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DVD & Blu-ray Reviews

Composing Outside The Beatles – Lennon And McCartney 1973-1980 (2011)

An interesting survey of the two Beatles apart from the Beatles.



Published on December 6, 2011



Composing Outside The Beatles – Lennon And McCartney 1973-1980 (2011)

Interviews: Klaus Voorman; Denny Laine; Peter Ames Carlin; Robert Christgau; Denny Seiwell; Anthony DeCurtis; John Blaney; Chris Ingham; Paul Gambaccini; and Johnny Rogan
Chapters; Intro; Divergent Paths; Getting Closer; Slippin' And Slidin'; Power Cut; Against All Odds; Lost And Found; Get Back!; New Faces; Let 'Em In; On Top Again; Don't Let It Bring You Down; And The Band Played On; Letting Go; Out Of The Blue; The Dream Is Over: Bonus Features: Denny Laine Winging It; Contributor Biographies; Beyond DVD
Studio: Pride/MVD Visual PGDVD142 [10/25/11]
Video: 4:3 Color & B&W
Audio: English, Dolby Digital 2.0 Stereo
All Regions
Length: 139 minutes
Rating: *1/2**

When The Beatles broke up in 1970 (or was it 1969?), expectations for solo albums were skyrocketing. For the prior decade, any release of a Beatle album was the most significant event in the music industry. With the turmoil of the Fab Four (painfully documented in the *Let It Be* film) creating a rift within the group, it was thought that a clean break might be fruitful. The fallout from the breakup of most iconic rock bands (Rolling Stones, The Who, Cream, to name a few) resulted in mitigated levels of success. Unfortunately, this axiom held true for The Beatles. Much of that success hinged on the tenuous, combative relationship of Paul McCartney and John Lennon.

With archival footage and vintage photographs (color and black & white), and interviews with musicians and journalists, the two divergent careers are examined. McCartney is portrayed as a dedicated band leader (with Wings) whose quest for commercial success came to fruition. This included one hit (“Live And Let Die”) which interestingly enough was arranged with the help of former guru and classical producer George Martin. Lennon on the other hand is viewed as an artist who is tortured by his legal and marital problems. Earlier he had produced two critically acclaimed albums, *John Lennon/Plastic Ono Band* and *Imagine*. Subsequent projects were uneven and lacked his fiery attitude. The notorious Los Angeles “lost weekend” is discussed, including a great black and white photo of a bleary-eyed Harry Nilsson. During this time, there was a slight reunion that never produced any releasable material.

Regardless of success for McCartney and his band Wings (Band On The Run, “Silly Love Songs”), the results would invariably be measured against “Let It Be”. The culture shaking element was gone. There are some uncomfortable clips of McCartney songs that did not have the impact of the groundbreaking short films (“Strawberry Fields”, “Hey Jude”) that accompanied the release of Beatles singles. At times, Lennon seems forgotten in the documentary until the discussion turns to his final release, *Double Fantasy*. This album has some excellent cuts (“Watching The Wheels, “Woman”) but never approximated the impact of prior material. The documentary ends with a classic performance of “I Want To Hold Your Hand” underscoring the eternal

appeal of The Beatles, not the individuals who constituted the band.

Composing Outside The Beatles – Lennon And McCartney 1973-1980 manages to discuss the post-Beatle narrative with a reasonable balance. There is more material on McCartney due to the interviews with Denny Laine and Denny Seiwell, both Wings members. There also seems to be too much attention to the commercial viability of the two artists. Originally a two-part BBC documentary, the two hours, twenty minute DVD has a faintly deliberate pace. [There are two additional documentaries titled *Composing the Beatles Songbook...Ed.*] The stereo sound quality is very good and some of the 1970's cultural fashions are hilarious. The innate thirst for everything Beatles will never be quenched.

—Robbie Gerson

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