

## MOVIES

# Sgt. Pepper submarines to new lows

**Peter Frampton  
sings with a  
bottle of murine  
in each eye.**

**SGT. PEPPER'S LONELY  
HEARTS CLUB BAND**  
Screenplay by Henry Edwards  
Directed by Michael Schultz  
Produced by Robert Stigwood  
RSO film, a Universal release

I walked into the theater ten minutes late, with the slightest of expectations, but quickly realized I had not set my sights low enough and that I should have come two hours late instead. This film has everything: sure-draw headliners backed by star-studded cameos, an already-proven score, with gimmicks lifted from *Star Wars* should all else fail. It has everything, that is, except a reason to exist.

Not content with ripping off what little plot there is in this blithering embarrassment from the unpretentious film *Yellow Submarine*, the people responsible have also seen fit to pillage and plunder some of the finest popular music of our time. It's impossible to believe the Beatles' music could be made to sound so unrelievedly bad until you hear the Bee Gees' version of "A Day in the Life," or Peter Frampton—with a bottle of Murine in each eye—doing "Long and Winding Road."

As for acting, well, Frampton and the Brothers Gibb (together, the Lonely Hearts Club Band) worked up through the ranks of the hard way—by selling millions of

records. To call their performance catatonic would be kindness. Robin Gibb, in particular, reacts to every situation with a look of stupefied bewilderment that makes you want to reach up onto the screen to shake him out of it. Still, this is to be expected. The real mystery is why an actor of Donald Pleasence's calibre became embedded in such a piece of cement, and why he seems no more out of place here than the other zombies. The only ones who deliver themselves with any grace are Steve Martin, who has all-too-brief a scene as the demented Dr. Maxwell Edison, and Aerosmith, who plays the Future Villain Band. Perhaps "grace" is not *le mot juste*, but whatever Aerosmith has separates them from the Bee Gees, who sing "I Want You" as if they were addressing a cheeseburger.

Which brings us to the whole question of interpretation. "Strawberry Fields Forever," one of the most haunting evocations of alienation ever recorded, is here a romantic ballad. Alice Cooper transforms "Because," a song of spacious wonder, into something like his own "Dead Babies." Even the title song has been tampered with. By arranging and directing the music in this film, George Martin has besmirched his entire history of collaboration with the Beatles. He will never be able to live it down.

Producer Robert Stigwood need not worry, since he has more or less made a career out of bad taste, while director Michael Schultz (whose previous credits include the immortal *Car Wash* and *Cooley High*) is just doing what comes naturally. We

must single out writer Henry Edwards, though, for having concocted the emptiest grab-bag of a script since *Star Wars*, from which he borrows heavily. The Future Villain Band is a sort of collective Darth Vader, Mean Mr. Mustard's "Computerettes" could be second cousins to C3PO, and there is even a "silver hammer" fight between Dr. Maxwell Edison and one of the Gibbles that parallels the now-famous swords of light. And oh, yes, the story: *a la Yellow Submarine*, bad guys steal magic instruments, good guys get them back, music saves the world—and I am the Sheik of Araby.

Now if you'll excuse me, I'm going to turn off the lights, put on my copy of *Sgt. Pepper*—the original—and try to forget.

—Kurt Luchs

*Kurt Luchs is a free-lance writer and one-third of the Luchs Brothers, a comedy group from Wheaton, Ill.*



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# Rec



Sham 69 climbs up the ladder of success.

**TELL US THE TRUTH**  
Sham 69  
(Sire Records)

Despite the success of a few performers on the periphery of punk rock, particularly Patti Smith and Elvis Costello, the real stuff hasn't broken through the aesthetic, political, and commercial barriers to American acceptance. Considering the hostility of the American music industry to punk—and the resulting lack of airplay on FM radio, let alone AM—punk's commercial failure in the U.S. could have been predicted.

In Great Britain, however, punk prospers. Many groups have singles and albums on the charts, and now that bans against punk concerts have been lifted in some cities, the punk rock scene continues to burgeon.

Sham 69 was first recognized as an important band late last year. Although the Jam write more engaging melodies and the Clash have a clearer grasp of the radical implications of the unrest among unemployed British youth, Sham 69's debut album is impressive.

Not surprisingly for an album entitled *Tell Us The Truth*, the songs are direct and hard-hitting. Half the album was recorded live, the other side in the studio. The power of a song like "Borstal Breakout" is enhanced, as are all the live cuts, by an audience response that makes even the most enthusiastic American audiences sound as if they were attending a tennis match. One is struck by the honesty of the attack on punk posers in "Hey Little Rich Boy" and the pointed commentary on "Family Life," which begins with Mum calling junior "a bloody burden."

Sham '69s style of simple, rough-edged rock'n'roll isn't for

everyone. But as an example of the unflagging vitality of punk rock, *Tell Us The Truth* is highly recommended.

—Bruce Dancis  
*Bruce Dancis writes regularly for IN THESE TIMES on rock and reggae music.*

**Sham 69 shows punk still alive in Great Britain, and the Kinks' latest album shows them as vital as ever.**

**MISFITS**  
The Kinks  
(Arista Records)

For more than ten years, Ray Davies of the Kinks has been one of the great iconoclastic thinkers in rock music. From his mid-'60s jabs at the idle rich ("Well Respected Man" and "Sunny Afternoon") to his more recent forays into transvestism ("Lola" and "Out of the Wardrobe"), he has never ceased trying to provoke his audiences while entertaining them.

*Misfits* continues the Kinks tradition in grand style. There are the usual doses of Davies' humor in songs such as "Hay Fever," and "Permanent Waves," a satire pointing out that changing one's appearance won't necessarily change one's life. Also quintessentially Kinks are the songs reflecting Davies' political cynicism—"Live Life" and "Get Up"—and the thoughtful, presumably autobiographical, title track.

If this were all, *Misfits* would

be a good, solid album. But two striking songs raise *Misfits* to another level.

"Black Messiah" is a put-down of Rastafarianism, the black messianical religion of Bob Marley and many other reggae musicians. Davies seems to be attacking both the black racism he sees in Rastafarianism and the hypocrisy of white liberals: "Everybody talking about racial equality, but I'm the only honky living on an all-black street..."

He concludes that we all have to live together with less hatred and more understanding, but his statement that "white's white, black's black and that's that, And that's the way you should leave it" is either a racist argument for separation or an understanding that the differences between blacks and whites shouldn't prevent both groups from living together in harmony. Ambivalence aside, "Black Messiah" is brilliantly conceived, beginning as a reggae take-off before shifting into neo-Dixieland.

"A Rock'n'Roll Fantasy" ranks with the Kinks' great songs and it really got me. In this reflection about his life as a rock star, Davies reveals his self-doubts about "living on the edge of reality," wondering whether his band can still continue to develop after so many years.

The reason the Kinks have remained popular despite the shifting trends of rock during the past 13 years is that their music always seems fresh and vibrant. Ray Davies is one of the few genuine auteurs in rock. While other supergroups break up or stagnate, the Kinks grow.

"And I know it's a miracle, we still go, and for all we know we might still have a way to go."  
No doubt. —Bruce Dancis

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