



The DVD release of Tony Palmer's long-unseen British TV miniseries doc **"All You Need Is Love"** (1976) is a welcome look back upon the long history of pop music as it evolved piecemeal and at the behest of musicians, before the 24/7 market ubiquity of iPods, "American Idol," satellite radio and internet streaming. This is Ken Burns before Ken Burns (if not quite as polished as "Baseball" or "Jazz"), comprised of interviews and archival footage both common and rare (including footage of a singing Woody Guthrie, and a woeful Roxy Music performance that nonetheless affords a glimpse of a synthesizer-playing Brian Eno), and unfurling the whole story, from Scott Joplin to Earl Hines to Bessie Smith to Benny Goodman to Pete Seeger, Bob Dylan, the Beatles and Jethro Tull.

Palmer's 14-hour-plus odyssey is filthy with progressional details — as when it is made clear how the WWI upkick in urban munition factories mobilized southern blacks to northern cities, encouraging them to leave the harmonica and piano behind in favor of the steel guitar and what became the modern blues. Destroyed are the common beliefs that ragtime, jazz and blues grew out of one another (they were completely separate entities, culturally and geographically), and that the Mississippi Delta was some kind of ground zero for the blues (you needed to go hundreds of miles upriver). Palmer also dedicates, amid the swing and rock and country and folk, entire episodes to pivotal periods/manifestations you'd never think to include (or wish to endure), among them 'music hall' (featuring Liberace!) and The Musical (oh boy, "Tommy"). Pop music itself is by definition a very mixed bag, so some of the necessary digressions are painful, but the banquet is large and long and enriching. My favorite morsel: a live Roosevelt Sykes doing the best "St. James Infirmary" I've ever heard, and giving it credit as a 300-year-old Liverpoolian riff to boot.

By [Michael Atkinson](#)