

A Series That's Music to Your Ears

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Music fans of all kinds can rejoice at the arrival of Tony Palmer's "All You Need Is Love: The Story of Popular Music" on DVD for the first time.

The 17-episode series, originally broadcast in Britain in 1977, tackles the seemingly impossible and pulls it off with elan. Palmer, a noted music journalist and filmmaker, pulls together rare footage, such as Billie Holliday performing a few weeks before her death, and informative interviews with a wide range of people to tell the story. Blues, country, rock, Tin Pan Alley, protest music, vaudeville, Broadway musicals, jazz and more all receive their due.



Tony Palmer's series first aired in 1977.

Acquainted with legends as diverse as Jimi Hendrix and Maria Callas, Palmer was the perfect man for the job. The idea for the series reportedly came about at the suggestion of John Lennon in the mid-'70s. Palmer ran with it and talked to as many key figures past and present as he could. His thoroughness gives a 360-degree picture of events. For example, the "Hail! Hail! Rock 'n' Roll" episode, which focuses on the genre's early years, includes performances by or interviews with Jerry Lee Lewis, Elvis Presley, Conway Twitty and Pat Boone.

In the R&B-centric "Good Times" episode, it's almost worth the price of the DVD (\$99.95) just to see a performance by Wilson Pickett and witness his stage presence and power.

There are countless other moments of note: Bo Diddley telling the story of his breakthrough while playing that legendary Bo Diddley beat. Hoagy Carmichael passionately recounting the time he first heard someone play a "blue" note and how he began working the blues sound into his own playing. Berry Gordy at his desk discussing the Supremes, "not just my big group, but the world's big group." Liberace slipping sly jokes into his patter during a performance.

Of course, music fans will notice two hugely important genres missing: punk and rap. Obviously that's merely a matter of timing. Both had begun to emerge but had not truly ignited when this encyclopedic series was filmed. Still, for an entertaining and informative history of popular music up through the mid-'70s, you could not do better than this engrossing series.



"All You Need Is Love," tracing the history of popular music, has footage of David Bowie, from left, Diana Ross, Charlie Parker, Miles Davis and others.

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