

Words and Deeds

**'1971 – NEVER A DULL MOMENT: ROCK'S GOLDEN YEAR'
DAVID HEPWORTH IN CONVERSATION WITH PAUL DU NOYER**

Hosted by Waterstones Liverpool One, 19th April 2016

The (fairly obvious) premise of this book is that 1971, when David Hepworth was 21, was rock's golden year. Does his age at the time affect his judgement, or is there a good argument to be made for the statement? We're hoping to find out tonight, as Hepworth is in conversation with Liverpool's own music journo, Paul Du Noyer.

Hepworth has the music-based qualifications to make such a judgement – the partial list of music and cultural mags with which he has been involved seems never-ending: Smash Hits, Q, Mojo, The Word...

Du Noyer opens proceedings with a shot across Hepworth's bows: the book has a "contentious beginning... [the premise regarding] 1971 'is just right'". Hepworth sees him and raises the stakes: we all have a favourite year in music but "I'm statistically correct". His argument is that 1971 saw a period of change and creativity that had never occurred before and won't be allowed to happen again. He later expands on this theory by observing that musicians were at their creative best in 71 and then lived off and replayed this output for the rest of their careers. (There is an argument to be made against this, but it's not raised.) The crucial fact seems to be that 31st December 1970 was the date of the writ filed by Paul McCartney to legally dissolve The Beatles' partnership, thus creating a huge gap in the musical sphere for other bands to fill. Ironically, however, John, Paul and George made their own separate contributions to filling it with 'Imagine', 'Ram' and the concert for Bangladesh respectively.

But it's not just The Beatles' influence – Hepworth lists a number of rock albums made in 71, theorising that, as the record companies, searching for the next big, marketable thing, took on artists they didn't understand, this benefitted the listener because the records were produced without any filter. (Again, this could be disputed.) However, juxtaposed with this freedom is the 'new' record contract, the music industry being "funky on the outside, fiscal as hell below", as Hepworth describes it. He gives the example of The Rolling Stones signing a record deal in 71 and moving from being a band making records to one exploiting its image (another contentious statement), and contrasts it with The Beatles' poor contract record. At the same time, he notes, technology was improving – an interesting concept is that there was just enough time, technology and money and not too much.

Hepworth makes the point that he is not nostalgic for 71, "the year of peak smoke" (smoking), reeling off all its negatives –terrible cuisine, pubs, TV and films – just in case we think he's viewing the period through a rose-tinted filter.

Du Noyer moves the conversation on to a discussion of albums (£2.50 each – expensive) and gigs (£0.50 – cheap) and the pair riff on the delight of "getting to know" an album on vinyl, from visiting it in the record shop before pay day and reading the cover to bringing it home, playing it over and over and reading the sleeve notes: "You invested yourself in the record," Hepworth

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explains; people were devoted to absorbing it. Again, this attitude is not limited to 1971, but, whilst the distinction between then and now is not overtly drawn, it's hard to miss.

Hepworth closes his argument by running through just a few of the great artists who were prolific in 1971: Joni Mitchell with 'Blue', Neil Young, who was touring and writing 'Harvest', the whole Laurel Canyon singer-songwriter scene, but also Marvin Gaye and Stevie Wonder. He finishes by stating that the whole book could have been about David Bowie's 1971 – even though Bowie had no success with his experiences of it in the year – as he went to the US, absorbed what and who he saw, heard and met, and reinvented himself. We sit quietly, thinking about Bowie's fluidity and creativity and mourning his loss – not knowing that a few days later we will be mourning the loss of another outstandingly creative and inventive musical genius, Prince.

The event itself ends with a Q&A session, the highlights of which are Hepworth's answer to being asked which year he would pick if not 1971: 1965, because of the great singles – not least 'Like A Rolling Stone' (can't argue with that); and his final, evocative, even poignant portrait: of Neil Young asking him during an interview: "Remember rolling a joint and listening to 'Harvest'? It'll never be like that again." As Hepworth adds, there's too much else in the world now. And on that depressing note, it's lights out and over to the book-signing table.

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