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Tuesday, December 29th, 2009

## DVD Review: The Zombies, "Odessey & Oracle: The 40th Anniversary Concert"

by [Ken Shane](#)



In June of 1967, the Zombies entered EMI's Abbey Road studios to record their masterpiece, *Odessey & Oracle*. Earlier that year, the Beatles had recorded their own masterpiece, *Sgt. Pepper*, in the same studio. In November, the Zombies completed their sessions, but by then the band was close to the breaking point. Tempers flared during the recording of "Time of the Season," which later became a massive hit. When keyboard player Rod Argent and bassist Chris White, who had produced the album and written the songs, delivered the mono masters to CBS, they were told that stereo masters would be required. They were out of money, and had to take money out of their own songwriting royalties to pay for the new mixes. It was the last straw. Singer Colin Blunstone and guitarist Paul Atkinson

left the band. The stereo mix was completed on January 1, 1968, but by then the Zombies had broken up.

*Odessey & Oracle* was released in April, 1968 in the U.K., and in June in the U.S. But it wasn't until "Time of the Season" caught on in 1969 that Columbia decided to re-release the album on its Date subsidiary. Clive Davis, then running Columbia, was not going to release the album at all, until Al Kooper, fresh off his stint in Blood, Sweat and Tears, and now working A&R at Columbia, convinced him otherwise. When "Time of the Season" finally hit it big on the charts in 1969, Argent and White were already busily engaged with their new band, Argent.

In recent years, Blunstone and Argent have been touring with what they call the Zombies, but when the 40th anniversary of *Odessey & Oracle* came about, they decided to put the whole band back together, and perform the album live. Guitarist Atkinson had died in 2004, but White, and drummer Hugh Grundy signed on. Three nights were booked at the Shepherds Bush Empire in London, and the March 8 show, the second of the three nights, was filmed for release on the DVD *Odessey & Oracle: The 40th Anniversary Concert* (MVD Visual).

The show is made up on two sets. In the first, Blunstone and Argent appear with their touring band, playing a set of songs that are all related to the Zombies in some fashion. They begin with three of their earliest recordings from 1964, including the terrific opener, "I Love You." Then they move on to three songs that Blunstone performed on his wonderful solo album *One Year*, that was recorded shortly after the Zombies broke up, and was produced by Argent and White. Among these songs are covers of Tim Hardin's "Misty Roses," and Denny Laine's "Say You Don't Mind. Blunstone is accompanied by a string quintet, much as he was on parts of the album. It's worth noting that Blunstone has lost none of the breathy intensity that characterized his vocals in the '60s. The set ends with two songs from the Argent oeuvre. The standard rock and roll boogie "Keep On Rolling" feels really out of place here, but there's a strong rendition of Argent's biggest hit, "Hold Your Head Up."

The second set opens with an appearance by Al Kooper, who tells the audience the story of how *Odessey & Oracle* came to be released in the U.S., mostly through his own efforts. Next comes the performance of *Odessey & Oracle*, performed by the surviving original band members, aided by touring band guitarist Keith Airey, and Brian Wilson Band genius Darian Sahanaja. *Odessey & Oracle* is one of the great albums of the late '60s, on a par with *Pet Sounds* and *Sgt. Pepper*, and this joyful performance does nothing to diminish that. Sahanaja no doubt had a hand in shaping the powerful vocal harmonies on songs like the opening "Care of Cell 44," and "Maybe After He's Gone." The show ends with two of the Zombies biggest hits, "Tell Her No," and "She's Not There."

One of the great things about seeing veterans perform is how much they seem to appreciate the fact that their fans have stuck with them over the years. They seem genuinely touched by the reception that these songs, all more than 40 years-old, receive. The Zombies broke up before they could play

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these songs live, so this was literally the first time that they had performed *Odyssey & Oracle*, and they make the most of it.

I have a few little quibbles with the DVD, mostly having to do with the distracting over-editing by Paul Williams. He has attempted to make a modern rock video out of a band and music that is not modern. But the quality of the music and the performance easily overcomes any technical issues. Incidentally, in the little documentary that accompanies the concert, original album artwork designer Terry Quirk fills us in on the fact that the misspelling of the word 'Odyssey,' far from being intentional, was just an error on his part when laying out the artwork.

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Awesome. I've long maintained that Hugh Grundy is the most underrated drummer from the British Invasion, and he hasn't lost a step. Also interesting to see "Time Of The Season" sung by a singer now the creepily likely age to use the line "who's your daddy? is he rich like me?" on a girl (no hate on Blunstone, just a line that always bugged me).

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I had the same reaction to the "who's your daddy" line. But Colin is still singing very well.

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Agreed on the line, but I still have a soft spot for The Zombies. Who knows what could have been if they had held together way back in the '60s.

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