

Across the Universe

A cock-eyed, yet fitfully entertaining musical farrago from the acclaimed theater director Julie Taymor ("The Lion King" on Broadway), *Across the Universe* is a return to the Sixties filtered through the music of the Beatles, as re-imagined by the Fab Four's great producer, George Martin.

The story, clearly pitched to the massive boomer generation, traces the lives of a group of naïve mainstream kids (Evan Rachel Wood, Jim Sturgess, Joe Anderson, T.V. Carpio, *inter alia*) who come to political consciousness after settling in New York City during the turbulent 1960's. These sincere youngsters, including one Liverpudlian (Sturgess) brought in to cement the Beatle credentials, are frankly reminiscent of the New York gang in "Rent", but 25 years earlier and challenging a war rather than a disease. In measuring out their lives with song, they are also reminiscent of the characters in Baz Luhrman's *Moulin Rouge* (of 2001). As with that latter picture, the songs are all delivered by the cast themselves, not by professional singers, and those deliveries vary from convincing to mannered.

Where *Across the Universe* really differs from the earlier musicals mentioned is in its periodically surreal direction. Though the dramatic parts of the movie—young love, death, peace and war, budding sexuality—are played pretty straight, Julie Taymor has decided that bursting into song is so unrealistic an enterprise that it may as well be dressed up in fantasy. Thus, she lets her imagination roam when the music wells up, producing some funky and striking sequences, such as Eddie Izzard popping up with a positively psychedelic "For the Benefit of Mr. Kite" and an end credit sequence that reimagines "Lucy in the Skies With Diamonds."

This movie is admittedly for special tastes, but the Beatles songbook (more than 30 numbers), delivered earnestly, does hold it together—most of the time.

(*This film is rated "PG-13;" 131 minutes.*)

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