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[The Cream of the 60s Crop Concludes](#)



“What is the meaning of The Cream?”

Rather than a complaint to a waiter about spoiled milk, this was part of the verbatim written reaction prolific British film producer-director Tony Palmer received from American execs upon presenting them with his music documentary *All My Lovin*. Palmer winged out from London to wig out a delighted closing night Mods and Rockers Film Festival audience at Hollywood’s Egyptian Theatre with the aforementioned, as well as the premier UK rock trio in their alleged last concert at the Royal Albert Hall, *Cream Farewell Concert* and Palmer’s poetic travel doc with the drummer of The Cream, *Ginger Baker in Africa*.

Palmer, a protégé of Ken Russell, was not a rocker (nor a mod, for that matter), in the days when he did music docs on Puccini, Wagner, Callas and Stravinsky. But John Lennon urged him to do a piece that would not only display the music of Britain’s top rock acts but a mélange of views both witty and urgent, the socio-political views of such folks as Paul McCartney, Hendrix, the Who, Donovan, many of the previously expected suspects of this remarkable Mods and Rockers Fest 2007. Frank Zappa acerbically and wonderfully recalls having Marines onstage with the Mothers of Invention, singing military songs and then mutilating a scale model doll on cue. Author Anthony Burgess roundly tears into 60s youth and music but lightly backpedals when it comes to the use of marijuana.

But Palmer isn’t just kidding around, as he intersperses the more serious quotes with jolting imagery: Holocaust corpses, a burning Buddhist monk in Vietnam. This 1967 film was actually originally relegated to a time period after signoff on the BBC. It was, Palmer told the crowd and Festival founder and high wizard Martin Lewis, aired after a priest delivered a closing “Epilogue” for the night, followed by 30 seconds of darkness. Happily, the DVD of *All My Lovin* will illuminate home video viewers next month.

“I don’t know if they’ll let you get away it,” Eric Clapton told Palmer after he saw *All My Lovin* and doubted its eventual airing. Thankfully, Palmer has done so and his coverage of The Cream onstage at the Royal Albert Hall sometimes becomes video art, with flaring colors, getting across the body heat of the performers, including Jack Bruce’s powerful singing and most especially Baker’s snaky arms and writhing head during an extended drum solo. Asking Baker and Clapton to demonstrate, in the relative calm of a studio, specific blues guitar and drum techniques is a unique and additional treat.

Palmer is not quite sure why he agreed to go along with Baker in 1971 from Algeria to Nigeria, for the creation of *Ginger Baker in Africa* but Baker’s narrative, which sounds more like spoken song lyrics, is a pleasant choice. Whether it’s a jam with Lagos musicians, a wild dance sequence featuring Fela Kuti or an offbeat animated retelling of their arrest on a technicality, this doc constantly surprises.

As befits the best attended M&R Fest, one that exceeded the fondest wishes of many with scores of live musical performances and music luminaries, Lewis had a closing night coup: psychedelic pop icons Strawberry Alarm Clock—including five of the six original members—were pleasantly coerced into performing in the “clubhouse,” the rear room of the Pig and Whistle restaurant next door.

“Incense and Peppermints” went to number one in 1967 and the Strawberry Alarm Clock did an elongated version of it in the clubhouse, one that took the controlled fuzzy tone of that lead guitar and expanded on it, gnarly and thrashing, yet returning to the sweet melody of it.

That's why this writer so loves 60s music and culture and this essential Fest, every year at the Egyptian. Through a lens smudged with global warming and depleted uranium and suitcase bombs and the fallout of collapsing bridges and levies, one can look back at the 60s and smile. Not because the era was free from its own strife. Maybe a major accomplishment of the 60s was a willingness to protest war and racism and sexism and pollution and just American empire in general. And in film and music, 60s artists could deeply, purely express a righteous wellspring of rage or a giddy, feel-good, even spacy expression of the hope provided by the thing that we still, albeit shakily, hold onto: that all our loving combined, even as a psychological construct, is far more valuable than glib, clever despair.

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