

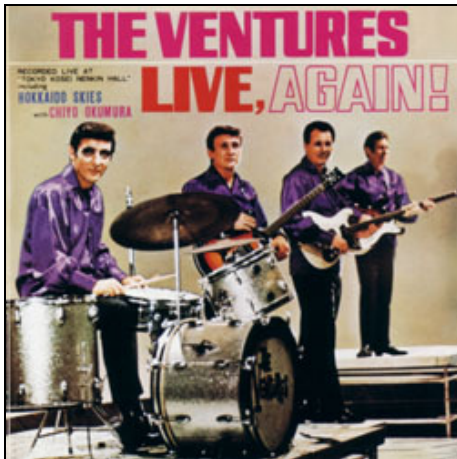
1968

## ALBUM TRACKS

January 1968 Live LP (Japan)

*Live, Again!*

Liberty LP 8250 Stereo



1 [68/1L] BLUE CHATEAU ||| 2 [68/2L] HOKKAIDO SKIES ||| 3 [68/3L] BLACK SAND BEACH ||| 4 [68/4L] A LITTLE BIT ME, A LITTLE BIT YOU ||| 5 [68/5L] WOOLY BULLY ||| 6 [68/6L] GINZA LIGHTS ||| 7 [68/7L] SENTIMENTAL GUITAR ||| {8 [67/1L] LA BAMBA} ||| {9 [67/4L] CALIFORNIA DREAMIN' } ||| 10 [68/8L] A TASTE OF HONEY ||| 11 [68/9L] SLOW SUNDOWN ||| 12 [68/10L] DIAMOND HEAD '67

This collection was put together from summer 1967 concerts, with two exceptions: tracks 8 & 9 were taken over, whether by accident or design, from the *On Stage Encore* album of January 1967. It was the most determinedly Japan-orientated live set to date, homing in as it did on numbers that appeared originally on the June 1967 LP *Pops In Japan* (tracks 1–3, 7, 11). A LITTLE BIT ME ... was on *Super Psychedelics* from the same period [67/30], whereas WOOLY BULLY dated back to September 1965 (*The Ventures À Go-Go*, [65/39]). For comment on the residue, see entries [66/49L] (DIAMOND HEAD: on *All About The Ventures*) and [66/7L] (GINZA LIGHTS a Ventures-penned 'special' for Japan) + [67/2L] (A TASTE OF HONEY: both on *On Stage Encore!*).

The incorporation of two numbers from the previous live release, and the participation of Ms Chiyo Okumura on track 2, mean that we are down to under 20 minutes of new Ventures. But the music is absorbing in the main. It has frequently been remarked, at times with an air of resignation or even disapproval, that the Japanese numbers put The Ventures' way lacked the muscle so characteristic of the group's usual output: they are mellow, laid back, do not have the same drive.

This *Live Again!* set is significant — and indispensable — for the very reason that here the group, spearheaded by lead guitarist Nokie Edwards in astoundingly agile

and inventive form, rock them up uninhibitedly and with a vengeance — exactly as they bestow extra thrust, colour and above all tricky embellishments upon the studio-recorded non-Japanese compositions in this selection, **A LITTLE BIT ME ...**, **WOOLY BULLY**, **A TASTE OF HONEY** and even **DIAMOND HEAD**. Here, in a concert environment, The Ventures can follow their instincts, as commercial considerations are not of paramount importance: just as **A LITTLE BIT ME ...** on a studio album needs to reflect the original hit reasonably faithfully, so Japanese demos supplied by a Japanese record company are not going to be radically reshaped by the group for marketing in Japan.

**BLUE CHATEAU** in its studio guise ([67/36]) oozed atmosphere, not least because of the skilfully crafted organ interventions. The live workout is brisk and businesslike with notably busy and intricate bass-lines. But, 12-string lead notwithstanding, the overall effect seems a shade cold and clinical, and even the resounding close does not quite match the original in punch.

On **HOKKAIDO SKIES** sung by Japan's darling Chiyo Okumura, her sultry and tremulous vocals occasionally breaking out into something of a shout bordering on the fraught, which it would no doubt require appreciation of the Japanese lyrics (and Japanese intonation) to savour adequately, see entry [67/42]. It comes as no surprise to note that the group does not exactly hold back either, and some of Nokie's lead work is certainly attention-grabbing.



Next up is a number that is lifted by the absence of the organ, which did not do a lot for the studio cut ([67/46]). Here the intrepid foursome up the tempo of **BLACK SAND BEACH**, taking it from a moderate cruising speed to a rapid fast forward, with Don Wilson's energetically pattering/ slashing accompaniment setting off the elaborate quick-fire lead lines magnificently.

Tha Japanese connection is suspended with **A LITTLE BIT ME**, **A LITTLE BIT YOU** and **WOOLY BULLY**. On the evidence of this pair of gems, so electric as to elicit one or two whoops from the habitually taciturn performers themselves, no comparable ensemble in the 60s could match The Ventures onstage in fluidity, pinpoint accuracy, cohesion and drive. If the vivacious **A LITTLE BIT ME ...** with its raunchy makeover and wild solo break throws off sparks, the Sam The Sham number, so brilliantly presented on the *À Go-Go* album of 1965 ([65/39]), is positively incandescent, with an ensemble performance of stunning dynamism and Nokie's dexterity scaling truly dizzy heights. Throwing off dazzlingly quick-fire licks, he

follows through with one of his orientalisising 'special effects' routines, from which the group emerges with a explosive surge forward to the close.

One of the most striking and stylish pieces in The Ventures' early Japanese-sourced repertoire was **SENTIMENTAL GUITAR**. As usual, the group onstage don't hang about and they push this one a lot harder than they did in the recording studio (see [67/38]), with Nokie positively packing in the rapid-fire notes, as he deftly elaborates the melody in a way which must surely have delighted and/or astonished its gifted creator Koichi Sugiyama.

**SLOW SUNDOWN** on the *Pops In Japan* album ([67/41]) was a showcase for Nokie's clever, jazz-tinged licks filling out an attractive melody, made even more appealing by the well crafted organ accompaniment. The onstage delivery is faster paced but not too breathless, and it is more robust, while the lead lines and fills are more gritty and even more convoluted.

April 1968 LP (Japan)  
***Pops In Japan No.2***  
Liberty LP 8351 Stereo



This follow-up collection of studio material specially produced for the Japanese market is not highly regarded in Ventures circles, with good reason. The *Pops In Japan* set from the previous June came with impressive credentials: the composers were drawn from some of the stalwarts of the westernising musical scene, many of the melodies were appealing, there were three group originals which were not just throwaways but were well worth having, and the ensemble performances did not let the side down. What a contrast these twelve tracks, or a clear majority of them at least, present!

For one thing, with two or three notable exceptions, the composers seem to be shadowy figures in comparison with those of the earlier set, unless the present writer has failed to track down the relevant documentation. The quality of writing certainly is well below par by any standard, and when taken as a whole it is hard to credit that a group who would one month further down the line release an album of the calibre of *Flights Of Fantasy* could put together something which is, for the most part, so dull and uninspired. It seems idle to speculate at length on the reason or reasons behind this dismal state of affairs (were they the leftovers from the previous set, or, as DP is inclined to believe, was this a new batch sent over from Japan to keep things going after sales of the live January album started to fall away?).

One further aspect deserves comment. It has been remarked more than once that the organ and more especially the piano in many of these numbers are real liabilities, with needlessly florid fills and other inept punctuations. It is hard to believe that what is perpetrated is down to an actual arranger, so maybe the keyboardist was simply given carte blanche to do as he/she thought appropriate at any given moment. It certainly sounds that way.

### <<<<CHOICE CUTS>>>>

**A couple of the faster pieces stand out here, MAX A GO-GO and AOZORA-NO-ARUKAGIRI. The mellower ANO-HITO is attractive too.**

#### **1 [68/11] MAX A GO-GO**

(Ichiro Araki)

As fine an opener as one could hope for, this one has tremendous pace, a catchy tune hammered out by an ultra-twangy lead, and amazingly cutting rhythm guitar throughout (particularly at 0:45/1:41: superb!). The organ break at 1:22 seems a mite unadventurous and doesn't match the rest in verve: why couldn't it have detached itself from the melody line and roamed a bit more freely? Still, beat intros don't come much better than this.

#### **2 [68/12] KOYUBE-NO-OMOIDE**

(Jun Suzuki)

A yearning tone to this mid-paced opus, with a very grand-sounding piano and a decidedly over-employed organ busily interfacing with Nokie's lead lines — in themselves attractive enough. It all seems rather laboured, and there is a rather abrupt descent into the fade, as if nobody knew quite when to pull the plug.

#### **3 [68/13] KIRONO-KANATANI**

(Yasuko Nakajima)

A dreary tune, enlivened or at least diversified by a steady stream of arpeggios from Don Wilson by way of accompaniment. Nokie embellishes some line-ends with string-bending or gentle application of the tremolo arm, but it all sounds very artificial and at times desperately monotonous. The dirgelike organ break is in good company. Not quite zero out of ten, but not far off.

#### **4 [68/14] KOI**

(Masaaki Hirao)

Trip the light fantastic with The Ventures: this is possibly the first serious Ventures foray into the realm of *Come Dancing*. The majestic sounding melody is presented with a Latin lilt, in the form of a joyless, listless tango — of sorts. The pianist clearly revels in the sway of it all with busy fills, while the organ break would sound more at home in a funeral procession. Dire.

#### **5 [68/15] BLUE FOUNTAIN**

(Tadao Inoue)

The composer switches from brilliant [67/36] BLUE CHATEAU to dull BLUE FOUNTAIN with this rather laboured mid-tempo effort, topped and tailed with a mild/polite variation on 'Black Is Black'. The melody is not a strong one, and the attempts to awaken interest from the absurdly florid piano (1:22 ...) and OTT rhythm

guitar (2:10 ...) come across as inept. Better than KOI certainly, but that's not saying much.

### **6 [68/16] ANO-HITO**

(Kunihiko Kase)

For prolific composer Kunihiko Kase of the prominent Japanese group The Wild Ones see *A Pocket Guide To Shadow Music* p.201 (on his 'Omoide No Nagisa', first recorded by The Ventures in 1975). Here is a welcome return to real class. This is a ballad with a heart-tugging melody of affecting simplicity, played on acoustic lead, no doubt equipped before it came The Ventures' way with lyrics to match about teenage romance/angst or the like.

### **7 [68/17] RED HOT SUN**

(N. Hara)

A creditable piece of atmospheric writing evocative of a sultry climate, but briskly performed with exceedingly bustling accompaniment (rhythm guitar, organ with a variety of colourings). There is an oriental flavour to the sound, though it is not pronounced, so it would not be out of place in one of those spy-pics set in an exotic location (Sahara, Morocco or the like).

### **8 [68/18] AOZORA-NO-ARUKAGIRI**

(Kunihiko Kase)

Cf. on track 6 above. 60s Japanese outfits like The Wild Ones generally combined their *eleki* with harmony vocals, so out and out stompers, though they do occur (and might have been expected to occur more often given the aggressive-sounding group-names commonly adopted!), do not seem nearly as numerous as ballads and mid-tempo outings. This one, recorded by The Wild Ones in 1967, is certainly exceptionally lively if not downright riotous by the standards of The Ventures' Japanese material overall. "Its fuzzy blast and powerhouse drumming will awaken you from the deepest slumber" declares John Beddington menacingly<sup>1</sup>.

### **9 [68/19] KAGAYAKU-HOSHI**

(Y. Hayashi)

This one sounds as if it could be traced back to a typical Japanese harmony vocal group of the 60s: a ballad with a pleasant melody and a relaxed delivery, fine for a late-night television slot, but instantly forgettable.

### **10 [68/20] KAZE-GA-NAITEIRU**

(Kuranosuke Hamaguchi)

Released as a vocal by crack Japanese group The Spiders in 1967. Dramatic and fraught, with lyrics reportedly relating how a distressed lover late at night listens to the wild wind, in the hands of The Ventures it comes across as another likely candidate for a spy film/TV series, with its sense of urgency and touches of exoticism.

### **11 [68/21] IN A LONELY CITY**

(Tadao Inoue)

With shades of the same composer's [67/36] BLUE CHATEAU about it, this motors along quite nicely, with a liveliness sorely lacking in this set as a whole; it is good to see another example of Don Wilson's cutting rhythm guitar technique. The closing flourish from the organist, who has not come through this second collection of



Japanese pieces with flying colours to say the least, imports a vulgar note which seems wholly unwarranted.

## 12 [68/22] BOMBAY DUCK

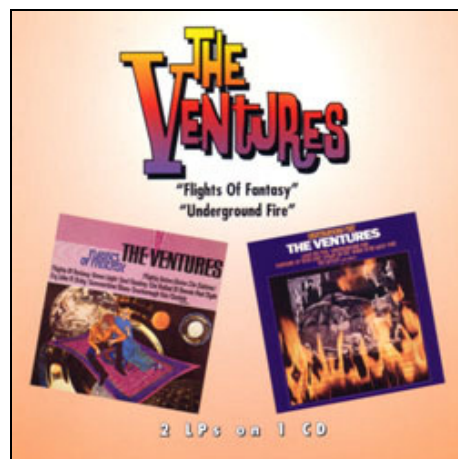
(Toshio Honda)

For The Ventures, if not for The Shadows, an airy, cheery number. The arrangements adopted by both are essentially similar, and no doubt our two groups were drawing upon an identical demo, very possibly sent by the President of Toshiba EMI to America as well as to the UK (see *A Pocket Guide To Shadow Music* p.186). The Ventures' wah-wah infused rendition is light and frothy, a fun piece really ("a chirpy jog" it has been aptly called<sup>2</sup>), whereas the British version (an April 1967 B-side in the UK, but an A-side in Japan), despite the reference in the title to a piece of dried fish securely laid to rest, has all the power and grunt of a charging rhino with its lashings of rasping fuzz guitar and driving percussion.

May 1968 LP

### *Flights Of Fantasy*

Liberty LST 8055 Stereo



Quite how it came about that The Ventures, after giving their fans the runaround with the *\$1,000,000 Dollar Weekend* set, did a U-turn and produced an album of such undoubted excellence, relying on their core resources and some particularly well-judged support from sessioneers (p.19 below), we shall probably never know. In any event, *Flights Of Fantasy*, some of its tracks awash with fuzz and, courtesy of engineer Lanky Lindstrot, a more recently trumpeted piece of studio trickery, phasing (see on track 2), is certainly an impressive collection, more especially from the standpoint of the in-house compositions, five in number (for an extended enthusiastic review see Dave Peckett in *New Gandy Dancer* 74<sup>3</sup>). There are the inevitable covers of hit singles too, all seven of them from 1968, but this time curiously not from among the very highest performers, ranging as they do from a #2 (The Box Tops) through ##7, 10, 11, 14 & 37 to an untypically low #39 (The American Breed); and three of the seven were not from American artistes. Maybe these low rankings had something to do with our album's relatively poor performance in the listings (#169; only six weeks on chart).



### <<<<CHOICE CUTS>>>>

Two of the self-penned numbers impress, **INTERMOTION FAZE**, and even more so **WALKING THE CARPET**; among the covers, **GREEN LIGHT** is a real stormer.

#### 1 [68/23] **MIGHTY QUINN (QUINN THE ESKIMO)** (Bob Dylan)

Manfred Mann were fortunate enough to get hold of one of a number of songs recorded but not released by Bob Dylan & The Band at Woodstock in 1967, the most commercially successful of them in fact, hitting UK #1 in February 1968; it peaked at #10 in the States, on 13 April, so it could well be that The Ventures expected better of it. In any event, it was no surprise that Manfred Mann, with singer Mike D'Abo now well settled in, came up with an irresistible brew of catchy song, immaculate vocal delivery and beautifully crafted accompaniment, streets ahead of the American beat merchants of the time. It provides a worthy opener for this set, the lead guitar a delicious cocktail of fruity fuzz and tart twang, and tasty organ too with lots of funky flourishes (0:30 etc.), electric piano pitching in forcefully later for good measure.

#### 2 [68/24] **INTERMOTION FAZE**

(Bob Bogle/ Nokie Edwards/ Mel Taylor/ Don Wilson)

The swirling/ smearing effect produced by phasing *aka* fazing/ flanging (the latter a type of the former but similar in sound) caught on in a big way with musicians (Jimi Hendrix is a prominent example) in the wake of its striking application on The Small Faces' 'Itchycoo Park' from 1967, a hit both sides of the Atlantic. ('Intermotion' will be an allusion to the process involved in the recombination of split signals after the application of phase-shifting). The Ventures certainly go to town on it here, and the result is impressive, as the melody is a strong one and the piece is shot through with an air of drama, the searing lead guitar reinforced by a second, deep-toned lead line. The bass accompaniment is markedly energetic and intricate. DP agrees, seeing this album as marking a pivotal point in the evolution of the group's sound: "At last and in keeping with rock production of the time (West Coast/prog rock/underground), where the bass guitar stopped being in the background, it was suddenly catapulted upfront and Bogle found his true sound. He'd take this to even greater lengths on *Underground Fire*".

#### 3 [68/25] **THE BALLAD OF BONNIE AND CLYDE** (Mitch Murray/ Peter Callender)

Georgie Fame had a 1968 UK #1/US #7 with this lively piece inspired by the film *Bonnie And Clyde* from the year before — its appeal lay in the strong and characterful

vocal (a no nonsense message: the pair were murderous and doomed to a bloody end), harnessed to a jaunty trad jazz-styled rhythm. For the Ventures it is a jolly romp, a bar-room throwaway with a piano tinkling away cheerily and various sound effects, most conspicuous of which is very cardboardy-sounding automatic gunfire. It has not worn well, but then it was surely never meant to be more than a whimsical interlude.



#### 4 [68/26] WALKING THE CARPET

(Bob Bogle/ Nokie Edwards/ Mel Taylor/ Don Wilson)

What a contrast this one provides! Del Halterman<sup>4</sup> notes that Nokie plays lead through a Leslie amp/speaker, and splendid it is too in a number that is punchy but with all the melodiousness and poise of Raymond Lefevre's 'Soul Coaxing' two tracks further on. The pace is unhurried but the tone is thrusting, a resonant and full-bodied 'vibraphoned' guitar passage providing tonal variation (0:47 and again at 1:53). There is a tasteful electric piano interlude (1:13) before the main theme is resumed, while Don Wilson's rhythm subtly provides extra push at a key moment (1:44). A wonderful confection.

#### 5 [68/27] FLIGHTS OF FANTASY

##### Album Version

(Bob Bogle/ Nokie Edwards/ Mel Taylor/ Don Wilson)

[67/33] PSYCHED-OUT from the *Super Psychedelics* album is revisited with phasing applied (see Halterman 159 for the background), naturally losing something in crispness in the process; the cutting rhythm guitar is slightly less apparent in the rejigged version and the stereo channels have been reversed. The differences are not huge, though SfM's reproduction of *Flights* is muddy and does not provide a good basis for comparison. A cracking number though, in either implementation. *Record Mirror* was prompted to exclaim of the earlier single release of January (see [68/60S]), where phasing had been applied with a thoroughness bordering on the immoderate: "... viciously exciting"!



## 6 [68/28] SOUL COAXING (AIME CALINE)

(Michel Polnareff)

Paul Mauriat's 'Love Is Blue' was a five-week #1 in the States in 1968; Raymond Lefevre's 'Soul Coaxing', which came out shortly after, was at least as fine, but could only manage #37. In the UK it was played and played on radio and snapped up as theme music by Andy Archer on Radio Caroline South, yet it stalled at #46, though the parent album had enjoyed some measure of success prior to the single's release. It is a killer melody stunningly produced, with mellifluous piano, lush strings and soaring wordless voices. The Ventures' version is a much simpler affair, but it does not sound small-scale in the slightest and it is no less affecting: a gorgeously creamy-sounding guitar leads the way, with a haunting, wistful organ accompaniment providing the icing on the cake.



## 7 [68/29] GREEN LIGHT

(Annette Tucker/ Nancie Mantz)

Although this one has trademark Ventures belter written all over it, it is not theirs but a cover of a 1968 US #39 single from The American Breed, a group best known for their slightly earlier Top 5 hit, 'Bend Me, Shape Me'. A rare breed alright, an American group that really knew the ropes when it came to power pop, 'Green Light' was a frenetic workout with loud brass and guitars and lashings of old-fashioned beat. To return to The Ventures: this one suits them down to the ground if anything does, an unrestrained guitar-led rave-up ably supported by pounding bass and organ and with fuzz guitar bursting on to the scene savagely at 1:00. On top of all this, there is an exhilarating outro heralded by a siren-like organ.

## 8 [68/30] CRY LIKE A BABY

(Dan Penn/ Spooner Oldham)

The Box Tops with the grainy-voiced Alex Chilton at the helm had a very brief career, but their legacy in the realm of 'blue-eyed soul' is solid enough, even if they were essentially a one-man band in terms of musical input, with top-notch Memphis sessioneers on call. This 1968 US #2 (UK #15) hit, a choice example of their work, is a richly textured opus benefiting from swirling strings and a distinctive electric sitar solo by Reggie Young. What do The Ventures make of it? They put in a pulsating

performance with prominence given to fuzz guitar, suitably plaintive, but that organ solo seems too chirpy by half, as are the organ fills overall.

### **9 [68/31] FLY AWAY**

(Bob Bogle/ Nokie Edwards/ Mel Taylor/ Don Wilson)

A classy mid-tempo piece which positively glides along, the phasing technique proving an especially effective tool here. There are some funky guitar figures throughout and a fluid bass-line which indulges in a winning swoop as we move into the fade. For tonal contrast, a piping organ break is picked up challengingly by a series of ever so deep rasps from the lead guitar (1:23), a nice touch.

### **10 [68/32] LOVE SHOWER**

(Bob Bogle/ Nokie Edwards/ Mel Taylor/ Don Wilson)

Alan Taylor's verdict<sup>5</sup>, "... a cleanly recorded so-so melody with an acoustic/ semi-acoustic lead and a corny organ break" seems unduly severe to me. Not a killer melody certainly, but not by any means dull. On the credit side we have a very assertive bass-line which marries well with the percussion department and some quick-fire guitar figures slipped in here and there, while the organ break is lifted somewhat towards its close by some spirited guitar interventions (from 1:33 and 1:40).

### **11 [68/33] SUMMERTIME BLUES**

(Jerry Capehart/ Eddie Cochran)

Loud, raucous, bluesy in an exceedingly crude kind of way, San Francisco's Blue Cheer were inspired by Jimi Hendrix to set themselves up as a group now regarded as one of the pioneers of heavy metal. They bludgeoned their way through this timeless classic and came out of it with a US #14 in 1968, and it is this that The Ventures lit upon for this set. They pick up ideas and refine them: not the wrong word, because their workout is 'heavy' only in a strictly regulated kind of way, not least because they actually have proficient guitarists to deliver the goods: spitting fuzz in abundance, a propulsive rhythm, histrionic pauses, etc. — but no nifty guitar break for those who like a tiny bit of variety in their lives, which is a great pity.

### **12 [68/34] SCARBOROUGH FAIR/ CANTICLE**

(Paul Simon/ Art Garfunkel)

Having just subjected their loyal fans to something of a culture shock in one direction the group close by performing the same trick in another. A nineteenth century version of this placid composition, which goes back ultimately to seventeenth century England but went through dozens of mutations subsequently, was picked up and adapted by Simon & Garfunkel who took it to US #11 in 1968 (Sergio Mendes & Brasil '66 jumped in too, making #16). This strictly acoustic version, guitar-led with a piano interlude and a recessed but ultra-busy harpsichord in the left channel, is so utterly angelic sounding as to be distinctly out of place in this particular Ventures set. Reviewers seem to fall silent when it is this one's turn to fall under the microscope, and certainly it strikes these ears as agreeable but not at all remarkable.

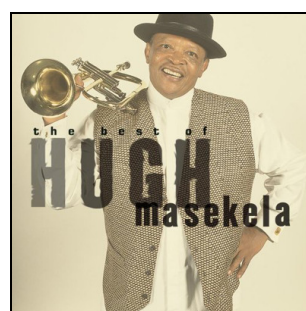
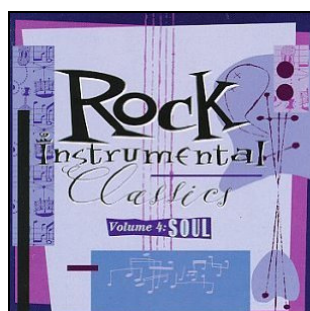
August 1968 LP  
*The Horse*  
Liberty LST 8057 Stereo



The topics of the changing musical climate (growing role of brass sections, more prominent percussion and bass, less importance attached to conventional rhythm guitar, all of these characteristics evidenced in this set) and the replacement of Nokie Edwards with Gerry McGee have been sketched by Gerry Woodage in his liner notes to the SfM issue of this set and need not occupy much space here. The new guitarist, from the sound of it, must have been given some degree of latitude in the selection of material (DP however thinks not: “Bogle & Wilson, or the record company, were the deciders”: but see the concluding remark in entry [69/7] below). While the policy of scooping up recent chart material is scrupulously adhered to (seven from 1968, only one of them sourced from the UK), most of these hits are ideally suited to McGee’s general style of playing (more reserved and less demonstrative than that of his predecessor), as they have a funky air and rely heavily for their effect on repetitive riffs rather than a catchy tune — the American Top 10 alone threw up a copious quantity of memorable tunes in the course of 1968, none of which was taken up. The non-hits are of the same basic complexion, with the solitary exception of the melodious SOUL BREEZE, but even that admits a fair degree of repetition.



The brass arrangements in this set were the work of George Tipton. In the subsequent notes the brass unit is referred to for economy's sake as 'The GTs'. To be noted in tandem with the extensive deployment of brass in this set is the diminished role of the organ, an instrument which had contributed so tellingly and at times so spectacularly to the majority of Ventures albums to date (for other sessioneers employed see pp.19–20 below). *The Horse* made it to an unremarkable #128 and only lasted the course chartwise for nine weeks.



#### <<<<CHOICE CUTS>>>>

**The MEDLEY is ingenious, marred only by imported crowd noise; the rhythmically similar HORSE POWER is appealing too, as is the very different SOUL BREEZE.**

#### 1 [68/35] THE HORSE

(Jessie James)

Much of the background to this unusual number, conveniently available on the 1994 Rhino CD *Rock Instrumental Classics Volume 4: Soul*, has been set out by Dave Peckett<sup>6</sup>. Here are details with some additional points of interest. The Horse was a dance that went back to the start of the decade, but it came to prominence via a 1968 US #2 for Cliff Nobles & Co., though Nobles (who nonetheless did the rounds of TV shows across the country to demonstrate the footwork!) was not on this instrumental record, the 'Co.' being Philadelphian septet MFSB (Mother, Father, Sisters, Brothers), one of whom was composer Jessie James. The original was replete with brass, with a racing bass and invigorating stickwork, elements reflected in The Ventures' cover. The main novelty is Gerry McGee's extremely nifty and polished guitar work, making rather more of the (appealingly!) mind-numbing repetitive riff that pervades the piece. Maybe THE HORSE was chosen as the opener for precisely that reason, to put the

newcomer's dexterity on prominent display. The GTs, on this track at least, are a positive asset, their robust contribution definitely living up to MFSB's performance and enhancing the track's danceworthiness.

## **2 [68/36] HERE COMES THE JUDGE**

(Billie Jean Brown/ Suzanne De Passe/ Frederick Long)

A novelty number inspired by a catch-phrase, devised by Pigmeat Markham, on *Rowan & Martin's Laugh-In*. There were two hit singles in 1968, from Markham himself (US/UK #19) and from Frederick 'Shorty' Long (US #8/UK #30), both of them wordy affairs with noisy background chatter and funky musical backdrops. If it is true that either or both of these deserve to be thought of as proto-rappers, then Don Wilson in our version can lay fair claim to the title of proto-rapper economy class, for this is an instrumental built round the title and not much else aside from a cringeworthy vocal exchange at 1:35. The technique is the same as for the previous track, McGee laying hold of the funk and making it even funkier, supported by an organ that might profitably have been given a bit more scope.

## **3 [68/37] LICKING STICK-LICKING STICK**

(James Brown/ Alfred Ellis/ Bobby Byrd)

Dave Burke<sup>7</sup> is unforgiving but spot-on: "Creating tension out of a repetitive rhythm is a James Brown speciality and not one easily replicated, as this tedious track proves only too well". Here is a hit single (a 1968 #14) that takes funk minimalism about as far as it can be taken, a mesmerising, naggingly repetitive vamp — not an assemblage of aimless repetitions, however, but a work infused with Brown's powerful presence as he calls out to the horn section and other band members, in the words of one critic "almost improvising their performance from his central position". Without the vocal input, let alone this remarkable performer's charisma, The Ventures' track is stripped of all vital force, moving from expressively minimalist to barrenly minimalist if you like. The GTs can blow all they like in their strenuous efforts to provide some kind of build-up by stepping up the mean volume level, but they are little more than a distracting encumbrance.

## **4 [68/38] CRAZY HORSE**

(Jerry Cole/ Glen Kastner/ Norman Kastner)

One of the many activities of the ubiquitous Jerry Cole in the 60s was his association with fellow-guitarist Glen Kastner in the group The Kickstands, a band of sessioneers playing music aimed at motorcycle aficionados. What species of horse was originally envisaged for the present title — the term is naturally part of bikers' vocabulary — I cannot say. For the fourth time in as many tracks we gather that extended repetition is the flavour of the moment, and forty-three seconds of colourless introduction herald the main theme consisting of a battery of bluesy riffs with a heavy backbeat, the bass-lines being more than usually prominent. From 1:31 the sound thickens up and becomes more bluesy still, swinging along quite funkily into a distinctly unceremonious fade.

## **5 [68/39] THE GALLOP**

(Danny Hamilton)

While the number is typical of Danny Hamilton's gutsy, thrusting style, it is not that brisk, and just what is envisaged as 'galloping' here is not clear. If a horse, it's not much of one. Maybe some sort of fowl, for this is the first pronounced, extended



example of a McGee speciality, the chicken scratchin' style of playing! A pity it hadn't been tried first on something with a half decent melody and unencumbered by strident brass. As it is, it's securely in unusual sound effects territory.

#### **6 [68/40] GRAZING IN THE GRASS**

(Philemon Hou)

Exiled South African trumpeter and bandleader Hugh Masekela fought off Gary Puckett, The Rolling Stones and other mainstream pop acts to make US #1 in 1968 with a piece whose title (like its follow-up, 'Puffin' On Down The Track') naturally prompted associations with drugs, for the possession of which he was arrested in 1969. There is barely a suggestion though of a 'trip' of any kind in this innocuous-sounding piece, a laid-back if mildly infectious toe-tapper with a poppy, light jazz feel to it, with Masekela's trumpet set off by piano and attractive percussive effects. The Ventures follow the basic arrangement from the opening ringing cowbell on, with plenty of robust input from the GTs, followed up in due course with smoothly-oiled and mildly funky lead lines from Gerry McGee. But hardened RI enthusiasts might well begin to wonder halfway through where or when it is all going to end.

#### **7 [68/41] Medley:**

#### **WALK, DON'T RUN: LAND OF 1,000 DANCES**

(Johnny Smith : Chris Kenner)

According to DP, Nokie Edwards' last appearance on a single before he bowed out for a while. Recorded in May 1968 (DB), this is a novel take on a Ventures medley, combining WALK, DON'T RUN not with similarly structured pieces such as [61/5] PERFIDIA, but rather with a very different, funky song linked most conspicuously to soul singer Wilson Pickett (a US #6/ UK #22 in 1966). The first number is started up, and is underpinned strenuously throughout, by a catchy riff reminiscent of Los Bravos' stirring 'Black Is Black' (1966), and the resultant jogging rhythm, coupled with some arty lead playing, provides a breath of fresh air. The 1,000 DANCES section is well handled too, the stentorian blast of the GTs heralding some invigorating soloing from lead guitar, with a brief reversion to The Ventures' classic to round things off. An interesting arrangement then, but the imported audience noise that wells up periodically sounds absurdly contrived and does it absolutely no favours.

#### **8 [68/42] SOUL BREEZE**

(Christian Wilde)

This was the B-side of a charting US single, see entry [69/19] HAWAII FIVE-0, and was also a B-side in 1968 for Don Wilson in vocal mode, under the title 'How Can I Help You Girl'. From Christian Wilde, author of the album's trying sleeve notes, and co-composer of an entire side of the early 1969 album *Underground Fire*, comes a piece with a beautiful melody that hadn't soared up the national charts of late or indeed ever. What's the catch? None that I can see. This is what Dave Burke<sup>8</sup> had to say about it: "A gentle, flowing ballad played finger style on guitar, with a middle eight on organ that is a match for the main theme in terms of melodic purity and is a complete and absolute joy". The organ contributes subtly to the main theme too, and it makes a refreshing change to have it back in the picture, for the importation of this album's deeply engrained brass section would have been ruinous.

### **9 [68/43] JUMPIN' JACK FLASH**

(Mick Jagger/ Keith Richard)

This UK #1 only made it to #3 in the States in 1968 (failing to break past Hugh Masekela and Gary Puckett), despite the fact that The Rolling Stones were riding high there at the time. Working with Traffic producer Jimmy Miller, they came up with a song that was seen as a return by the group to their R&B/rock style, and it is indeed gritty with a killer guitar riff which Bill Wyman later claimed to have dreamt up while playing the organ. This is the closest The Ventures get on this set to the tightly knit 3+1 (with some extra guitar fed in) performances of yore, with the emphasis on polish rather than earthiness. The bass-lines seem signally subdued and lacking in imagination when set against the original's daring tour de force, and its riotous close is not mirrored, but by way of compensation Don Wilson clearly revels in the required thrashing and Gerry McGee progressively steps up the bluesy licks, with a fine representation of the naggingly repetitive break away from the main theme at 1:32.

### **10 [68/44] CHOO CHOO TRAIN**

(Donnie Fritts/ Eddie Hinton)

A hit for The Box Tops (US #6 in 1968) penned by two accomplished composers and sessioneers (Fritts: keyboards, esp. for Kris Kristofferson; Hinton: guitar, for Box Tops amongst others). The train jogged along at a fairly leisurely pace, hence the appeals from the gravel-voiced Mr Chilton for haste, to which the 'engine' responded audibly (0:49 and 1:51) — a clever shift not reflected in The Ventures' version. There was brass accompaniment, not too obtrusive, in tandem with tasty guitar fills in country style, with some well-judged vocal sound effects. There is brass in The Ventures' version as well, and thoroughly shouty it is too, while the lead guitar either has fuzz applied or rings out piercingly; an organ feeding in from the right combines with rhythm and percussion to provide the traction. A choo choo from the good old days from the sound of it, or from the 50s anyway.

### **11 [68/45] HORSE POWER**

(Christian Wilde)

The opening riff momentarily bears more than a passing resemblance to that of the medley (track 7), and there is the same bobbing rhythm. It is clear even before the brass excursion at 1:05 that we are dealing with a fun number possessed of a machine-like momentum (isn't that what horse power is all about?), a chirpy jog, to borrow an expression used by an esteemed colleague about a different Ventures track. Delightful. The set could certainly do with some lightening up, and the next track moves further along that path with aplomb.

### **12 [68/46] TIP-TOE THRU' THE TULIPS WITH ME**

(Al Dubin/ Joe Burke)

The miseries of this world are going to run for cover at the approach of this one, but it is one of the high points of the set in my view. It is of course all in the name of fun folks, to quote fragments of the lyrics, with the ukulele, slide guitar, the winningly out of tune lead guitar, the rasping interjections (to use a polite term) from the left channel which seem to become positively costive at the close, and the vaudeville swing (and isn't that a tap-dancing routine at 1:07?!). "It was a lot of fun, every time we envisaged Tiny Tim [a US #17 in 1968], we just laughed and laughed", Mel Taylor<sup>9</sup> recalled in a 1980 interview. Go on, smile at least ...

December 1968 Live LP (Japan)  
***In Tokyo '68***  
Liberty LP 8542 Stereo



**1 [68/47L] LET'S GO! ||| 2 [68/48L] TELSTAR ||| 3 [68/49L] Medley YESTERDAY : FLINT HILL [Earl Scruggs] ||| 4 [68/50L] BORN FREE [vocal; Don Black / John Barry] ||| 5 [68/51L] CARAVAN ||| 6 [68/52L] THE BALLAD OF BONNIE AND CLYDE ||| 7 [68/53L] A TASTE OF HONEY ||| 8 [68/54L] ODE TO BILLIE JOE [vocal] ||| 9 [68/55L] WIPE OUT ||| 10 [68/56L] PIPELINE ||| 11 [68/57L] THE HOUSE OF THE RISING SUN ||| 12 [68/58L] APACHE ||| 13 [68/59L] WALK, DON'T RUN**

This was The Ventures' last live album of the decade, as there was a lull the following year. By now Gerry McGee had assumed lead guitar duties, and an organ had been taken into the act, played by Sandy Lee. It would have been gratifying to report that the live series was rounded off by a release well up to The Ventures' high standards, but regrettably the opposite is the case, as has been intimated earlier in the comments on certain of the numbers in this set.

Gerry McGee does not seem wholly at home with some of the material and certainly when we move into the live albums of the next decade he is much more assured. At times he sounds under-rehearsed, at others not wholly committed to the tunes he is playing (he has expressed his distaste for much of the group's repertoire often enough since). DP comments: "One got the impression that B/W/T were a bit nervous of not having Nokie in 1968 for Japan where he was a hero. Maybe that's why, for the tour anyway, they replaced him with two musicians! The (late) Sandy Lee was decorative but the band never used her for recording".

On top of this, the relative balance of the various instruments is poor and reproduction overall is ill-focused and muffled. That records made in Japan attained enviably high standards in the 60s and beyond may be true as far as actual pressing quality goes, and, on the cosmetic front, red vinyl and similar novelties were much prized, but there is ample justification from Shadows records released in the country during this period for pointing a finger of condemnation at Japanese recording engineers, whose miking and acoustic sense could be suspect, and who could resort to the most bizarre manipulations of masters sent from parent or associated companies abroad (often with little regard for their suitability, it has to be said). To take a single

example, a mono master could be bludgeoned into sprouting a 'stereo' label by alarmingly inept techniques of 'channel splitting', the end product at times being hopelessly awash with distortion and intrusive noise generally. Sometimes the notional right or left channel could go completely silent as swathes of noise-freighted sound surged towards the centre, rendering any talk of lateral imaging and other attributes within the capabilities of competent sound engineering wholly meaningless.

Some of the programme on this Tokyo set has been examined already: CARAVAN, WIPE OUT, PIPELINE, APACHE under April 1965, *In Japan*; TELSTAR, THE HOUSE OF THE RISING SUN under March 1966, *All About*; A TASTE OF HONEY under January 1967, *On Stage Encore*.

**LET'S GO** from the August 1963 LP of that name ([63/39]) with its repetitive motifs and basic approach to music-making seems on the face of it an unlikely one for Gerry McGee to take on with any equanimity, but he gets stuck into the solo breaks with considerable verve, the second of them taking an enliveningly gritty approach, some way removed from the well-oiled smoothness of a Nokie Edwards.

**YESTERDAY & FLINT HILL** which follows directly on from it certainly make an unlikely pair. A Ventures version of the former had appeared on the *\$1,000,000 Weekend* album of December 1967 ([67/61]), and a desire to promote that will also account for the inclusion of the Bobbie Gentry number a few tracks further on. The Beatles' staggeringly successful opus comes across as rather more characterful here than the studio cut fronted by Nokie, possessing a warm sonority, nicely phrased and enlivened by the occasional arpeggios and other embellishments. There is a brief but effective organ passage, distant and ethereal-sounding, while Mel Taylor brings the number to a tasteful close.

After the tranquil strains of YESTERDAY the follow-on number bursts forth with startling ferocity. Flint Hill, North Carolina was Earl Scruggs' birthplace. One of the luminaries of the country scene, Scruggs moulded largely traditional fiddle tunes into lively and often dazzling works for the banjo. Gerry McGee has transposed it for the guitar, delivering the piece with obvious relish in his best chicken scratchin' style; the rest of the group provide robust support and holler into the bargain!

Just when things were looking up, Don Wilson stepped forward to front a vocal version of **BORN FREE**, a choice prompted perhaps by the fact that it had been revived and made into a Top 40 hit for soul group The Hesitations in February 1968. Sadly, the rocked up accompaniment fails to mask what can only be termed an excruciating delivery, which gets progressively stressful as the number builds to a shouty close in the wake of a relentless barrage of ah-ahs. "I wasn't really thrilled that it ended up on our [viz., this] live recording", remarked Don Wilson.<sup>10</sup>

**THE BALLAD OF BONNIE AND CLYDE** was not one of the highlights of the May 1968 album *Flights Of Fantasy* ([68/25]), but in all its boisterousness it seems to have gone down well in Tokyo. Though the organ does nobody or nothing any favours, Gerry McGee plays the tune twangily and certainly improves on the contrived studio cut. The standard of reproduction miraculously recovers after a distinctly boomy and congested start.

Could there be anything more dire than a laboured instrumental of **ODE TO BILLIE JOE** (see entry [67/52])? There could, and the evidence is here before you now, courtesy of Sandy Lee in vocal mode. One can only marvel that the group, who were clearly feeling their way with a new lead guitarist in tow, not to mention an organist who often seemed ill at ease, thought fit to unleash close on four minutes of

such painful meanderings on their clearly devoted Japanese audience, though there did seem to be some sustained cheering amid the polite handclaps.

The last live release of the decade closes appropriately enough (on the original record at least) with a rendition of [60/6] **WALK, DON'T RUN**, the only live example from the 60s in its own right as opposed to a medley opener. And a cracking version it is too, even if it cannot be enjoyed to the full with the limited dynamics made available by Liberty's engineers for this performance: a chunky, sonorous lead guitar with thrusting backup, potent enough to elicit the odd cry of appreciation from the generally good as gold concertgoers.

**1968**

## **FURTHER TRACKS**

January 1968 Single, Liberty 56019

**[68/60S] FLIGHTS OF FANTASY**

**Single Version**

**[68/61S] VIBRATIONS**

**Single Version**

(Bob Bogle/ Nokie Edwards/ Mel Taylor/ Don Wilson)



An orgy of phasing. See above under May 1968, LP *Flights Of Fantasy*, [68/27] and under June 1967, LP *Super Psychedelics*, [67/32]. Both tracks are conveniently available on the 2005 CD *In The Vaults Volume 3*.

April 1968 B-Single (UK), Liberty 56115

**[68/62S] PANDORA'S BOX**

(John Carter/ Alan Caddy)

This one slipped out as the flipside of the UK issue of [cf. 68/60S just above] **FLIGHTS OF FANTASY**. Caddy was a prominent member of The Tornados and their recording of the piece finally saw release in 2007 on the CD *The Tornados/ Geoff Goddard: Tea Chest Treasures* (see the review by Dave Peckett in *NGD* 83<sup>11</sup>). The styling adopted by The Ventures sounds markedly Tornados-like, but they inject some pep into the rather deliberate original and have applied their trademark polish. It would be interesting to know precisely what inspired the title, for the piece moves along with the studied grandiosity of big screen epic theme tunes of the Lawrence Of



Arabia mould, with shimmering, tremulous keyboards from John Durrill (see Halterman 183 for the technique employed) paving the way for relatively short-lived bursts of twangy guitar. The unusual rhythm underpinning, reminiscent of the celebrated 'Take Five', accentuates the air of stateliness. The track is conveniently available on the 1997 CD *In The Vaults*.

June 1968 B-Single, Liberty 56044

**[68/63S] TOO YOUNG TO KNOW MY MIND**

(Christian Wilde)

The flipside of the medley [68/41] WALK, DON'T RUN: LAND OF 1,000 DANCES, this morose-sounding ballad penned by group associate Wilde (see under August 1968, LP *The Horse*) and recorded in May 1968 (DB) with Nokie Edwards on lead guitar (see the entry on [68/41]), grinds along laboriously, hampered by a synth accompaniment that sounds more and more ill-coordinated as the number enters its closing stages. The track is conveniently available on the 1997 CD *In The Vaults*.

## 1968

### DAVE'S VIEW FROM THE VAULTS

#### 1

In March 1968 we witnessed the end of an era as Nokie Edwards recorded his final sixties album with The Ventures, *Flights Of Fantasy*. During that month he, Don, Bob and Mel cut 'Soul Coaxing' with Bill Pitman, Red Rhodes, Gene Pello, Lincoln Mayorga and Mike Rubini. Also in the same month the band recorded 'Summertime Blues' with Lou Morrell, Red Rhodes, Mike Melvoin, Mike Rubini and Gene Pello. Keyboard player Melvoin is yet another musician with a long jazz background who had performed with the likes of Paul Horn, Joe Williams and Frank Rosolino and also recorded with Peggy Lee and Billy Eckstine. Lou Morrell is still another high pedigree guitarist who had recorded with Dean Martin, Percy Faith, Sandy Nelson and Gene Vincent and was also a regular member of Phil Spector's Gold Star crew. After the disappointing *Million Dollar Weekend* album, *Flights Of Fantasy* came as something of a relief to fans with the band returning to their more customary rock stylings. However, some damage had clearly been done by the diversionary nature of its predecessor because it was the lowest charting Ventures album of the sixties, struggling to make it as far as number 169.

#### 2

In June 1968 Gerry McGee made his studio debut as The Ventures' new lead guitarist on *The Horse* LP. Alongside him were Don, Bob and Mel as well as Red Rhodes, Mike Rubini and Gene Pello — this was the grouping that recorded The Rolling Stones' classic 'Jumping Jack Flash'. It's typical of The Ventures that when the LP appeared with Gerry McGee pictured on the cover in place of Nokie Edwards there was not a single word of explanation. George Tipton was another new name listed on the cover, where he was credited with horn arrangements. Previously Tipton had worked with The Mills Brothers, Peggy Lee, Jan And Dean, Bobby Vee and Brian Hyland, while he later arranged for Harry Nilsson and The Mariachi Brass as well as composing a host of themes for popular TV programmes such as *Soap* and *The Golden Girls*. One of the tracks on *The Horse* LP, Christian Wilde's composition 'Horse Power', is also known as 'Indian Pony'. I am aware of this because I ordered it

up for *In The Vaults Volume 3* believing it to be an unissued track. It illustrates how many pitfalls exist on a project like *In The Vaults*, although the other side of the coin is where you quite unexpectedly discover a track as exciting as 'The Jam' which graced *In The Vaults Volume 4*.

### 3

On the face of it The Ventures and McGee combination was a bizarre union — a band who determinedly followed every successful trend in the pop market and a guitarist who was steeped in the unchanging style of Cajun music and the blues. Back in the mid-fifties McGee played Cajun music around his hometown of Eunice in Louisiana with his fiddle playing father Dennis McGee who had first recorded back in 1928 and was something of a legend of the genre. By 1968 The Ventures were beginning to be seen as unfashionable, being unfairly perceived as shallow opportunists who just covered other people's hits, while McGee's stock was riding high having recently played with the critically acclaimed Delaney and Bonnie and even being admired by the likes of Eric Clapton. McGee has often spoken of his decision to join The Ventures with just a little bemusement, as though he could not quite understand it either, usually concluding that it was probably for the best in the long run. Although McGee was drawn to roots music, he also had something of a conservative nature and was uncomfortable with the drugs and general debauchery that usually accompanied the counter-culture's experimentation in those traditional fields. The Ventures did not see themselves as revolutionaries either, and so in another way the partnership did make sense. It obviously helped that McGee had worked with Mel Taylor's brother, bass player Larry Taylor, since his arrival in Hollywood back in 1961. Together with drummer Bill Smith, McGee and Taylor were the core musicians who provided the backing for The Monkees' early hit records which were cut at the RCA studio in Hollywood in 1966. Clearly McGee would have been well known to Don, Bob and Mel prior to the invitation to join and may well have been regarded as something of a catch by them. Unfortunately there was a lingering hostility to McGee from a few Nokie Edwards fans who absolutely resented anyone taking his place. To his eternal credit McGee ignored the critics and let his fingers do the talking.

### 4

In October 1968 Gerry, Don, Bob and Mel recorded 'Born To Be Wild' for the *Underground Fire* album with Mike Melvoin and Gene Pello also present. It seems self evident that Don Wilson did not play on the originals that made up side one of the *Underground Fire* album simply because he is absent from the writing credits, which are listed as McGee, Bogle, Taylor and Wilde, the latter being Christian Wilde. He was actually a classically trained singer whose voice was considered by Hollywood producers to be "too good" for the commercial pop of the sixties. He also happened to play very good guitar. In his early days he had worked in parking lots where he valeted cars and saved up money to finance his own record productions. His name appeared on a couple of writing credits for The Ventures, most notably on 'Soul Breeze' which graced *The Horse* LP, for which he also wrote the sleeve notes. In fact 'Soul Breeze' was originally a vocal composition titled 'How Can I Help You Girl', but The Ventures simply removed the lyric and adapted it as an instrumental. He later wrote songs for Bill Cosby, Glenn Yarbrough, Tom Jones, Andy Griffith and Harry Nilsson as well as a couple of songs with Danny Hamilton. Surprisingly he later achieved some fame by writing a best selling book titled *Hidden Causes Of Heart Attack And Stroke*.

## REFERENCES IN TEXT

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

- 1     VR 55 [1999] 15.
- 2     Dave Burke, *P* 44 [1999] 43.
- 3     NGD 74 [2005] 24/26.
- 4     H110.
- 5     *P* 69 [2005] 50.
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- 7     *P* 35 [1997] 50.
- 8     *P* 35 [1997] 50.
- 9     NGD 15 [1980] 10.
- 10    H171.
- 11    NGD 83 [2007] 32–33.