

NEW MEDIA: DVDS: NEW RELEASES: 1977'S 17-EPIISODE ALL YOU NEED IS LOVE

The musicians and the stories behind their music



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Welcome to the time machine. In preparing for the 17-episode 1977 series **All You Need Is Love**, slated for a five-disc DVD release on May 13, British rock critic Tony Palmer and his producers interviewed everyone they could think of who shaped 20th-century popular music, from early ragtime to 1970s rock. Where the subjects had died, the producers found just the right footage, frequently rare - jazz great Charlie Parker playing his sax, or Woody Guthrie singing.

Along the way, viewers get to follow the Rolling Stones backstage, listen to Billie Holiday sing a few weeks before her death, enjoy Eric Clapton playing *Layla* (the rock version, not the easy-listening one), watch Jimi Hendrix smash his guitar into his amp during *Wild Thing*, and sit back while Edith Piaf warbles *Milord*. One episode concentrates on the Beatles, which is appropriate, not least since John Lennon urged Palmer to embark on this series. It's a miracle that the producers managed to secure all the music clearances for the DVD release.

One by one, the faces of the century's music come alive, offering insights into how their minds worked. Here is Irving Caesar, creator of such classic songs as *Tea for Two*, explaining how he wrote one of his lesser-known tunes. He had scribbled an overheard snatch of conversation in his notebook - "the good Lord never made a bad day" - and carried it around for years until someone suggested he repeat a couple of the words: "Oh, the good, good Lord never made a bad, bad day." Buddy Rich provides a lesson in playing the drums. Hoagy Carmichael, author of such pop standards as *Stardust*, describes the excitement he felt years earlier on first hearing the blues played on a harmonica: "Even in the year 1918, to hear a blue note blew my head, blew my top."

Through it all, Palmer's narration is engaging and argumentative, on occasion springing out of left field, as in his declaration that Leon Rosselson was "the best of contemporary troubadour" in 1977. Rosselson was a politically engaged folk singer and satirist of some note, but was he really the best?

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Palmer and his producers drew on the best in the business. The episode on musicals was prepared from a script by Stephen Sondheim; other experts and archivists included Leonard Feather, John Hammond and Ian Whitcomb. There's time in these 15 hours for wild performances, like Jerry Lee Lewis's piano-pounding *Whole Lotta Shakin' Goin' On*. And there's time for frivolity as Liberace plays boogie-woogie for an appreciative older audience, asking the women to sing the chorus, then asking the men, and then saying, "I hope I didn't leave anybody out."

Also out

P.S. I Love You is a romantic weepie in which Gerard Butler's character presciently leaves a series of letters for Hilary Swank's character to help her get over his death. (The disc begins with a sacrilegious co-opting of scenes from *Casablanca* to suggest Bogart and Bergman are warning viewers against pirating DVDs.)

Over Her Dead Body is one of those to-heaven-and-back comedies in which a spirit (Eva Longoria Parker) seen only by one character (a psychic played by Lake Bell) returns to wreak havoc. The chemistry is good between Bell and Paul Rudd, but Parker's character is insufferable, and the first of many implausible elements is that Rudd would have got engaged to her, let alone mourned her death for a year.

The Fox Network's cancellation a few years ago of the witty series *Greg the Bunny*, starring Seth Green and uncontrollable puppets, hasn't kept the bunny down. *The Passion of Greg the Bunny: Best of the Film Parodies Vol. 2* captures the act's latest, more foul-mouthed incarnation on cable television, spoofing such films as *Monster* and *Dogville*. The DVD includes copious extras, including Greg's first steps on 1998 public-access TV.

Mongrel Media offers the documentaries *How to Cook Your Life*, German director Doris Dorrie's 2007 look at chef and Zen master Edward Espe Brown, author of *The Tassajara Bread Book*, and *The Wild Horse Redemption*, John Zaritsky's 2007 study of a volunteer rehabilitation

program in Colorado where convicts are taught to tame wild mustangs.

In *How She Move*, written by York University film grad Annmarie Morais, the heroine (Rutina Wesley) pursues a better life through step dancing. The bonus features make it clear how much work went into putting a snap in those dances. And *The Hottie and the Nottie*, the critically savaged beauty-and-the-beast comedy with Paris Hilton, comes with a commentary by producer Hadeel Reda and two of the stars, but not, despite promo assurances to the contrary, by Hilton herself. She does apply makeup to someone in an extra.

Extra! Extra!

"What costume designer wouldn't want to do a film called *27 Dresses*?" asks Catherine Marie Thomas, the designer on this romantic comedy with Katherine Heigl and James Marsden. Forget the usual rom-com complications; just feel the material in the 27 bizarre bridesmaid gowns Heigl's character amasses. Thomas's "marching orders were 'bigger, uglier, louder, shinier,'" director Anne Fletcher says in the extras. She also throws a bone to future bridesmaids. "It doesn't matter how ugly the dress is. If you get enough of them in a row, there's something very pretty about it."

Extra! Extra! Extra!

Steel City is a downbeat drama about two dissimilar sons (Thomas Guiry, Clayne Crawford) and a father (John Heard) who deserted them as children and now sits in an Illinois prison. The first feature by writer-director Brian Jun, which also stars a pre-*Ugly Betty* America Ferrara, is well made, but Jun recognizes in one of two worthwhile commentaries that such slice-of-life dramas aren't necessarily his ticket to getting studio assignments. His next film, he tells editor Ryan Samul, will be more commercial. "I'm not trying to talk trash on Hollywood. I'm just not really part of that system. If I'm ever on a studio lot, I'm probably parking someone's car."

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