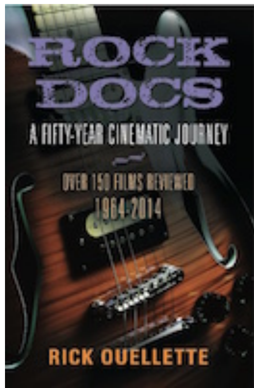
A FIFTY-YEAR CINEMATIC JOURNEY

OVER 150 FILMS REVIEWED

1964-2014

RICK OUELLETTE



The T.A.M.I. Show. Don't Look Back. Monterey Pop. Woodstock. Gimme Shelter. Let it Be.
The Last Waltz. The Kids Are Alright. Stop Making Sense. Standing in the Shadows of Motown.
The Filth and the Fury. Searching for Sugar Man. Twenty Feet From Stardom.

Over the last half century, music documentaries like these have provided us with a priceless moving-image history of rock 'n' roll. Rock Docs: A Fifty-Year Cinematic Journey is a first-of-its-kind anthology of the rockumentary genre, viewing pop music's timeline through the prism of non-fiction film. Since its earliest days, the look of rock 'n' roll has been integral to its overall appeal.
Up and down the hallways of pop history there is always something interesting to see as well as to hear. This book reviews over 150 films, starting with a ground level look at the Beatles' world-changing first visit to America and coming full circle fifty years later with Good Ol' Freda, where the Fab Four's secretary looks back through the years as both a fan and an insider. In between, readers will find many films to re-experience or discover for the first time.

Roc Docs: A Fifty-Year Cinematic Journey, 1964-2014

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Rock Docs

A Fifty-Year Cinematic Journey, 1964-2014

Rick Ouellette

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Introduction

Rock 'n' roll has always been almost as much of a visual medium as it has been an audio one. Delirious girls screaming and bouncing in their seats during an early Beatles show, Jimi Hendrix torching his guitar at Monterey Pop, James Brown's superhuman dance moves, the flower power music festivals, the grandiose staging of arena-rock heroes, the dressed-to-distress uprising of the punks. Up and down the hallways of pop history, there is always something interesting to look at as well as hear.

Even when one refers back to its early days, rock 'n' roll fans of all ages will invariably mention Elvis Presley's gyrating hips, Chuck Berry's duckwalk or Jerry Lee Lewis attacking his piano. Right from the get-go, the look of rock was closely tied to the impact of the music. In the 1950s the movies starting arriving almost as soon as the phrase was coined. *Rock Around the Clock*, *Don't Knock the Rock*, *Rock Baby Rock It*, *Rock Rock Rock* and *Jailhouse Rock* all saw release by the end of 1957. These teen movies were usually uneasy alliances of the new youthful spirit of the times and hackneyed Hollywood plot points featuring head-scratching adults. The wild dancing, the Alan Freed cameos and the spotlight performances by everyone from Elvis to Bill Haley to LaVern Baker and the Platters, give these films a certain historical value—if you can sit still through the wooden acting and tired show-biz scenarios.

It wasn't really until 1964, with rock music as a named genre now a decade old, that it had enough cache to find itself committed to film in documentary form. In early February of that pivotal year, when the Beatles arrived in America for the first time, the two disciplines would first join up for real. Brothers David and Albert Maysles were young filmmakers from the observational Direct Cinema school of thinking who got a call from Granada Television in England on February 7th when the Beatles' plane was at least halfway across the Atlantic. They were planning a special on the group and needed footage. In our new super-connected millennium, it's amazing to think of the way the Fab Four, a sensation in their homeland but barely on the radar in the States, were such a spontaneous and

momentous cultural event at the time. In a turn of events unthinkable today, the Maysles found themselves filming in the band's limo on the way in from JFK Airport to their Manhattan hotel. Gathering footage for what would be the first entry in this book (*The Beatles—The First U.S. Visit*), they spent the next few days unobtrusively shooting them in their rooms, in Central Park and mixing with passengers on a train to D.C. to do a concert. Of course, in the middle of all this their appearances on the Ed Sullivan TV show catapulted them to a level of rock stardom often strived for but seldom approached. From here on in, rock 'n' roll and the various youth subcultures that went along with it were important stuff and would more often than not get recorded on film.

The legendary all-star *T.A.M.I. Show* was released in late 1964 and by the next year the Beatles' two closest neighbors at the top of the hill (Bob Dylan and the Rolling Stones) were also getting non-fiction film treatments. The Stones, who had also appeared in *T.A.M.I.*, were the subjects of Peter Whitehead's cameras on a chaotic mini-tour of Ireland, a project that would only get properly released decades later as *Charlie is My Darling*. D.A. Pennebaker, another serious documentarian who worked with lightweight equipment and patiently waited for the truth to out itself, was commissioned to follow Dylan on a 1965 acoustic tour of England. The influential and idolized singer-songwriter, barely in his mid-twenties, found the weight of fame pressed a little too heavy on his slight shoulders and responded with a bracing series of testy encounters and petty cruelties that were left to stand with Dylan's approval—hard to imagine in today's age of careful image control.

By 1967, Johnny-on-the-spot Pennebaker was in California to film the Monterey Pop Festival, the first of the great outdoor counterculture events that would become a staple of rock filmdom. Different types of pop music docs developed before the contracted moniker "rockumentary" came into general use. The sense-of-occasion film started to appear: for instance Tony Palmer's *Cream: Farewell Concert* about the Royal Albert Hall finale of the first so-named supergroup. Things were still so new that some events went without professional filming and even the eventual Oscar-winning

Woodstock documentary only got is funding and crew together at the eleventh hour. It was as of yet a little difficult to portend what would be an epoch-making gathering—for reasons both good or ill. *Gimme Shelter*, the Maysles' record of the Stones' 1969 American tour, infamously concludes with a man being killed in front of the stage by Hell's Angels at an ill-conceived free concert held at California's isolated Altamont Speedway in the last month of the fabled Sixties.

Since the 1970s, non-fiction films have become a varied and reliable resource when it comes to tracing pop music history. *Rock Docs* follows this for a fifty-year period from the Maysles' documentation of the Beatles taking America by storm to *Good Ol' Freda*, a touching profile of the Fab Four's secretary and fan club president five decades on. In between these bookends, *Rock Docs* anthologizes and critiques the wide categorical range that developed around this subject. There's the aforementioned festival or event concert movie (*Concert for Bangladesh*, *The Last Waltz, Stop Making Sense, Wattstax*); the behind-the-scenes look at normally inaccessible superstars (of which *Don't Look Back* and the Beatles' *Let it Be* were notable early examples); film bios of individuals, bands and scenes (*The Kids are Alright*, *New York Doll*, *Athens GA: Inside/Out*), and many variations in between. Of the more than 150 documentaries reviewed, most if not all were screened theatrically at one point. This criterion upholds the communal aspect so key to rock music—viewing something like Led Zeppelin's *The Song Remains the Same* at a midnight show was once an event in itself—as well as acknowledging that nowadays such music documentaries have gained a significant foothold at film fests and arthouses. Moreover, it would be nearly impossible to catalog all the material derived from television and straight-to-video releases, though these are easily available online or on library shelves.

Instead, *Rock Docs* offers an accumulated alternative history of rock music as reflected back from the once-proverbial silver screen—even if the reader who discovers or re-watches these titles views them from a computer or DVD player. From the indelible black-and-white images of the Beatles spearheading a youth revolution, the books moves gradually into that movement's advanced middle age—with all

that entails. Forty plus years after the only such movie to win an Academy Award for best documentary (*Woodstock* in 1970) it seemed somehow fitting that the two rock-related films that won it consecutively (*Searching for Sugar Man* in 2012 and the following year's *Twenty Feet from Stardom*) both concerned themselves with the redemption of performers half-forgotten in the intervening decades. Yes, it has been a long and strange trip as the saying goes. But thanks to the many filmmakers who have captured bits and pieces of that now-extended history, we now have an impressively-scaled record not just of the sounds that mean so much, but of the multiplicative imagery that it links to. This includes the dreamboat singers, the shrieking fans, the scrunchy guitar-solo faces, the backstage decadence, the kaleidoscopic swirl of psychedelia, the gritty punk nightclubs, the successes and tragedies and creeping mortalities—but also an elated inner spirit that in its way has not dimmed since the day that John, Paul, George and Ringo first stepped off that plane in New York.

The Beatles: The First U.S. Visit

Albert and David Maysles—1964/1991—83 minutes

It was only ten weeks after the assassination of President Kennedy. With the pall of national tragedy still in the air that winter, filmmaker Albert Maysles got a call from Granada Television in England saying a musical group named the Beatles were arriving in New York in a couple of hours and asking if they would mind heading down and maybe getting some footage? Negotiating a deal right there on the phone, camera operator Albert and his soundman brother David were soon on their way to John F. Kennedy Airport (just renamed for the fallen president). They arrived just in time to record that famous moment when John, Paul, George, and Ringo hesitated a moment at the top of the steps while leaving their plane, realizing that the hordes of people lining the balcony of the terminal were there for them and not some head of state as they first thought. And just like that, the Maysles brothers found themselves in the middle of one of the twentieth century's defining cultural moments. *The First U.S. Visit* is a 1991 re-edit of the original '64 film (called W*hat's Happening: The Beatles in the U.S.A.*) that adds more music and excises some verite material. But both versions pull the viewer right into the middle of the tumultuous birth of modern youth culture. It also features the Beatles performing thirteen unedited songs, from both a Washington, D.C., concert and the epochal *Ed Sullivan Show* TV appearances.

The Beatles were starting to make a bit of stir stateside before touching down in New York, and early segments show famed DJ Murray the K in his studio hyping them up. At the airport press conference, the lads quickly charm the jaded New York press corps with their contagious high spirits and sharp wit; then they are whisked off to Manhattan and to a rock 'n' roll superstardom never to be equaled.

Although a few hours before they had hardly heard of the Fab Four, the Albert and David found themselves squished into the back of a limo with the confident but still nonplussed quartet. Arriving at the Plaza Hotel, we get the first dose of Beatlemania up close with

fans pounding on the window, the boys dashing from the car to the lobby door, and the scenes of police struggling to keep back the hordes, all soon to become iconic images of the Sixties. Two nights later, on February 9, 1964, the band would make television history with an estimated seventy million tuning in to Sullivan's Sunday-night showcase. The Maysles brothers tagged along for the next five days with unfettered access and whether it's the boys goofing around in hotel rooms, dancing at the Peppermint Lounge, or getting photographed in Central Park, the camera never seems more than a few feet away from the action.

When it's time to head south for the D.C. concert, the whole entourage takes the train like it's no big deal and the band jovially mingles with the other passengers. The group is shown at a giddy apex of fame just before becoming imprisoned by their own celebrity. And although the performances on Sullivan's show seem as fresh and buoyant as ever, the gig at the old Washington Coliseum may be the musical highlight in this film. Playing from a makeshift stage in the middle of the arena, the group is surrounded by the deafening din of screaming girls but manage to cut through the pandemonium with a manic energy unseen on the tube. "I Saw Her Standing There" rocks with an almost punkish jolt and Ringo gets a rare concert lead vocal during a likewise frenetic "I Wanna Be Your Man." The sight of the four of them having to turn around their own amps and rotate the drum riser to play to a different part of the house couldn't be quainter—roadies weren't even invented yet!

Ed Sullivan is waiting down in Miami Beach, ready to introduce these "fine youngsters" for the second of the three consecutive weeks on his show. Also included is their return appearance at the regular New York location (but taped earlier) for week three on Sullivan (with a farewell rave-up of "Twist and Shout" and "I Want to Hold Your Hand") and a bit of their departure and triumphal airport reception back in London.

The filmmakers' methods seem to point the way to one of rock's most celebrated films, *A Hard Day's Night*, which started filming a month after the group's return. That movie's director, Richard Lester, carefully crafted a pseudo-documentary feel and a few notable scenes,

like the mob-besieged Beatles running to catch their train for fear of being ripped to shreds, were not staged but done spontaneously—a bit of cinematic verisimilitude not appreciated by the band. *What's Happening!* (as it was still known) was a great feather in the cap for the Maysles brothers. With an eerie symmetry, these Johnny-on-the-spot filmmakers would close out the 1960s with *Gimme Shelter*, unwittingly filming the dark flip side of the scene the Beatles created while following a late 1969 tour by the Rolling Stones.

The Rolling Stones: Charlie is My Darling—Ireland 1965
Peter Whitehead—1966—64 minutes

Good footage of the early Rolling Stones has been harder to come by. Their ascent to fame in the days before mass media overkill has yielded little more than their *T.A.M.I. Show* set and a few old TV clips. Produced by their manager Andrew Loog Oldham reportedly to get his rising stars used to the idea of film, *Charlie is My Darling* was the first documentary about the band. Back in the screaming-teenager epoch of the mid-1960s, the boys are whisked off to Ireland for a quickie tour hastily arranged to capitalize on the recent smash hit "Satisfaction." It's a bit of a revelation here to see the Stones in the first flush of their youthful success. They were already well known for the riotous audiences they attracted and by the end of the third number in Dublin the stage invasion is in full stride, memorably captured by Peter Whitehead's in-the-wings camera. There's also some surprisingly thoughtful interview material, and the guys work out a new song back in the hotel room, briefly satirizing their mates in the Beatles. After a brief theatrical release in 1966, all prints of *Charlie* were reportedly stolen and the film receded from memory, only getting a proper re-release in conjunction with the band's fiftieth anniversary tour in 2013.

Beloved Invaders
George M. Reid—1966—81 minutes

Contemporaneous with the British Invasion, the Ventures, the instrumental-only guitar combo from Washington State, became conquering heroes themselves on a 1965 tour of Japan that began the country's half-century love affair with the group. The authentically live concert clips are first-rate. Hits like "Walk Don't Run" and "Apache" feature the trademark trebly guitar lines and vibrato effects of guitarists Nokie Edwards and Don Wilson. But many viewers will be newly impressed by proto-heavy bassist Bob Bogle and superman drummer Mel Taylor, who bring the house down on "Wipeout." The Ventures helped lay the groundwork for the more emphatic rock instrumentation to come and the movie itself is a pretty good developmental-stage band documentary. The extended closing jam on Duke Ellington's "Caravan" gives the filmmakers a chance to cut away to show the group as good-natured ambassadors, hanging with their fans and sampling Japanese culture.

The T.A.M.I. Show

Steve Binder—1964—123 minutes

This concert, a so-called "teenage command performance," was held at the Santa Monica Civic Auditorium in October 1964 and briefly released as a theatrical feature later that year. The Teenage Awards Music International show can be seen as the veritable motherlode of modern pop music, in a sense both musical and visual. Its near legendary status was helped along by its subsequent unavailability. Director Steve Binder and producer Bill Sargent filmed the star-studded concert in "Electronovision," a precursor to the hi-def technology we're so used to today. So even though it looks and sounds spectacular, most pop fans of the era would go through their lives hearing of *The T.A.M.I. Show* as little more than a tantalizing rumor. Sargent had a tiger by the tail but due to financial shortcomings he soon lost the rights to the film, relegating it to

bootlegs, truncated versions on TV and home video, and isolated clips airlifted into various rock documentaries. A full (and fully-authorized) release finally landed on DVD in 2010.

Where else would you ever get such a cross-section of dynamic acts, all in their early flush of fame, all under the same roof? James Brown, the Rolling Stones, the Supremes, Smokey Robinson, Marvin Gaye, Lesley Gore, and the Beach Boys are among the notables, all giving career-staking performances in front of a young audience whose oft-filmed reactions range from wildly enthusiastic to completely bonkers. Though the Fab Four had taken the world by storm earlier in ’64, *The T.A.M.I Show* served notice that there was a second wave right behind them, emanating from both the U.S. and the U.K., coming in nearly as strong.

But to begin at the beginning, the surf-pop duo Jan and Dean (as our comical hosts) introduce Chuck Berry, already a bit of an elder statesman at that point, though he had returned to the Top Ten a few months earlier with “No Particular Place to Go.” Berry is in great form during his rendition of the rock ‘n’ roll origin story, “Johnny B. Goode.” But halfway through “Maybellene” Gerry and the Pacemakers are revealed stage left to finish the song. A puzzling move, but maybe the producers thought their Beatle-less gig could benefit from a reasonable-facsimile showing from their less gifted (and less cute) Liverpool counterparts. Their dogged lead singer Gerry Marsden does acquit himself well on the ballad “Don’t Let the Sun Catch You Crying” and Mr. Berry re-asserts himself on the shared stage with “Sweet Little Sixteen.”

No discussion of this film would be complete without mentioning the immortal go-go dancers, which included future stars Terri Garr and Toni Basil. At first situated on stairstep risers in back, their irrepressible arm-pumping and shimmy-shaking moves are soon uncontainable and for much of the concert they are cheek by jowl with the artists. That’s not a problem for a young Smokey Robinson and the Miracles. After a fierce rendition of the big hit “You Really Got a Hold on Me” the group has their own internal dance-off on the wild “Mickey’s Monkey.” But the go-gos get their groove back on Marvin Gaye’s dance smash “Hitchhike,” unveiling a thumbs-out,

court-jester routine that almost upstages one of the crown princes of R&B. Lesley Gore, with seven Top 40 records to her credit, does “It’s My Party” and a handful of her other hits, accompanied not only by the dancers, but ultimately all the other performers seen to this point. The audience eats it up.

Then it’s “surf’s up” time as the musical style changes to reflect the local Southern California culture that before now was only hinted at in the free-spirited opening credits. Skateboarding MCs Jan and Dean sing the praises of the “Little Old Lady from Pasadena” and “Sidewalk Surfing” before yielding the floor to their crosstown contemporaries. The Beach Boys, sporting their classic candy-striped shirts (in contrast to the rugby jerseys preferred by J&D), deliver a lively four-song set that will quickly remind viewers that these guys were a bonafide rock group and not a barbershop quintet. “Surfin’ USA” and “I Get Around” really cook behind Dennis Wilson’s primitive powerhouse drumming and the wave-riding guitars of brother Carl and Al Jardine, inspiring some goofy dance moves from singer Mike Love. After Brian Wilson gets his sensitive star turn on “Surfer Girl,” they crank it up again on “Dance, Dance, Dance,” sending the teens into another tizzy.

The T.A.M.I. Show, as groundbreaking as it may be, isn’t perfect. Although they might have some die-hard supporters to this day, it’s difficult to fathom the appeal of the geeky Billy J. Kramer and the Dakotas. The nascent garage-rock form gets a welcome nod with the brief appearance of the scrappy Barbarians (kookily introduced as being from “the caves of old Cape Cod”), but if it had been a year later they could have done their genre classic “Are You a Boy or Are You a Girl?” instead of their flop single “Hey Little Bird.” In between them we get the prime time Supremes, all triple-scoop hairdos and uptown elegance, doing some early singles as well as that week’s number one song, “Baby Love.” Their performance may be remembered as much for its dramatic close-ups of Diana Ross as it is for the emboldened go-go dancers charging the cameras and nearly nudging the ladies off their marks—that’s Terri Garr in the bull’s-eye sweater.

Now we arrive at what's been described as the ultimate Battle of the Bands—James Brown and the Famous Flames vs. the Rolling Stones. It definitely helped that both still had a lot to gain at this point in their careers. Brown coveted the crossover audience that so far eluded him and the Stones were fighting to crack into the American pop marketplace. Though Brown wanted to close the show the producers opted for a British Invasion finale. It hardly mattered: The Flames' eighteen-minute set is justly hailed as one of the more exciting concert sequences of the rock era. This in turn made the Stones step up their game and during all this the audience makes the final transformation from excitable to certifiable.

Brown struts in from the wings in a short checkered suit and matching vest, sporting a boss pompadour. He and the Flames (complemented by the famous Wrecking Crew, the show's house band under the direction of Jack Nitzsche) hit the boards already firing on all cylinders. They tear up the fast numbers, which blaze by in a rush of outrageous dance moves and staccato singing, and slow burn the down-tempo ones. After "Prisoner of Love" gets the latter treatment, Brown outdoes himself for all time on the classic "Please, Please, Please." It features a full four minutes of his exalted "cape" routine, as Brown hits multiple screaming crescendos and, after dropping to his knees, is deemed too exhausted to continue. He somehow finds the energy to finish with a delirious rendition of "Night Train" where his one-foot twisting and leg-split calisthenics are the stuff of legend.

Stones' guitarist Keith Richards would later say that following James Brown would be their biggest professional mistake but it wasn't like they were about to throw in the towel. The group was still several months away from their first stateside number one with "Satisfaction" but their dynamic live show was already well honed by that point. Mick Jagger—hitting the stage only minutes after The Hardest Working Man in Show Biz—jumps around and shakes his skinny English arse like there's no tomorrow and Richards and founding guitarist Brian Jones work the front line with their relentless riffing. After bulling their way through "Time is on My Side" and "It's All Over Now," an extended jam leads to a finale where

everyone (the go-go contingent included) congregate onstage, a collection of talent the type of which one would seldom see together again, at least not with such informal and spontaneous spirit. The vanguard of youth music had well and truly arrived and popular culture in the Sixties and beyond would never be the same.

The Big TNT Show
Larry Peerce—1966—94 minutes

A year after *The T.A.M.I. Show*, the same winning recipe was tried again with a new roster of artists and was nearly as successful. There's another ebullient opening-credits sequence (set to the Modern Folk Quartet's "This Could Be the Night") as fans and bands converge on L.A.'s Moulin Rouge theater and the famous go-go girls rehearse in a dance studio. There's another stellar cross-section of soul, pop and folk artists, though nothing quite as high-flying as *T.A.M.I.'s* James Brown and Stones finale. Phil Spector was the musical director and he frontloads this late 1965 show with Ray Charles and Bo Diddley and clses with a ten-minute medley rave-up from the Ike and Tina Turner revue. In between you get some fine folk-rock from the Byrds and Lovin' Spoonful and charming turns from Petula ("Downtown") Clark, Roger ("King of the Road") Miller, and the Ronettes while Donovan and Joan Baez are made available for the sensitive set. As with its predecessor, the enthusiastic audience is attentively filmed, reminding us that rock 'n' roll is often as interesting as a fan's medium as it is an artists' medium.

Festival!

Murray Lerner—1967—97 minutes

This film was such a first-of-its-kind thing that it could get away with calling itself just *Festival!* Rock festivals were still a few years off into the future; the only real precursor to this Murray Lerner doc was *Jazz on a Summer's Day*, Bert Stern's record of the 1958 Newport Jazz Festival. The two films share the same Rhode Island

location and a similar casual vibe. But Lerner made his work a compilation of four festivals (from 1963 to 1966), capturing many of the era's great folk and acoustic blues acts as well as Bob Dylan's controversial debut with an electric band in 1965. Along the way there is an inkling of an emerging counterculture that would come into full flower, so to speak, by the end of the decade.

The Newport Folk Festival started in 1959, went under in 1971, and since its rebirth in 1985 has been held each year. A twenty-first century weekend at this event will feature corporate sponsorship, elaborate stagecraft, and more than a smattering of pop-oriented artists. But back in the early days depicted in this film, it gave the appearance of an almost homespun affair, and Lerner's camera takes in all the pre-commercialized charm. Many in the crowd could be considered proto-hippies, and there are several scenes of them gallivanting in town, camping out on the beach, and giving forthright fan-on-the-street interviews. The consensus seems to be that both folk music and the blues pride themselves on authenticity as opposed to, in this case, the easy blandishments of Tin Pan Alley songwriting.

They have a point. Peter, Paul and Mary launch into a rousing version of "If I Had a Hammer," a vivid reminder of the socially conscious tenor of the times before its later tendency to lapse into cliché. Performances of similar verve follow in a medley sampling Spider John Koerner, Odetta, and the estimable Pete Seeger. It was a movement that also affected the comebacks of old blues greats like Son House, Mississippi John Hurt, and Sonny and Brownie, all featured here. And this footage goes far enough back in the day to also serve up a sampling of truly arcane acts like the Georgia Sea Island Singers and Cousin Emmy. They may look a bit corny to many modern viewers, but they do serve to pull back the curtain on a time when "roots" music was just that and not a convenient catchphrase.

But the times were quickly a-changing, a fact best exemplified in the scenes featuring a young Bobby Dylan. He was not the only performer here who was making his way up the fame-and-fortune ladder (witness the presence of Johnny Cash and Donovan), but right from his entree into the cosmopolitan folk scene centered in Greenwich Village, there was a sense of inevitability about Dylan, of

a special kind of greatness that his early devotees were especially protective of. Dylan, of course, would soon prove too mercurial a personality to be tied to any set of expectations. Early in the film he performs in the back field of the festival grounds (where it seems a lot of the best musical action took place), charming the crowd with his coy “All I Really Want to Do” and then mesmerizing them with “Mr. Tambourine Man,” the one song that best personified that awakening consciousness of a new generation. Yet, after one number he is besieged by fans and sulks in his getaway car while Joan Baez, in the front seat, mulls over the growing tendency to idolize pop stars while the message gets second billing.

Although Son House has been seen doing an electrified set with the Paul Butterfield Blues Band (and going over well with it) it’s another story when Dylan plugs in with the same guys and launches into “Maggie’s Farm,” complete with a searing guitar solo by Mike Bloomfield. The reception is actually mixed, in contrast to the tales of him being booed off the stage. He is coaxed into coming back with his acoustic guitar, but the die has been cast. The authenticity earlier mentioned has shaded into defensive orthodoxy and Dylan, seeing the similarly gifted Beatles already becoming worldwide icons, was off to chart a new course.

There is time for one more old-timey sing-along with the whole cast on “Down by the Riverside,” as Lerner concludes his fascinating glimpse of a crucial transitional period in popular music history.

Don’t Look Back

D. A. Pennebaker—1967—96 minutes

D. A. Pennebaker’s masterful *Don’t Look Back* brought the cinema verité brand of observational filmmaking to the rock-star-on-tour milieu, the kind of behind-the-scenes vehicle that would be refined in scores of music films that came in its wake. But the original article, a nervy account of Bob Dylan’s solo-acoustic tour of England in 1965, has never been equaled for its brittle ambience. Dylan was then in his mid-twenties and at a crucial crossroads in his career. He

had just released the single "Subterranean Homesick Blues," one of his first electric rock songs, but was still pegged as a socially-conscious folksinger, a designation he was clearly chafing against. Within the next year and a half, Dylan would transform rock music with his classic trio of albums, *Bringing It All Back Home*, *Highway 61 Revisited*, and *Blonde on Blonde*. Viewers see a man in the final throes of his original incarnation, and Pennebaker catches him out in a raw and revealing succession of scenes away from the limelight, often lashing out verbally against admirers, colleagues, and London's old-school journalists. It would be a long time before anyone would again view Dylan in such unguarded moments, and the mixed feelings the film received from fans and reviewers alike reflected their uneasiness with a "spokesman of a generation" who decided he was no longer going to play the expectations game with anyone. Don't look back, indeed.

The film famously opens with a little taste of this new direction, in the often-imitated proto-music video for "Subterranean Homesick Blues." It's a signature rock moment of the 1960s, with Dylan flipping cue cards in a London alleyway while Alan Ginsberg lurks in the background. Dylan's personality is as brilliantly cryptic as that song's lyrics, and as soon as he steps off the plane in England, chaos seems to take hold. It was just a year after the Beatles' triumphant landing in New York, and this scene feels like a black-sheep version of that event. At the disheveled press conference that follows, Dylan is not without a certain renegade charm, but his anti-answers to painfully standard questions about the meaning of his songs sets the tense tone for what is to follow. From the reporters and the hangers-on in hotel suites and green rooms, to the fans in the lobbies or chasing his taxi, everyone wants a piece of Dylan, even though most of them are not careful what they wish for. Pennebaker captures it all in long, unflinching takes; most notorious may be Dylan's belittling tirade against a hapless reporter from *Time* magazine and the obtuse, half-jesting/half-spiteful argument with a student reporting for his college paper, now known to be Terry Ellis, future cofounder of Chrysalis Records. The notion emerges of someone overcompensating in trying to shed the "protest singer" label,

although the interspersed concert clips shows a committed Dylan performing the likes of "The Times They are A-Changin'" and "The Lonesome Death of Hattie Carroll."

Dylan's wide-ranging compassion for humanity at large contrasts sharply with his unwillingness or inability to display personal warmth, making *Don't Look Back* an object lesson in the necessity of separating art from the artist. Animals keyboardist Alan Price is unceremoniously dumped from the entourage by a ballistic Bob for causing a wine glass to drop from a hotel window. A virtually ignored Joan Baez is seen finally walking out the door, later revealed to be the moment their relationship ended. Most compelling (if uncomfortable to watch) is the meeting with Donovan, the rising folk-pop star from Scotland who was touted as "Britain's answer to Bob Dylan" by overeager media outlets. The anticipated meet-up is something of a running joke during the movie, and there is quite a gulf between the earnest nineteen-year-old Donovan—who regales the room with the rather obvious sentiment of "To Sing for You"—and the calculating Dylan, who responds (at Donovan's request) with the crushing finality of "It's All Over Now, Baby Blue." Baez and Donovan, of course, would enjoy their own levels of fame throughout the years, but Dylan simply exists on a different plane altogether, and Pennebaker's trend-setting rock doc is what befits a legend most, even if his film's accomplishment is a little uneasy to behold.

The Dylan-Pennebaker team was back together in England in 1966 to film Bob's tour with the Hawks—later the Band. What became the rarely-seen ***Eat the Document*** *was commissioned by ABC-TV as a one-hour special but later was rejected as "incomprehensible." Filmed by Pennebaker under Dylan's direction, it is willfully edgy and free-form, if a bit disjointed. The great concert scenes at Manchester Free Trade Hall, where at one point a diehard folkie famously screams "Judas!" at the singer for the loud rock music emanating from the stage, was re-used by Martin Scorcese in his excellent 2005 PBS documentary* ***No Direction Home****.*

Tonite Let's All Make Love in London

Peter Whitehead—1967—75 minutes

With today's ubiquitous visual media coverage, everything under the sun—from piano-playing cats to street revolutionaries—seems to be disseminated immediately. It's getting difficult to imagine a life just a few decades back when this wasn't the case, even with cultural movements of some renown. The Swinging London scene of the mid- to late-Sixties was just such a momentous era, where contemporary film records are a little scarce. Sure, you can get a taste of mod-London with period movies like *A Hard Day's Night, Blow Up,* or *Smashing Time*. But for a documentary perspective you pretty much have to go with *Tonite Let's All Make Love in London*.

Peter Whitehead was a thirty-year-old director who had just made the first film of the Rolling Stones (*Charlie is My Darling*) and who was keen to capture the burgeoning counterculture. *Tonite* opens with someone intoning the bold titular declaration just before the jarring opening chords of Pink Floyd's "Interstellar Overdrive." This classic space-rock instrumental is set to a visual whirlwind of nightclub dancers, Piccadilly Circus neon, body painting, Carnaby Street fashions and related print media headlines ("A lusty, shock-filled new Elizabethan era!"). Subtitled a "Pop Concerto for Film," *Tonite* hews close to the self-consciously "trippy" collage sensibility of the times, with interviews and early music videos interspersed.

The old town's flashy re-invention is often seen through the lens of the era's protean pop music scene. As a bridge between tradition and modernity, we are treated to the novelty hit "Changing of the Guard" (set to appropriate pomp-and-circumstance footage) by the Marquis of Kensington, a.k.a. Robert Wace, the Kinks' upper-class early manager. There are clips of Pink Floyd playing a nightclub; Eric Burdon and the Animals in a studio belting out "When I was Young" (accompanied by images of war and protest); tunes by period acts Vashti and Chris Farlowe; and the pill-popping anthem "Here Comes the Nice" by the great Small Faces—here re-purposed for a scene of Hugh Hefner's Bunnies arriving at Heathrow Airport to publicize the opening of a Playboy Club in London. Most intriguing are scenes

from the Rolling Stones' riotous show at the Albert Hall, group members dodging stage invaders in an eerie, slowed-down playback set to the studio recording of their dulcimer-led ballad "Lady Jane."

This sort of slapdash, pop-art format extends to the interview segments where subjects bounce around from miniskirts to metaphysical musings, from changing sexual mores to why the city's pubs close so early at night. A rather pensive Mick Jagger thinks aloud about how his generation, the first in many not brought up amid war or economic collapse, had comfort enough to question establishment values of the past. Actors Julie Christie and Michael Caine, artists David Hockney and Alan Aldridge, as well as author Edna O'Brien and others all chime in with their views on sexual mores and looming societal upheaval—not always in the most articulate way imaginable (some seem more at ease discussing the pubs and clubs) but with a purposeful intent that is refreshing considering the lowering standards of pop celebrities to come.

After a brief stopover in the Portobello market, the free-form impressionistic visuals return along with the dissonant Pink Floyd soundtrack. "Tonite let's all make love in London," intones Alan Ginsberg, "as if it were the year 2001." As he did in San Francisco, the beatnik bard's blessing leaves you in the realm of the portentous, a prerogative of counterculture awakening. Despite some dated stylistic choices, Whitehead's piece is great time capsule stuff and in the end premonitory: The influence of London's mid-Sixties zeitgeist—in music, film, fashion, art—would stretch to the 2001 benchmark and beyond and he was there to catch it like lightning in a bottle.

Tonite Let's All Make Love in London *is sometimes confused with the ancillary piece* ***Pink Floyd: London 1966-67****. This thirty-minute cinematic pastiche shares some of the same material with* ***Tonite*** *but the soundtrack consists solely of the original Floyd lineup playing live in the studio—a full seventeen minutes of "Interstellar Overdrive" followed by "Nick's Boogie." Director Peter Whitehead and acid-casualty icon Syd Barrett were college mates and this is some of the best footage of Floyd's founder who left the group a year later. Already looking a bit too stoned for his own good, Syd beams in*

some great psychedelic lead guitar, accompanied by Richard Wright's heady keyboards and the punchy rhythm section of drummer Nick Mason and bassist Roger Waters. Along with the studio filming are fluttering scenes of the group playing the way-out UFO club and revelers inside the cavernous hall of the Alexandra Palace during the famed "Technicolor Dream Extravaganza," a fourteen-hour counterculture event held in April 1967.

Monterey Pop

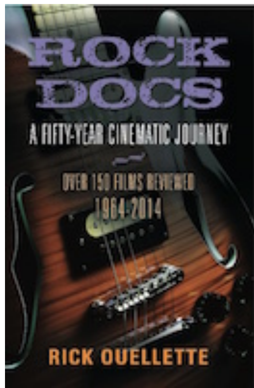
D. A. Pennebaker—1968—82 minutes

In what is considered the grand opening event of the hippie movement, the Monterey International Pop Music Festival took place on the virtual solstice of the Summer of Love in 1967. If the Human Be-In, held the previous January in San Francisco's Golden Gate Park, was the launching of the counterculture revolution, then this festival held seventy miles to the south in Monterey on June 16-18 was its early apex. Its infectious good vibes, manageable size, and series of revelatory performances that soon passed into rock 'n' roll legend were captured by D. A. Pennebaker, who always seemed to be ahead of the curve with his instinct to be there with camera crew in tow when pop history was being made.

The romantic tone underlining *Monterey Pop* kicks in right from the opening sequence as the flower-power crowd filters into the county fairground to the tune "San Francisco," Scott McKenzie's premeditated hippie anthem, as well as to the film's first live performance: the Mamas and the Papas' "California Dreaming." ("Papa" John Phillips, promoter Lou Adler, and Beatles publicist Derek Taylor organized the festival.) There's hardly a baby-boomer to be found who doesn't know something of the quartet of near-mythic Monterey Moments: the Who's pre-punk working class anthem "My Generation" ending in a cacophony of smashed equipment, Janis Joplin's no-holds-barred belting on the bluesy "Ball and Chain," soul singer Otis Redding's electrifying set winning over the "love crowd" in a career peak just six months before dying in a

plane crash, and, of course, Jimi Hendrix's epic eroticisation of the hitherto harmless ditty "Wild Thing." The Seattle native had gone to England to make his name, and here reintroduced himself to America with a stunning display of six-string mastery that culminated with the famous fiery sacrifice of his instrument.

Moving beyond these iconic peaks, viewers revisiting *Monterey Pop* may be just as taken by the acid-drenched ambience of Jefferson Airplane and Country Joe and the Fish, or marvel at how the sequencing of Canned Heat/Simon and Garfunkel/Hugh Masekela suggests the diversity of talents already on offer in the hothouse of creativity that was the 1960s. It was certainly a bold choice for Pennebaker to conclude his film with an eighteen-minute raga by classically trained Indian musicians. He uses the first half of Ravi Shankar's piece to survey the colorful crowd one more time (noted documentarians Richard Leacock and Albert Maysles were among those wielding cameras that weekend), and the exotic sitar sound is like a clarion call of the psychedelic age. The view turns to the stage as the piece gradually intensifies and Shankar repeatedly eggs on his two associates to increase the tempo, and the crowd stirs from its contemplative mood, realizing they are witnessing something special. In one of the most exciting concert sequences ever filmed, Shankar brings the raga to a climax with an inconceivably rapid flurry of notes as the camera turns back to the audience just in time to witness them jumping out of their seats as one in ecstatic applause. In the end, it's this sort of moment that makes *Monterey Pop* so enduring—it's still all about the music at this juncture, and the festival is not weighted down by the heavy claims of "world-changer" foisted on Woodstock. The audience and the artists were still discovering each other back then and Pennebaker's vivid portrait of a receding golden age remains one of rock's greatest artifacts.



The T.A.M.I. Show. Don't Look Back. Monterey Pop. Woodstock. Gimme Shelter. Let it Be.
The Last Waltz. The Kids Are Alright. Stop Making Sense. Standing in the Shadows of Motown.
The Filth and the Fury. Searching for Sugar Man. Twenty Feet From Stardom.

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