

books

It Was 20 Years Ago Today by Derek Taylor (Bantam)

The 60s are booming, in publishing anyway it seems. Standing out of the pile of ghost-written autobiographies and exposés is Derek Taylor's witty analysis of 1967 that repeats the well considered approach of the TV documentary. Refreshingly free of pop sociology generalisations, it nevertheless shows there was more to the year than *that* LP and Haight Ashbury.

Despite being the year of world enlightenment in which the *Times* supported the Rolling Stones, not everyone took LSD, and Tom Jones and Engelbert Humperdinck hit No 1 along with Scott McKenzie and the Strawberry Alarm Clock. The birth of the counter-culture is recounted, with the '67 alternative politics having a charming naivety (levitate the Pentagon, anyone?) compared to the more radical ideologies of '68. Besides the US, the underground scenes of London (*IT* newspaper, Pink Floyd at the UFO club) and Amsterdam are covered.

Superbly illustrated, with pithy captions from Taylor (who can't resist inserting many personal anecdotes, being "in the right place" many times — he was the PR man for Monterey Pop), it's the most well-rounded entertaining account of the era that's been produced (not being Frisco-obsessed, and the "did me the world of good" attitude to acid helps too).

Chris Bourke

Heroes and Villains: the True Story of the Beach Boys by Steven Gaines (Macmillan)

Who deserves the Albert Goldman (*Elvis*) treatment? Hitler, definitely; Sinatra, maybe. Gaines is Goldman's understudy; his *Love You Make* was the Beatles go *Dallas*, a transparent piece of treachery ghost-written for an Apple turncoat. But for *Heroes and Villains* Gaines has had to fabricate nothing, only flesh out the details of the sad and sordid Beach Boys story people have been waiting for years to read. The sagas of Brian (the "genius" who believed in his publicity and ended up a paranoid drug casualty) and Dennis (the "penis with a surfboard" who provided their image but drowned while drunk) are well known, but the heart of the problem seems to have been the Wilsons' dad Murry, who used their success to live out his own musical aspirations, abused the boys as children, and sold their publishing off for a song when they spurned him.

Heroes and Villains is a study of ego and excess, but like all exposés, it misses the point of why anyone was interested in the first place: their musical talents. For an understanding of the Beach Boys' achievements, there's still nothing better than Jim Miller's essay in *The Rolling Stone Illustrated History of Rock & Roll*.

Chris Bourke

Dreamgirl: My Life as a Supreme by Mary Wilson (Sidgwick & Jackson)

This will make Diana Ross's mascara run! For just as Ross was the villain of *Dreamgirls*, the Broadway musical blatantly based on the Supremes' career, so too with this autobiography of Mary Wilson, ex-Supreme. The characterisations within pop's most perfect trio are simple: Diane (as Wilson calls her throughout) — ruthlessly ambitious and manipulative in her quest to become pop's queen. Florence — the tragic heroine, the trio's greatest singer, pushed aside, rejected and doomed to alcoholism and death at 32. In the middle is Mary — sweet, innocent, honest and earnest. *Dreamgirl* reads like a schoolgirl's diary, with every broken fingernail and secret lust noted, but it does have valuable pen-portraits of Motown's extended family. For the real history though, read Nelson George's *Where Did Our Love Go?* CB

Janis Joplin: Piece of My Heart by David Dalton (Sidgwick & Jackson)

One wonders about the interest in a biography of Janis Joplin nearly 20 years after her death: a larger than life character, although not of the lasting historical significance of Hendrix, say. However the psychology of Joplin's self-destructive personality is revealed with more depth in this collection of colourful contemporary pieces by Dalton than in Myra Friedman's straight bio or the exploitative *Going Down With Janis*. Many of the articles appeared in the early issues of *Rolling Stone* and together they paint an affectionate, sympathetic portrait. With many illustrations and a chronology. CB

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together by fragments from Laurie Anderson and John Cale (including a wonderfully loopy piece of Cale throwaway for viola and piano during a restaurant scene), there are songs by everyone from David Byrne to the Troggs. My favourite in the context of the film was a particularly deadly cover of David Bowie's 'Fame' by the Feelies at the reunion dance. As for the final credits sequence, with Sister Rita in mid-shot against a burnt red, graffiti-encrusted wall, singing her version of 'Wild Thing', that was the most engaging piece of cinema in the whole film. Perhaps, somewhere between the roadside motels and Newark bathrooms, there was a music film trying to get out.

William Dart



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