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Rock of ages

The Boston Globe



By Linda Laban
Globe Correspondent / May 27, 2008

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British journalist Tony Palmer's 1970s documentary series, "**All You Need Is Love**," has now been resurrected as a compelling five-disc DVD set. Apparently, John Lennon first suggested to Palmer that he document the "story of popular music." Lennon chose wisely.

The result - spread over 17 episodes containing almost 15 hours of often-vital footage - is an astute, fine-tooth-combing through popular music in all its hues and ages. From ragtime to rock 'n' roll, Palmer rebuffs myths, such as jazz being invented in New Orleans, pointing out that jazz, like the blues, came from Africa. He adds, deadpan, a footnote comment: "The black man, in order to get recognition, has always had to compromise . . . to the detriment of his music." There's rare footage of two who perhaps didn't: Charlie Parker and Miles Davis (above) playing together in New York in 1952.

Everyone from bluegrass godfather Bill Monroe to concert impresario Bill Graham to randy Rolling Stones bassist Bill Wyman is interviewed. "All You Need Is Love," an ironic title to be sure, was broadcast on television between 1976 and 1981. As the old music business and its icons were deemed irrelevant in the new punk-rock order, this fascinating document gathered dust.

Now there's another 30 years of music to add - punk, new wave, hair metal, grunge, hip-hop, indie rock. Yet, in today's convoluted and fractured music industry that equates revenue with artistic relevance, Palmer's documentary feels relevant and a necessary reset button. ■

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