

'All You Need Is Love' is story of pop music



With John Lennon's encouragement, director Tony Palmer created a TV series that explored the history of pop music right up through rock 'n' roll and The Beatles

By Gillian G. Gaar

When British filmmaker Tony Palmer was visiting New York City during the early '70s, he was pleased to run into an old friend from back home one afternoon — John Lennon. After their initial greetings, Lennon asked Palmer what he'd been up to in a typically pointed fashion.

"I can hear him as if it was today," Palmer recalls. "He giggled, and then he pointed his finger at me and said, 'Are you doing anything useful?' 'Minding my own business!' I think I replied. And later, over rather too much brown rice, he said what was really needed was a film which put the whole saga [of music] into some sort of social and historical perspective, so that we could really understand where rock 'n' roll had come from. And so, what began as a rather foolhardy idea eventually became 'All You Need Is Love.'"

"All You Need Is Love," subtitled "The Story Of Popular Music," was the first TV series to explore the subject in depth. And, over the course of 17 50-minute episodes, it's a series that leaves few stones unturned. Palmer looks at virtually every genre, from ragtime, jazz, and the blues, to vaudeville, musicals, and swing, country, folk, and, from episode 13 on, rock 'n' roll.

"I think John hoped that if I did the series, people would see that rock 'n' roll had made an extremely important contribution to the social history of our times," says Palmer. "That was certainly an ambi-

tion of his, and it became an ambition of mine. And I don't want to take too much credit for it, but it was the first long series to do that."

The series first aired on British television in 1976 and was in circulation until the early '80s. But after that, it seemingly disappeared, not even being released on video. It's an absence Palmer attributes to an uncertainty over who owned the distribution rights.

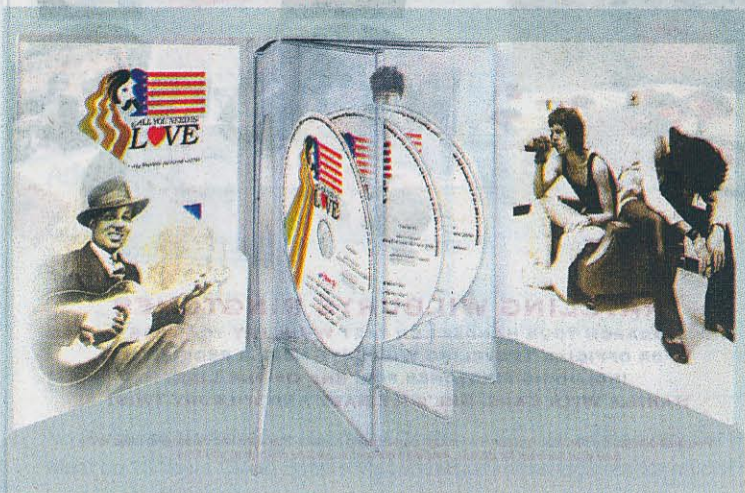
"That was the main reason it languished," he explains. "Eventually, it was sorted out by a group of lawyers who

seemed far more determined than me to get it issued."

Thus, its new release in a five-DVD set marks the first time the series has ever been commercially available.

Palmer had previously covered rock music in "All My Loving," again at Lennon's suggestion ("He said, 'Palmer, you have a duty; you're working [at the BBC]. Get [the bands] on by fair means or foul, but get them on!'"). But that film, which first aired on British TV in 1968 and fea-

Palmer continued on page 24



◀A look inside the packaging of the new five-DVD set showing all 17 episodes of "All You Need Is Love," a British TV series conceived and directed by filmmaker Tony Palmer.

The cover of the new "All You Need Is Love" DVD set. ▶

TONY PALMER'S CLASSIC SERIES THE STORY OF POPULAR MUSIC

John Lennon

'A mighty achievement. Thank you.'

Bing Crosby

'Magnificent...the editing is truly outstanding. A priceless archive.'

Pete Seeger

'Its colossal emotional, intellectual and historical range is breathtaking'



Palmer continued from page 22

tured acts like Jimi Hendrix and Pink Floyd, had been an hour long; this new venture was set to be much more ambitious.

"I said to Lennon, 'How the hell am I going to learn about all these different subjects in a crash course?'" Palmer says. "And he said, 'Well it's easy. All you have to do is get hold of all those clever people' — he always called them clever people — 'who know about these things.' So, it was fairly straightforward, actually. I just made a list of subjects. In fact, I think we started to make the list over the lunch as I remember, over the brown rice."

And as the brief was to cover all popular music, not just rock, the subject list grew rather long.

"There had to be a film about ragtime," says Palmer. "There had to be a film about blues, a film about jazz, about soul, about music hall, about Tin Pan Alley. And, obviously, when it got to rock 'n' roll and The Beatles time, then it'd be a film about rock 'n' roll, and it had to be a bit more chronological."

Palmer then approached people like producer Jerry Wexler, musical composer Stephen Sondheim and Beatles press aide Derek Taylor, among others, and asked them to write an essay about what their particular genre of music meant to them. "What the

essays did was that they helped me focus on what was, from the point of view of the people who'd written them, the really significant and important feelings that were trying to be encapsulated by that music," Palmer explains.

By then, it had become obvious the subject was not one that could be covered in a few hours. Palmer chuckles as he remembers being asked by ITV, the U.K. network funding the series, how many hours he needed for the show. "I said, 'Well, how about 16?'" he says. "I remember one television executive, he literally dropped his cup of coffee and said, 'Are you seriously asking us for 16 hours of prime time television?' To which the answer was 'Yes please! Why not?' Television is such a mess now that you wouldn't get away with that kind of insulting request today. But there certainly was a period 10 or 15 years ago when people were quite willing to think in those terms."

Once it was decided what each episode would cover, Palmer next made lists of potential interview subjects, "and then it became a kind of military campaign to track these people down," he says. "Often we found that the mere fact that we were willing to go to them was the first sign in their minds that we were taking them and their music seriously, treating them with respect, rather than just

Palmer continued on page 26



▲ In his series, Tony Palmer took viewers to the Mississippi Delta to study the blues.



▲ A photo of a Beatles recording session taken from the TV series "All You Need Is Love."

Palmer continued from page 24

summoning them to a studio. I remember with some of them, it was a kind of dare. Bo Diddley insisted that we went to his farm, but what he didn't tell me, it was 200 miles in the middle of nowhere in the Navajo desert! I remember cursing him as we were going; I thought, 'This is madness! We're never going to find this place!' And, of course, when we turned up, he just laughed and thought the whole thing was too funny. But then he gave us absolutely everything that we needed."

On another occasion, after unsuccessfully trying to track down Muddy Waters, Palmer found him by chance, while filming in Chicago and noticing an ad for a Waters gig in the local paper.

"So we went to this extremely seedy club on the West side of Chicago," he says. "And I got there in plenty of time, because I thought the place was bound to be packed to the gun-walls. And it would not be true to say there were more people in the film crew than there were in the audience, but that's what it felt



like. And I was just amazed. When we filmed B.B. King, he kept thanking me for coming to see him. 'Son, it's really a pleasure to have you here.' And then he gave me a lift to his other concerts. I think once they realized that we were treating them with the respect they

properly deserved as musicians, let alone as human beings, then there was nothing we couldn't get."

Help also came from interviewees like John Hammond and Tina Turner, who were happy to recommend Palmer to their friends, and

"The bottom line is that nobody thought this music had any real merit. And that was one of the reasons I wanted to make this series."

— Tony Palmer

as a result, the series features an astonishingly wide range of interviews: Pat Boone, Eubie Blake, Bing Crosby, E.Y. Harburg, Ken Russell, Sam Phillips and many more. The archive footage is equally wide-ranging.

"We did have a phenomenal couple of researchers who were like a dog with a bone; they weren't going to let go," Palmer says. The series has what Palmer says is "the only long interview that Artie Shaw ever gave," as well as interviews with people who died not long after the series first aired, like Crosby, Cab Calloway and Benny Goodman. They also filmed historic locations which were later torn down. "It became quite important to us, even only two or three years after we finished filming, that we'd got there just in time," says Palmer.

And despite the divergence of the musical styles explored, a common theme is clearly apparent in nearly all the episodes — the rise, assimilation and subsequent dilution of musical movements.



▲ Elvis in all his hip-swinging glory.

► Diana Ross



“What quickly emerged was that all popular music follows a pattern,” Palmer explains. “It starts off with its roots in the streets as it were. Suddenly, it’s successful. Suddenly, men in suits and big business realize there’s money to be made out of it. And they rip the hell out of it, and it becomes something totally different and redundant. So, you go all the way from Scott Joplin wanting to write an opera through to ‘Alexander’s Ragtime Band,’ which has got nothing whatsoever to do with ragtime. Once big business gets involved and starts manufacturing the hell out of it, you’re in trouble.”

It’s an attitude reflected by several interviewees throughout the series, such as Ernest Tubb.

“Ernest Tubb didn’t want to be interviewed in the building now called the Grand Old Opry,” Palmer says. “He wanted to be interviewed in his tour bus. And I asked him why, and he said ‘Well, when we started out on this country music trail, it was something

very simple. Now down the road it’s a theme park [referring to the now-closed Opryland amusement park], and I don’t want to have anything to do with that.’ That was very moving to me.”

Ultimately, the series is weighed toward rock music, with five episodes devoted to the genre. And of all the artists profiled, The Beatles are the only group to have an entire episode devoted to them, marking the first time there had been an overview documentary on the group (the 1964 Maysles brothers film, “What’s Happening! The Beatles In America,” focused on the group’s first U.S. trip).

Some sequences clearly influenced Eric Idle’s Beatles parody film “All You Need Is Cash,” about the “pre-fab Four,” The Rutles. “Eric Idle, he owes me money,” Palmer jokes. “That was another thing that finally provoked us into getting the series out on DVD. Or, to cite another example, the interview in that episode with Mrs. Epstein, that was the only

time she ever ever talked about her son, Brian [the Beatles manager]. And if you look on the Brian Epstein official website, you’ll see the interview there — which I don’t remember anybody asking permission to use. Now, I don’t care about that kind of thing; I’m all for the instant dissemination of all knowledge. But it did become increasingly annoying that I kept seeing bits of the series and bootleg copies appearing everywhere; I just thought, this is it!”

Though Palmer had been a music critic for The Observer, writing reviews “of practically everybody you ever heard of,” working on the series proved to be as much a learning experience for him as for the audience.

“I was going to say that what surprised me was how extraordinary these musicians — as musicians — were,” he says. “But that wouldn’t be true, because I already kind of knew it, or I suspected it. But to be inches away from B.B. King while he was going hell for leather was awe-inspiring. Because nobody had filmed him that up close before. I felt also that the social conscience that these people had was, again, awe-inspiring. The two days that we spent with Pete Seeger I will never forget in my life. The difficulties he had been through of being spat at for his quasi-Communist sympathies, and therefore being yanked off the air and forbidden to perform in public — and this is a white guy! This isn’t even a black guy. To think of the problems he had and yet he was still going at it. It’s incredibly inspiring.

“And it’s awe-inspiring and humbling the extent to which these musicians from the very beginning clearly wanted to say something about the world in which they lived,” Palmer continues. “And they’d chosen to say it in a medium that was not taken seriously, that was derided as just being sex, drugs and rock ‘n’ roll and therefore incapable of coherent joined-up social conscience. That was what hit me very hard, repeatedly. And I felt this is something which has to be celebrated, has to be made extremely clear, and I have to just brazen it out with the television executives and just tell them they’re going to get some nice little films about this harmless popular music. They got a hell of a shock when I delivered it!”

Palmer lets the story unfold slowly, letting the interviewees do most of the talking. Nor was he afraid to court controversy; an episode on protest songs included an IRA song, which caused some concern. But to their credit, ITV not only accepted the series as is, they even made it longer, suggesting that Palmer add an introductory episode to explain the breadth of the series to the audience.

Palmer initially resisted, “But they said, ‘No, no, no, you’ve got to trust this,’” he says. “‘Because it will grab the audience, and they’ll stay with it.’ And, in fact, that’s exactly what happened. It did grab the audience, and they hung on through all the episodes, because they knew that any minute they were going to get Paul McCartney. Though in fact Paul McCartney didn’t come on until considerably after the first episode!”

But in the U.S., WNET, who picked up the series for the PBS network, weren’t so generous, and asked Palmer to edit the series down.

“And they were absolutely shocked when I said, ‘No, I’m not going to change these films,’” Palmer recalls. “‘You don’t want to show the films that’s your prerogative. But I’m not going to water them down simply to make them nice and palatable for people like you.’ My attitude was go stuff yourselves, basically.”

In the end, WNET only showed select episodes. “I think they showed about half of it,” says Palmer. “They showed the ‘nice’ episodes — though I’m not quite sure which episodes they thought were nice!”

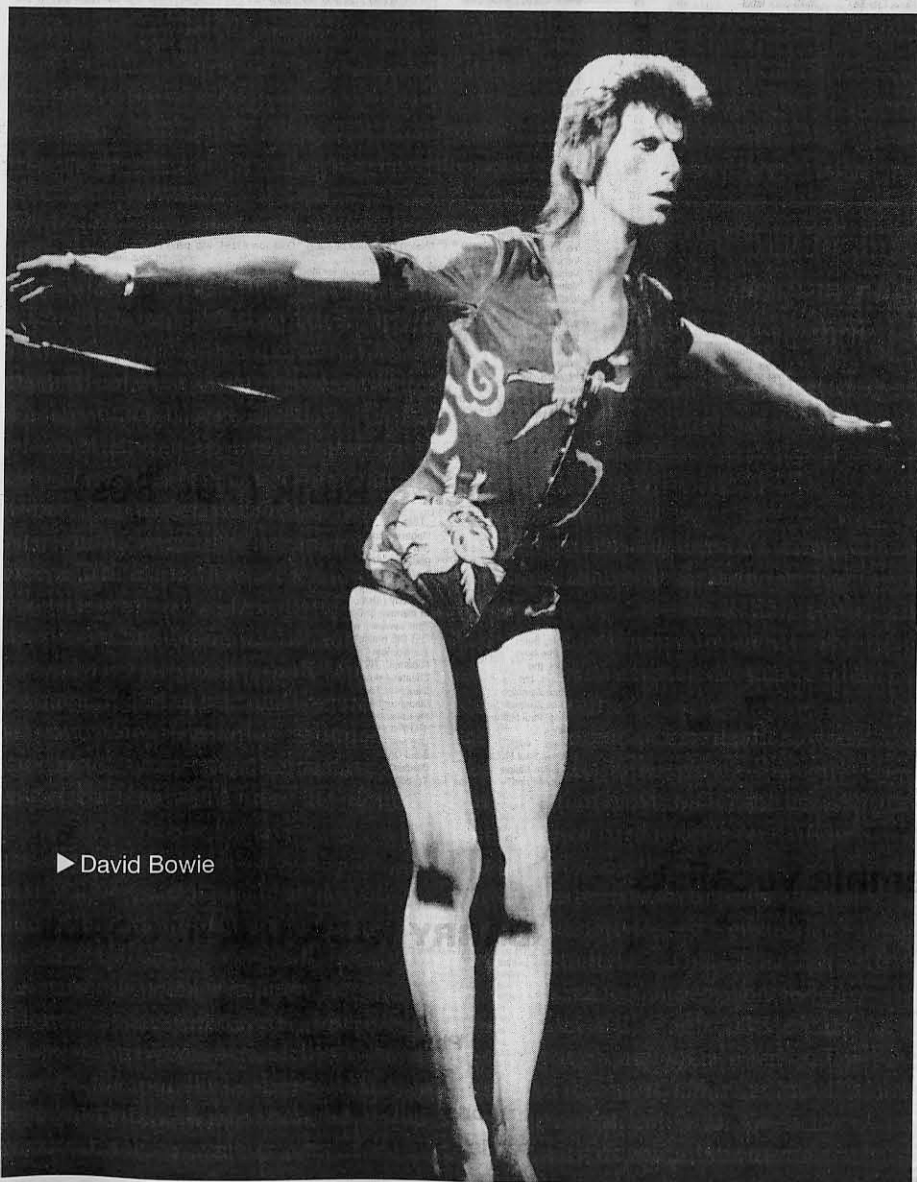
Though the series largely fell off the radar in the ‘80s, uncredited clips have turned up in music documentaries ever since. A tie-in book, written by Palmer, helped keep awareness of the series alive. And the rise of the Internet also brought a steady stream of requests for the series to be reissued.

“I kept getting emails saying, ‘Where can we get “All You Need Is Love?” Why can’t we buy it on DVD?’” says Palmer. “It was a provocative irritant, and I finally thought, ‘Right, I’m fed up with getting these e-mails, I’d better try and do something about it.’”

It’s hard to imagine such a series being created for television today; would any U.S. network allow Palmer the freedom he enjoyed 30 years ago? Not to mention that television now seems to be mired in what Palmer calls a “focus group mentality.”

“It was possible in the mid-’70s for one television executive to say, ‘That’s a good idea. Let’s do it,’” he says. “Now there would be committees which would go on for five years, by which time I’ve lost all enthusiasm and just want to get the gun and kill the buggers! It sounds like I’m a geriatric complaining about the golden days, but not at all. There’s wonderful, wonderful films and programs being made now, and they get on the air. But they get on air frequently in spite of television executives rather than because of them.

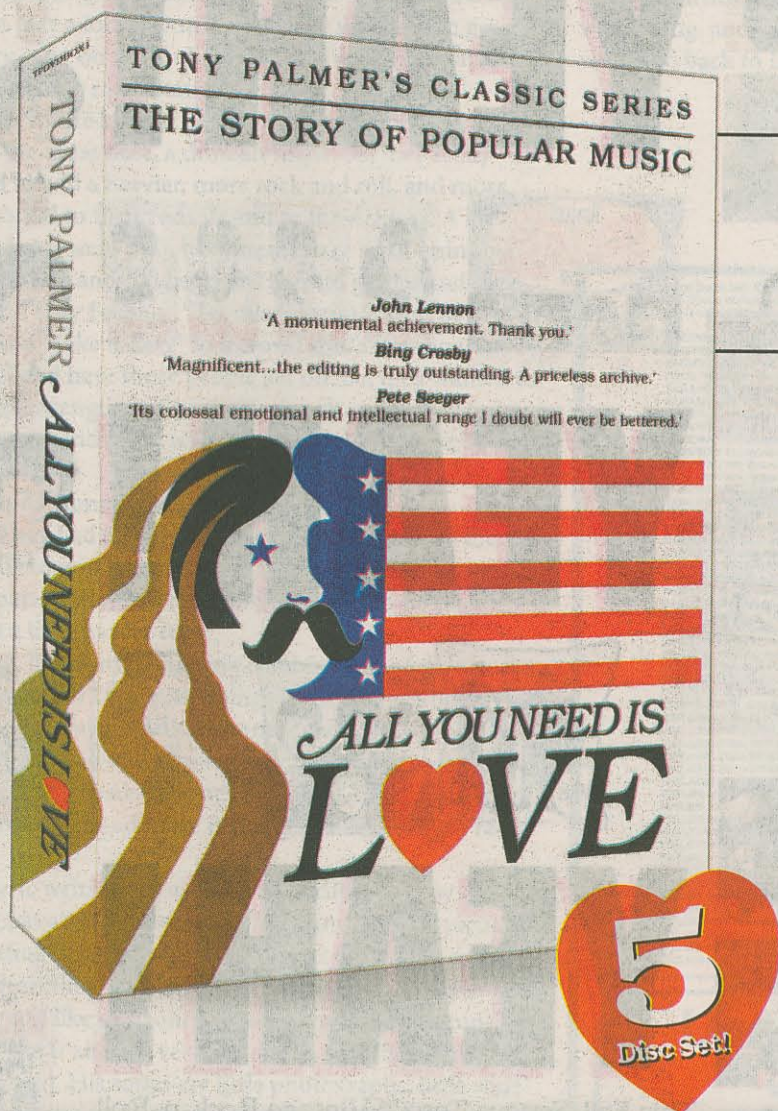
“The bottom line is that nobody thought this music had any real merit. And that was one of the reasons I wanted to make this series.” **GM**



► David Bowie

ALL YOU NEED IS LOVE

TONY PALMER'S CLASSIC SERIES · THE STORY OF POPULAR MUSIC



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NOW AVAILABLE FOR THE FIRST TIME, *All You Need Is Love* makes its DVD debut as a lavish boxed set which contains all 17 episodes of the series on 5 discs. Contained within those discs is the 'Story of Popular Music,' encompassing Ragtime, Blues, Jazz, Vaudeville, The Musical, Folk, Swing, Country and Western, Rock 'n' Roll and beyond, and includes interviews with some of the major names of the past 50+ years including:

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|---------------------------|-----------------------|------------------------|---------------------|
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| The Rolling Stones | Bing Crosby | Dizzy Gillespie | Bill Monroe |
| Elvis Presley | Mike Oldfield | Richard Rodgers | Bill Graham |
| Jerry Lee Lewis | The Beach Boys | Roy Rogers | Bill Wyman |
| Jimi Hendrix | Tina Turner | Bo Diddley | Frank Zappa |
| Stephen Sondheim | Sam Phillips | Muddy Waters | Eric Clapton |

and many, many more. It has frequently been described as the "**definitive music documentary**," and is regarded just as highly today as 'cult viewing' as it was over 30 years ago when it was first broadcast.

The critically acclaimed *All You Need Is Love* was broadcast across the world between 1976 and 1981. But since that time, it has neither been repeated nor commercially released on either video or DVD.

VIEW THE TRAILER & EPISODE GUIDE AT:
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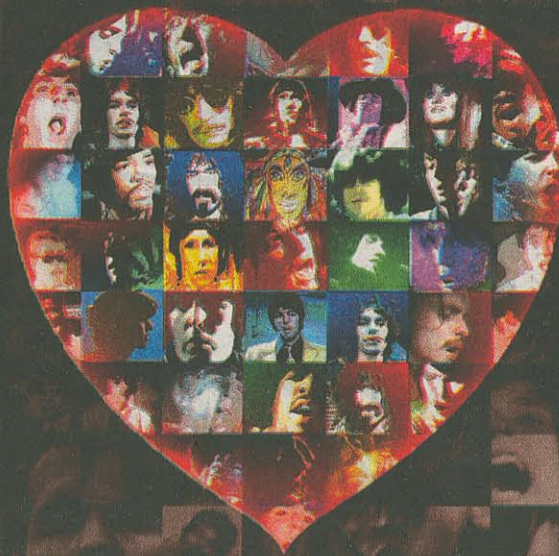
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