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All You Need Is Love

There's no shortage of ambition in this 17-episode series directed in 1977 for British TV by music journalist and filmmaker Tony Palmer. Subtitled "The Story of Popular Music," this is the closest we will ever get to a definitive portrait of such a sprawling topic. It doesn't even arrive at rock 'n' roll until Episode 13, first exploring ragtime, jazz, the blues, Tin Pan Alley, swing, R&B, country music and more. In addition to the rich collection of archival performance footage that is the staple of such programs, Palmer takes his camera crews all over America and beyond to shoot original footage of some of the biggest popular music stars of all time and interview musical luminaries from Bing Crosby to David Bowie, Roy Rogers to Paul McCartney. There is no narrator, only the words of the witnesses interviewed for the production. The five-disc set is collected in a digipak with book-leaf trays and comes with an episode guide. For whatever reason, the DVD producers have reframed the episodes in the wide-screen format, which works fine with the documentary footage.

- Sean Axmaker