



## DVD REVIEW

## The Beatles

### Magical Mystery Tour Memories

MVD Visual (MVDV4779)

Grade: ★★★★★

When it was first unveiled to an unsuspecting British public during Christmas 1967, "Magical Mystery Tour" was widely derided as The Beatles' first failure, an ill omen for what lie ahead after their attempt to regroup following the death of manager Brian Epstein. Interestingly enough, this new video documentary cites part of the cause as the fact that it was shown only in black and white, given that the BBC TV had apparently yet to discover color. Whether or not that singular distinction was entirely to blame for the film's abysmal notices seems somewhat dubious, but with the passage of 40 years and better quality copies of the original film available for public viewing, a glimpse in hindsight would suggest the film didn't deserve the wretched reviews it initially received.

Of course, the film did have its flaws, judgmental decisions that "Magical Mystery Tour Memories" is quick to exact. For starters, Paul McCartney came up with the concept only days after Epstein's death, a decision some saw

as callous in light of the fact they had barely enough time for grieving, much less to map out their next project. It also suffered from poor planning and a naiveté about what it took to execute any operation under The Beatles banner, without having anyone to lay the groundwork as Epstein had always done.

Those are the more concrete conclusions reached in what is essentially an hour of good-natured fluff and reflection, with an additional 20 minutes in bonus features that essentially tell more of the same tales. A combination of home movies shot during the actual production and recollection from insiders and observers who were witness to the largely improvised adventures, "Magical Mystery Tour Memories" provides an interesting adjunct to the film itself, both for its insights and its nostalgia. Despite the fact that they were the world's most heralded superstars, they were apparently still accessible to the citizenry along the tour route, and it's the comments from those bystanders four decades removed that effectively makes The Beatles' free-spirited romp come to life in ways rarely witnessed by anyone who wasn't actually there. Likewise, the testimony of those who were part of band's inner circle — actor Victor Spinetti, a Beatle buddy who starred in "A Hard Day's Night" and "Help," tour manager Tony Bramwell, publicist Tony Barrow, Mike McCartney (AKA Mike



McGear and Paul's big brother), Spencer Davis and Neil Innes of The Bonzo Dog band — offer an insider's view that's as fascinating as it is informative.

Of course, any new offering with a Beatles tag is bound to appeal to the Fab Four's followers, whether it deserves the attention or not. However, given its wealth of reminiscences and snapshots of the times, this is one batch of memories well worth treasuring.

— Lee Zimmerman