn't hit all bullseyes. There are some good moments, though. "Self" starts out with a needle drop on a vinyl drop, with a nice ballad with the feel of the JL/Plastic Ono Band album. "Tomorrow Today" is a Ringo-ish ballad with some religious overtones. "When Messiah Comes" has a guitar work that will remind you of George. "Option # 1,582," a hard rocking fast-paced song, recalls "Revolution." "I Recall," another Plastic Ono soundalike, is promoted on the cover of the copy we received as a favorite of former Apple employee Ken Mansfield. "As I Do Now" recalls "Let It Be." Overall, the songs are not the best (after all, who could come up to the Beatles' level anyway?) -- and we had a hard time figuring out in a couple of songs if it was Paul or John the album was trying to represent, but it has some interesting moments. It's available at <http://www.cdbaby.com/TheAbout>.



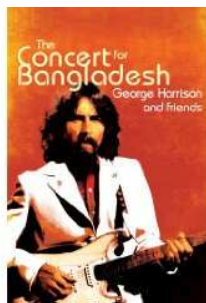
Update (6/14/08) **Shoulda Been There: A Novel on the Life of John Winston Lennon** by **Jude Southerland Kessler**: Fictionalized biographies have always made us uneasy. One such book, Chet Flippo's "Your Cheatin' Heart," his bio of Hank Williams Sr., took so many liberties with its subject, it was clearly more a novel than a biography. Jude Southerland Kessler's "Shoulda Been There," the first of three volumes planned by the author on Lennon's life, manages to avoid those pitfalls. She met with many Beatle associates, including Pete Best, Mersey Beat editor Bill Harry, Quarryman Rod Davis, Louise Harrison, Lord Woodbine, Allan Williams and Bob Wooler, for background and historical accuracy. It's described on the back of the book as a "historical novel," but it reads like a movie. Which, basically, it is. She points out in several places that, not surprisingly, the events are real, but the conversations are not. Does she bend the characters much to her own image? It's hard to say. But the fact that she's honest about it being a historical novel says a lot over some Beatle authors. We recommend "Shoulda Been There." It's a fun read. It may not sit next to the oft-thumbed Beatle reference books, but it's one that won't get buried in the stack. (Note: Thanks to the author, we have a copy to give away. Send an email by June 21 with your name and address and we'll pick a winner.)



- Update (2/16/08) **Composing the Beatles Songbook: Lennon & McCartney 1957-1965**: It's rare when a Beatles DVD that tries to summarize their career in any way makes any kind of sense. The store shelves are filled with slap-dash DVDs of the same old Beatle clips with shallow histories of the Fab Four. **Composing the Beatles Songbook: Lennon & McCartney 1957-1965**, to be released March 18 in the U.S., is a very rare and welcome exception. The 80-minute film is an intelligent (for a change) roundtable discussion of the Lennon and McCartney partnership by a number of well-known rock musicians, journalists and authors and broadcasters. The fact some of them have strong Beatle connections gives the project credibility. Those on board include Klaus Voorman, who drew the "Revolver" cover, Barry Miles, co-author of Paul McCartney's biography and Maureen Cleave, the journalist to whom Lennon uttered the infamous quote about "we're now more famous than Jesus," and broadcast journalist Paul Gambaccini, who has interviewed Paul for several official projects. Also on the disc are veteran journalist Robert Christgau (Village Voice), Anthony DeCurtis (Rolling Stone), authors Johnny Rogan, Pete Doggett, Steve Turner and Nigel Williamson. The group analyzes the development of Lennon and McCartney as songwriters. The disc includes clips from "The Ed Sullivan Show," The Royal Variety Performance and other appearances, plus there are clips of the Rolling Stones, the Byrds and Bob Dylan. Any discussion of Lennon and McCartney is, of course, subjective, but we think this disc will provoke a lot of discussion on its own. The disc includes extras with extended interviews, biographies and a Beyond DVD section. Don't miss this.

(Update (2/16/08)

- "The Beatles: Destination Hamburg"**, available now, is another in a long string of rehash documentaries of the Beatles story, this one under the guise of examining their Hamburg days. The disc cover trumpets "never before seen footage," but all the Beatle footage in it has been seen elsewhere and in better quality. The disc includes an extensive interview and music by Tony Sheridan, with additional recollections from Roy Young, but hardly anything you haven't heard before. None of the music is by the Beatles. Don't bother.



- (12/14/05) The re-release of the **Concert for Bangladesh (2pc)** (also available in a **Limited Deluxe Edition**) (and first time legit release on DVD in the U.S.) was highly anticipated for a long time by Beatle fans. It was one of George's last projects before his passing. Now, it's finally here and it's well worth it. The movie looks great, crisp and clean with superb sound, much better than the tinny (by comparison) import copies that had floated around the past couple of years. The set includes a second disc with extras on the making of the film and the album, plus three unreleased performances. We figured Dylan's "Love Minus Zero (No Limit)" from the afternoon show would be included, but there are two other surprises: a duet with George and Dylan doing "If Not For You" plus a simply stunning version of "Come On (In My Kitchen)" with George and Leon Russell, the last two from the rehearsal and sound check, respectively. Why, oh why, was the last track not included in the show? The making of documentaries contain a lot of interesting stories on how the project -- since filming a benefit show was a cutting edge idea for its day -- came to be. It wasn't easy, that's for sure, according to the documentary. George was proud of this project and rightfully so. Oh, that he could be here now to be proud with us again. (Hold the emails -- yes, I know George is still with us in spirit, but you know what we mean.)



- Five years ago (has it been that long?), Laurence Juber gave us **"LJ Plays the Beatles."** Now comes **"One Wing."** in which Juber, a former member of Wings himself, pays tribute to that



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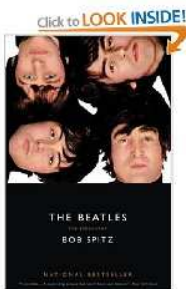
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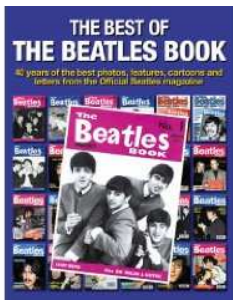
group with solo guitar versions of Wings songs. For anyone who's familiar with Juber's previous albums, you don't have to be sold very hard on this one. Juber's solo renditions of Juber's songs give a new depth and respect to songs that tend to get passed over in Paul McCartney's legacy. Simply put, Juber adds beauty and tenderness to the 13 tracks, which include "Band on the Run," "Another Day," "My Love," "Every Night," "Arrow Through Me" and "Mull of Kintyre." The faster tempo songs, like "Jet," don't seem to work as well as the slow ones, but Juber's intricate guitar style is a joy to listen to anyway. Grab this one.

- The two newest Beatles books from [Tracks](#), both by Paul Wane, are simply gorgeous time trips back to the mid-Sixties. Both contain fan photos and show the Fabs outside the realm of smiling publicity photos. "Sgt. Peppers" features pix taken outside Apple studios during recording sessions of the album. The Fabs are dressed colorfully in outfits befitting that psychedelic time. The photos include captions with anecdotes surrounding the making of the pics. The book also contains some new info on the shooting of the album cover. "Paul McCartney, London, NW8 - 1967," are fan shots taken mostly outside his Cavendish Avenue home. The narrative in the book often talks about his mercurial mood in dealing with fans who camped outside his gate. It's not very often images show a human side of the Beatles away from the glare of TV or professional photographers, but these books do just that.



- (11/22/05) Bob Spitz's book, ["The Beatles"](#) has taken an incredible amount of heat from fans over the factual errors in the book, most visibly in the picture captions, but also scattered all through it. On the plus side, however, the huge book, just under 1,000 pages, really gets into the spirit and atmosphere of the Beatle years. The author has crafted with words beautiful pictures of "being there." Yes, it was promoted as the "definitive" biography, but with Mark Lewisohn having his own version in the works, there's no way Spitz's book would trump that. Still, Spitz's book shouldn't be dismissed. It's an incredibly well-written tome, one that we think belongs on your bookshelf, even with the errors. (And it certainly wouldn't be the first Beatle book with errors.)

- There are two ways to approach the ["Best of the Beatles"](#) DVD: Either you take it as an effort to re-spin history a little more favorably toward Pete Best -- or it has in-depth and unheard stories by one of the few people who can say they were actually a Beatle. If the real purpose of the disc is to do the former, I'm not sure it gets to the goal line, but the oral history contained in some of the discussions is probably the disc's best accomplishment. What is surprising about the DVD is some of the people who join in the discussion -- Cynthia Lennon and Neil Aspinall, lending somewhat of an official stamp of approval to this thing. There's also Allan Williams, Bill Harry, Tony Sheridan and several others, too. It becomes somewhat like a reunion for all these folks, even if they're not in the same room.



- ["The Best of the Beatles Book"](#) is precisely what the title implies: a collection of articles from the fan magazine that was revived and continued on for several years. Too many of the articles, though, seem to come from the later years and not the original 1960s issues, which is a shame because of the historical significance they have. Still, the Beatles Book always ranked high on the quality scale in Beatle scholarship and any collection from that magazine is worth looking at.

- Another magazine known for its quality is LIFE magazine, and it has produced a beautiful volume called ["LIFE: Remembering John Lennon 25 Years Later."](#) Photography was always the drawing point of LIFE, and some of the photos here are just charming. A gorgeous book.

- There isn't much to say about Louis Lapham's ["With the Beatles."](#) For one, it's a very small book. It promotes itself as a reporter's look inside the Indian ashram where the Beatles spent their time with the Maharishi, but little of the text actually directly concerns the Beatles, and it appears Lapham didn't spend as much time *with the Beatles* as the title implies. There is much description of the atmosphere in the ashram during their stay, however. For completists.

- For you PETA fans, Paul wrote the intro to PETA President Ingrid Newkirk's ["Making Kind Choices."](#)

(11/13/05) ["Here, There and Everywhere: My Life Recording the Music of the Beatles"](#) by Geoff Emerick: This won't be out until next year, but proof copies are already in circulation. We've seen one and can say that the book will be just what the title suggests -- detailed accounts of Emerick working in the studio with the Beatles, both the ups and downs. (For those who would prefer the British edition, you [can purchase that here.](#))

Two British documentaries examine the seamier side of the Fabs: We've seen two relatively recent British tabloid-type documentaries, both originally broadcast on the UK's Channel 4, that attempt to look behind the public face of the Beatles and dredge up "behind the headlines" gossip.

The first -- and most notorious -- is "The Beatles Biggest Secrets," originally broadcast in December, 2004, and [released recently on DVD in the UK.](#) (Note: The DVD is in Region 0 PAL format, which means it won't be playable on U.S. TV sets, but should be playable on your computer or portable player.)

"Biggest Secrets" is a strictly sleazy look at the Fabs -- all the sex, drugs and rock 'n' roll you could ask for. Most of the revelations will be familiar, but a few were new, to us, anyway.

But what's surprising is some of the reputable Beatle people interviewed -- Alistair Taylor, Klaus Voormann, Tony Bramwell, Tony Barrow and Bill Harry, among others.

There's little attempt to put a nice face on the Beatles here -- the seamy side of the Fabs is the focus. In a world that seems to love gossip and celebrity news, this documentary would seem to fit right in, but it's sad to see such a positive force as the Beatles twisted this way.

Then there's "The Real John Lennon," which first aired in 2000. The words "The Real ..." in the title mean the non-Yoko John, as the film concentrates mainly on his life before and with the Beatles before he and Yoko were together. It's no coincidence, certainly, that a mention by Cynthia of "devious" people is followed by a discussion of Yoko. She isn't treated very kindly in this documentary. Cynthia also mentions John's violent nature, something she's also mentioned more recently in her book, "John."

"The Real John Lennon" isn't as sleazy as "Biggest Secrets" -- a tough limit to pass, certainly. When it concentrates on profiling John as a person, it's pretty sentimental and almost straightforward. But, of course, being that it was made as a tabloid documentary, it's purpose was to dredge up whatever it could. Fortunately, for the most part, it generally keeps to the intended purpose of profiling John, leaving the seamy undercurrent, almost out of sight, where it best belongs.

Neither of these two films will be highly regarded by Beatle historians -- and that's perhaps the best thing that can be said about both of them.

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