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- 885 Minutes
- Scene Selection
- No Extras

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ALL YOU NEED IS LOVE

"Pop music is the classical music of now." – Paul McCartney

All You Need Is Love: The Story of Popular Music DVD Review

By Jonathan Boudreaux

If you are a music buff, put down those CDs, iPods, and old 78s and pick up *All You Need Is Love: The Story of Popular Music*. This jaunty romp through the origins and future (well, "future" meaning post-1980, since this British documentary series was produced from 1976-1980) will leave you both humming along and begging for more.

Each episode explores a different facet of popular music's roots. The first episode provides an introduction that previews the sixteen episodes to come: its beginnings in Africa, ragtime, jazz, blues, vaudeville/music hall, Tin Pan Alley, musicals, swing, rhythm and blues, country, songs of war and protest, rock and roll, The Beatles, "sour" rock, glitter rock, and new directions. Each episode is filled with rare footage, great performances, and interviews with experts.

The series is best when it perfectly pairs commentators and subjects. Eubie Blake is a joy to watch as he explains ragtime and syncopation. Liberace taking on vaudeville, music hall, and Vegas is a campy treat. Stephen Sondheim telling us about the development of the musical? That's a no-brainer.

A few of the commentators are...well...acquired tastes. Poet/playwright/lightning rod Amiri Baraka might be an expert on jazz, but his more inflammatory comments are a bit hard to swallow. Lester Bangs, the now-deceased but still esteemed music critic spends much time throwing firebombs at popular artists, saying that Elton John's work, for example, could easily be thrown in the trash bin after one or two listens.

One could quibble about how some of the music is classified. Personally, I would never lump Cajun music in with country, but at least it allows us a glimpse of Doug Kershaw's wedding in the Houston Astrodome. And speaking of country music, why no mention of then-contemporary artists such as Dolly Parton, Kenny Rogers, and George Jones? Instead we're stuck with David Allen Coe and Troy Hess, billed as "the world's youngest recording star," even though he is about as starchy as a cloudy night.

All You Need Is Love is no staid history lesson. It often finds dry humor by intercutting disparate images and points of view. A fiery diatribe by the Reverend Jimmy Snow at the *Grand Old Opry* against sin and excess is paired with footage of Webb Pierce declaring that when he became bored with his \$100,000 tricked-up Pontiac convertible, he knew he just had to get a guitar-shaped pool. A perky performance by The Osmonds jarringly cuts to gruesome clip from an Alice Cooper concert. The episode on popular music's beginnings in Africa is topped off with a quote from Tina Turner who says, "I get that Africans are a very sort of lazy people. They're not very aggressive. They just want to sort of live off of the land and they're very comfortable. Which is great, if you can do that, you know...[but I enjoy going to Europe]...because the people there are very fashionable. When I go to Africa, I'm very down because, like, the food isn't good, I don't get any good, fantastic vibes from the people, so I'm just really bored." Guess she won't be touring there later this year!

Omissions and other quirks aside, *All You Need Is Love: The Story of Popular Music* is a music fan's delight.

The seventeen episodes that make up *All You Need Is Love: The Story of Popular Music* are divided onto five discs. The discs are housed in clear plastic holders that are "bound" together book-style. The cover features the *All You Need Is Love* logo, as does the face of each disc. A pocket on the inside front cover holds an episode guide.

The disc menus - featuring the series' theme song - allow viewers to choose from individual episodes. There is no "play all" feature. All episodes (except for the first) are divided into chapters.

Video and Audio

The series has been given a 16:9 digital restoration, but with the amount of old footage used—some of it literally long-forgotten numbers that turned up under beds and in closets—scratches, dirt, and pops are often visual. Even the "new" footage filmed in the mid- to late-70s is drab and not quite crisp.

The sound is also inconsistent. It ranges from crisp and clean to low and muddy, sometimes in the same scene.

Still, there is so much to treasure here that these flaws probably won't really bother most viewers.

Extras

There are no extras per se, but let's face it, this release is one giant extra.

Summary

You may not have ever heard of *All You Need Is Love: The Story of Popular Music*, but once you watch it, you won't forget it.

5/27/08

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