

# ALL YOU NEED IS LOVE

**Tony Palmer docs cross genres at lightning speed**

In 1963, budding director Tony Palmer gave the most recognizable man in the world a tour of Cambridge University. In 1966, Palmer reconnected with John Lennon, who in turn provided him all the inspiration he needed to try and distill the entire history of popular music, up to that moment in time, on film.

"I had just started working at the BBC. (Lennon) said that I had a duty to make a film to somehow get on to television all the musicians he admired that you simply couldn't get on television. So, I made a film called *All My Loving*. That literally included extraordinary people like Hendrix, Cream, Frank Zappa, the Who. People you couldn't get on to television at that time because either they wouldn't play three minute pop songs or they didn't want to appear behind gyrating nubile, which was sort of the fashion those days," explains Palmer over a crackled connection across the Atlantic.

As one of the first serious pop moments on film, *All My Loving* was met with both critical and popular success, not least of all from Lennon himself. A chance encounter with the Beatle four years later in New York City completed the movement. From that moment on, it would be Palmer's job to capture the history of popular music in a cohesive, comprehensive documentary.

*All You Need Is Love*, whose title was - appropriately enough - suggested by Lennon, is divided into seventeen episodes, which was the style in the 1970s. It tells "The Story of Popular Music" by interviewing the faces of the bands, capturing raw moments in history, and presenting them all in a way that makes the history seem palatable.

"One of the things that John Lennon mentioned when we sat down to talk about it, was that he thought it was very,

very important that popular music was placed very firmly in some kind of social and political context, that it wasn't just mad, drugged-out dudes strumming their guitars. They all meant to say something, they felt that the music they wrote and sang expressed a particular time and a particular place," continues Palmer. Not only did Palmer then have to figure out whom to speak to in each of the popular music genres (such as blues, jazz, swing, country and glitter rock), but he too had to figure out, much more precisely, how each genre and band fit into the larger music as a whole. *All You Need Is Love*, then, is unique in its approach to music as a veritable cultural text.

The entire documentary is separated into episodes, but that seems to be primarily more of a capricious choice - to make the history seem more approachable. In reality, there is a tremendous amount of cross-referencing between the episodes. To really understand the entire scope of the story of popular music, says Palmer, all genres have to be considered together as part of a larger social whole.

In an effort to connect the celluloid strip to a more tangible social reality, the Plaza will run a special series once a week during the month of February. From January 31st to February 21st, every Saturday will feature a different episode taken from Palmer's set, complete with a live band that will play before the screening in the motif of that week's episode. The live bands, all local talent, should add a certain depth to the music and add a certain visceral component to the potentially passive experience of sitting in a cinema. Thus, the screenings at the Plaza may afford an excellent opportunity to begin to understand what it means to live, breathe, play, the music.

by Sebastian Buzzalino

