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“The Performance is the Record”: Olivier JULIEN’s *It was Forty Years Ago Today*

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Peddie titles 'The Paradox of Anti-Social Protest'. It is difficult to see why these topics should be 'paradoxical' since each essay portrays a scene or subculture that consciously or not brackets itself off from various versions of mainstream (or hegemonic) society or music. They could reasonably be defined as cultural equivalents of the 'temporary autonomous zones', a concept introduced into radical political thought by Hakim Bey.

Kathleen McConnell focuses on an industrial subculture, the indie scene of the Pacific North-West; Kimberley Jackson introduces a classic, anachronistic subculture, that of Goth; and Steven Hamelman introduces a plangent

autobiographical note in his elegy for the protest dimension of 'straight edge' post-punk music. Sean K. Kelly adds a different take on heavy metal, reading its texts as models of 'a future democratic community' where resistance and universality are compatible.

In sum, like many such edited collections, *The Resisting Muse* is a mixed blessing. It suffers from an incoherent editorial concept but is redeemed by several chapters that deserve to outlive the book itself, particularly those by Weinstein, Potter and Street.

Dave LAING

"The Performance is the Record": Julien's *It Was Forty Years Ago Today*.

Olivier Julien (ed.), *Sgt. Pepper and the Beatles: It Was Forty Years Ago Today*, Aldershot & Burlington, Ashgate, 2008.

Olivier Julien's tribute to the Beatles' groundbreaking *Sgt. Pepper* stands, at heart, a retrospective that attempts to place the album both within its historical context and further understand its cultural merit. Acknowledging that "this masterpiece of British psychedelia" has an "absolutely unique position in the history of recorded popular music" (xvii), Julien and the book's contributors aim to contextualize the album's uniqueness from a variety of perspectives. Noted Beatles and music scholars such as Ian Inglis, Russell Reising, and Sheila Whiteley, to name just a few, contribute provocative insight into the album that help us understand how the forty years that have passed

since its debut offer new insights into the cultural uniqueness and merit of the album.

The collection begins predictably with Julien's brief overview of the circumstances leading up to the creation of *Sgt. Pepper*. Julien cites the Beatles' wariness of touring and the members' respective time apart as major contributing factors to the creation of *Pepper*; notable, too, in this brief introduction is the changes in studio space and equipment (a fact that Hannan's article explores in much more detail). Julien's other contribution to the collection, "A Lucky Man Who Made the Grade," places the album as a defining moment in the history of "the phonographic

tradition," in which culturally-accepted norms were re-defined forever. With these two articles as bookends, the message of this collection is that Sgt. Pepper is indeed a product of its time, yet a unique one at that: while Sgt. Pepper certainly arose out of the 1960s' zeitgeist, most of the contributors to this collection also see it as a particularly unique product of the times.

Only one article disputes *Sgt. Pepper's* place as the ultimate product of its age; Thomas MacFarlane's contribution to the collection, "*Sgt. Pepper's Quest for Extended Form*" suggests that Pepper was in fact one step in a "two-year process of experimentation that culminates with the extended form of the *Abbey Road Medley*" (33). MacFarlane's thesis is that Sgt. Pepper is not,

in fact, a bona fide "concept album" because its extended form simply isn't carried through. Considering musical elements and historical analysis, MacFarlane effectively complicates the prevailing narratives about Pepper's ultimate iconic status. Such a perspective, I think, adds freshness to a collection that ultimately upholds the status quo's opinions of Pepper. This is not to say that these perspectives are not useful and insightful. It is only to mention that perhaps with the influence of 40 years' time, we might have a more rounded and diverse collection.

That said, I do think the collection offers diverse perspectives and readings of the album certainly worth reading. For instance, Allan Moore's re-reading of his ideas about interpretation, and Whiteley's revisiting of her initial understanding of the record, stand as the strongest points in this collection. In addition, Inglis' analysis of the cover—only one such analysis in the collection—fully acknowledges the participation in mythology that both the cover and its consumers engage in. While Moore claims that the album's "great strength...is that it manages to capture, more vividly than almost anything contemporaneous, its own time and place" (140), he also suggests that the search for "unity," or essentializing, remains "problematic" at best: "putting into words, interpreting, is not the same as reducing the song to a form of unsung words, as declaring what it is about" (145). For Moore, a tension between wanting to understand the album as *the* representation of 1960s psychedelia and the resistance to essentialize drives not only his revisitation of the album, but also, significantly, the range of responses to it.

Whiteley's article also takes up the thread of revisitation in her "Tangerine trees and marmalade skies" that opens the collection. She explores,

Sgt. Pepper and the Beatles

quite insightfully, whether the album constitutes “optimistic escapism” or sets an “agenda for cultural and political change” (11). Using historical, biographical, and musical evidence for her examination, Whiteley demonstrates that Sgt. Pepper “highlight[s] the need for cultural change and setting an agenda based on love” (22). Though it is well argued and convincing, this perspective resonates with many of the others in the collection, and does not seem to do much more than confirm Sgt. Pepper’s status as a groundbreaking album.

Inglis’s sophisticated analysis of the cover provides further evidence that Sgt. Pepper did revolutionize album cover art, and though the cover engages in several levels of mythmaking (in which we have willingly participated), Inglis convinces us that the Beatles were able to change the face of album covers (literally). Coupled with Julien’s insightful discussion of Pepper’s place in the phonographic tradition, I think Inglis’ analysis makes a great deal of sense, as it is not merely drawn from more sentimental readings of the album. Even those articles that do engage in quite sophisticated musical or cultural analysis (e.g. Reck; Wagner; Hannan; Reising and LeBlanc), all seem to agree about Sgt. Pepper’s merit as the ultimate in rock albums.

We do gain interesting insight into the behind-the-scenes creation of the album throughout the collection, and the musical analyses are quite interesting even if they do not move us too far

beyond the mythos of Sgt. Pepper. Particularly, Hannan’s discussion of Sgt. Pepper’s sound design is a welcome exploration into the more technical aspects of the album that many ordinary listeners and fans might not completely understand. In addition, Reising and LeBlanc’s discussion of the relationship between the band, the album, and “psychedelic insight” helps those of us born much later than the Summer of Love better understand the culture that gave birth to this musical and cultural masterpiece. For a wide readership, then, this collection succeeds because it confirms what we expect to read about our culture’s favorite album. The title of this review, I think, is an apt characterization of the collection as a whole: we have come to see the performance of all things Beatle, psychedelic, and love as Sgt. Pepper. And while I admire this insight, and the collection greatly (it is, after all, a welcome addition to my extensive library of Beatles books), at the same time I cannot help but want something a little more in keeping with the breakthroughs the album inaugurated. Perhaps I want to have my cake and eat it, too, in terms of my expectations of a commemorative collection. After all, when we commemorate, we are necessarily participating in mythologizing and romanticizing with all the sentimentality we desire. And that, I guess, is the final lesson of this collection, especially for those of us who love not only the Beatles, popular music, and Sgt. Pepper as much as we do.

Sarah ETLINGER