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By Scott Deskin

Take a look at the Beatles, a group whose music and legend is only equaled by the quality of its music. In their eight years of recording, they produced (and shaped) the music that would define much of the 1960s, just as it continues to influence musicians and listeners today.

Most Beatles fans are influenced by just one aspect of the group's history (Beatlemania, Sgt. Pepper, Abbey Road medals) or the cookie-cutter caricatures of the band members themselves (Lennon's pessimism, McCartney's idealism, Harrison's mysticism, and Starr's clownish charm). Too often the group's early history is overlooked; first-time director Iain Softley chooses to offer a different perspective in the film Backbeat.

The year is 1960, and the band from Liverpool is struggling for recognition in the dark, sleazy, smoke-filled clubs of Hamburg. John Lennon (Ian Hart), Paul McCartney (Gary O'Neill), and George Harrison (Chris O'Neil) all play guitar, with pre-Ringo drummer Pete Best (Scot Williams) and bassist Stu Sutcliffe (Stephen Dorff) comprising the rhythm section. But, as McCartney's character so often makes clear, Sutcliffe's sub-par basslines aren't giving the band much help.

Lennon and Sutcliffe (whose presence lends the band a cool, James Dean-like persona) are bandmates in the early days along with avant-garde photographer Astrid Kirchherr (Sheryi Lee). The romance between Sutcliffe and Kirchherr may be the weakest part of the movie; however, when it's time to explore a serious moment between the two of them, it succeeds in creating a diversion from the main thrust of the story (rock 'n' roll) into something less enjoyable (a heavy and somewhat pretentious love triangle between Lennon, Sutcliffe, and Kirchherr). It also feels like the story is trying to create a myth out of "little Beatle" Sutcliffe, in that buying into the mythology surrounding John Lennon, the audience gets two tortured artists for the price of one. But, whereas Lennon got to face his demons later on, Stu Sutcliffe's existential lover, Astrid Kirchherr. It also feels like the story is trying to influence musicians and listeners today.

The romance between Sutcliffe and Kirchherr is made evident by John's relationship with Sutcliffe's sub-par basslines aren't giving the band much help. Lennon and Sutcliffe (whose presence lends the band a cool, James Dean-like persona) are bandmates in the early days along with avant-garde photographer Astrid Kirchherr (Sheryi Lee). The romance between Sutcliffe and Kirchherr may be the weakest part of the movie; however, when it's time to explore a serious moment between the two of them, it succeeds in creating a diversion from the main thrust of the story (rock 'n' roll) into something less enjoyable (a heavy and somewhat pretentious love triangle between Lennon, Sutcliffe, and Kirchherr). It also feels like the story is trying to create a myth out of "little Beatle" Sutcliffe, in that buying into the mythology surrounding John Lennon, the audience gets two tortured artists for the price of one. But, whereas Lennon got to face his demons later on, Stu Sutcliffe's existential lover, Astrid Kirchherr.

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