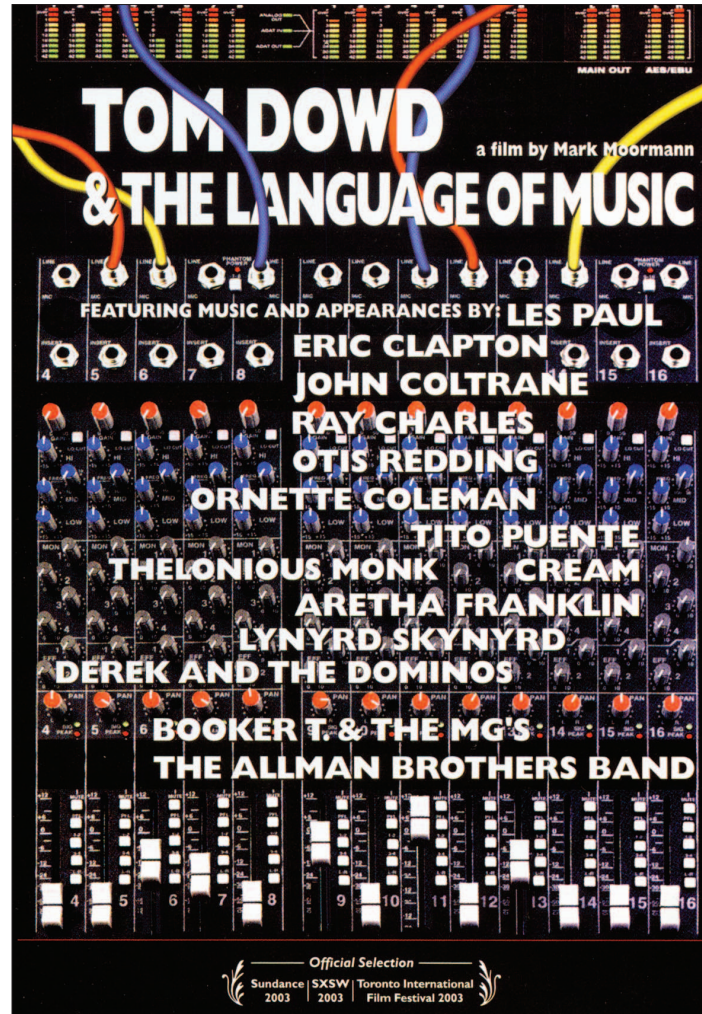


Pop History

Tom Dowd & The Language of Music
Palm Pictures DVD 3077-2

Pat St. John



SINCE MY COLUMN is named "Under Lock & Key," the name Tom Dowd might fit that description to many people, yet his name has appeared on virtually every Allman Brothers Band, Cream, and Derek and The Dominos album. But this is a name that goes way beyond that.

As a reader of this magazine, you're into music far more deeply than the average listener. Your taste in music no doubt is wide, so if the players I've named don't get your attention, try these: John Coltrane, Ray Charles, Aretha Franklin, Tito Puente, Booker T. & The MGs, Ornette Coleman, Lynyrd Skynyrd, and Thelonious Monk. How's that for a list of headliner names you've never seen in the same sentence before? Tom Dowd's directly worked with them all.

I've used great restraint waiting this long to tell you this is the most fascinating DVD I have ever experienced. Though we lost this man a few years ago, Mr. Dowd tells the story himself (with interviews from Eric Clapton, Gregg Allman, Ahmet Ertigan, Phil Ramone, and countless others thrown in, footage of conversations with and hugs from Ray Charles, and filmed praise from many top-flight musicians, singers, record executives, and most successful producers in the field.

From his start in the business in 1947 until it ended for him in 2002, Tom was not merely an engineer, a music fan, an inventor, a producer, but also a man with a hugely perceptive musical vision, and an ear, a mighty fine one. (Well, okay, two.) And never mind the fact that he was also involved in research and develop-

ment of the atomic bomb, ... well, I just don't have space for all that in this column. But I can only tell you that for Dowd, it was all about the music, and if you care about any form of music at all, whether you're a lover of pop, jazz, rock, blues or whatever, you have been profoundly affected by the work of Tom Dowd. Important is not strong enough a word to describe this man's contribution to our entertainment experience. Huge was Dowd's influence, even if you think the main thing he contributed was to put in the water-sloshing sounds at the beginning of "Splish Splash" by Bobby Darin.

But when you've got Les Paul singing Dowd's praises, when he's given credit for "putting Atlantic Records on the map," when you've got the guy using an eight-track recorder some 10 years before the The Beatle's recording of *Sgt Pepper* at a time when Abbey Road Studios was using three or four tracks (at most), when Dowd was using stereo and later digital techniques before anyone else Well, believe me,

you'll watch this DVD many, many times, just as I did – with an open jaw. One very interesting technical item, Tom tells us on the DVD how he was responsible for placing the linear potentiometer, the fader, or "slider" into recording consoles and

All you need to say about Tom Dowd is who he helped, from Les Paul to Eric Clapton.

thus replacing the "knobs" which were too big and unmanageable for multi-channel work. *That* certainly made a big difference – maybe all the difference

What a piece of history this man is, crafting the music of Ruth Brown, Rod Stewart, Dizzy Gillespie, Otis Redding, the Allman Brothers, and even Eric Clapton. The DVD is chock full of vintage photographs, historic footage, and inside stories from the giants of the worlds of jazz, soul, and rock'n'roll. Go beyond that, and you'll see Tom Dowd himself humbly telling his

story, yet the "spirituality" as a loving Dad and great human being just shines throughout this chronicle.

You've probably been asked about your "desert island disc". I'd give up every DVD I own just to have this one, which is why I'm telling you that you have to have it. I've given different records and CDs high praise before, but I don't think I've ever said "buy this." I'll say it about this package.

The man was an inspiration to everyone he met. Without knowing it, he's already inspired you by making your favorite music sound better, as surely you love the music of at least some of the performers whom I've mentioned in this column. When you get this DVD in your machine, enjoy it, as it is truly a deep look into a man who has played a major part in everyone's musical experience. If I'm right, you'll watch this with sincere gratitude and thanks to a man who's just made you realize you've just learned to speak a new language.

What a revelation — *Tom Dowd & The Language of Music.*

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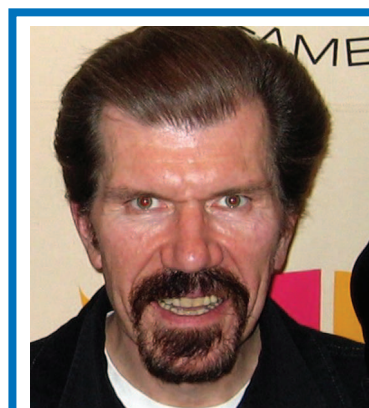
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