

The Beatles

Hank Malone

1968

a review of

The Beatles, The Authorized Biography, by Hunter Davies, McGraw Hill, 1968, NYC, \$6.95, 357 pp.

Here, for the first time in book form, is all the hoo-hah publicity bullshit about the Beatles. Now you can throw away all your old lipstick-covered newspaper clippings and sea-smelling scrapbooks. Mild mannered journalist and novelist Hunter Davies (creator of *Georgy Girl*) has assembled most of the “authorized” Beatlememorabilia in a neat slick historical package.

There’s (alas) nothing new or vaguely interesting in this biography, unless you’re some kind of geriatric Beatle-novice. I would have preferred reading a radically unauthorized biography, for there is something (despite occasional “gear” four-letter-word asides) totally sterile and cellophane-wrapped about Mr. Davies’ Beatles, something foul and deceitful, too much PR, freshly-washed sparkling cheeks, friendly smile, etc.

On the other hand, there are certain redeeming facts in this biography which must be mentioned, just because they will aggravate the flaccid, largely-arrogant moral imagination of most Beatle fans. For instance, it was perversely satisfying for me to realize (as Mr. Davies’ compendium of facts rolled on and on) that the Beatles are spiteful, class-conscious, compulsive, politically-reactionary, ignorant, reflexively-materialistic music geniuses.

It is perversely comforting to see that so many American visionary revolutionary consciousness-expanded prophetic kids have sized their Beatle-mentors so badly. It gives one a new faith that a generation now 20, despite its trigger-happy omnipotence, is only human, prone to making large fanciful risen-ape-type errors of character judgment, prone to being carried away on a melody into the fairy-tale world where Beatle music and maryjane are storming the doors of the Pentagon, creating The Great People’s Psychedelic Revolution.

Don’t misunderstand. I’m a great Beatle fan. But if you’re looking for Spiritual Salvation Clues in this biography (a ten point lesson on how to raise yourself up by your sandal-straps from a young alienated suburban American teenybopper to Salvation via the Liverpudlian and Indian musical-metaphysical ecstasy) I would estimate you’ve got the bloody wrong idea about our Heroes, and this book.

In fact, our Beatles were, as you know part of a multi-million dollar musical phenomenology that included, at one time, the Everly Brothers and Elvis Presley. And if you absolutely must use the word “revolution” in the same breath with Beatledom, then yes, they were surely part of a musical revolution...a revolution manufactured and carefully nurtured by ambitious and money-hungry men who were seeking a new sound because they were desperately seeking fresh in-roads into your giant record-buying bankroll.

It happens that the precision-built Image of Beatledom did break your bank-account barrier, creating a new marketing record age where the Beatles’ giant popularity induced fans to buy a \$4.98 LP at virtually the same consumption-rate as former R and R fans would consume 89-cent singles.

The real Beatle revolution, then, probably lies in the economic fact that kids no longer buy singles, they buy albums. Financially-speaking, that is a revolutionary break-through for American capitalism. They have got you (and me) buying our diaphanous Spiritual/Musical Revolution through the nose. Not a bad trick. eh?

Admittedly, I haven't said much about this Beatle-book, or have I? Maybe I have. There are two major ways of looking at the Beatles, the important way—the Musically Revolutionary Way, which the biography (and this review) ignores, and the unimportant way—the How Much Did the Beatles Earn at This Concert way, in which the book wallows. None of the marvelous Beatle-music and Beatle-esthetic is explored, and their groping with “Spiritual Wisdom” is handled so clumsily by Mr. Davies that you end up half-despising, half-pitying The Boys.

In short, this is an awful biography, worse than most. It says precious little about the marvelous interiors of the human beings who created “Norwegian Wood,” “Michele,” “Help,” “Within You, Without You,” and so many other miraculous musical journeys. It is a book that says far too damn much about nothing at all, about Liverpool, and “Mumsy,” and fish and chips.

The authorized biography of *The Beatles* is another tentacle of the swindling Beatle Image-Machine. The money-hungry men are out to get your \$6.95. Give 'em a surprise. Don't buy it. Support the Black Panthers.

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