



REVIEWS

Various Artists

All You Need Is Love

MVD Visual (TPDVDBOX1)

Grade: ★★★★★

Tony Palmer's landmark series tackles the subject of popular music in a style quite different from how television documentaries are put together today. What's most noticeably absent is any overriding voice telling the viewer how they're supposed to feel about the subject.

"The audience is not stupid," Palmer told Goldmine. "The audience is perfectly willing to give you the benefit of the doubt and listen to complicated ideas expressed in a relatively complicated way. But television executives don't believe that."

Thankfully, Palmer had all the leeway he needed back in the '70s, when the series was made, as U.S. viewers can now see for the first time. For when the series aired on U.S. TV in 1977 (having first aired on U.K. TV the previous year), only select episodes were shown. And, as the series was never released on video, this DVD set is not only the first time the series has been made commercially available, it's also the first time a U.S. audience will be able to experience the series in its entirety.

Over the course of 16 episodes (along with a 17th introductory episode), Palmer traces the development of American popular music from its overseas roots. Episode 2, "God's Children," is the most fascinating in this respect.

Slaves brought from Africa were expected to assimilate and not allowed to play music from their homelands, only being allowed to copy the music of their owners: European ballads and folk songs, and Christian hymns. Thus, from the very beginning, America's musical voice was a melting pot of black and white influences (meaning rock 'n' roll, with its blend of black rhythm & blues and white country & western, was simply following a long-standing tradition). Its evolution is traced through episodes on ragtime, jazz, blues, vaudeville/music hall, Tin Pan Alley, musicals, swing, rhythm & blues, country, folk and finally rock 'n' roll.

The series utilizes a treasure trove of archive and live footage and interviews. Palmer's technique, especially in the later episodes, is to let these clips provide the narrative, which may make the episodes on rock music harder to follow for those not already familiar with the story and the major players. In the earlier episodes, such as "I Can Hypnotise 'Dis Nation," on ragtime, a designated interviewee (Rudi Blesh in this case) provides more narrative context. Palmer also mixes and matches footage in a manner that's sometimes puzzling (why all the footage of bull wrestling from rodeos?).

One of the first themes to emerge is the constant exploitation of African-American musicians. But,

TONY PALMER'S CLASSIC SERIES
THE STORY OF POPULAR MUSIC

John Lennon
"A mighty achievement. Thank you."
Bing Crosby
"Magnificent...the editing is truly outstanding. A priceless archive."
Pete Seeger
"Its colossal emotional, intellectual and historical range is breathtaking"



what's also made clear is that each genre of music goes through a similar cycle, rising from the underground to the mainstream, with its success ironically also guaranteeing that some of the genre's originators will inevitably be cast by the wayside. As such, the story is frequently a sad one (as for poor Scott Joplin, who died penniless in a New York City mental hospital). But, it's also a story of constant motion, making the point that music is a living, breathing entity of its own.

There are innumerable striking moments throughout the series: footage of Bing Crosby performing in blackface; Phil Spector accompanying himself on guitar as he sings a rendition of "Then He Kissed Me" that descends into gibberish; Jerry Lee Lewis, decades after his '50s heyday, attacking his piano with his usual relish. There are also innumerable surprising revelations: jazz didn't get its start in the brothels of Storyville (those establishments used piano players, lest loud music attract the undue attention of the authorities); "Yankee Doodle Dandy" was initially an anti-American ditty; during WW2, there was actually a "Music War Committee."

Though working at a slower pace than a contemporary documentary, "All You Need Is Love" holds your interest throughout — though you'll certainly need more than one viewing to absorb it all.

— Gillian G. Gaar

Various Artists

The Tomorrow Show with Tom Snyder: John, Paul, Tom & Ringo

Shout! Factory (SF 10129)

Grade: ★★★★★

This two-disc set features the three shows TV host Tom Snyder did with the ex-Beatles (though given that each interview runs around an hour, one would think they could have all fit on one DVD instead of two).

The John Lennon show was broadcast the day after his murder, on Dec. 9, 1980, and features the interview Snyder did with Lennon on April 25, 1970 when he was still embroiled in his immigration difficulties (his lawyer, Leon Wildes, also appears). He's in a very thoughtful mood, in stark contrast, say, to the combativeness of his 1970 interviews with Rolling Stone. He's also very patient with Snyder, who comes across as remarkably naïve at times. When Lennon says, for example, that groupies are a primary reason people become performing musicians, Snyder responds, "You got to be kidding me!" and then quickly goes on to assure that it's not like that with other performers (like himself, for instance).

Lennon occasionally pokes gentle fun at Snyder but also provides considered answers, no matter how labored the question. He's also refreshingly honest. In a discussion about drugs that it's impossible to imagine happening on a talk show today, Lennon hesitates to say he'd make an ad that would denounce all drug use, saying it's important not to lie to the kids.

The low-key atmosphere in this and the other interviews also allows Snyder to have an actual conversation with his guests. It's not all about soundbites. The Lennon disc also has interviews with journalist Lisa Robinson and *Double Fantasy* co-producer Jack Douglas (who looks especially shell shocked, being interviewed less than 24 hours after Lennon's death).

Snyder's interview with Paul McCartney and various Wings aired on Dec. 20, 1979, and was recorded right before a show on Wings' last U.K. tour. No one seems particularly thrilled about doing the interview; at times, Linda looks like she's about to fall asleep.

Instead of asking much about music, Snyder covers the topics of crowd security (fans had died at a Who concert earlier in the month), tour logist the McCartney's family life, and where they sell the wool from their sheep (the Wool Marketing Board). More frankly, he also asks if groupies have played havoc with the McCartney marriage (short answer: no), and how Linda feels about the attack on her (it's the critics, she says, not the fans). The tease Snyder a bit, dropping his name into their answers more than is needed, for example. But again, everyone makes the effort to give considered answers.

Ringo Starr's interview is the shortest of the three. The show was broadcast Nov. 25, 1981, and focuses on Starr's latest album (*Stop And Smell The Roses*), and his recent marriage to Barbara Bach. A brief clip of the "Wrack My Brain" video is also shown.

Though there are a few work-related questions Snyder veers off on other strange tangents, asking Starr how being 40 is different than he thought it would be, for example, and how Starr's and Bach's

JOHN LENNON