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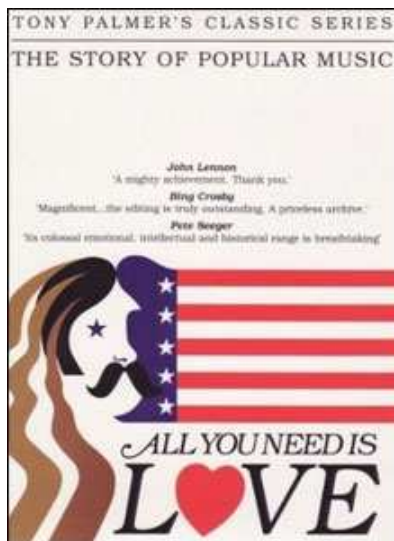
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All You Need is Love

VoiceprintBy **JEFF TAMARKIN** | July 1, 2008

4.0 Stars

By way of putting into perspective the scope of Tony Palmer's five-disc, 17-part, nearly 15-hour documentary on the history of popular music, let me note that rock and roll doesn't get its due till Episode 13. By that time, British documentarian Palmer has already surveyed jazz, country, blues, vaudeville, protest songs, Tin Pan Alley, and more. With each disc concentrating on a single area, the series — which was made in 1976, before punk, hip-hop, or Britney — has plenty of time to delve. "The Beginnings" tracks the rise of popular song from Africa through Europe and ahead to ragtime, blues, and gospel. The raw, pre-'60s black music, notes Atlantic Records executive Jerry Wexler, was unappealing to suburban white girls, but come the British Invasion they "could now listen to the Beatles singing a Big Bill Broonzy song and find it quite acceptable because the sexual image that this song was suggesting would be perfectly safe." Or maybe not: in Episode 15, inexplicably dubbed "Sour Rock," Eric Burdon of the Animals says, "We just wanted to ball every chick in sight . . . and have a continual party." Although the narration tends toward the droll (it's British, remember), the edits are often jarring, and the last couple of episodes overestimate the lasting impact of progressive and glitter rock, the set — with plenty of rare performance footage — is never less than fascinating and informative.

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