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Tuesday, August 5, 2008

Tony Palmer's All You Need is Love

In 1974, John Lennon suggested an ambitious project to a filmmaker friend: telling the story of popular music.

"All You Need Is Love," landing Tuesday on DVD, is director Tony Palmer's hearty response to his Beatle buddy. The TV series ran for 17 enthralling episodes in 1976. The interviews, performances and old clips Palmer gathered make up nearly 15 hours on five discs.

http://www.cleveland.com/movies/index.ssf/2008/05/dvds_in_all_you_need_is_love_t.html

The best documentary I've seen on music - if not the best documentary I've ever seen - Tony Palmer's All You Need Is Love brought tears to my eyes again and again as I watched it recently, through its beauty and insight. It's hard to describe an approach to filmmaking so idiosyncratic and yet so to the point. Perhaps the most important thing to say is that Palmer tells HIS story, HIS version of the history of pop music; yet at the same time he gives each talking head and each musical performance he weaves into his film plenty of time to express itself. Because he doesn't just select out the bits that fit neatly into the story he is trying to tell, he allows a cacophony to unfold, a cacophony that manages to make perfect sense, but only if you don't try too hard to hold it together.

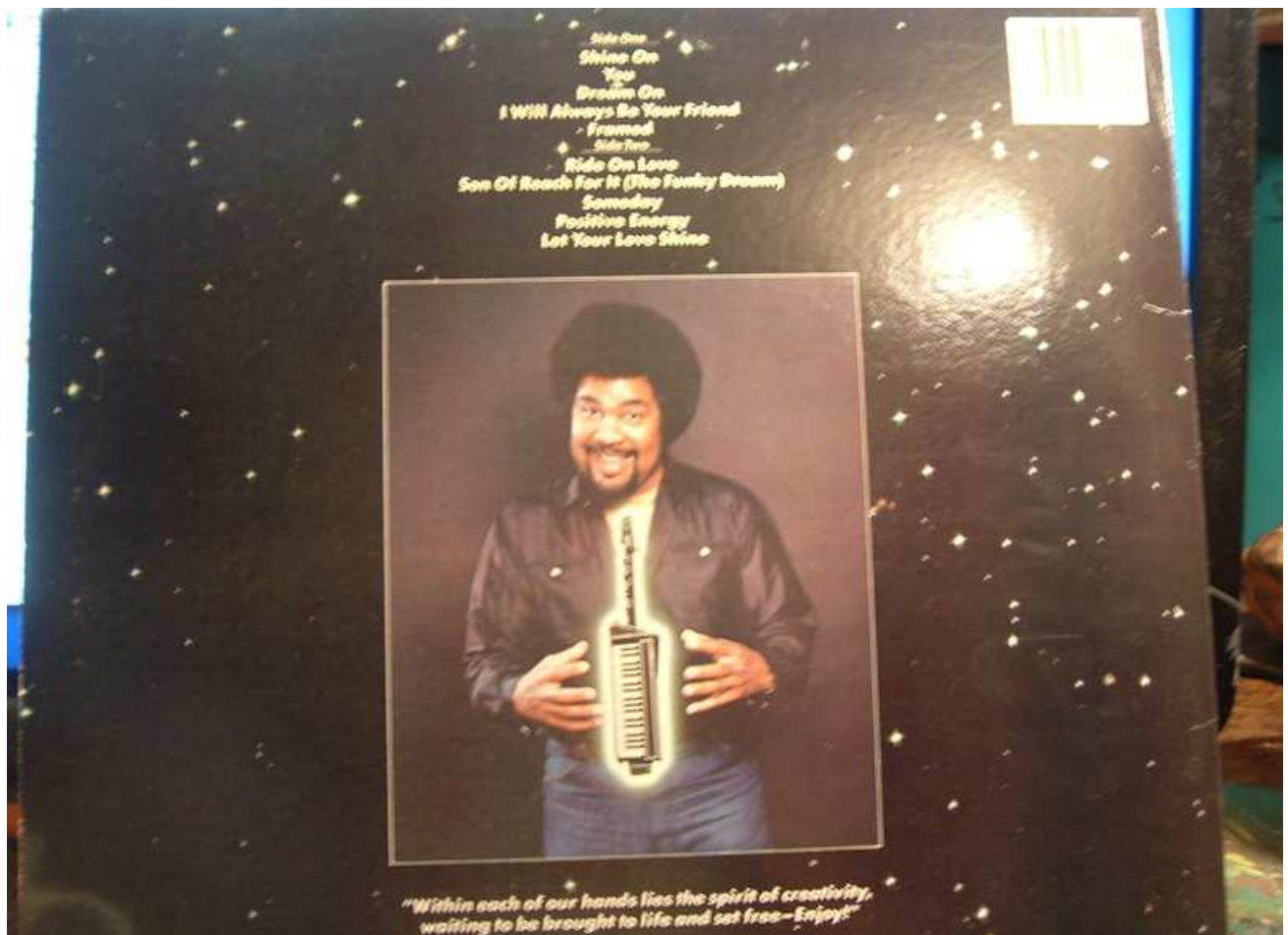
I've never seen anything like it. Maybe I just need to see more of Tony Palmer's work.

<http://www.tonypalmer.org/>

Meanwhile I've been continuing my journey into early eighties post disco music. My current selection is from an artist I've never heard of before, George Duke. It's Dream On from 1982.



The cover is a very engaging takeoff (by the looks of it) on Boston's first album cover, replacing Boston's iconic flying rock guitar with a flying keyboard/guitar (just as iconic, as a symbol of the early eighties). The back cover is delightful too, with George Duke making a playful visual boast about his keyboard prowess:



This it seems was no idle boast:

In 1990, George Duke was named "R&B Keyboardist Of The Year" by Keyboard Magazine for the second consecutive year.

<http://www.georgeduke.com/biography.html>

Duke's early career was spent in jazz. Like Quincy Jones, he morphed from this into production for pop music, events and festivals, film and television - most notably, from my point of view, he scored the Five Heartbeats, one of my favorite films. Duke has also (shades of Frank Zappa, whom he played for at one time!) created orchestral music.

I would say that Dream On is a very typical post-disco, pre-Thriller fusion/r&b record. Honestly, I like the cover art better than the album; it makes me wish Duke had cut loose with his keyboard more on the album than he seems to. But it's a good album anyway. Worth owning, worth listening to.

Posted by workshop at 3:19 PM

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