

1960

ALBUM TRACKS

December 1960 LP

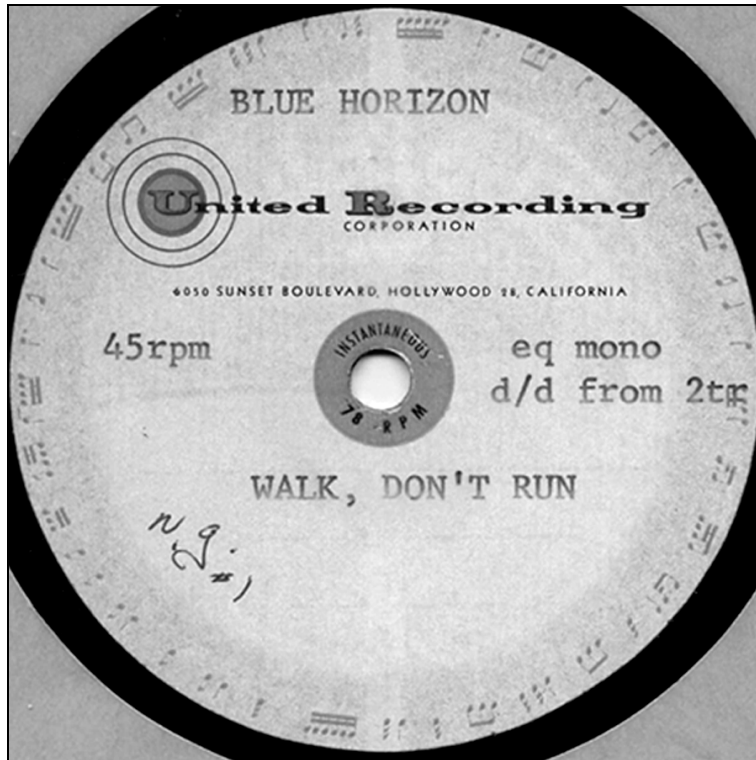
Walk, Don't Run

Dolton BST 8003 Stereo*/ BLP 2003 Mono

* Tracks 3 & 6 were reproduced in mono; no stereo cut of the former has ever come to light¹.



1960 saw the solid bodied electric guitar finally come fully of age as *the* focal point of the small group sound. The now familiar three guitars + drums instrumental, convincingly and elegantly pioneered by The Fireballs in America in the late 1950s, would very soon find one of its finest and most celebrated exponents in the shape of The Ventures, whose WALK, DON'T RUN, based on a Chet Atkins track but stripped down and rocked up, was refined over a period into one of the all-time greats of the genre. (Later in life Johnny Smith would freely acknowledge his debt to Atkins for inspiring The Ventures, adding: “I don’t claim any of the credit for the success of ‘Walk Don’t Run.’ As a matter of fact, I didn’t even name the song. I called it ‘Opus’, but it was Teddy Reig, the owner of Roost Records, that named it”). “It took us about three months to come up with our arrangement after playing it at house parties and weddings” (Don Wilson, 1997 interview in *The Edmonton Journal*²; for this stellar number’s antecedents see Piet Muys’ fascinating survey in *Pipeline* 70³).



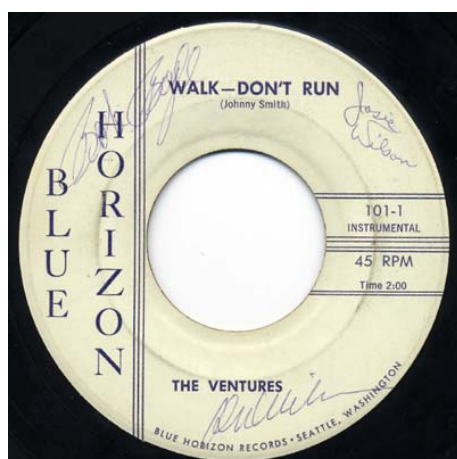
The Ventures' debut album likewise took in numbers practised in public over an extended period, and it too proved to be a milestone release, presenting as it did for the first time to a wide audience (just missing a Top 10 placing in the American charts, but remaining in the listings for 37 weeks) a substantial set of instrumentals that were uncompromisingly guitar-dominated. Not a single one of the dozen tracks made use of the saxophone, so pervasive in the previous decade and indeed a key

ingredient of some of the numbers chosen for this set, an instrument that was also an integral element in the recent pioneering, and highly influential, guitar work of Duane Eddy. Nor for that matter was there any attempt to lend animation, jollity or atmosphere to the proceedings with another favourite trick, the incorporation of non-musical elements in the form of forced whoops, yells and other inarticulate utterances, as well as gimmicky effects such as gunshots. Clearly this was deliberate policy and, despite the recent runaway success of the single, such a thoroughgoing cleaning-up operation may well have occasioned some raised eyebrows. In a revealing interview⁴, the two key group members of the time remarked:

Don Wilson When we went into the studio to record 'Walk, Don't Run', everyone told us we would not get a hit with just four pieces.

Bob Bogle If we had done what they said it would have sounded like everyone else's records.

The set has frequently attracted adverse comment for its dry acoustic or overall lack of warmth, but the effect, not untypical of many recordings of the early 60s, can hardly be called extreme and a more important issue by far is the selection of material and how it was handled. Much of it said to have been drawn from group playlists (the flowing CARAVAN in particular seems well rehearsed), it majored on stylistic diversity and wide appeal. The smash hit from a few months ago, so astutely reworked as to merit an "arrangement by ..." in the composer credits, was reinforced by three vigorous group originals. While the refurbished RAUNCHY and HONKY TONK harked back to a style that was beginning to sound more than faintly old-hat, other numbers, including numbers composed a fair way back, had a more immediate link with the present through recent recordings, whether vocal or instrumental, three of them making the national charts: in the former category we have MORGEN (Ivo Robic), HOME (The Mills Brothers), TARA'S THEME (Jimmy Clanton), in the latter NIGHT TRAIN (The Viscounts), and CARAVAN together with the most distinguished of the lot in terms of market penetration, SLEEPWALK (both Santo & Johnny).



An overarching influence here though, if not stylistically then in terms of programme, was Chet Atkins. His *Teensville* album of January 1960 offered versions of NIGHT TRAIN and SLEEPWALK; in the years running up to that he had turned his hand to CARAVAN, WALK, DON'T RUN and TARA'S THEME. Don Wilson commented thus on the 1957 *Hi-Fi In Focus* album from which WALK, DON'T

RUN was plucked: “Chet’s album was pretty profitable for us: Bob and I released versions of ‘Lullaby Of The Leaves’ and ‘Tara’s Theme’ ... Both were on Chet’s album and both were hits for us as well”⁵.



A particularly thorny question arises early on in this set. In a 1991 interview⁶, Nokie Edwards declared that he played lead on four tracks of the debut album — RAUNCHY, NIGHT TRAIN, CARAVAN and HONKY TONK. (Note that he here omits to include NO TRESPASSING, a number often attributed to him, but that seems far from certain.) Nokie added that he did so thereafter on “most songs”, citing as (random) examples [61/16] BULLDOG, [61/26] YELLOW JACKET and [62/1] DRIVING GUITARS. The latter assertion certainly sounds like an exaggeration, running counter to the usual assumption, supported by repeated (if occasionally contradictory) statements from group members over successive decades, of a more gradual takeover of lead duties by Nokie. See further the introductory comments on the May 1962 LP *The Ventures’ Twist Party Vol.2*.

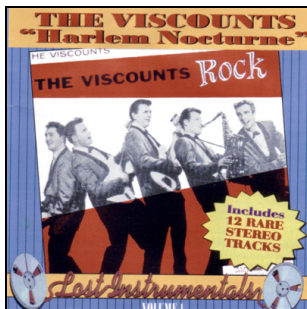
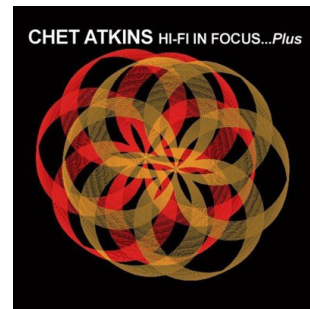
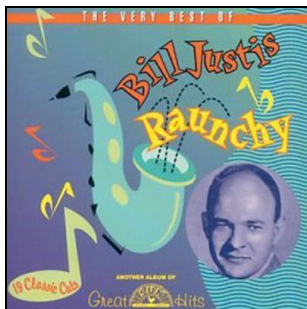
Equally, it is hard to know what reliance can be placed on specific titles advanced off-the-cuff. Dave Towers⁷ detects what he terms Nokie’s “soaring bass” on five tracks, by which he must be referring to RAUNCHY, THE SWITCH, NO TRESPASSING, CARAVAN and THE McCOY, two of which converge with Nokie’s claimed lead contribution mentioned above. (The mannerism in question however naturally surfaces conspicuously and unmistakably on uptempo numbers, hence Nokie’s involvement is not necessarily excluded on more sedate material.)

There is undeniably a difficulty therefore, given that it seems unlikely that overdubs were resorted to in order to allow Nokie to trace the melody as well as throw out these remarkably elastic/ acrobatic bass runs, leaving Bob Bogle with nothing to contribute. In fact, the lead on track 9 (CARAVAN) sounds more like the latter’s work to me, and more generally, as we have remarked, a certain amount of the material on the earlier albums would have been thoroughly familiar to him in that it had been played repeatedly by the core Bogle & Wilson partnership from some way back. In any event, while Bob Bogle did not possess the dexterity or flexibility of Nokie Edwards, he was certainly no slouch. However, there seems little point in blow-by-blow speculation with more tangible and pressing issues to consider, particularly as nobody has ever scrutinised the material from the early albums from this angle and initiated the detailed debate that would need to follow in the hope of reaching some sort of

consensus. In the case of this early material, with the tacit acknowledgement that a considerable area of uncertainty must inevitably remain, I have confined mention of known or supposed deviations from the 'Bogle on lead/ Edwards on bass' arrangement to examples where comment seems instructive (including the occasional track with Don Wilson on lead, see for instance entry [60/4]).

<<<<CHOICE CUTS>>>>

WALK, DON'T RUN and **NO TRESPASSING** choose themselves. A third contender for special commendation has to be **THE SWITCH**, providing as it does a fine example of a Ventures composition performed with a verve and tightness that boded well for the future, the kind of no holds-barred approach that reached perfection in albums like *Where The Action Is*.



1 [60/1] MORGEN (Peter Moesser)

One of the brisker numbers in the set (**NO TRESPASSING** most obviously) might have got things off to a more arresting start, but for an opening track **MORGEN** is distinctive enough and would have struck a familiar note, as a cover of a relatively recent US chart success. In an arrangement by Bert Kaempfert, it was a million-selling hit single for Yugoslav Ivo Robic. Sung in German, its appeal was such that it climbed to #13 in the US charts, where it stayed from late August through to November 1959. (Billy Vaughn & His Orchestra followed through quickly with a B-single, drained of all tenderness by raucous brass accompaniment.) Robic's warm and resonant delivery was enhanced by tuneful, and high-profile, backing vocals from The Song-Masters. They are not missed in our version, where the focus is firmly on the delicate and expressive, but never cloying, lead lines. The gentility is relieved by a punchy middle-eight and the tune is capped by a brief but racy quick-fire outro that contrasts with the more measured strummed introduction.

2 [60/2] RAUNCHY

(Sidney Manker/ Bill Justis)

1957 saw three contending versions of what would become one of the staples of instrumental compilations make the US Top 10 (Bill Justis #2, Ernie Freeman #4, Billy Vaughn #10). It is the original that has stayed the course: it is the really distinctive one of the three, the rough-hewn charm of its naggingly repetitive melody traced out alternately by jangly guitar and rasping saxophone with a brief but tuneful piano interlude providing an effective tonal contrast. Vaughn's success must have been down to his track record as a hitmaker: his arrangement is highly sanitised with a dismally tame guitar contribution. With Freeman the guitar sound is over-smooth and dull, though his is the better performance of the two overall with a fair representation of the sax and, not surprisingly (Freeman himself was a noted pianist), a lively piano passage. In The Ventures' version, the twang of the lead guitar, which interfaces strikingly with the sinuous bass, is beautifully judged to retain something of the flavour of the Justis hit while simultaneously serving as the focal point of the modernising 3+1 line-up.

3 [60/3] HOME ('WHEN SHADOWS FALL')

(Peter van Steeden/ Harry Clarkson/ Jeff Clarkson)

This one goes back to 1931 and was much recorded (Louis Armstrong & His Orchestra 1932, Nat 'King' Cole 1950 etc.; it was performed live by The Beatles 1957–1960, though no example is extant). But the immediate inspiration was probably the recent version by the popular Mills Brothers (on their LP *The Mills Brothers Sing*, early 1960; little noticed now, it is available on their 1991 CD *Rare Recordings*). This lilting, relaxed, atmospheric rendition provides a satisfying partnering number for Santo & Johnny's opus seven tracks further on.

4 [60/4] MY OWN TRUE LOVE (TARA'S THEME)

(Max Steiner/ Mack David)

The music was written in 1939 by Max Steiner as part of the lushly orchestrated score for the film *Gone With The Wind*. (The lyrics were added by Mack David, giving maturing teen idol Jimmy Clanton a #33 US hit in 1959.) The Ventures make skilful use of the three guitar line-up to build an ample and brightly lit soundscape: the rhythm guitar part is largely dispensed with in favour of a variety of fills and frills embellishing the robustly played main melody with Don Wilson on lead, further reinforced by busily executed bass-lines, with Howie Johnson's contribution set far back in the mix.

5 [60/5] THE SWITCH

(Don Wilson/ Bob Bogle/ Howie Johnson/ Nokie Edwards)

We have to wait a while in this set for a really propulsive tightly performed number of a kind The Ventures would make virtually their own over the following few years, with serious rivals few and far between. This is the first of them. After an energetic start notable for a great sparring bass-line, the frenetic atmosphere is relaxed for a short spell at 0:36 with a *switch* to a 'Tequila'-like rhythm (recalled towards the close) and shortly thereafter a *switch* of key⁸, then at 1:08 the group takes off like a bat out of hell with rhythm and drums also pushing to the fore with renewed vigour. Dave Peckett⁹, himself a drummer, picked up on "crackers like 'The Switch' and 'Raunchy' with that amazing drum sound and rim shots of the late great Howie Johnson".

6 [60/6] WALK, DON'T RUN

(Johnny Smith)

“... the initial session remains vivid for Bogle. ‘At the time, I had recently purchased a Fender Jazzmaster guitar ... which I played through a Fender Dual Showman amplifier. In those days, there were no punch-ins; you kept playing the entire song until you got it right. I seem to remember us laying down about a half-dozen takes of ‘Walk Don’t Run.’”, Gary Eskow: *MIX Magazine* website, 2007.

The disappointing UK chart performance of what has proven to be one of the truly stellar representatives of the genre calls for comment. The Ventures broke into the US charts in late July 1960 and peaked at #2 behind Elvis’ magnificent ‘It’s Now Or Never’, enjoying an eighteen week spell among the best sellers. The number enjoyed some exposure in the UK, chiefly wafted to these shores by Radio Luxembourg, and duly made our charts mid-September (#26), rising to #17 a week later, at which point John Barry’s version on Columbia came in at #24. Barry had shrewdly spotted a winner and produced what was to all intents and purposes a commercially attractive copy. True, the overall texture was very different: it was a more measured performance, relying on driving rhythm (let down somewhat by the ponderous bass-lines) and percussion, contributing to a powerful wall of sound. This was spearheaded by an appealing twangy lead guitar, though the use of the tremolo arm seemed rather heavy-handed: Vic Flick, who borrowed Eric Ford’s Bigsby-equipped guitar for the session, “later felt that he had somewhat overdone the tremolo effect”!¹⁰ Dave Towers¹¹ takes a much severer — surely oversevere — view with a scathing appraisal of what he regards as a “dreadful” cover version: “It still sounds to me like a casual one-take run-through complete with a crude jam-session ending”. In any event, there was nothing too fancy: Barry stuck pretty rigidly to The Ventures’ cunningly crafted, pop-flavoured adaptation of the intricate Chet Atkins model.

Now this British offering enjoyed one tremendous advantage that proved to be decisive when it came to chart honours. John Barry by that time had established himself as one of his country’s most important and influential musicians. In particular, on the level of pure pop, the catchy guitar-led ‘Hit And Miss’ with trademark pizzicato string accompaniment had made the Top 10 a few months previously, a number adopted as the theme-tune for BBC TV’s immensely popular *Juke Box Jury*. When it came to airwave exposure, the John Barry version steadily gained precedence over the American one, particularly on the all-important Radio Luxembourg. We can plot just the Top 20 placings for the respective versions to see how one came to get the better of the other (24 September–19 November, dates adjusted to Saturday marking week-end; JB with Ventures in brackets): 24 (17), 18 (11), 15 (8), 15 (11), 11 (12), 13 (14), 14 (18), 11 (27), 17 (—). These represent the standard *Record Retailer* returns; *NME*, which meant much more, if not everything, to pop fans of the period in question, most of whom had very probably never even seen a copy of the austere *RR*, shows a similar shift for the period 17 September–12 November: 20 (19), 16 (12), 10 (9), 8 (9), 11 (10), 6 (11), 7 (16), 11 (18), 12 (30).

This same September saw the release on the prestigious Decca label of a version by Rhet Stoller, which has attracted its fair share of praise since, along the lines of “his version was actually superior to the JB7 effort with spirited drum and bass support”¹². Agreed on the accompaniment, it was certainly punchy, but there was a flaw which, I suggest, would have proved ruinous had this been the only version to confront The Ventures head on: Stoller had definitely been listening to Chet Atkins’ account of things, for he reflects to some degree his breezy, bouncy approach, an approach that bleeds away the unalloyed exuberance and more especially the sheer

clout and momentum of The Ventures' reformulation. However that may be, I clearly recall as a regular Radio Luxembourg listener that the station did play it once, or rather played a portion of it, seeming to regard it as something of a curiosity, which indeed it was. Still, they made up for it soon after, helping to elevate Stoller's much more engaging 'Chariot' into the Top 30.

7 [60/7] NIGHT TRAIN

(Oscar Washington/ Lewis C Simpkins/ Jimmy Forrest)

Jimmy Forrest borrowed an idea from Duke Ellington to record in 1951 this catchy piece with its famous saxophone riff which attracted its fair share of imitators, including the recent sax-led version earlier in 1960 from New Jersey combo The Viscounts, noted for their 'Harlem Nocturne' (see entry [61/6] below). This was spirited and diverting enough in an exceedingly boisterous way, for this is one noisy loco. There is nothing gutsy or in-your-face though about this Ventures workout, which is handled very smoothly indeed, with a beautifully flowing break at 1:13, highlighting as effectively as any of their early numbers the group's ability to transpose one of the staple formats of 50s music — hard-driving rhythms dominated by raucous sax — into a fresh-sounding twangy guitar-led idiom. When The Ventures revisited the tune a few years down the line, the train moved along rather more energetically: see entry [64/27].

8 [60/8] NO TRESPASSING

(Don Wilson/ Bob Bogle/ Howie Johnson/ Nokie Edwards)

This was the B-side of a US charting single: see entry [61/5]. The album's second group composition became known initially to UK fans as the flipside of *PERFIDIA* (both tracks recorded in September 1960) and attracted widespread admiration among the Edinburgh schoolboys' instrumental circle in which the present writer passed part of his misspent youth. I recall sharply the incredulity with which *NME*'s off-the-cuff verdict was greeted: "a so-so blues". To Bob Bogle's surprise in a 1980 interview¹³, its popularity has been sustained in polls and in fanzines, and Colin Pryce-Jones, ace lead guitarist of The Rapiers, counts it his all-time favourite track from the group¹⁴. DP notes: "It was a very highly thought of track here in the N.E. [of England] by local bands, who, searching for fresh ideas, preferred playing flipside to big hits".

It is indeed inspired, from the tantalising WDR-soundalike intro to the cleverly spiralling fade. Stunning lead work apart, that thudding damped accompaniment from Don Wilson, interspersed with more conventional rhythm work, lends muscle to an already robust composition, while the coalescing of the bass-line with the main melody in the run at 1:24, arriving quite out of the blue, is a spectacular example of Nokie Edwards' flair. Dave Burke¹⁵ characterises the track thus: "Not too much of a melody but what a sound! Bob whips up some stunning rifferama lead against a wall of throbbing, solid beat topped with inspirational moments like when Nokie's bass suddenly wells up to follow Bob's lead line, and the ending, with its loop-like lead disappearing into the distance supported by Howie's unstoppable drums". (On the question of who played lead on this track see Introduction to this album.)

Del Halterman¹⁶ detects the influence of Floyd Cramer's 1958 *Flip, Flop And Drop* and/ or The Wailers' *Snake Pit*, recorded in 1959. The latter is closer though hardly very close, and in any case it only saw release in the 1990s (though The Ventures may have heard it performed live).

9 [60/9] CARAVAN

(Duke Ellington/ Juan Tizol/ Irving Mills)

In the hands of The Ventures this classic number, which would be revived on the *Bobby Vee Meets The Ventures* set of April 1963 with Nokie on lead (see entry [63/13]), would be developed onstage into a drumming showpiece and often a drumming extravaganza. In its initial airing however it is a straight three guitars + drums workout with some fine tonal variations from the lead guitar (which sounds Bogle-like to me, despite Nokie Edwards' claim cited above in the introduction to this LP) and an attractive shuffle beat wafted along by assured bass underpinnings. On occasion the phrasing seems to draw upon the more intricate, less formalised rendition from Santo & Johnny, the opener on their 1959 debut album (the first side of which closed with the stellar number considered next).

10 [60/10] SLEEPWALK

(Santo, Johnny & Ann Farina)

Santo & Johnny's exquisite miniature had been such a smash hit in 1959, topping the US charts and occupying them for thirteen weeks with abundant airplay nationwide, that a version from our fledgling big-name guitar group was all but inevitable. In The Ventures' hands it weathered the absence of that distinctive steel guitar sound remarkably well, Bob Bogle's ringing Fender providing a winning alternative. It is a carefully measured rendition, aided rather than hampered by the dry acoustic, making a pretty good job of capturing the alluring beauty of the melody, particularly in the middle-eight.

Despite its lower showing in the UK charts (peaking at #22 in the *NME* listing of 7 November 1959, one rung above Ivo Robic's equally short-lived 'Morgen'), the composition caught on in Britain with the tremendous surge of interest in electric guitar-led instrumentals over the second half of 1960, The Ventures spearheading a host of versions from groups adopting what was soon to prove the 'standard' 3+1 line-up. For some illuminating background to the number itself see Piet Muys in *Pipeline* 70¹⁷.

11 [60/11] THE McCOY

Album Version

(Bob Bogle/ Don Wilson)

Enough has survived in one form or another of The Shadows' (initially The Drifters') 1959 instrumental output to form a clear impression of how they emerged the following year with the rough edges smoothed away. The single version of THE McCOY, written in the closing months of 1959 (see entry [60/15S] below), set against the re-recording for this debut album, provides a rare glimpse of how The Ventures for their part left behind an exceedingly raw 50s sound as they set themselves up to be one of the foremost representatives of their genre in the succeeding decade: they proved to be dynamic and thrusting, certainly, but only very rarely unrefined or unsophisticated. The piece in its rejigged form retains something of the original's youthful exuberance as it powers along (the hammer-blows coming in at 1:23 are especially arresting) supported by a conspicuous bass-line (more sophisticated than that of the single version) carving out a melody all of its own.

12 [60/12] HONKY TONK

(Bill Doggett/ Billy Butler/ Shep Shepherd/ Clifford Scott/ Henry Glover)

To call Doggett's 1956 gloriously loping smash hit a slab of RI is not really stretching a point, as is sometimes claimed, for it gave guitarist Billy Butler plenty of scope to turn in a winning performance in a style not *too* coloured by jazz, with Clifford Scott's glorious tenor sax coming in relatively late on to provide the icing on the cake. In any event, it certainly turned this accomplished 40-year old jazzman into a reluctant and "unlikely teenage rock scene hero", to recall music journalist Fred Dellar's description. The Ventures' recasting sacrifices the element of intimate cool and has a sharper edge than the model. Transposed into the modern styling of guitars/drums, it boasts some fine lead work, particularly towards the close, and the ensemble performance is impressive too, best appreciated as these things commonly are on the stereo cut. Still, it is not quite a match in my book for their RAUNCHY or NIGHT TRAIN.

Dave Burke¹⁸ has this to say on the track: "Their limited instrumentation — compared to most bands of the time — led them to place special emphasis on their arrangements. 'Honky Tonk' is typical. They had no sax or organ to match Bill Doggett's original, and so they add thoughtful little touches to the arrangement to make up for it — a pause here, a flourish there, and by the time they have finished you have forgotten that it ever had anything other than just guitars".

1960

FURTHER TRACKS

February 1960 Single, Blue Horizon 100

[60/13S] COOKIES AND COKE

[60/14S] THE REAL McCOY

(Bob Bogle/ Don Wilson)



An interesting analogy is thrown up here with The Shadows (earlier The Drifters), who started life as would-be vocalists. Though they carried on throughout the 60s committing the odd tune with words to record, The Ventures chose to direct their group energies almost exclusively towards instrumentals, leaving Don Wilson in the main to sing in his own right. Wilson takes the lead here in this product of the times, a very rough and ready rockabilly ditty, which might well have sounded to British ears,

had any heard it at the time, rather like a skiffle number, furnished as it is with a cacophonous accompaniment that scrupulously tracks the two very basic guitar breaks, as well as with an incongruously cosy-sounding chorus.

THE REAL McCOY is the basic building material for [60/15S] THE McCOY, itself recast for the album track discussed above (entry [60/11]). It is as raw as sashimi beyond a doubt, little more than a succession of basic chords/riffs, but there can have been little incentive to refine it since the main brunt of the number comes from the Walter Brennan-like interjections from Don Wilson (as colourfully described by Dave Burke and Alan Taylor in their *In The Vaults Volume 3* annotation), which become increasingly forced and set it firmly in the throwaway novelty bin — save for keen Ventures fans of course, for whom it provides a fascinating pointer to the principle that first impressions in music can sometimes be wholly misleading.

The making of these numbers is commented on by Don Wilson in *Pipeline* 34¹⁹, and discussed at length in Halterman 23–25, who also (37) cites George Babbitt's verdict, "... that awful record". Both sides of the single are conveniently available on the 2005 CD *In The Vaults Volume 3*.

July 1960 B-Single, Dolton 25X

[60/15S] THE McCOY

Single Version

(Bob Bogle/ Don Wilson)

WALK, DON'T RUN's B-side successor to [60/3] HOME²⁰, this remoulding of [60/14S] THE REAL McCOY, with the vocal elements abandoned, is something of a crude thrash, in the best possible sense of the term. The group hammer their way through these powerful riffs with unrestrained gusto — a foretaste not just of the more cultured and controlled album version (see on [60/11]) but of those famous driving guitars ... It is conveniently available on the 1997 CD *In The Vaults*.

1960

DAVE'S VIEW FROM THE VAULTS

1

To complement Malcolm's exhaustive and fascinating review of The Ventures' sixties productions I am contributing my own little potpourri of miscellaneous facts, legends and mysteries. Here you will find the most comprehensive listing of session detail ever published, together with many insights and observations gained from ten years of working on Ace's highly respected *In The Vaults* series of CDs. Along the way we take a look at the musicians, arrangers and producers who have contributed to The Ventures' story and also offer one or two opinions about the band and their music. As far as possible I have entered data in chronological order on a year by year basis, but obviously there is a time lapse between songs being recorded and then released. So as to match the date order of Malcolm's text, titles have been entered in the year in which they were actually issued even when they may have been recorded in the previous year. Other tracks whose release was considerably delayed, or are still unissued, are primarily referred to in the year in which they were recorded.

2

If we go back just ten years the general view of the way that The Ventures operated in the studios during the sixties is far different to the way that we see it today. Back then the assumption was that Don, Bob, Nokie and Mel were responsible for virtually all of the instruments we heard on their recordings and any session help was confined to keyboard players. A good example of the prevailing attitude was a posting made several years ago by a regular contributor to The Ventures on-line discussion group who commented on Bob's versatility in being able to play the string bass heard on 'Wack Wack'. It was an innocuous enough remark, but the message revealed that most fans had little understanding of the way that the recording industry actually operated in Hollywood where virtually all of the band's records were made. In the sixties Hollywood eclipsed even New York as the world's biggest recording centre and was awash with top class musicians. No professional recording artist would waste time in the studio playing an unfamiliar instrument when a specialist could be hired who would perform the part perfectly. Similarly, time would not be spent on expensive overdubbing when an additional couple of guitarists could instantly be brought in to provide what was needed right there and then. Hollywood operated on sound economic sense above all else. Newcomers may find some of the revelations in this book quite startling, but it is hoped that the reader will maintain a sense of perspective and realise that, while The Ventures may have been routinely augmented with other musicians, they never lost their own sense of identity or failed to turn out consistently great records.

3

Any journey of discovery begins with the first few steps, and these were in the eighties and nineties when Dave Peckett's *New Gandy Dancer* published a full-scale Ventures discography and Gerry Woodage travelled to the States to interview band members for his *Ventures Resurgence* magazine. If there were an award, perhaps the MVE (Member of The Ventures Empire), then these two should be at the front of the queue to receive one. Further enlightenment was provided by staunch Ventures fans such as Dave Towers, an enthusiastic bassist, who correctly asserted that there were different bass players at work on the early Ventures albums. It was even more of an eye-opener when, following discussion between myself and fellow instrumental lover Clive Poole in *Ventures Resurgence*, Clive noted that The Ventures' 'Needles And Pins' used the same basic track as Jackie deShannon's original record. We concluded that her vocal had simply been wiped and then replaced by a guitar lead. It was hard to believe at first, but close listening proved it to be true. Amazing! If that could be done then almost anything else was possible.

4

The release of *In The Vaults Volume 2* in 1999 inadvertently illuminated a significant part of the puzzle for me. There was a suggestion in a review of *Vaults 2* that the tracks were made by session players with little or no involvement by The Ventures, because the band members could not recall any of the titles in question. Luckily I had just obtained a number of session contracts which showed that Don and Bob had been on many of the titles. It was just another day in the studio for them, nearly forty years ago, working on a track that was never even released — why on earth should they remember? The issue did stimulate my thoughts though: were these titles really different from other tracks recorded by the band? All of them were listed in EMI's log in the same way that every other Ventures track was, and the session contracts, which covered random titles for the period 1961–1967, showed that the band were regularly augmented by other musicians — not just on the *Vaults 2* titles but across the board.

The answer suddenly revealed itself: *they were no different* — this was just the way that The Ventures normally operated in the studio. Eureka! But perhaps we are getting too far ahead of ourselves: we should follow that sage advice suggested by The Ventures themselves — Walk, Don't Run. So for a more detailed commentary let's rewind back to the beginning...

5

The most hotly contested discussion point within Ventures circles regarding their 1960–61 period is inevitably the “who played lead guitar on what track” debate. It's no surprise that over a four decade period memories have become blurred, with different, sometimes conflicting accounts having been given by members of the band. Most fans assume that session contracts would provide the definitive answer, but this is not true. By their very nature they are financial documents and do not normally record which instruments are played on a session. Where particular roles are suggested by the author they are merely the best guess of a reasonably well informed observer. Neither is there necessarily any direct linkage between a session and the actual issued recording. Some tunes may have been recorded twice and so there is not always certainty about which version was actually released by the record company. However, it is because session contracts record a financial transaction — they itemise each musician's payment and quote their social security numbers for tax reasons — that they are completely reliable as to who was actually present at a recording. Even then, as three or four tracks were often recorded at a session it does not necessarily mean that all musicians played on all tracks. Some individual contributions may have been ‘mixed out’ at a later stage, and a musician who was required for only one track is still noted as a participant on all of the tracks cut at that particular session. Regardless of their limitations though, session contracts are still the best means of illuminating The Ventures' recording methods; and certainly a collection of such contracts provides an unparalleled insight into the way in which work was conducted in the studio. Most of the information that follows is taken from such contracts.

6

The story of The Ventures in their early years is inextricably linked with that of Bob Reisdorff and Dolton Records. In the late fifties Reisdorff was working as a sales representative for an independent record wholesaler called C&C Distributing Company operating out of Seattle. His job was to hawk the records round to retail outlets and radio stations, and while he was doing this he developed an uncanny ability to forecast the hits. The company were so impressed with his predictions and understanding of the business that they appointed him as their Promotion Manager. With the exception of Coral and Epic, C&C Distributing handled just about every label in the Northwest and Reisdorff became so influential that he had a hand in breaking Martin Denny's ‘Quiet Village’ and Andy Williams' ‘Hawaiian Wedding Song’, both of which had originally been B-sides and were flipped by local DJs at the suggestion of Reisdorff. The Ventures recorded ‘Hawaiian Wedding Song’ themselves in 1961, although it would not be released until nearly forty years later on the *In The Vaults Volume 2* CD. Reisdorff was ambitious and was soon wondering how he could move up into record production. He went to his boss Lou Lavinthal and his partners Stan Solman and Stan Jaffe and persuaded them that they should launch a new record label. They agreed to his plan and space was found at their office and warehouse in downtown Seattle at 708 Sixth Avenue N from which Reisdorff operated. The Northwest's biggest star Bonnie Guitar, who had recorded in Hollywood and had recently enjoyed a US Top 100 hit with ‘Dark Moon’, was also drafted in as a partner to groom Reisdorff's new signing: three young college kids

dubbed The Fleetwoods. She played guitar on their million seller 'Come Softly To Me' which was recorded at Joe Boles' Custom Recorders in Seattle. Reisdorff soon made other signings — The Frantics and Little Bill & The Bluenotes — and he was rewarded with US Top 100 hits from both, with further smashes being scored by The Fleetwoods too. With all this success it's no surprise that there was some rivalry between studio owner and producer. At one point Boles angered Reisdorff by endeavouring to sign The Bluenotes himself. As a result Reisdorff took The Frantics to Northwest Recorders on Union Street where they were recorded by Kearney Barton (he is the snarling voice of the wolf-man on The Frantics' *Werewolf*) and even moved his office to the same building. However, a deal was soon struck with Boles whereby he would receive a percentage from recordings made in his studio and, as the fifties dissolved into the sixties and The Ventures arrived on the scene, one of his first jobs was to record the fledgling band.

7

It is well known that The Ventures' debut album was recorded in Joe Boles' tiny studio on two-track Ampex recorders, but it would be several decades before fans came to realise that there were two drummers featured on the LP. It was Skip Moore who first laid down the classic early Ventures drum sound: a double hit on the snare followed by a rim shot on the second strike for emphasis, and then a driving single stroke roll sharply accented with more rim shots to move from one sequence to another. The cymbal work on 'Walk, Don't Run' is unusual inasmuch as Moore switches from the standard sixteen beat rhythm used on most rock material of the time to the kind of triplets more normally associated with jazz drumming for the middle eight. It is not known whether his successor, Howie Johnson, deliberately set about mimicking the basic style heard on 'Walk, Don't Run' and 'Home', but certainly the move from one drummer to another was executed seamlessly. Johnson was a far more skilled drummer than Moore (who did have a tendency to sound casual), and Howie set about polishing the rim shots and accented rolls to perfection. In fact the drumming style was as important as Don Wilson's rhythm guitar in establishing the mesmerising blend of sounds that made the early recordings of The Ventures instantly recognisable and completely irresistible. Sadly Moore died from cancer in his mid-twenties and received only \$25 for his landmark performance on 'Walk, Don't Run' after he opted to take a set fee rather than a share of the royalties. Such is life.

8

The age of The Ventures was also a significant factor in the success of the band. In 1960 most fans who were attracted to their music were just entering their teenage years, which meant that the members of the group were already roughly twice their age. Those thirteen or so years of additional experience served The Ventures well because it meant that they were far more familiar with recent musical history than their audience. Many of the tunes recorded on the band's first four LPs harked back to their own formative years in the thirties or forties, as Malcolm details so well in his exhaustive notes. Don's interest in the trombone and his early liking for big bands, particularly Tommy Dorsey, obviously made him more aware of music prior to rock 'n' roll and many of the songs composed in that period are amongst the most melodic ever written. Clearly they had a wealth of wonderful material to draw on and the experience to choose wisely. Although their maturity meant that they were less likely to be selected as popular pin-ups by adolescent girls, whose interest centred on youthful stars such as Bobby Vee and Bobby Rydell, it did mean that they were far more accepted by young men as role models. Even the displaying of instruments on their album sleeves appealed so much more to the male psyche where 'tools' and

‘mechanics’ were a readily recognised ingredient of the established male identity. And, of course, the Fender guitar’s iconic shape and good looks were in their own way almost as attractive as young women to the eager male eye! On a more practical level their greater experience also meant that they were more able to take advantage of the opportunities that came their way. The Wailers, who were based in the same Tacoma area and also enjoyed a major instrumental hit with ‘Tall Cool One’ in 1959, were all teenagers when fame knocked on their door. Within a short space of time the original line-up of The Wailers was torn apart, not just by the natural rivalry that surfaces between young men but also by the ambitions of their various sets of parents who had their own ideas (and a legal say) on what course the band should take. The Ventures had to endure no such difficulties, and when the invitation to go and record in Hollywood arrived their simple reply was: “When do we leave?”

REFERENCES IN TEXT

H *Del Halterman’s Ventures book*
 NGD *New Gandy Dancer*
 P *Pipeline*
 VR *Ventures Resurgence*

- 1 H49.
- 2 See VR 51 [1998] 11.
- 3 P 70 [2006] 22.
- 4 P 38 [1998] 18.
- 5 VR 61 [2000] 4.
- 6 VR 26 [1991] 23.
- 7 P 30 [1996] 20.
- 8 Cf. H47.
- 9 NGD 42 [1994] 18.
- 10 P 18 [1993] 16.
- 11 VR 90 [2007] 10.
- 12 Trev Faull, P 11 [1991] 7.
- 13 NGD 15 [1980] 4.
- 14 VR 84 [2006] 12.
- 15 NGD 45 [1995] 42.
- 16 H40.
- 17 P 70 [2006] 22–23.
- 18 P 16 [1992/93] 35.
- 19 P 34 [1997] 9.
- 20 Cf. H34–35.