

• The Beatles: the Authorized Biography

Hunter Davies

by David McCaughna

The Beatles: The Authorised Biography by Hunter Davies \$5.95

The danger inherent in writing a book about anything very contemporary, especially as contemporary as The Beatles, is that by the time the book has been written it will be obsolete. Such is nearly the case with Hunter Davies' authorised biography of The Beatles.

Davies, a novelist (*Here We Go, Round the Mulberry Bush*), and young British journalist (he inherited the Atticus column in *The Sunday Times* from Ian Fleming) approaches The Beatles as the great, very significant phenomenon which they are and also with a certain sense of reverence. But, unfortunately, we all know so much about The Beatles, as much as most of us care or need to know, that Davies' book, while providing some interesting insight into their personalities and early lives, does little to show anything more about The Beatles than has already been written and said by so many others. Perhaps it is because there isn't anything more to know about them but I strongly detect that Davies just wasn't able to get close enough to the foursome to bring out anything else.

Davies' biography was completed last spring, before The Beatles had abandoned their flirtation with Maharishi Yogi, before John had taken up his flirtation with Yoko Ono, and before The Beatles had taken their new step, backward or forward, musically, which we are anticipating on their next album. What we get in Davies' book is The Beatles of a year ago, and a year makes a great deal of difference when it involves the ever-changing Beatles. Perhaps one-hundred years from now, when The Beatles have taken their places in musical history, Davies' study will be pertinent and illuminating to those



wishing to understand them as human beings and as musical innovators.

The most revealing sections of the book are those dealing with The Beatles' childhoods and their family life. John, Paul and Ringo all come from somewhat turbulent, unsettled backgrounds, in each case one parent was dead or gone. John, the most interesting and eccentric of The Beatles, had the most difficult childhood of them all. Only George grew up in seeming normality.

From childhood on to The Beatles as teenagers. They were all fairly routine Liverpool kids, none doing very well in school. George almost left Liverpool to immigrate to (hold your breath) Canada! And John went to art college where he

met his future wife Cynthia, who describes him then: "I just thought he was horrible. My first memory of looking at him properly was in a lecture theatre when I saw Helen Anderson sitting behind him stroking his hair. It awoke something in me. I thought it was dislike at first. Then I realized it was jealousy. But I never had any contact with him, apart from his stealing things from me like rulers and brushes."

Davies provides some insight into the history of the little-known Stu Sutcliffe, the early Beatle who died in Hamburg at twenty-one. He was apparently the most sensitive and creative of the group and although he wasn't happy playing rock music one gets the feeling that had he

lived he would have become the greatest artist of them all.

Also rather enlightening are the episodes on how the group acquired Ringo Starr to replace the drummer they were dissatisfied with and the already legendary story of The Beatles' rise, due to the efforts of Brian Epstein. After their fair share of despair and hard-work The Beatles finally make-it. Beatlemania hits the world in the fall of 1963 and since then, well, we all know about that.

To show the Beatles as real, authentic blood-and-flesh human beings Davies spent a day in the company of each and from this and his conversations with them he attempts to analyze each personality wise. But his views are not half as illuminating as are those of George Martin, The Beatles' musical director: "In their music they have an instinctive awareness of what to do. They are always ahead of everyone else. But in much of their thinking they tend to be juvenile psychologists."

They are like children in many ways. They love anything magical. If I had to clap my hands in front of John and produce a vase of flowers, John would be knocked out and fantastically impressed and I would be able to do anything with him.

They like everything to be like instant coffee. They want instant recordings, instant films, instant everything."

But we don't want instant biography. While Davies' biography is occasionally informative, there is a feeling that there is much more to the Beatles than is presented in this book. Perhaps the only true way to discover them is through their music. And, anyway, as Davies says in his 'End Bit' to the book, "They (The Beatles) probably won't believe half the things they said in the last four chapters by the time you've read them."

• The Beatles: the Real Story

Julian Frost

by Linda Bohnen

The Beatles: The Real Story by Julian Fast, \$7.50

If ever there were a just cause for censorship Julius Fast's *The Beatles, The Real Story* is it.

Not because Fast uses obscenities — on the contrary, he is a prude. Not because he tells lies or somehow defames the Beatles' characters; there is nothing like that. And certainly not because he has invaded the Beatles' privacy — he reveals nothing personal about them.

But because *The Real Story* is a sophomoric, dull, cliché-ridden attempt of a cheap journalist to make a buck out of someone else's art. Fast has taken the lives of four musicians who have combined artistic and popular success in a way no one knows quite how to assess, he has taken the stuff myths are made of — and has reduced it to cardboard. And that is obscene.

The Real (as opposed to Authorized) Story purports to be a critical biography of the Beatles, tracing their personal and



musical development. What it ends up as is an edited conglomeration of all the trivia Fast could dig up. Evidently he couldn't arrange personal interviews with the Beatles themselves, so he settled for assorted teachers, relatives and childhood buddies. This is legitimate, if incomplete, but Fast proceeds to pass judgment on what they tell him. So what we get is Fast's opinions on minutiae about the Beatles — not second-hand information, but third-hand.

I imagine Fast wrote *The Real Story* in

some gargantuan newspaper morgue. In that respect the book is a real story, all right — of what every reporter in the English-speaking world has had to say about the Beatles. Unfortunately, they

have all said pretty much the same thing.

To make up for the paucity of original information Fast has had to pad, and he is not even particularly good at that. Who cares that on the day the Beatles arrived in New York City for their first U.S. tour President Johnson promised water aid (whatever that is) to Israel? Who cares that Liverpool has 70 bowling greens and six crematoria and cemeteries? Social history and trivia are not the same thing.

As if writing a history book for children, Fast cannot resist describing the Beatles' supposed reactions and motivations. He cannot resist inserting his own psychological "insights"; comments like "If the hysterical, 'orgiastic' reaction of the girls who watched the Beatles and listened to their music is motherly, then Oedipus be damned." There are profundities like, "You cannot write a lyric to a song using equivocal meanings without running the risk of equivocal interpretations." And there are slimy pruderies: instead of saying outright that Brian Epstein was a homosexual, he writes, "He had never been able to maintain an intimate relationship with a woman, he just didn't care for them, and yet he felt that the life he did lead only served to degrade him."

Surprisingly, Fast's chapters on the Beatles' musical development are the least offensive. Not informative — any Beatles fan could have done as well — but at least, harmless.

Fast wrote *The Real Story* for money, of course. On the jacket cover it says that "among his most recent books is *What You Should Know About Sexual Response*." After that, what remains to be said?

Except, perhaps, that *The Real Story* is a desecration. Do not buy it.

