

Bio-video looks at Mamas & Papas

If there's one format perfectly suited to the videocassette, it's that odd subgenre, the musical biography. A breezy paperback detailing the history of a band is fine, but you don't get to hear the music (or laugh at the funny period costumes).



The Mamas & the Papas

The latest offering in this category is "Straight Shooter: The Mamas & the Papas," a visual biography recalling the Great American Hope of the British Invasion-dominated '60s. The 80-minute rockumentary is available from Rhino Video for \$19.95 — more costly than a paperback, but prettier to look at and much easier to hear. OK, so the narration is abysmally written and the video graphics are tacky, and band founder John Phillips has grown to be a shallow and self-serving old coot. But the rare footage of early '60s hootenanny folksters (like the Journeymen, who metamorphosed into the Ms & Ps) and the warts-and-all interviews detailing sexual triangles and drug habits are eminently watchable.

We forget now what an impact John and Michelle Phillips, Denny Doherty and "Mama" Cass Elliot (dead at the age of 33 from her particular addiction: food) had on the music scene in the heyday of flower power.

Before their breakup in 1968, The Mamas & the Papas dominated the charts with songs like "California Dreamin'" and "Monday, Monday." Watching Ed Sullivan kowtow to the band live on Sunday night reminds us of their stature, as does the litany of famous names who pay homage to the tight-harmony foursome.

Did you realize that John Phillips wrote Scott McKenzie's hippie anthem "San Francisco (Wear Some Flowers in Your Hair)," as well as the Beach Boys' recent hit "Kokomo"?

Rock 'n' roll was more naive 20 years ago, and you can get wistful watching these rainbow-garbed idealists with full knowledge of what lies ahead. But it's a great lesson in musical roots for anyone who thinks that the Bangles, for instance, are actually doing something new.

In a humorous twist of fate, Neil Young's "This Note's for You" has been nominated as Best Video of the Year in the MTV Video Music Awards. It's ironic because the music cable initially banned the clip from airplay altogether, saying that by spoofing "product placement" in music videos, it was committing the self-same sin.

"We got a giggle out of it," said MTV general manager Lee Masters when he heard about the nomination,

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adding that nominations come from video industry professionals and not MTV itself.

Other nominees in the Best Video category are Fine Young Cannibals' "She Drives Me Crazy," Michael Jackson's "Leave Me Alone," Madonna's "Like a Prayer" and Steve Winwood's "Roll With It."

Artists who pop up frequently in other categories include Bobby Brown, Paula Abdul, Jody Watley, Living Colour, Guns 'N Roses and Def Leppard.

Bon Jovi's Richie Sambora and Jon Bon Jovi are scheduled to perform an acoustic duet at the Sept. 6 MTV ceremony, and the Rolling Stones will make an appearance via satellite. This year, the broadcast will also air globally over MTV Europe, MTV Australia and MTV Japan.

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OUR LANGUAGE

by Jeffrey McQuain

In newspapers, banner indicates a large headline across the page. Wave this type of banner to support freedom of the press.

Anemic appears weak or lacking in vitality. Adding words such as anemic is a sure way to strengthen your vocabulary.

Q. My wife says "swam." I say "swum." Which one's right?

A. That depends. The past tense of the verb swim is swam, as in "I swam yesterday." The past participle, however, is swum, usually found after a helping verb: "I have swum several times this week." From now on, when you use swam and swum, you should be in the swim.

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