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Docs that Rock, Music That Matters

An exclusive interview with Harvey Kubernik discussing his newest book

BY JIM KAPLAN

HARVEY KUBERNIK OUR HEAD of editorial at *Record Collector News* has published his 19th book from Otherworld Cottage Industries, a 520-page, photo-illustrated comprehensive exploration of music history in documentary films for 21st century fans and collectors who never experienced (or wish to re-experience), the excitement of live festivals and concerts from the '50s to the present, many now available on DVD, Blu Ray and streaming platforms.

The book includes 1974-2020 interviews Kubernik conducted with Oscar, Emmy and award winners Dick Clark, Curtis Hanson, Michael Lindsay-Hogg, D.A. Pennebaker, Chris Hegeudus, Albert Maysles, Murray Lerner, John Ridley, Allan Arkush, Steve Binder, Morgan Neville, and David Leaf, as well as commentary by the Supremes' Mary Wilson, Johnny Cash, Heather Harris, Ray Manzarek of the Doors, Bobby Womack, Sandra Warren, alongside chapters devoted to Elvis Presley, the Rolling Stones, Bert Berns, Jimi Hendrix, Link Wray, Bob Dylan, The Band, Tower Records, Motown, Stax and pop music television shows of the sixties and seventies. The George Harrison and Ravi Shankar-inspired *The Concert for Bangladesh* is examined which celebrates a 50th anniversary in August 2021.

This richly textured anthology is an essential item for music and collectors and also serves as a university text book for film schools. But it's not too deep on film stock, camera angles and blocking scenes for students.

ENDORSEMENTS AND TESTIMONIALS TOUT THE TITLE

ANDREW LOOG OLDHAM: "I FIRST MET Harvey Kubernik at the Hollywood Bowl the night Brian Wilson first performed *Pet Sounds*. It was 2000, an auspicious beginning to the century. HK and I had



the last century and more to gnaw on. He was equally at home discussing Steely Dan or Dan Bourgoise; George Harrison or Chakaris; Sandra Dee or Dee Anthony. Harvey has a third ear; he writes with it, and that is what separates him from the cut and paste. He is our reference library and he reps us well."

Dr. James Cushing: "Rock is the gift of sound and vision, and Harvey Kubernik's *Docs That Rock* is the essential guide to the history of rock on film. Kubernik's been doing his homework on this subject for fifty years; he knew everyone, spoke to everyone, and got them to tell stories they never told anyone else. We learn how Steve Binder made *The T.A.M.I. Show* happen in 1964 and helped save Elvis' career in 1968; we hear Murray Lerner giving the details of filming Hendrix at the Isle of Wight in 1970, and we even dig into the backstory of *Shindig!* Perfect for film and cultural studies classes, *Docs that Rock* gives a rich context to movies you thought you knew all about."

Roger Steffens: Not only does Kubernik reveal his choices for the greatest music films of all time, but he gives us the background, challenges, discoveries and excitement inherent in these visual treasures, taking us into the dressing rooms, the cutting rooms, the theaters and the auditoriums, speaking with the prime creators of the form. An absolute must-read for anyone who loves popular music and its secret histories."

Heather Harris: "It matters not that I've known Harvey Kubernik since the early 1970s. Even if this author were an utter stranger, I still would cite him as today's best on the spot codifier of pop culture's complex media. Harvey can toss off these split-second analyses about every other sentence in casual conversation and even make you laugh at the same time with some heretofore never imagined juxtapositions. So imagine the glorious outcome of his concerted research efforts added to his extraordinary insights about music and film. Harvey by-passes the lock-step conformity that our entertainment business has become as a matter of course, and we're damn lucky to have him."

Gary Pig Gold: "For those thoroughly discriminating amongst us who know and wish to listen with their eyes as well as both ears, Harvey Kubernik's most authoritative view of on-screen rock 'n' roll instructs plus informs as it brightly illuminates the always-on-key figures on both sides of the lens. Oh! And you can also dance to it!"

Daniel Weizmann: "Most books about rock in movies are by 'double outsiders'--people who wish they understood movies and definitely don't understand rock. As a Hollywood native with a music biz insider's eye for the secret details upon which pop history turns, Harvey Kubernik puts shame in their game. The rock doc is having its '65:'66 moment and this book frames the whole trip. Bullseye."

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HARVEKUBERNIK INTERVIEW

IN AUGUST HARVEY AND I conducted an interview discussing *Docs That Rock, Music That Matters*

Q: *I have to say, the media, TV, newspapers and film schools the last couple of years and 2020 call for greater diversity displayed on TV and film, but I can't think of a music book that has more diversity.*

What's cool, and you've been active in this arena for decades, is that you don't continually point out the Native Americans, Afro-centric culture, the interracial Paul Butterfield Blues Band, women directors and producers, Bob Marley and reggae.

I know it's a music and film/TV themed book, and not inherently political, but racial incidents are cited in the Motown, Dick Clark, Travis Pike and

Shindig! chapters along with the struggles of artist exposure depicted in RUMBLE The Indians Who Rock.

A: Guess I didn't jump on the bandwagon! This book stretches back to the mid-seventies, and as you indicated, most of my work and edited versions of these interviews were way before 2020.

My Johnny Cash and Glen Campbell interviews were conducted in 1975. During

1976 I spoke with David Ruffin of the Temptations and in 1974 the Miracles' Bobby Rogers. Jack Nitzsche dialogues were 1988 and 2000.

When you got the advance PDF, several friends also sent emails that praised me for the socio-political aspect of the book and the inclusion voices of women directors and producers. A woman Linda Snyder designed the front and back graphics. I've never met or spoken with her.

I'm the real deal Hollywood. Whenever possible, my choices in art and music are instinctive and impulsive, and not committee-driven.

I'm a native of Los Angeles, actually born in Hollywood, Echo Park, in a room overlooking the Hollywood 101 Freeway. The first decade of my life was in downtown L.A. and Crenshaw Village.

And if anyone checked out my 48 years of work and previous books they'd realize I've never had to really consider implementing politically correct directives like diversity, inclusion and identity politics in work I've done and do. My cruise has always been multi-cultural. As Dennis Dragon used to say, "We don't define it. We just do it."

I mean, I dug the movie *RUMBLE The Indians Who Rock* from a few years ago. I didn't imagine in 2020 that leaders and spokes people for Native American culture would be forefront confronting sports team names and actor portrayals.

My own life journey, coupled with impeccable research and devotion did yield some results we never really see displayed in books. Maybe aspects were in commissioned academic studies, library papers or by authors who were grant-funded.

Q: *In creating and compiling*
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the personally archived information you bring to the surface the role of race and artistry versus commerce. We get a deep-dive into so many documentaries and influential '60s TV dance music shows. It's one thing to check this stuff out on YouTube or stream a documentary, but your info, data, and contributor voices add so much more.

A: Maybe a small part of it can be traced to my college degree in Literature and Sociology. I worked in the West Los Angeles College library for two years in the '70s. I stocked the shelves and ordered magazines the first two years the school opened. You'd be happy to know I initiated subscriptions to *Ramparts*, *Downbeat* and *Ebony*.

But I've always been a record collector and you of all people can attest to that. It's influential. I like to employ the Q. and A. method and multi-voice narratives that bring the reader deeper into the collective journey.

Most of today's online music and certainly newspapers do not give a forum to 5-10,000 word pieces. RCN has always let me groove in the 2,500-5,000 word zone.

Q: Any theories why this book and your catalog connect with avid music fans and collectors? People really love your passion and action in the trenches.

A: The filmmakers, directors, producers, writers, including those who have been neglected and overlooked are profiled and presented in equal footing and billing as the many Oscar winners.

It goes back to all my books and published articles is I know I am exposing and bringing some well-needed attention to some music, recordings, films and artists to readers who now are finding out about Bert Berns, Christopher A. Allport, Travis Pike and the music TV show *Upbeat*, as well as re-investing in the catalogs of Otis Redding, Motown, the Ramones, Paul Butterfield, James Brown, the Funk Brothers and the Wrecking Crew.

Q: Much has been written about the Rolling Stones, Elvis Presley, Jimi Hendrix and Bob Dylan, but even hardcore experts pre-occupied and guided by east coast media bias hail your mission and photos.

These acts are so well covered for many decades but positioning the filmmakers or directors as central narrators does add a

whole new dimension. Plus, I learned a lot more about Bert Berns and Bang! Records, director/writer John Ridley, Heather Harris, and The Concert for Bangladesh after I read this book. TV host Ed Sullivan was a pioneer in exposing R&B music talent way before he gave us the Beatles.

This book has arrived at a perfect time when we're all landlocked, viewing movies, watching music documentaries more than ever and also discovering and returning to classic rock and pop music films.

Too bad the Alex Winter-directed movie Zappa wasn't out when you did this.

"I always knew there was an interest and devoted audience for these specific movies."

HARVEY KUBERNIK

A: You have a wife who lets you listen and still collect Zappa and go to record swap meets!

In 2006 I did *Hollywood Shack Job: Rock Music in Film and On Your Screen* featuring my conversations with Melvin Van Peebles, Paul Thomas Anderson, Ice Cube, Mel Stuart, Jim Jarmusch, Curtis Hanson with James Ellroy, Baz Luhrmann, and other filmmakers, deejays, and music supervisors.

Docs That Rock Music That Matters isn't a sequel at all. It houses director/producer online interviews, profiles, 2020 penned essays, dialogues with Oscar winners, full version expanded texts from my library, multi-voice narratives, memoir tributes to television music dance program hosts, as well as coverage on outdoor music festivals and movie soundtracks.

During 2020 Netflix had 25 million new subscribers. Demand for documentaries has really grown since Netflix veered into original content including music documentaries. You of all people know several of these rock documentaries and biopics were first examined in edited articles I first did for RCN.

The collection has interviews I conducted from 1974-2020. I've known for close to a half century how important and informative documentaries were.

Streaming platforms have made them more accessible. Plus, rock 'n' roll itself is now way over 50 years old. It's discussed at length by veteran filmmakers with me.

Q: You remind us that it's about legacy. It was very important that you ran a tape recorder with the icons and groundbreaking pioneers like D.A. Pennebaker, Murray Lerner, Albert Maysles and Dick Clark.

RCN readers and subscribers might know their names and films on *Monterey Pop*, *Gimme Shelter*, the Doors, Leonard Cohen and Jimi Hendrix, but it is so cool to hear their actual voices on the pages from the interviews you did with filmmakers and the bands.

A: Many years ago I would screen their movies in college during the '70s. In 2006 I showed *Dont Look Back* at the University of Southern California School of Cinema and Television.

I always knew there was an interest and devoted audience for these specific movies. And, wanted to know how they were made. Now the world wants to know the back story behind the perceived glory. And thankfully, photographer Henry Diltz and SOFA Entertainment really helped me out with their library photographs and images. Companies were happy to supply product covers.

Q: You've definitely been an insider into the process more than I ever realized. Your TV and DVD credits really prepared you for this book. We've seen you on authorized documentaries on Elvis Presley, Queen, Meat Loaf, Bobby Womack, Christine McVie of Fleetwood Mac, and John Van Hamersveld. In 2020 you were a consultant on the Alison Ellwood directed documentary Laurel Canyon: A Place In Time.

In 2009 you published Canyon of Dreams: The Magic and the Music of Laurel Canyon.

A: The melodic and bio-regional legacy Laurel Canyon has never been more popular. I know you were more of a Topanga Canyon kid. The 2020 broadcast Laurel Canyon documentary, there's a karmic reward knowing I played a small part ensuring Johnny Echols of Love, Mark Volman of the Turtles, Frank Zappa and Mickey Dolenz of the Monkees are seen and heard in the Ellwood film. Howard Kaylan's voice on the 'Turtles' "Happy Together" starts the movie. He's a former RCN cover subject.

I gave at the office.