

The melodies and the makers

Filmmaker Leslie Ann Coles' doc about one of the world's most influential music magazines gets WFF world premiere

By [Cathryn Atkinson](#)



• PHOTO SUBMITTED

- **PROUD MARY** *Melody Maker* photographer Barrie Wentzell shows one of his photos, of singer Tina Turner, in *Melody Makers: Should've Been There*, which is premiering at the Whistler Film Festival.

That filmmaker Leslie Ann Coles was handed a treasure trove is a bit of an understatement.

Her documentary *Melody Makers: Should've Been There* tells the story of the British magazine, *Melody Maker*, which became one of the world's most influential music magazines during the 1960s and '70s.

Coles met the magazine's photographer Barrie Wentzell, who told her remarkable stories of the Golden Age of Rock, snapping artists such as Jimi Hendrix, The Rolling Stones, The Who and Tina Turner. He had the pictures to prove it and was happy to share them.

Coles met Wentzell in 1996 and they became close friends, with Wentzell taking photos for her first film.

"What captured my attention and imagination were his photographs, oh my gosh. I had a studio in the same building as Barry and he was always telling us these great stories behind the pictures," she explains.

"Originally, the documentary was intended to be an intimate artist's portrait about this photographer who fell into the zeitgeist of rock and roll in 1965, but then it ended up being a much bigger story."

She decided to go to London and interview Wentzell's colleagues on the magazine and become more familiar with the importance of *Melody Maker* in that era.

"That is when the film really evolved," she says.

At its height, *Melody Maker* sold 250,000 per week, made careers of both musicians and writers, created the first LP charts in the U.K., and had huge influence — calling for the Beatles to receive the Order of the British Empire in March 1965. Buckingham Palace listened and the Fab Four were duly honoured the same year.

Melody Maker was last published in Dec. 2000, falling victim like so many other media outlets to digital technology and changing reader habits.

The world premiere of *Melody Makers: Should've Been There* is taking place at the Whistler Film Festival (WFF), time and date to be announced.

Coles says this is her first feature documentary, but through the Female Eye Film Festival in Toronto — of which she is founder and artistic director — she has been producing and directing short experimental documentaries by indigenous youth from Manitoulin Island.

She says this will be her first visit to WFF.

"It has taken a long time (to make) this film, without any real funding at all. It has been truly independent," she says.

"My desire to make this film coincided with the growth of reality television, so no one was buying intelligent art documentaries when I was pitching it at Banff (World Media Festival). I put it down for a couple of years. It seemed to be impossible to get money for it at the time.

"Finally, I said, 'I'm finishing it! It's got to get out there.' I hope there will be interest in the U.K., I've been approached by a few people."